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Exploring Boundaries of the Effects of Applicant Impression Management Tactics in Job Interviews

Wei-Chi Tsai*

*Department of Business Administration, National Chengchi University,
64, Chih-Nan Road, Section 2, Taipei 116, Taiwan*

Chien-Cheng Chen

*Department of Business Administration, Chung Kuo Institute of Technology and
National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, 56, Singlong Road, Section 3, Taipei 116, Taiwan*

Su-Fen Chiu

*Department of Business Administration, National Taiwan University of Science and Technology,
43, Keelung Road, Section 4, Taipei 106, Taiwan*

Applicant impression management tactics have been shown to positively influence interviewer evaluations. This study extends previous research by examining the moderating roles of interview structure, customer-contact requirement, and interview length in real employment interviews for actual job openings. Results from 151 applicants of 25 firms showed that the more structured the interview, the weaker the relationship between applicant nonverbal tactics and interviewer evaluation. In addition, when the extent of customer contact required for a job was relatively low, the influence of applicant self-focused tactics on interviewer evaluation was minimized. Furthermore, when the interview was of longer duration, the effects of applicant self-focused tactics became insignificant.

Keywords: *job interviews; impression management tactics; interview structure; interview length; customer-contact requirement*

The employment interview is a common human resource selection tool for many organizations (Bell, 1992). Past scholars have had reservations about the validity and reliability of interviews (e.g., Arvey & Campion, 1982; Schmitt, 1976). However, with the advancement in interview research (e.g., structured interview; see Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997), the psychometric properties of interviews have been substantially enhanced, although there is still room for improvement. While the interviewer is attempting to gather information about the applicant in the interview, the applicant is similarly trying to convince the interviewer that he or she is indeed the best candidate (Kacmar, Delery,

*Corresponding author. Tel.: 886-2 2939-3091; fax: 886-2 2939-8005.

E-mail address: weichi@nccu.edu.tw

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& Ferris, 1992). Research has documented that applicants may choose to employ impression management (IM) tactics to influence interviewer decisions (Baron, 1989; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Stevens & Kristof, 1995).

IM has been defined as “attempts to control the images that are projected in . . . social interactions” (Schlenker, 1980: 6) and was classified into two forms (e.g., Stevens & Kristof, 1995): (a) verbal tactics and (b) nonverbal tactics (e.g., eye contact, smiling). Kacmar et al. (1992) further classified verbal IM tactics as self-focused IM (applicants choose to direct the focus of the conversation to themselves) or other-focused IM (applicants focus the conversation on the interviewer or the company) tactics. Examples of self-focused IM tactics include exemplification (convincing the interviewer that his or her behavior is good enough to use as a model for others), entitlement (claims about being responsible for past achievement), and self-promotion (demonstrating one’s own qualifications). In contrast, examples of other-focused IM tactics include other-enhancement (flattering the interviewer or organization) and opinion conformity (agreeing with comments made by the interviewer). Previous research has found that applicants in interviews use both verbal and nonverbal IM tactics, and these tactics would positively influence the interviewers’ evaluations of the applicants (e.g., Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kacmar & Carlson, 1999; Kacmar et al., 1992; Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995).

This study seeks to explore boundaries of the effects of applicant verbal tactics (only the self-focused IM will be examined) and nonverbal tactics by examining three moderators: interview structure, customer-contact requirement, and interview length. To date, only two studies have examined such issues. Howard and Ferris (1996) examined whether interviewer training would moderate the effects of applicant IM tactics. They found that applicant self-promotion IM tactics were less effective in influencing the evaluations of the interviewers who had received interview training, compared with those receiving no training. Hazer and Jacobson (2003) showed that the lower the interviewers’ self-monitoring traits, the weaker the correlation would be between applicant self-presentation IM tactics and interviewers’ perceived employability of the applicants.

The present study extends Howard and Ferris’s (1996) and Hazer and Jacobson’s (2003) research in three ways. First, both of those studies involved laboratory experiments, whereas this study is conducted in a field setting. According to Posthuma, Morgeson, and Campion, our research strategy has the advantage of reflecting “the physical, emotional, and cognitive fidelity of interviews where there are real outcomes for both interviewer and applicant” (2002: 41). Second, in contrast to the work of Howard and Ferris (1996) and that of Hazer and Jacobson (2003), where applicants’ uses of self-promotion (a component of the self-focused IM construct) were examined, this study focuses on a more complete conceptualization of the self-focused IM construct (i.e., including both self-promotion and exemplification). Finally, Howard and Ferris (1996) and Hazer and Jacobson (2003) examined the influence of interviewer characteristics (i.e., interviewer training and interviewer self-monitoring, respectively) on the effects of applicant IM tactics. This study, however, examines three moderating variables that capture the situational aspect of the interview (see Dipboye, 1992, for a categorization of interview variables), namely, interview structure, customer-contact requirement, and interview length.

