USE OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN RESPONSE TO A FEEDBACK

INTERVENTION

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ABSTRACT

Providing performance feedback in a way that leads to improved performance is an integral aspect to the success of an organization. Past research shows the feedback does not always improve employee performance. Characteristics of feedback can direct attention away from improved performance and toward attention to the self. This study examined the impact of characteristics of feedback delivery on individuals' tendency to use impression management strategies (exemplification, self-promotion, ingratiation, supplication). The results indicate that participants did not use impression management differently when feedback was delivered publicly versus privately. However, participants reported a higher likelihood to use ingratiation and self-promotion strategies after receiving negative than positive feedback. Discussion of results, along with limitations and directions for future research, are discussed.

Keywords: impression management, feedback intervention, privacy, valence

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Organizations want to improve the performance of their employees in order to achieve organizational goals, such as increased employee motivation and improved performance. One way organizations can improve employee performance is to provide feedback, or a feedback intervention (FI). An FI is defined as "providing people with some information regarding their task performance" (Kluger & DeNisi, 1998). The primary goal of providing feedback is to increase the effectiveness of an employee's work, but this is not always the outcome. In a meta-analysis, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) found that FI's reduce performance more than one-third of the time, regardless of whether the FI was positive or negative feedback. This means that for every three FIs, at least one could lead to a reduction in individual performance. The features, or characteristics, of an FI can have a great impact on the response an employee has to the feedback. Specific feedback features that will be discussed in this paper are valence (positive/negative) and mode of delivery (public/private). The effectiveness of FIs is important to organizations because they can lead to positive organizational outcomes, such as improved performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), or greater organizational commitment (Joo & Park, 2010).

FIs are often given in a private setting, which research (Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Joo, 2012; Kupritz & Cowell, 2011) shows leads to more effective feedback (Alvero, Bucklin, & Austin, 2001). In a review of 43 articles published from 1988 to 1995, Alvero, Bucklin, and Austin (2001) found that in 56% of the cases, participants preferred private feedback. Additionally, it was found that 80% of participants preferred a mix of private and public feedback when the feedback was positive. Results from Alvero, Bucklin, and Austin (2001) indicated that understanding the characteristics of the feedback (private, public, mix) that helped the employees, led to the supervisor giving more effective feedback. This is important as there

are instances in which public feedback is either necessary and cannot be avoided (group work, staff meetings) or may be preferred (awards, recognition). This study will explore responses to public and private FIs.

Valence of the feedback, whether an FI is positive or negative, can also have an impact on responses to feedback. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) found that both have an impact on performance, and both could potentially improve performance. Zhou (1998) found that the valence of feedback can lead to increased creativity, thus improving performance. Additionally, Spreitzer and Sweetman (2009) found that a perceived negative facial expression during an FI can lead to decreased performance.

Since individuals are often concerned with what their supervisors think about them (Gardner & Martinko, 1988), their concern may increase immediately following an FI. Employees' concern may increase due to an FI being a formal appraisal of what their supervisor thinks of their performance. Because of this, individuals may be particularly motivated to manage or attempt to change the impression their supervisor has of them after receiving such an FI. This can be done using impression management strategies that allow the individual to create or maintain a particular image. As an example, one impression management strategy is exemplification, which involves the employee wanting to be viewed as dedicated and hard working. For example, when an individual receives negative feedback, they may begin to come in early for work each day to try to make their supervisor think better of them.

This paper focuses on the impression management strategies that individuals use in response to receiving an FI. Here, Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT) (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996) is used to explain why individuals may want to use certain impression management strategies in response to positive or negative FIs. The way in which an FI is delivered, whether it is public or

2

private, may also have an impact on the individuals' use of impression management strategies, and will be additionally examined.

FEEDBACK INTERVENTION THEORY

FIT (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996) draws from goal setting theory (Latham & Locke, 1991) and control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981), which both focus on an individual's behavior as goal directed. FIT argues that when people get feedback, they compare the information about their behavior to a standard or goal (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), and then their attention focuses in one of three areas: task-motivation, task-learning, or meta-task processes. First, during task-motivation, individuals are focused on improving or maintaining their performance and they spend their attention on the task at hand. Second, task-learning involves individuals seeking out information that may help improve their performance, but this takes attention away from the actual task. Third, meta-task processes direct attention back to the individual and direct needed attention away from the task at hand. Attention to the self may cause individuals to use impression management strategies, so this paper will focus on meta-task processes.

Feedback Standard Comparison

When an FI is given and a supervisor identifies an individual's performance as being lower than the standard, a feedback standard comparison is identified. When an FI is given and a supervisor identifies that the individuals' performance meets the standard, they may still focus on that feedback. Based on this, individuals may change their behavior to achieve the standard, or in rare cases, not achieve the standard. Feedback-standard comparisons are important because they identify a discrepancy between the supervisor's expectation for an individual's performance and the individual's perception of their actual performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). When this discrepancy is identified via the FI, the individual may seek to change their behavior in order to reduce the gap. For example, if an individual receives an FI stating they did not complete a project on time, they may work harder on the next project to ensure it is completed on time.

