

International OB

Influence Tactics in China

Researchers usually examine cross-cultural influences in business by comparing two very different cultures, such as Eastern and Western. However, differences within a given culture also matter because they can sometimes be greater than differences between cultures.

China is a big country, housing different cultures and traditions. A recent study examining Mainland Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong managers explored how the three cultural subgroups differ according to the influence tactics they prefer to use.

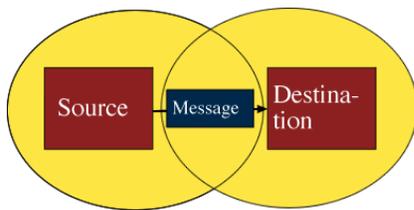
Though managers from all three places believe rational persuasion and exchange are the most effective influence tactics, managers in Taiwan tend to use inspirational appeals and ingratiation more than managers from either Mainland China or Hong Kong. Managers from Hong Kong rate pressure as more effective in influencing others than do managers in Taiwan or Mainland China. Such differences have implications for business relationships. Taiwanese or Mainland Chinese managers may be taken aback by a Hong Kong manager's use of pressure tactics, while managers from Hong Kong may not be persuaded by managers from Taiwan, who tend to use ingratiating tactics. To smooth business transactions, firms should make their managers aware of the differences within cultures.

A study of Swedish, German, Czech, Polish, and Finnish managers found Swedish managers saw mere differences in opinion as conflicts, so they adopted a conflict-avoidant strategy that emphasized more passive forms of persuasion. German managers, on the other hand, saw disagreement as a useful opportunity to gain new knowledge and fostered some rational discussion as an influence technique. Finnish managers preferred discussion-oriented influence tactics as well. Czech and Polish managers believed managers were under pressure to halt conflicts quickly when they arose, since conflict resolution is time consuming. Therefore, the Czech and Polish managers switched to more autocratic, power-oriented influence styles.

Sources: Based on P. P. Fu, T. K. Peng, J. C. Kennedy, and G. Yukl, "A Comparison of Chinese Managers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China," *Organizational Dynamics*, February 2004, pp. 32-46; and E. Szabo, "Meaning and Context of Participation in Five European Countries," *Management Decision* 44, no 2 (2006), pp. 276-289.

Class Exercise

In previous chapters, we have talked about the concept of Frames of Reference having considerable effect on the relationships between people.



These Frames of Reference can be anything in the symbol set for interpretation by the people in the interaction. Although language is typically the most obvious occurrence of different Frames causing barriers to interaction, the difference can be anything including cultural values, individual values, sub-cultural values, or opinions. This concept is the basis for the difference in perceptions and practice of influence in the workforce.

1. Ask students to prepare a brief paper describing their perceptions of managing workers in three different countries.
2. Begin with <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html> as a source.
3. Have the students compare the cultural values described and make recommendations of how to interact with each culture to successfully manage people from that country.
4. Are there differences in communication, values, opinions, traditions, or lifestyles that indicate variation in the interaction process to manage?

Myth or Science?

Power Breeds Contempt

This statement appears to be true. When people have power bestowed on them, they appear to be inclined to ignore the perspectives and interests of those without power, so says a study completed by a team of researchers from Northwestern University, Stanford University, and New York University.

In this study, researchers made one group of participants feel powerful by asking them to recall and write about a situation in which they had power over another person. Another group of participants was instructed to recall and write about an incident in which someone had power over them. Participants in the powerful group were much more likely to ignore the perspectives of those in the less powerful group, were less able to accurately read their emotional expressions, and were less interested in understanding how other individuals see things. The authors of this study conclude that power leads to “the tendency to view other people only in terms of qualities that serve one’s personal goals and interests, while failing to consider those features of others that define their humanity.”

So, while power has perks, it also appears to have costs—especially in terms of seeing things from the perspective of those with less of it.

Class Exercise

Lead a discussion of the ethicality of using personal contacts to get “what you want” in the following situation.

Situation: The administration of a state university wants all students—full, part-time, nontraditional—to pay a fee every semester for the next three years to fund the building of a new physical learning center for the campus. Students are upset because they do not want to pay for something they will not use. The student government has been ineffective in getting the administration or board to hear the students. You discover that your roommate’s parents are major donors to the university, are well-respected alumni, and are golfing buddies with the university’s president. Your roommate does not care about the fee because money is not an issue, but for you and your other friends, with heavy loans and having to work, this is a big deal. You have been helping your roommate survive a couple of key classes by tutoring him/her and helping with papers by offering suggestions. Your roommate went from failing to a C+ in these classes. You believe that your roommate’s parents could influence the university president’s final decision. Should you use your relationship with your roommate to affect the administration’s final decision? Do you have enough political capital to get your roommate to help? How could you increase, and how would you cash in, your political capital?

An Ethical Choice

Making Excuses

Excuses are one means of managing impressions so as to avoid negative repercussions of our actions. However, judging from some recent evidence on absenteeism, excuses are also a chance for workers to engage their creative side.

A 2007 survey of nearly 7,000 employees and 3,000 hiring managers revealed some pretty creative excuses for being late for work or absent from work:

- “Someone was following me and I drove all around town trying to lose them.”
- “My girlfriend got mad and destroyed all of my undergarments.”
- “A skunk got into my house and sprayed all my uniforms.”
- “My mother-in-law poisoned me.”
- “My mother-in-law is in jail.”
- “I blew my nose so hard my back went out.”
- “I’m too fat to get into my work pants.”