Theory

Effects of Applicant IM Tactics

Gilmore and Ferris (1989) found that applicant IM tactics positively influenced interviewer evaluation, even controlling for the effects of applicant credentials. Kacmar et al. (1992) examined the effects of two types of verbal IM tactics (self-focused vs. other-focused) on interviewer evaluation. Results

showed that applicants' uses of self-focused tactics were more effective than other-focused tactics in influencing interviewer ratings and job recommendations. Stevens and Kristof (1995) found that both self-promotion tactics and nonverbal IM tactics positively influenced interviewers' evaluations of the applicants, whereas other-enhancement tactics (a form of other-focused IM) had no significant influence on interviewer evaluation. Howard and Ferris (1996) examined mechanisms linking applicant IM tactics and interviewer evaluation and showed that applicant nonverbal IM tactics affected interviewers' perceived competence of the applicants, thus leading to higher perceived job suitability of the applicants. A recent study by Kristof-Brown et al. (2002) showed that applicant self-promotion tactics significantly influenced interviewers' perceptions of person-job (P-J) fit, and nonverbal tactics correlated positively with interviewer perceived similarity. However, the link between other-focused tactics and interviewer-perceived similarity was not confirmed. Ellis, West, Ryan, and Deshon (2002), in contrast, found that both ingratiation (one form of other-focused IM) and self-promotion tactics correlated positively with interviewer evaluation. Taken together, as no consistent evidence exists to demonstrate that other-focused IM tactics influence interviewer evaluation, this study only looks at self-focused and nonverbal IM tactics. Thus, the following is proposed:

Hypothesis 1a: Applicant self-focused IM tactics will be positively related to interviewer evaluation.

Hypothesis 1b: Applicant nonverbal IM tactics will be positively related to interviewer evaluation.

The Moderating Role of Interview Structure

A number of scholars have argued that applicants' IM tactics may represent a potential source of error in interviewer evaluation (e.g., Kacmar et al., 1992; Motowidlo & Burnett, 1995). For example, Stevens and Kristof (1995) indicated that applicants might use IM tactics to portray a positive image of themselves as being qualified for the jobs they are applying for, even though these IM tactics might have nothing to do with their future job success. Although these IM tactics may lead to inaccurate evaluations of the applicants, issues on how interviewers can make valid decisions without being influenced by applicant IM tactics remain relatively unexplored. Posthuma et al. (2002) suggested that future research be conducted to investigate whether interview structure would be useful in reducing the effects of applicant IM tactics. The present study answers their calls by investigating the moderating role of interview structure on the relationship between applicant IM tactics and interviewer evaluation.

Certain components of interview structure seem to have the potential to reduce the effectiveness of applicant IM tactics (Campion et al., 1997). For instance, the component of "evaluating applicant responses to each question" decreases the cognitive complexity involved in interviewer decisions; consequently, the influence of irrelevant information on interviewer evaluation can be reduced. The component of "basing questions on a job analysis" encourages the interviewer to ask job-related questions. Thus, applicants are less able to control the content of the discussion, thereby reducing their opportunities to use IM tactics (Chapman & Rowe, 2001). The component of "asking exact same questions of each candidate" provides a common ground for information collection and thus would help ensure that information gathered in the interview reflects the actual qualifications of the applicant rather than interviewer biases (Dipboye, 1997). In other words, applicants are less able to manipulate and shape the interviewer's impressions in a favorable direction because of the standardization of questioning (Dipboye & Gaugler, 1993).

Kristof-Brown et al. (2002) examined the effects of applicant IM tactics in unstructured interviews. They found a correlation of .40 between applicants' uses of self-promotion IM and interviewer perception of P-J fit. In contrast, Ellis et al. (2002) explored applicants' uses of IM tactics in structured interviews. Results of this study showed that the correlation between applicant self-promotion IM and interviewer evaluation was .21, a figure that was significantly smaller than the value reported in

Kristof-Brown et al.'s (2002) research. These two studies were similar in many aspects (e.g., both studies examined the same IM tactic in interviews with real people; the jobs in question were both of nonsales types) but differed in the level of interview structure. Thus, we expect that the higher the interview structure, the weaker the relationship would be between applicant IM tactics and interviewer evaluation. Hence, the following is proposed:

Hypothesis 2a: The greater the interview structure, the weaker the relationship will be between applicant self-focused IM tactics and interviewer evaluation.