4

Hierarchy & Attention

Once an FI is delivered, the individual's attention is directed toward one of three levels of the hierarchy of attention identified by FIT (Kluger & DeNisi; 2000). The highest level involves meta-task processes and can manifest in several ways. First, meta-task processes represent a shift in attention away from the focal task to a focus on the self. Individuals engaging in meta-task processes may choose to focus on non-focal tasks that can give them a positive self-view. Second, they may direct their attention to the self, which turns their attention away from the task. Third, an individual engaged at in meta-task processes may also experience a depletion of cognitive resources. Depletion of cognitive resources occurs when an individual focuses on the feedback gap so much that they do not have the cognitive capacity to focus on the task that needs to be improved. Finally, affective processes are emotions that can be activated by attention to the self and distract from the task itself.

The second level of attention is task-motivation and at this level individuals are focused on actual task performance. The individual focuses only on the task at hand and works hard to reduce the feedback-standard gap (Kluger & DeNisi, 2000). This level is arguably the most important level in terms of organizational goals, as it is the level in which individuals are focused solely on the task at hand. This means that it is important for supervisors to deliver feedback in a way that leads an individual into task-motivation and away from meta-task processes. This level represents the overall goal for organizations, since attention to the task is the intended result after an FI is given.

The final level is the task-learning level. Task-learning is the lowest level of attention and focuses on learning more about how to perform the task at hand (Kluger & DeNisi, 2000). During task-learning, the individual may seek to find a different, or even better, way to complete the task. Additionally, this level can be both positive and negative in terms of achieving actual

standards. An individual may spend more time thinking about how to approach the task at hand

and find a more productive means to achieve the standard.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE FEEDBACK

The manner in which an individual receives feedback may have an impact on the way the individual responds to that feedback (Westerman & Westerman, 2013). Aguinis, Gottfredson, and Joo (2012) and Alvero, Bucklin, and Austin (2001) strongly recommend that for feedback to be effective, it needs to be delivered in private. Private communication is defined as, "when the communicator has the power to control to whom a communication is distributed and chooses to do so by limiting who comprises of the audience" (Jameson, 2014, p. 8). There are situations in which public feedback is necessary and cannot be avoided (i.e., team projects, staff meetings). To learn how this feedback to be delivered effectively, more research is needed. Public communication is defined as when "the communicator either lacks the power to control distribution or chooses not to limit the audience" (Jameson, 2014, p. 8). In this study, public feedback is defined as feedback that comes from the supervisor and takes place in front of the employees' co-workers.

Employees prefer to receive confidential information, such as their annual review, in a private, face-to-face communication (Alvero, Bucklin, & Austin, 2001; Kupritz & Cowell, 2011). Additionally, receiving feedback in front of coworkers can impact perceptions of justice, can be detrimental to the individual and is considered demeaning (Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Joo, 2012; Westerman & Westerman, 2013). However, Alvero, Bucklin, and Austin (2001) found that participants from 43 different studies preferred a mix of feedback that was delivered both publicly and privately. However, Alvero, Bucklin, and Austin (2001) also found that 56% of participants in these students preferred solely private feedback.

Westerman and Westerman (2013) found that individuals might not want to receive negative feedback in public, but may prefer positive feedback to be delivered in public. Public feedback can be useful when a supervisor needs to deliver the same message to multiple

employees at the same time. This could happen during staff meetings or in an e-mail to all employees working on a specific project. However, this may not be the most effective method when delivering a negative FI.

It is possible that an FI received in a public setting may lead an individual to engage in attention to the self. In the workplace, feedback about an individual's performance is considered private information that should only be shared between the supervisor and the employee (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kupritz & Cowell, 2011). If a supervisor violates this expectation by delivering feedback publicly, the receiver of the feedback may turn their attention away from the task and think about what their peers or supervisor think of them. This discomfort may lead the individual to work to repair their supervisor's impression of them.

VALENCE

Message valence, the positivity or negativity of a message, has a significant impact on how an individual responds to feedback. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) found that both positive and negative feedback could have beneficial effects on performance. Positive feedback indicates that performance relative to the task is acceptable or above the standard (Alder, 2007). In contrast, a negative FI informs the individual that their performance is falling short of the standard (Alder, 2007).

Giving negative feedback is necessary at times to provide a means for people to improve their performance (Westerman & Westerman, 2010). FIT suggests that individuals will only improve performance in response to negative feedback when the individual directs attention to the task (task-motivation processes) and not the self (meta-task processes) or outside information (task-learning processes) (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Alder, 2007).

Receiving a negative FI may lead an employee to worry about what their supervisor thinks of them. It is likely that employees will act in a way they feel is effective in changing the impression their supervisor has of them due to this negative FI. These responses are important because they draw the individual's attention away from the task and into meta-task processes. This poses a threat to organizations, as too much time spent focusing on meta-task processes decreases time spent on task-motivation processes.

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Impression management is the process by which people attempt to influence the image others have of them (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995). Individuals engage in impression management to construct a preferred image in the minds of others, which can be achieved by using a number of strategies (Goffman, 1955; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Some of these strategies include: ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication, and intimidation (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Because people are concerned about what their supervisor thinks of them, it is likely that they will want to use impression management strategies following an FI that identifies a feedback-standard gap (Gordon, 1996).

FIT (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996) suggests that once a gap is identified, individuals seek to reduce it; here it is argued that individuals may seek to reduce this gap not by working on the task, but by attempting to influence their supervisor's impression of them using one of these strategies. Previous research (Gordon, 1996) shows that these impression management strategies are effective in impacting supervisor impressions of employees. Gordon (1996) found that when individuals use these strategies they are viewed as more interpersonally attractive. This research seeks to investigate whether individuals use these strategies to try to remedy their supervisor's impression of them in response to an FI.