Though you have to give the excuse makers high marks for originality, we seriously doubt supervisors bought these excuses. The making of excuses may be one of the few areas in which creativity is bad.

If you’re considering making an excuse at work, take the following considerations into account:

1. Excuses can be effective. Research indicates that overall excuses do effectively shift blame away from an individual.
2. Excuses are sometimes ineffective. Because excuses often work doesn’t mean they always work. Excuses backfire when they (a) lack believability, (b) rely on conditions that seem likely to recur, and (c) reflect self-absorption—the excuse is all about you. So, if you are going to use an excuse, you should ensure it is believable, it reflects a one-time event, and it is not self-oriented.
3. Use excuses selectively. If you use excuses often, you won’t be believed even when your excuse is legitimate. Excuses also risk damaging the excuse maker’s perceived character. So you have to ask yourself, would you rather shift blame for a negative event or have your character called into question?

Sources: Based on J. M. Tyler and R. S. Feldman, “The Double-Edged Sword of Excuses: When Do They Help, When Do They Hurt,” *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology* 26, no. 6 (2007), pp. 659–688; K. Gurchiek, “Sorry I’m Late; A Raccoon Stole My Shoe,” *HRWeek* (May 29, 2007), http://moss07.shrm.org/Publications/HRNews/Pages/CMS_021684.aspx; and K. Gurchiek, “Runaway Horses, Charging Buffalo Kept Workers Home in ‘06,” *HR Week* (December 28, 2006).

Class Exercise

1. Divide the class into groups of three to five each.
2. Ask the groups to read the article at <http://www.articlesnatch.com/Article/Top-10-Excuses-For-Getting-Out-Of-Work/175644>
3. Using the criteria in point 2 above, evaluate the ten excuses for the three criteria.
4. Which of the ten excuses does the group believe to be the most potentially effective?

Point/CounterPoint

Managing Impressions is Unethical

Point

Managing impressions is wrong for both ethical and practical reasons.

First, managing impressions is just another name for lying. Don't we have a responsibility, both to ourselves and to others, to present ourselves as we really are? The Australian philosopher Tony Coady wrote, "Dishonesty has always been perceived in our culture, and in all cultures but the most bizarre, as a central human vice." Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative asks us to consider the following: If you want to know whether telling a lie on a particular occasion is justifiable, you must try to imagine what would happen if everyone were to lie. Surely you would agree that a world in which no one lies is preferable to one in which lying is common because in such a world we could never trust anyone. Thus, we should try to present the truth as best we can. Impression management goes against this virtue.

Practically speaking, impression management generally backfires in the long run. Remember Sir Walter Scott's quote, "Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!" Once we start to distort the facts, where do we stop? Many careers have been undone when discrepancies have been discovered in résumés. J. Terrence Lanni, chairman and CEO of MGM Mirage, was forced out after the Wall Street Journal revealed he never obtained the MBA from the University of South Carolina listed on his résumé. At Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, the code of ethics instructs students to provide only truthful information on their résumés and obligates them to be honest in interviews.

People are most satisfied with their jobs when their values match the culture of the organizations. If either side misrepresents itself in the interview process, then odds are people won't fit in the organizations they choose. What's the benefit in this?

This doesn't imply a person shouldn't put his or her best foot forward. But that means exhibiting qualities that are good no matter the context—being friendly, being positive and self-confident, being qualified, and competent, while still being honest.

CounterPoint

Oh, come on. Get off your high horse. Everybody fudges to some degree in the process of applying for a job. If you really told the interviewer what your greatest weakness or worst mistake was, you'd never get hired. What if you answered, "I find it hard to get up in the morning and get to work"?

"White lies" are expected and act as a kind of social lubricant. If we really knew what people were thinking, we'd go crazy. Moreover, you can quote all the philosophy you want, but sometimes it's necessary to lie. Wouldn't you lie to save your family? It's naïve to think we can live in a world without lying.

Sometimes a bit of deception is necessary to get a job. I know a gay applicant who was rejected from a job he really wanted because he told the interviewer he had written two articles for gay magazines. What if he had told the interviewer a little lie? Would harm really have been done? At least he'd have a job.

When an interviewer asks you what you earned on your previous job, that information will be used against you, to pay you a salary lower than you deserve. Is it wrong to boost your salary a bit? Or would it be better to disclose your actual salary and be taken advantage of?

The same goes for complimenting interviewers, agreeing with their opinions, and so forth. If an interviewer tells you, "We believe in community involvement," are you supposed to tell the interviewer you've never volunteered for anything?

Of course you can go too far. We're not advocating that people totally fabricate. What we are talking about here is a reasonable amount of enhancement. If we can help ourselves without doing any real harm, then impression management is not the same as lying and actually is something we should teach others.

Class Exercise

Managing Impressions: The Debate

This exercise works best if you can do it before students read this chapter.

1. Ask students whether they know individuals who have attempted to "manage impressions" in a job interview.
2. Ask the students to take a position as to whether it is "ok" to manage impressions in order to "land the job" or not.
3. It is a safe assumption that students will be on both sides of this issue and will generate significant discussion in class.
4. After the discussion, cover the material in the chapter and ask students to reassess their initial positions. Have students changed their minds? Why or why not?