Hypothesis 2b: The greater the interview structure, the weaker the relationship will be between applicant nonverbal IM tactics and interviewer evaluation.

The Moderating Role of Customer-Contact Requirement

Scholars have also argued that interviewers may consider applicants' uses of IM tactics to be a job-related skill for certain jobs (Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Rynes (1993) indicated that a good sales representative is often able to conceal his or her own characteristics and to put his or her best foot forward. Therefore, when applicants proficient in the use of IM tactics are hired, it may bring great benefits to the organization (Ralston & Kirkwood, 1999). Stevens and Kristof (1995) advocated that as certain jobs require employees to effectively interact with others in public settings (e.g., sales representatives must convince customers of their job competence), the ability to use IM tactics might be more needed in those jobs. Similarly, Ellis et al. (2002) indicated that IM tactics might be criterion related for certain jobs. They argued that insurance agents, for example, might perform better when they use IM tactics during their interactions with customers. An empirical study by Gilmore and Ferris (1989) showed that for customer-service jobs, interviewers considered the self-presentation exhibited by the applicants during interviews to be more important than applicants' qualifications. Thus, we expect that when the extent of customer contact required for a job is relatively high (e.g., sales or customer-service jobs), interviewers may be more likely to pay attention to applicants' uses of IM tactics during job interviews and, as a result, give higher evaluations for applicants who demonstrate IM tactics. Alternatively, when the extent of customer contact required for a job is relatively low (e.g., R&D jobs), interviewers will likely pay less attention to applicants' demonstrations of IM tactics and instead concentrate on applicants' professional skills and abilities (Hazer & Jacobson, 2003). Consequently, the relationship between applicant IM tactics and interviewer evaluation becomes weaker. Hence, the following is proposed:

Hypothesis 3a: The lower the extent of customer contact required for a job, the weaker the relationship will be between applicant self-focused IM tactics and interviewer evaluation.

Hypothesis 3b: The lower the extent of customer contact required for a job, the weaker the relationship will be between applicant nonverbal IM tactics and interviewer evaluation.

The Moderating Role of Interview Length

In practice, many interviewers would browse the applicant's application or resume during the interview (Dipboye, Fontenelle, & Garner, 1984). As the interview continues, the interviewer would learn more about the applicant (Tullar, Mullin, & Caldwell, 1979). Wortman and Linsenmeier (1977) indicated that the amount of background information the raters have about the ratees might affect how individuals are evaluated; individuals' influence tactics are likely to be less effective when the raters have more information about the ratees. In a meta-analysis, Higgins, Judge, and Ferris (2003) compared the relative effectiveness of influence tactics in different HR contexts and showed that individuals' uses of self-promotion tactics were less effective in the context of performance appraisals than in

selection interviews. As supervisors typically have more opportunities to observe the employee during a longer period of time, the supervisors may have a greater ability to recognize influence tactics for what they are, rather than as accurate descriptions of one's accomplishments.

Taken together, the longer an interview lasts, the more it will help the interviewer obtain job-relevant information about the applicant. Jones and Pittman (1982) suggested that when claims of competence can be easily refuted, the individual's chances of achieving success are likely to be diminished. It follows that the interviewers may be more able to recognize applicants' uses of IM tactics when the interview length is higher. As a result, applicant IM tactics will become less effective in influencing interviewer evaluation. Therefore, the following is proposed:

Hypothesis 4a: The longer the interview, the weaker the relationship will be between applicant self-focused IM tactics and interviewer evaluation.

Hypothesis 4b: The longer the interview, the weaker the relationship will be between applicant nonverbal IM tactics and interviewer evaluation.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of 151 applicants of nonmanagerial positions and 43 interviewers of 25 firms in Taiwan, including 6 firms in the financial industry, 10 in the manufacturing industry, and 9 in the service industry. In general, 4 to 10 applicants ($M = 6.04$) in each firm were invited to participate in this study; applicants in the same firm might be interviewing for different jobs. Of the 151 job applicants, 72 (47.7%) were male, and their mean age was 28.19. In addition, 43 managers serving the role of interviewers were included in this study. Twenty-six of them (60.47%) were male, and their mean age was 36.77. On average, they had received interviewer training once and had conducted 72.18 interviews.