Maintaining supervisors' impressions is important for employees because supervisors have reward power over employees (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). Reward power refers to a supervisor being in control of organizational rewards, such as pay increases and promotions. Ferris, Judge, Rowland, and Fitzgibbons (1994) proposed that individuals engage in influence behaviors when they believe they can earn the rewards that their supervisor has the power to give out. Other researchers (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Bolino, 1999; Ferris & Porac, 1984; Schneider, 1969; Wayne & Liden, 1995) found that individuals engage in impression

10

management strategies in response to a workplace event that contrasts with the impression the individual wants to create or maintain. One such workplace event could be an FI that contrasts with the impression an employee is trying to construct in to the eyes of their supervisor. Upon receiving such an FI, employees may seek to change the impression by engaging in influence behaviors (i.e., impression management strategies).

Jones and Pittman (1982) developed a list of five impression management strategies to encompass the wide variety of impression management behaviors that early researchers (Goffman, 1955; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi, 1981) identified. Bolino and Turnley (1999) found that these five strategies were important because of their focus on specific behaviors. For example, an individual using the exemplification strategy may come in early to work to show their supervisor they are a dedicated worker. This is a behavior that can be observed and serves a purpose, which Bolino and Turnley (1999) identify as specific behaviors.

In the present study the strategy of intimidation will not be used. This strategy involves individuals wanting to appear threatening to have others view them as dangerous (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). Additionally, it was found that individuals using this strategy have goals that are of "questionable value," especially in work groups (Turnley & Bolino, 2001, p. 355). This strategy is also used infrequently by employees and is more acceptable to be used by a supervisor (Bolino & Turnley, 2003). Intimidation can be used to create an image of danger and to appear threatening to colleagues (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007). Given this previous research, the intimidation strategy is unlikely to occur in this study with a sample of student participants. Students are supervised by their instructor, and are viewed as subordinates, which means intimidation would not a relevant strategy to examine in this study.

The remaining four strategies (ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication) will be studied to see how likely people are to use them in response to an FI.

Ingratiation

Ingratiation refers to when an individual does a favor or uses flattery in an attempt to be viewed as likeable (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). Ingratiation strategies have been associated with rewards, such as positive performance appraisals and reciprocity of requests (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003; Howard, Gengler, & Jain, 1995, 1997). Feedback receivers may use ingratiation after receiving feedback because they are concerned about how they are viewed by the feedback sender.

How feedback is delivered is expected to impact the use of ingratiation in the following way: if negative feedback is delivered privately, the receiver is likely to use the strategy of ingratiation toward their supervisor to try to gain favor with their supervisor. There are likely no negative consequences to doing this privately. However, if the feedback is delivered publicly (i.e., in front of coworkers), individuals will be less likely to use the strategy of ingratiation because of undesirable social implications, such as being seen as a "brown-noser." Using ingratiation strategies in response to private feedback is more likely because the individual wants to maintain or repair their supervisor's impression of them without incurring the social costs of coworkers having witnessed the public feedback followed by attempts at ingratiation. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Individuals who receive feedback publicly will be less likely to use ingratiation

strategies than those who receive feedback privately.

Negative feedback is necessary to provide individuals with the information needed to improve performance (Fedor, Davis, Maslyn, & Mathieson, 2001). However, it has been found that individuals may fail to improve performance in response to negative feedback (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; Ashford, 1989). If an individual receives a negative FI, they may be concerned with what their supervisor thinks of them and act accordingly to change their impression rather

than focusing on the task. For example, if an individual is told they are not meeting the performance standard, they may use ingratiation in response to the feedback to change the negative impression their supervisor has of them. If a positive evaluation is delivered, then ingratiation may not be necessary, even though there is an upward feedback gap. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Individuals who receive negative feedback will be more likely to use ingratiation strategies than those who received positive feedback.

Self-Promotion

Self-promotion is defined as the process in which individuals "play up" their abilities or accomplishments to be seen as competent (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). For example, through self-promotion an individual may say something like, "I should lead this project since my last project was completed ahead of schedule." Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley and Gilstrap (2008) state that individuals use self-promotion with the goal of improving the impression others have of them. Using self-promotion strategies will be more likely in response to public feedback, as the individual will want to establish, or maintain, this impression. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Individuals who receive feedback publicly will be more likely to use self-promotion strategies than those who receive feedback privately.

If an individual receives negative feedback, they will be less likely to use self-promotion that those who receive positive feedback. Having received negative feedback, an individual may not be able to use self-promotion until they repair the impression their supervisor has of them because they would appear disingenuous if they did so. Using the strategy of self-promotion after receiving a negative FI is unlikely to change their supervisor's impression until the individual

13

has done something to achieve the feedback standard, whereas self-promoting after positive feedback would be expected. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Individuals who receive negative feedback will be less likely to use self-promotion strategies than those who received positive feedback.

Exemplification

Exemplification involves employees making others perceive their actions as exemplary and worthy of serving as a role model (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Individuals that seek to be viewed as dedicated by their peers and supervisors are said to be using the impression management strategy of exemplification (Bolino, 1999). For example, individuals that arrive to work early and leave late are using the exemplification strategy. Additionally, individuals using exemplification strategies volunteer for tough assignments, go beyond the call of duty, and suffer to help others in the organization (Rosenfeld, Giacolone, & Riordan, 1995). Using exemplification strategies is more likely in response to receiving public feedback, as the individual will want to be seen, or continue to be seen, as hard working. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Individuals who receive feedback publicly will be more likely to use exemplification strategies than those who receive feedback privately.