Procedure

We first obtained permission from the firm's management and then asked their human resources (HR) staff to solicit the interviewers for cooperation. To prevent influencing interviewers' behaviors during the interviews, we did not reveal the true objectives of this study to the interviewers but simply told them that the study was concerned with the selection interview process. In this study, there was only one interviewer involved in each interview. Right before the beginning of the interview, the interviewer was asked to complete a survey concerning the type of job to be filled and his or her preinterview evaluation of the applicant. After the interview started, the second author waited outside the interview room and recorded the length of the interview. As soon as the interview was completed, applicants were invited to fill out a survey concerning the IM tactics they had used in the interview (the response rate was 97.24% in this study). We also asked interviewers to fill out a survey concerning their postinterview evaluations of the applicants, applicant physical attractiveness, the level of interview structure, and their demographic information.

Measures

IM tactics. Six items were used to measure applicant self-focused IM tactics, including three items adopted from Kristof-Brown et al. (2002) (i.e., "During the interview, I demonstrated my knowledge

and expertise,” “I described my skills and abilities in an attractive way,” and “I described my skills and experience.”). In addition, two more items adapted from Wayne and Ferris (1990) were used to tap applicants’ uses of self-promotion tactics: “I tried to draw the interviewer’s attention to my records of accomplishment” and “I emphasized the qualities that I possessed.” Furthermore, following the definition in Kacmar et al.’s (1992) study, we included one item that tapped applicants’ uses of self-exemplification tactics (i.e., “I tried to convince the interviewer that my behavior is good enough to use as a model for others.”). Applicants were asked to indicate the degree to which they employed these six IM tactics during the interview on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 6 = *strongly agree*). We performed an exploratory factor analysis on these six items of self-focused IM and the three items of nonverbal IM (introduced later) to examine the underlying dimensionality of IM tactics. Results of a generalized least square factor analysis with oblique rotation yielded a two-factor solution that explained 55.3% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha of self-focused IM tactics was .74 in this study.

Moreover, we adopted two items (i.e., “I smiled a lot or used other friendly nonverbal behavior” and “I always maintained eye contact with the interviewer”) from Stevens and Kristof (1995) and Kristof-Brown et al. (2002) to measure applicant nonverbal IM tactics. To further increase the internal consistency reliability of this measure, we divided the former item into two (i.e., “I smiled a lot during the interview” and “I used friendly nonverbal cues like smiling and nodding”). However, Cronbach’s alpha of the three items of nonverbal IM in this study was .63, a magnitude that was not sufficiently high. Thus, we chose to use the single item (i.e., “I used friendly nonverbal cues like smiling and nodding”) that broadly captures the construct of nonverbal IM tactics in the present study.

Interviewer evaluation. Five items adopted from Howard and Ferris (1996) and Stevens and Kristof (1995) were used to measure the interviewer’s postinterview evaluation of the applicant on a 6-point Likert-type scale. Sample items include the following: “I do consider this applicant suitable for hiring into this organization,” and “I am likely to invite the applicant to a second interview.” Results of a generalized least square factor analysis suggested a one-factor solution that explained 83.8% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha was .95 in this study.

Interview structure. Five items adopted from Barrick, Patton, and Haugland (2000) and Kohn and Dipboye (1998) were used to measure this construct. Interviewers were asked to indicate the levels of structure for their interviews on a 6-point Likert-type scale. Items include the following: “I had specific questions to ask prior to the interview,” “My questions were relevant for assessing the applicants’ abilities to perform the job duties,” “I used the exact same questions for all applicants,” “I asked questions in the exact same order for all applicants,” and “I evaluated applicants’ responses to each question.” Results of a generalized least square factor analysis suggested a one-factor solution that explained 45.4% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha was .70 in this study.

Customer-contact requirement. Two taxonomies of the “Occupational Requirement” domain in the O*NET database (see Peterson et al., 2001) were adopted to measure the extent to which a job requires its incumbent to interact with customers—“selling or influencing others” (i.e., convincing others to buy merchandise/goods, or otherwise changing their minds or actions) and “performing for or working directly with the public” (i.e., performing for people or dealing directly with the public, including serving persons in restaurants and stores, and receiving clients or guests). The job titles reported by interviewers were used to obtain the ratings of two work activity taxonomies from the National O*NET Consortium Web site (<http://online.onetcenter.org/>), with each rating ranging from 0 to 100. We then averaged the two ratings (Cronbach’s alpha was .92) to represent the customer-contact requirement construct.

Interview length. A stopwatch was used to compute the length of the interview. On average, the interview length was 33.97 minutes in this study.

Control variables. Past research showed that interviewers' preinterview impressions of the applicants would positively influence interviewer decisions (e.g., Chapman & Rowe, 2001; Dipboye, 1992; Macan & Dipboye, 1990). One plausible explanation is the "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Dipboye, 1982) in which the interviewers' conducts in the interview and their subsequent evaluations were biased in the direction of confirming their preinterview impressions. Thus, we included preinterview impression as a control variable. This variable represents the interviewer's knowledge of the applicant prior to the interview, obtained by reviewing the applicant's biographical data or resume. A single item, "The written information provided by this applicant gave me a very good impression" from Chapman and Rowe (2001), was used to measure this construct. Interviewers were asked to indicate their opinions on a 6-point Likert-type scale.

In addition, we included interviewer experience and interviewer training as control variables. Past scholars showed that interviewers with more experience are less lenient in their evaluations (Furnham & Burbeck, 1989). The experienced interviewers may be more sensitive to hiring quotas and, as a result, more cautious in making their decisions (Dipboye & Jackson, 1999). This construct was assessed with one self-reported item where interviewers indicated the total number of interviews they had participated in. It has also been suggested that interviewer training may influence interviewer judgment. Untrained interviewers may be more uncertain of the types of applicant characteristics they seek and, as a result, find it difficult to make fine distinctions between applicants. As interviewers typically pay more attention to negative information about applicants (Rowe, 1989), this difficulty in making fine discriminations may lead untrained interviewers to be harsher than trained interviewers when evaluating applicant qualifications (Stevens, 1998), leading to less favorable interviewer evaluations. Interviewer training was measured by one item where interviewers indicated the number of training sessions they had received in job interviewing.

Moreover, interviewer sex, applicant sex, and applicant physical attractiveness were also found to influence interviewer evaluation. For example, London and Poplawski (1976) found that female interviewers rated all applicants higher than did male interviewers. Dipboye, Fromkin, and Wilback (1975) indicated that female applicants generally received lower evaluations than men. Moreover, it has been found that applicants' physical attractiveness positively influenced their likability, which in turn affected interviewers' perceived hirability (Cash, Gillen, & Burns, 1977). One item adopted from Cable and Judge (1997) was used to assess interviewer evaluation of the applicant's physical attractiveness (i.e., "I think that this applicant's physical appearance is fairly attractive").

Finally, we expect that industry type may influence the degree to which applicants use IM tactics, which in turn influence interviewer evaluation. For example, in the service industry, more people might be required to engage in IM (e.g., smiling and friendly demeanor) in their everyday job activities than in other industries (Ford, Heaton, & Brown, 2001). Industry type was classified as financial industry, manufacturing industry, or service industry in accordance with the Standard Industrial Classification System definition commonly adopted by Taiwan government agencies. In this study, we created two dummy variables, with service industry as the referent category.

Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of all variables included in this study. Consistent with Kristof-Brown et al.'s (2002) research, applicants rated their uses of nonverbal IM tactics ($M = 5.13$) substantially higher than the self-focused IM tactics ($M = 3.91$). In addition,

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Manufacturing industry	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Financial industry	—	—	-.23**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Preinterview impression	4.23	1.04	.05	-.09	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. Applicant physical attractiveness	3.91	1.12	-.22**	-.22**	.12	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5. Interviewer experience	72.18	134.72	.03	.01	-.17*	.12	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6. Interviewer training	0.96	1.32	-.31**	.29**	-.03	-.02	.07	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
7. Interviewer sex ^a	—	—	-.43**	.23**	.09	.07	-.22**	.37**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
8. Applicant sex ^a	—	—	-.20*	-.01	-.04	.15	.04	.27**	.35**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
9. Interview structure	4.05	0.76	.03	-.31**	-.08	.24*	.37**	-.05	-.15	-.00	(.70)	—	—	—	—	—
10. Customer-contact requirement	45.55	26.65	-.37**	-.17*	-.13	.20*	.12	.08	.35**	.22**	.22**	(.92)	—	—	—	—
11. Interview length	33.97	21.33	.04	-.03	-.00	-.14	-.17*	-.21*	-.05	-.25**	-.08	-.04	—	—	—	—
12. Self-focused IM	3.91	0.76	-.03	.05	.15	.04	.19*	-.09	-.10	-.03	.12	.09	-.00	(.74)	—	—
13. Nonverbal IM	5.13	0.77	-.11	.14	.31**	.03	-.02	.03	.03	.12	-.16	-.09	.02	.14	—	—
14. Interviewer evaluation	4.18	1.14	-.15	-.08	.36**	.48**	.04	.11	.11	.14	.13	.09	.06	.31**	.08	(.95)