The exemplification strategy focuses on the individual demonstrating that they are working hard or, at the very least, are seen as working hard (Rosenfeld, Giacolone, & Riordan, 1995). If an individual receives a negative FI, they may use this strategy to try to change the impression their supervisor has of them. For example, the employee might try to take on new responsibilities or offer to complete a tough task that their co-workers are hesitant to take on. A negative FI may contrast the individual's perceived performance, so beginning to do some exemplification behaviors might show the supervisor that the employee is making an effort to

14

change. However, a positive feedback performance will confirm an individual's performance, so exemplification is not needed. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Individuals who receive negative feedback will be more likely to use exemplification strategies than those who received positive feedback.

Supplication

Turnley and Bolino (2001) defined supplication as a strategy in which "individuals advertise their shortcomings in an attempt to be viewed as needy" (p. 352). For example, individuals purposely appear to be less competent than they actually may be in order to gain assistance from others within the organization. This strategy differs from the other impression management strategies because individuals using this strategy want their supervisor to lower their expectations of them and hold them to a different standard. Simply put, individuals that do not want to create a positive impression in the eyes of their supervisor use supplication strategies. For example, an employee may use this strategy when they want someone else to help him or her with their work, or even do their work for them. When an individual wants to get out of a task that they do not want to do, they could use supplication strategies (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007).

Since individuals using supplication strategies want to be viewed as needy by their peers or supervisors, it is likely they will use this strategy when feedback is delivered in the presence of others. However, when an individual receives feedback privately, supplication may not be as effective because it is not acceptable to appear incompetent and needy to their supervisor. In contrast, there may be times that supplication is used privately with a supervisor if the employee believes their supervisor will help them. Additionally, when the feedback is received in front of the employees' co-workers (i.e., public), supplication may be more likely to be used around

coworkers, because they would understand the situation, take pity on the individual and help them. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Individuals who receive feedback publicly will be more likely to use supplication strategies than those who receive feedback privately.

Individuals that want to get out of an unpleasant task use supplication strategies (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007). An individual may choose to use the supplication strategy in response to a negative FI in order to change their supervisor's impression of them. For example, an employee may use supplication to appear incompetent in front of their supervisor in order to set a new, or lower, standard of achievement for future FIs. FIT suggests that when individuals receive negative feedback, they seek to reduce the feedback-standard gap (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). One way an individual may reduce this gap could be to use supplication to seek help from their coworkers. It would not be acceptable to use the supplication strategy with a supervisor in response to negative feedback because the supervisor may view the individual as even more incompetent. Additionally, employees may use this strategy to justify to their supervisor why they did not do well on a task. For example, an employee may state, "I am not good at writing business reports, which is why I was evaluated negatively. I would do better if I received help to write my reports." The following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: Individuals who receive negative feedback will be less likely to use supplication strategies than those who received positive feedback.

When individuals receive feedback it might be possible that they will use, or not use, more than one impression management strategy based on the received feedback. The publicness and valence of the feedback could also interact to have an impact on participants' use of impression management strategies. Based on the previous research presented in this paper, and

the proposed interactions between impression management strategies and the characteristics of

feedback delivery, the following research question is proposed:

RQ: How do valence and delivery of feedback interact to affect usage of impression

management strategies?

METHODS

Overview

This study was designed to simulate receiving feedback within a context that students understand. Students are a relevant sample for this study because they have experience receiving feedback from instructors, both privately (e.g., on assignments or tests) and publicly (e.g., in the classroom). Group projects are a simulation of work because students are working toward completion of a task and receive feedback from their instructor similar to how employees work on tasks and receive feedback from their supervisor.

Students are also an informative sample because many of them have work experience. Participants were asked to indicate their previous or current work experience, as this may have an impact on the impression management strategies they are likely to use.

Participants

Pre-test data were collected from upper level undergraduate students enrolled in a Communication course. A total of 29 participants responded to a paper survey that was done in class. Participants were not required to participate for course credit. These participants only received the manipulation check items.

Main study data were collected from undergraduate students enrolled in both the basic Communication course and upper level Communication courses at a mid-size Midwestern university. Overall, the sample included 141 college-aged students. For this sample, the average age was 19.15 with a range of 18 to 25. Sixty-four (45.4%) participants were male, fifty-three (37.6%) were female, and 24 (17%) preferred not to specify. One-hundred and ten (78%) participants identified as Caucasian, one (.7%) African American, one (.7%) Native American, two (1.4%) Asian American, three (2.1%) other, and twenty-four (17%) did not specify. Number

of weekly hours worked ranged from 0 to 90 ($M = 16.38$, $SD = 14.70$). Number of years worked in their present job ranged from 0 to 5 ($M = 1.21$, $SD = 1.10$).

Procedure

A paper pretest survey was run to check whether or not the message manipulations worked. The same manipulation check measures were also collected in the main study via online survey to test the manipulations a second time. The details of these checks are reported in the "Manipulation Checks" section below. The main study was a fully crossed 2 (delivery: public, private) X 2 (valence: positive, negative) design. Each participant was randomly assigned to one condition. The conditions are as follows: public/positive, public/negative, private/positive, and private/negative. After reading the vignette, participants completed measures for feedback valence, realism, publicness of delivery, ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication.