Note: IM = impression management; Cronbach's alpha coefficients are on the diagonal.

a. Sex was coded by 0 = male and 1 = female.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 2
Prediction of Interviewer Evaluation From Applicant Impression Management (IM) Tactics

Variable	Interviewer Evaluation			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control variables				
Manufacturing industry	-.05	-.03	-.02	.04
Financial industry	.01	-.01	.00	-.04
Preinterview impression	.33**	.30**	.31**	.29**
Applicant physical attractiveness	.43**	.43**	.45**	.45**
Interviewer experience	.02	-.04	-.02	-.08
Interviewer training	.11	.14†	.17*	.22**
Interviewer sex	.06	-.03	-.04	.00
Applicant sex	.07	.07	.11	.12
Independent variables				
Self-focused IM (SF)		.28**	.28**	.22**
Nonverbal IM (NV)		-.08	-.08	-.07
Moderators				
Interview structure (IS)			.03	-.05
Customer-contact requirement (CR)			-.02	-.07
Interview length (IL)			.18**	.23**
Interaction terms				
SF × IS				.08
NV × IS				-.17*
SF × CR				.18*
NV × CR				-.06
SF × IL				-.14*
NV × IL				.03
Model <i>F</i>	9.60	10.33	8.77	7.29
<i>R</i> ²	.35**	.43**	.45**	.51**
ΔR^2		.08**	.02†	.06*

Note: The entries in the table are standardized betas.

† $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

there were positive correlations between interviewer evaluation and preinterview impression, applicant physical attractiveness, and applicant self-focused IM ($r = .36, .48, \text{ and } .31$, respectively, $p < .01$).

As seen in Table 2, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were performed to test whether interview structure, customer-contact requirement, and interview length moderate the relationship between IM tactics and interviewer evaluation. In Model 1, eight control variables, including two industry dummy variables, preinterview impression, applicant physical attractiveness, interviewer experience, interviewer training, interviewer sex, and applicant sex, were entered into the regression. Overall, the model accounted for 35% of the variance in interviewer evaluation ($p < .01$). Preinterview impression and applicant physical attractiveness were significantly related to interviewer evaluation ($\beta = .33$ and $.43$, respectively, $p < .01$).

In Model 2, the two independent variables, self-focused IM (SF) and nonverbal IM (NV), were added to the regression. As shown in Table 2, the two variables explained a significant amount of variability in interviewer evaluation beyond that of the control variables ($\Delta R^2 = .08$, $p < .01$). The standardized regression weight was significant for self-focused IM ($\beta = .28$, $p < .01$), but not for nonverbal IM ($\beta = -.08$, $p > .10$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1a was supported, whereas Hypothesis 1b was not.

In Model 3, the three moderating variables, including interview structure (IS), customer-contact requirement (CR), and interview length (IL), were added to the regression. As shown in Table 2, the three variables explained a marginally significant amount of variability in interviewer evaluation

Figure 1
The Moderating Effect of Interview Structure (IS)

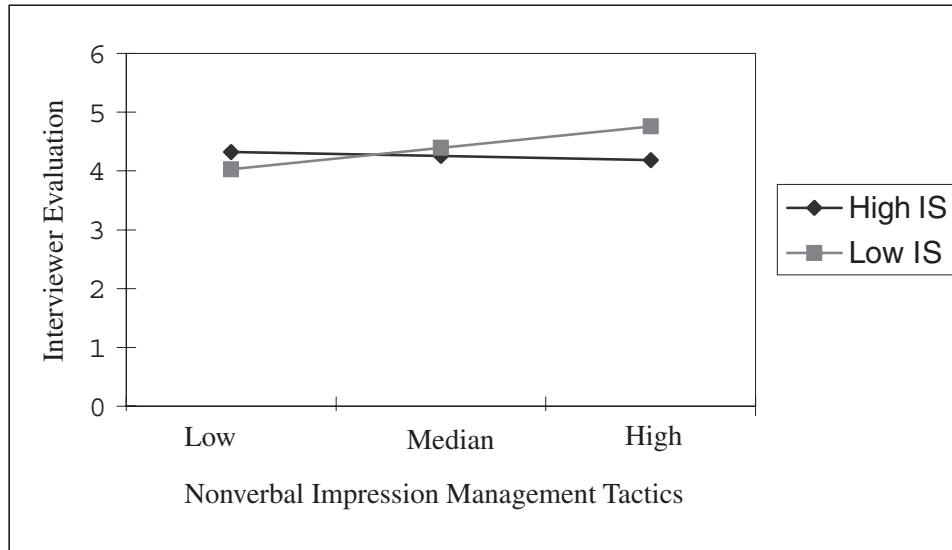
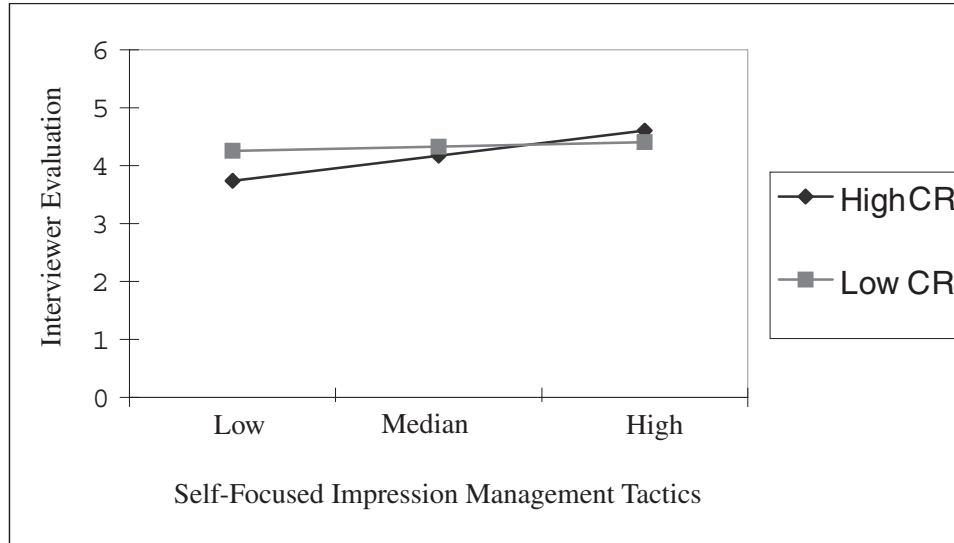


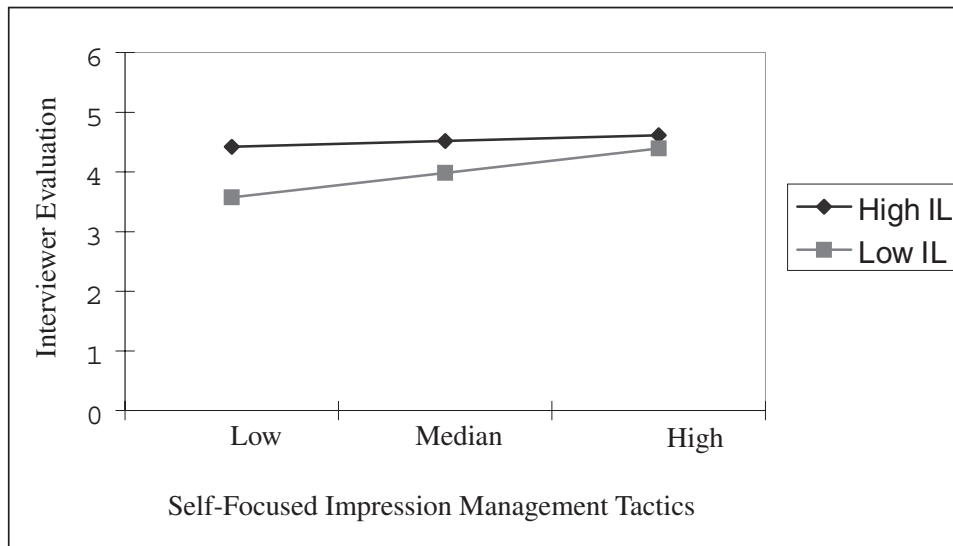
Figure 2
The Moderating Effect of Customer-Contact Requirement (CR)



beyond that of the control variables and independent variables ($\Delta R^2 = .02, p < .10$). The standardized regression weight was significant only for interview length ($\beta = .18, p < .01$).