Vignettes

Each participant received one of four vignettes followed by various scales. The vignettes described a situation in which the participant was part of a group project and received feedback from their instructor about their performance. The opening paragraph read as follows for all vignettes:

> "Imagine you and three classmates are working on a semester-long group project that is worth 40% of your final grade. Your instructor meets with your group each week to discuss your progress and give feedback. During your group's most recent meeting with your instructor…"

Immediately following this message was text associated with one of the four conditions. Public/private delivery was manipulated via the way the instructor delivers the feedback to the participant in the vignette. In the public delivery condition, the message manipulation was, "…

the instructor tells you in front of your group…" This created a situation where the individual is receiving feedback publicly because it is being given in front of their group. In the private delivery condition, the message manipulation was, "…the instructor meets with you individually…" This created a situation where the individual is receiving feedback privately in a one-on-one setting. Valence was manipulated via the feedback the instructor gives to the participant in the vignette. In the positive valence condition, the message manipulation was, "…you are doing excellent work and to keep it up." In the negative valence condition, the message was, "…you are doing a poor job and need to improve your work."

Each participant received one of four possible vignettes: positive feedback given in front of a group (public/positive), positive feedback given in a one-on-one meeting (private/positive), negative feedback given in front of a group (public/negative), or negative feedback given in a one-on-one meeting (private/negative). See Appendix A for a full list of the message manipulations.

Manipulation Checks

A paper survey pretest was conducted with 29 undergraduate students enrolled in an upper level Communication course at a mid-size Midwestern university. This pretest included tests of realism, valence, and publicness to determine whether the vignettes were manipulating what was intended. See Appendix B for a full list of the manipulation checks. The pretest reliabilities and results are reported below.

Realism. The realism scale (Westerman & Westerman, 2013) included five Likert-type items ranging from 1 (disagree very strongly) to 7 (agree very strongly). Higher scores indicate that participants viewed the vignette as realistic. Example items include, "I can imagine being in a situation like this one" and "I didn't have any problem with the realism of this situation." The pretest data revealed a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .71. To determine if participants viewed their

situation as realistic, a one-sample *t*-test was used. Overall, realism ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.08$) was significantly above the midpoint of the scale (4), $t(28) = 4.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .39$.

The same scale was used to test perceptions of realism in the main study. The main study data for this scale revealed a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .79. Realism ($M = 4.54$, $SD = .08$) was significantly above the midpoint of the scale (4), $t(118) = 6.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .29$ suggesting that this scenario was seen as realistic.

Valence. To measure perceived valence, a scale by Westerman and Westerman (2013) was used. This scale measures valence with a four-item, 7-point semantic differential to test how participants rate their performance on the task they received feedback on. Participants indicated whether they viewed the feedback they received as positive or negative. Example items include "Good/Poor," "Low/High," and "Below Average/Above Average." Higher scores mean performance was perceived as positive. The pretest data revealed a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .93. To determine how the participants perceived valence, an independent samples *t*-test was used. Positive feedback ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 1.13$) was rated significantly higher than negative feedback ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.58$), $t(22) = 4.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .46$. This suggests that participants perceived positive feedback as positive and negative feedback as negative.

The same scale was used to test perceptions of valence in the main study. In the main study data, the scale had a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .97. To determine how the participants perceived valence, an independent samples *t*-test was used. Positive feedback ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 1.05$) was rated significantly higher than negative feedback ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.84$), $t(119) = 10.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .47$. This suggests that participants perceived positive feedback as positive and negative feedback as negative.

Public/Private. The public/private delivery scale (Westerman & Westerman, 2013) included eight 7-point semantic differential items to test how participants rated the interaction

with their supervisor. Participants indicated whether they viewed the feedback they received as public or private. Example items include "Public/Private," "Closed/Open," and "Shared/Individualized." Higher scores on this scale indicate that participants perceived their feedback message as private. The pretest data revealed a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .80. In order to determine how participants rated the interaction, an independent samples t-test was used. Public feedback ($M = 4.77$, $SD = .72$) was rated significantly more public than private feedback ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.13$), $t(27) = 4.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .46$. This suggests that participants perceived public feedback as public, and private feedback as private.

The same scale was administered in the main study. The main study data revealed a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .87. An independent samples t-test was used to determine how participants rated the interaction. Public feedback ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.08$) was rated significantly more public than private feedback ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.28$), $t(119) = 6.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .29$. This suggests that participants perceived public feedback as public and private feedback as private.

Dependent Variables

Impression Management. Impression management strategies (ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication) were measured using items from Bolino and Turnley (1999). Each impression management strategy was measured using five Likert-type items on a scale of 1 (disagree very strongly) to 7 (agree very strongly) asking participants to rate their likelihood of using each strategy in response to the feedback they received in the vignette. All items were preceded by the statement, "In response to this feedback how likely are you to…"

Responses to the ingratiation items indicate participants' likelihood to try to appear friendly and likeable. Example items include, "Use flattery and favors to make your instructor like you more," and "Compliment your instructor so they will see you as likeable." See

Appendix C for the full list of ingratiation items. Higher scores indicate a higher likelihood to use this strategy. The data revealed a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .86.

Responses to the self-promotion items indicate participants' likelihood to speak highly of their abilities and accomplishments. Example items include, "Talk proudly about your experience or education," and "Let others know that you are valuable to the organization." Higher scores indicate a higher likelihood to use this strategy. The data revealed a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .92.

Responses to the exemplification items indicate participants' likelihood to attempt to appear hard working or take on more tasks. Example items include, "Try to appear like a hard-working, dedicated employee," and "Try to appear busy, even at times when things are slower." Higher scores indicate a higher likelihood to use this strategy. The data revealed a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .82.

Responses to the supplication items indicate participants' likelihood to appear incompetent or less than capable in an effort to advertise their shortcomings in order to gain extra assistance. Example items include, "Act like you know less than you do so people will help you out," and "Pretend not to understand something to gain someone's help." Higher scores indicate a higher likelihood to use this strategy. The data revealed a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .94.

RESULTS

To test the hypotheses and research question, a series of 2 (delivery: public, private) X 2 (valence: positive, negative) factorial analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed for each dependent variable.

A 2 X 2 factorial ANOVA was used to test H1, H2, and RQ1. H1 predicted participants that received feedback publicly would be less likely to use ingratiation strategies than those who received feedback privately. The main effect for publicness showed that those who received feedback publicly ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.03$) did not score differently on ingratiation strategies than those who received feedback privately ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .84$), $F(1, 115) = 2.70$, $p = .10$. The data were not consistent with H1.

H2 predicted participants who received negative feedback would be more likely to use ingratiation strategies than those who received positive feedback. Those who received negative feedback (M = 3.52, $SD = .93$) scored significantly higher than those who received positive feedback (M = 3.14, $SD = .95$) $F(1, 113) = 4.76$, $p < .05$. The data were consistent with H2.

The RQ asked about the interaction of public/private delivery and valence on ingratiation. The interaction was not significant, $F(1, 111) = .09$, $p = .76$.

A 2 X 2 factorial ANOVA was used to test H3, H4, and RQ1. H3 predicted participants that received feedback publicly would be more likely to use self-promotion strategies than those who received feedback privately. The main effect for publicness showed that those who received feedback publicly ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.29$) did not score differently on self-promotion strategies than those who received feedback privately ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.26$), $F(1, 116) = .11$, $p = .74$. The data were not consistent with H3.

H4 predicted participants that received negative feedback would be less likely to use self-promotion strategies than those who received positive feedback. The main effect for valence

showed that those who received negative feedback ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.34$) scored differently than those who received positive feedback ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.03$), $F(1, 116) = 14.35$, $p < .001$. However, the significance of the main effect was opposite of the predicted hypothesis. The data were not consistent with H4.

The RQ asked about the interaction of public/private delivery and valence on self-promotion. The interaction was not significant, $F(1, 116) = .09$, $p = .77$.

A 2 X 2 factorial ANOVA was used to test H5, H6, and RQ1. H5 predicted participants that received feedback publicly would be more likely to use exemplification strategies than those who received feedback privately. The main effect for publicness showed that those who received feedback publicly ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .85$) did not score differently on exemplification strategies than those who received feedback privately ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.02$), $F(1, 113) = .64$, $p = .43$. The data were not consistent with H5.

H6 predicted participants that received negative feedback would be more likely to use exemplification strategies than those who received positive feedback. The main effect for valence showed that those who received negative feedback ($M = 3.36$, $SD = .92$) did not score differently than those who received positive feedback ($M = 3.39$, $SD = .95$), $F(1, 113) = .03$, $p = .86$. The data were not consistent with H6.

The RQ asked about the interaction of public/private delivery and valence on exemplification. The interaction was not significant, $F(1, 113) = .01$, $p = .94$.

A 2 X 2 factorial ANOVA was used to test H7, H8, and RQ1. H7 predicted participants that received feedback publicly would be more likely to use supplication strategies than those who received feedback privately. The main effect for publicness showed that those who received feedback publicly ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.00$) did not score differently on supplication strategies than

those who received feedback privately ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.36$), $F(1, 115) = .10$, $p = .75$. The data were not consistent with H7.

H8 predicted that participants that received negative feedback would be less likely to use supplication strategies than those who received positive feedback. The main effect for valence showed that those who received negative feedback ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.21$) did not score differently than those who received positive feedback ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.17$), $F(1, 115) = .04$, $p = .85$. The data were not consistent with H8.

The RQ asked about the interaction of public/private delivery and valence on supplication. The interaction was not significant, $F(1, 115) = .43$, $p = .52$.

DISCUSSION

The current study was designed to answer questions regarding individuals' use of impression management strategies in response to feedback valence and the privacy/publicity of the feedback message. The findings reveal that individuals will be more likely to use ingratiation strategies in response to negative feedback than in response to positive feedback. Although the study did not originally look to compare across the strategies, it became apparent that participants reported higher levels of use for supplication strategies than any other impression management strategies. All findings will be discussed in more detail, as will limitations and directions for future research.

Delivering feedback publicly is a phenomenon that is unavoidable, due to group projects in academic settings and collaborative team projects in a workplace setting. For H1, it was argued that if the feedback were delivered publicly, individuals would be less likely to use the strategy of ingratiation because of undesirable social implications, such as being seen as a "brown-noser." The data did not indicate a difference in participants' use of ingratiation strategies between the public and private condition. This means that, regardless of the publicness of delivery of feedback, participants were equally likely, or less likely, to use ingratiation strategies.

H2 predicted that individuals would be more likely to use ingratiation strategies in response to negative feedback, than those who received positive feedback. Previous research (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003; Howard, Gengler, & Jain, 1995, 1997) indicated that positive performance feedback might increase the use of ingratiation strategies. However, this study found the opposite; ingratiation strategies were more likely to be used when receiving negative feedback than receiving positive feedback. It is possible that participants used this strategy to save face in front of their peers or supervisor (instructor) in response to the negative feedback

27

they received. This indicates that individuals are likely to use ingratiation strategies in response to negative feedback, when time could be spent improving their performance. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) proposed that individuals might take time away from the task at hand rather than focusing on reducing the feedback gap, which the current study supports—namely, they are managing their impression using ingratiation rather than focusing on the task, particularly when the feedback is negative. This is also in line with previous research (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; Ashford, 1989) that states negative feedback does not always improve employees' performance.

H3 predicted that when individuals received public feedback they would be more likely to use self-promotion, compared to those who received private feedback. This hypothesis was not supported by the data, as participants indicated an almost equal likelihood to use self-promotion strategies, regardless of the publicness of feedback. One possible explanation for a lack of difference in these cases is that participants might not have wanted to appear socially undesirable. Generally speaking, it is not societally appropriate to "brag" about oneself, so self-promoting might not be reported (or done) for that reason.

H4 predicted that when individuals received negative feedback they would be less likely to use self-promotion strategies, compared to those who received positive feedback. When the participants received positive feedback, they may have viewed this as enough confirmation in their abilities, leading them to decide not to "play up" their abilities. In response to negative feedback, participants likely did not want to speak about their accomplishments after being told they were not meeting the standard. The data presented in this study conflicts slightly with an argument from Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley and Gilstrap (2008), which stated that individuals use self-promotion with the goal of improving the impression others have of them. The data might not have been consistent with this hypothesis due to other factors, such as not needing to

improve the impression their instructor had of the participant or employing other impression

management strategies to reduce the feedback gap.

H5 predicted that individuals that received public feedback would be more likely to use

exemplification strategies, compared to those that received private feedback. The likelihood that

individuals would use exemplification strategies in response to public feedback did not differ

from those who received private feedback. Participants might not have used exemplification

strategies in response to public feedback, as it might not have been logical to employ some of the

exemplification behaviors. For example, individuals that use exemplification strategies volunteer

for tough assignments, or do the work that others do not want to complete. If an instructor is

giving the student feedback on their performance, the student might not be likely to volunteer to

do more work. In terms of private feedback, it is possible that it did not differ from public

feedback when it came to exemplification strategies due to not wanting to appear socially

undesirable in front of their supervisor, or in this case their instructor.

H6 predicted that individuals that received negative feedback would be more likely to use

exemplification strategies, compared to those who received positive feedback. This was not the

case, as exemplification strategies were equally likely to be used in response to negative or

positive feedback. One reason could be that the exemplification behaviors did not make sense for

participants to do. Participants might not have used exemplification strategies in response to

negative feedback due to the fact that some exemplification strategies do not apply to their

feedback situation (e.g., showing up early, staying late). Previous research (Rosenfeld,

Giacolone, & Riordan, 1995) indicated that individuals might arrive early to work or stay late to

appear as a dedicated employee. Items for this scale were changed to reflect actions students

would take in response to receiving feedback, such as "Try to appear like a hard-working,

dedicated student," and "Arrive at class early in order to look dedicated." However, it may be

that it is not as natural for students to do these extra-role behaviors as it would be for employees. Additionally, positive feedback might not have made a difference on exemplification strategies because it could have confirmed what students wanted to know about their performance. It is possible that, given other commitments, when a student receives positive feedback they may just continue the same level of work they were doing and not go above and beyond.

H7 predicted that individuals that received public feedback would be more likely to use supplication, compared to those who received private feedback. The likelihood of using supplication strategies did not differ based on whether the feedback was delivered publicly or privately. Scores were high for both private and public feedback, so it could be possible that individuals might use this strategy in response to this type of feedback in order to change their supervisor's (instructor) perception of the feedback gap (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996) or get out of a task they do not want to complete (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007).

H8 predicted that individuals that received negative feedback would be less likely to use supplication, compared to those who received positive feedback. The data did not support this hypothesis, as participants' likelihood to use supplication strategies did not differ based on whether the feedback message was negative or positive. A possible explanation for this might be that participants were focused on the actual feedback message. FIT research (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996) states that, in some cases, individuals focus more on the message of the feedback, rather than the task. Participants might have been more focused on managing their impression using supplication, rather than focusing on the task.

It is interesting that supplication scores reported the highest means of all impression management strategies. Even in response to positive feedback participants indicated at least some likelihood of using supplication strategies. It is possible that participants scored higher on this strategy due to the nature of group work. Participants might have felt that, no matter the

30

feedback characteristics, if they responded in a way that made them appear incompetent, another individual may pick up their work for them, including the professor.

Limitations and Future Directions

A limitation of this study could be the way in which feedback was delivered to participants. Participants received vignettes with their feedback scenario and were asked to read them before completing the survey. Participants might have had different responses if they were in a lab setting in which they had to complete a task and were then given verbal feedback on that task, either in front of others or privately. Participants could also have called upon a time that they received actual feedback and been asked to complete the survey with that in mind. This may have given the participants more of a connection to the feedback and elicited a stronger response, but would offer the researchers less control over the message.

Future research should be directed at examining why supplication reported higher means regardless of valence and publicness of feedback. It is possible that participants used this strategy with the hope of receiving more help in the work they set out to complete or wanted to get out of completing tasks in their group project. Further studies should seek to understand participants' reasoning behind using supplication strategies.

Future studies should also seek to identify other feedback situations in which individuals might use self-promotion strategies. Reported means for self-promotion strategies were slightly below the midpoint in both publicness of delivery and valence conditions. There may be other feedback situations in which participants would identify self-promotion as a more socially desirable strategy than one or more of the other strategies.

Analyzing the attitudes that third parties (other employees in the room) have when feedback is delivered publicly is also worth considering. Third party observers to public feedback might use impression management strategies in a different way than those actually

receiving the feedback. It is possible that employees might react negatively to one individual employee receiving positive feedback in a public manner, which would result in the third party observer using impression management strategies in a unique way.

Conclusion

Feedback is one important tool that organizations can use to improve the overall performance of their organization. This study sought to identify individuals' use of impression management strategies in response to different types of feedback and feedback delivery. First, the findings indicated that individuals are more likely to use ingratiation strategies in response to negative feedback than positive feedback. The data also showed that individuals scored highly on likelihood to use supplication strategies. This finding offers an interesting suggestion for future studies.

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APPENDIX A. MESSAGE MANIPULATIONS

1. *Positive/Public.* Imagine you and three classmates are working on a semester-long group project that is worth 20% of your final grade. Your instructor meets with your group each week to discuss your progress and give feedback. During your group's most recent meeting with your instructor, your instructor tells you in front of your group that you are doing excellent work and to keep it up.

2. *Negative/Public.* Imagine you and three classmates are working on a semester-long group project that is worth 20% of your final grade. Your instructor meets with your group each week to discuss your progress and give feedback. During your group's most recent meeting with your instructor, your instructor tells you in front of your group that you are doing a poor job and need to improve your work.

3. *Positive/Private.* Imagine you and three classmates are working on a semester-long group project that is worth 20% of your final grade. Your instructor meets with your group each week to discuss your progress and give feedback. During your group's most recent meeting with your instructor, your instructor pulls you aside and privately tells you that you are doing excellent work and to keep it up.

4. *Negative/Private.* Imagine you and three classmates are working on a semester-long group project that is worth 20% of your final grade. Your instructor meets with your group each week to discuss your progress and give feedback. During your group's most recent meeting with your instructor, your instructor pulls you aside and privately tells you that you are doing a poor job and need to improve your work.

APPENDIX B. MANIPULATION CHECKS

Questions of Valence

Good	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Poor
Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	High
Positive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Negative
Below Average	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Above Average

Questions of Realism

I didn't have any problem with the realism of this situation.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7

It was difficult to make myself feel that this situation was real.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7

This situation could happen, or has happened.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
A situation like this could develop in real life.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I can imagine being in a situation like this one.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Questions of Public/Private:

Public	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Private
Closed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Open
Available	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unavailable
Exclusive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unexclusive
Restricted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unrestricted
Shared	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Individualized
Confidential	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unconfidential
Secret	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Well-known

APPENDIX C. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Questions of Impression Management

Self-promotion
1. Talk proudly about your experience or education.
2. Make people aware of your talents or qualifications.
3. Let others know that you are valuable to the group.
4. Let others know that you have a reputation for being competent in a particular area.
5. Make people aware of your accomplishments.

Ingratiation
1. Compliment your classmates so they will see you as likeable.
2. Take an interest in your classmates' personal lives to show them that you are friendly.
3. Praise your classmates for their accomplishments so they will consider you a nice person.
4. Use flattery and favors to make your classmates like you more.
5. Do personal favors for your classmates to show them that you are friendly.

Exemplification
1. Try to appear like a hard-working, dedicated student.
2. Stay at class late so people will know you are hard working.
3. Try to appear busy, even at times when things are slower.
4. Arrive at class early in order to look dedicated.
5. Work at night or on weekends to show that you are dedicated.

Supplication
1. Act like you know less than you do so people will help you out.
2. Try to gain assistance or sympathy from people by appearing needy in some area.
3. Pretend not to understand something to gain someone's help.
4. Act like you need assistance so people will help you out.
5. Pretend to know less than you do so you can avoid an unpleasant assignment

APPENDIX D. DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics

Age
Your age: _____

Sex
Your sex: Male_____ Female _____ Prefer not to say _____

Ethnicity
Your ethnicity (check one):
_____ Caucasian _____ Hispanic
_____ African American _____ Pacific Islander
_____ Native American _____ Mixed (please specify): _____
_____ Asian American _____ Other (please specify): _____

Years of experience
How many years have you worked for your current employer? _____

Hours Worked
How many hours do you work per week, on average? _____

Major
What is your current academic major? _____

APPENDIX E. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT CORRELATION TABLE

	Self-Promotion	Ingratiation	Exemplification	Supplication
Self-Promotion				
Ingratiation	.49**			
Exemplification	.31**	.54**		
Supplication	.28**	.26**	.30**	
M	3.73	3.33	3.37	5.01
SD	1.26	.95	.93	1.19