In Model 4, a moderated regression was performed in which the six possible two-way interaction terms about interview structure (i.e., SF \times IS and NV \times IS), customer-contact requirement (i.e., SF \times CR and NV \times CR), and interview length (i.e., SF \times IL and NV \times IL) were added to the predictors. To

Figure 3
The Moderating Effect of Interview Length (IL)



counter problems of multicollinearity in tests of interaction terms, we centered all independent and moderating variables before creating the interaction terms (see Jaccard, Turrisi, & Wan, 1990). The interaction terms accounted for a significant amount of unique variability in interviewer evaluation ($\Delta R^2 = .06, p < .05$). As shown in Table 2, $SF \times IS$ was not significantly related to interviewer evaluation ($\beta = .08, p > .10$), thereby disconfirming Hypothesis 2a. However, $NV \times IS$ was significant ($\beta = -.17, p < .05$), offering support for Hypothesis 2b. Figure 1, produced from the slope and intercept data in the regression output (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), supports the expected shape of the hypothesized interaction. Figure 1 illustrates that when the interview structure was relatively low (i.e., low IS), applicant nonverbal IM tactics were positively related to interviewer evaluation. In contrast, when the interview structure was relatively high (i.e., high IS), the magnitude of the positive relationship was reduced.

In addition, there was a significant two-way interaction between SF and CR ($\beta = .18, p < .05$). The shape of this $SF \times CR$ interaction was investigated further in Figure 2, indicating that when the extent of customer contact required for a job was relatively high, applicant self-focused IM tactics were positively related to interviewer evaluation. In contrast, when the extent of customer contact required for a job was relatively low, the relationship was minimized. Overall, these results show that Hypothesis 3a was supported. However, the standardized regression weight for $NV \times CR$ was not significant ($\beta = -.06, p > .10$), thereby disconfirming Hypothesis 3b.

Furthermore, there was a significant two-way interaction between SF and IL ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$). The shape of this $SF \times IL$ interaction was investigated further in Figure 3, indicating that when the interview length was relatively low, applicant self-focused IM tactics were positively related to interviewer evaluation. In contrast, when the interview length was relatively high, the relationship became insignificant. Overall, these results show that Hypothesis 4a was supported. However, the standardized regression weight for $NV \times IL$ was not significant ($\beta = .03, p > .10$), thereby disconfirming Hypothesis 4b.

Discussion

The Main Effects of IM Tactics

One purpose of this study was to examine whether applicant IM tactics influence interviewer evaluation. As expected, we found that applicant self-focused IM positively influenced interviewer evaluation. However, our results showed that applicant nonverbal IM was not significantly related to interviewer evaluation ($\beta = -.08, p > .10$), a result that seems inconsistent with most of past research. Past research studies examining this issue were often conducted with a laboratory experimental design where interviewers evaluated applicant nonverbal behaviors in pictures or video interviews (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Howard & Ferris, 1996; Stone & Winfrey, 1994). Alternatively, a few studies videotaped the mock interviews or campus interviews (i.e., “live” interviews) and then asked the interviewers to evaluate applicant behavior shown in videos (Degroot & Motowidlo, 1999; Motowidlo & Burnett, 1995). Unlike in real employment interviews, where interviewers are likely to rate a succession of applicants (as in the present study), interviewers in those past studies made their evaluations simply by watching one or two applicants’ interview performance. Consequently, applicants’ nonverbal behaviors may actually receive more attention from the interviewers and, as a result, positively influence interviewer evaluation. Moreover, although there were a few studies examining such issues in real job interviews, as applicant nonverbal behavior and interviewer evaluation were both rated by interviewers (e.g., Anderson & Shackleton, 1990; Parsons & Liden, 1984), the problem of common method bias may have operated and inflated the effects of applicant nonverbal behaviors.

Findings of Kristof-Brown et al. (2002) on the effects of applicant nonverbal IM, however, appear to be consistent with that of the present study. Their research strategy was similar to the present study in that real business recruiters acted as interviewers (as opposed to students playing the role of the interviewer), and applicants self-rated their own nonverbal behaviors in a field setting (i.e., mock interviews in their study). One dependent variable included in their study (i.e., P-J fit) is conceptually similar to our dependent variable (i.e., interviewer evaluation). Kristof-Brown et al. (2002) found that the magnitude of the relationship between applicant nonverbal IM tactics and interviewer perceived P-J fit was .05 ($p > .05$), a figure that is similar to that of the present study ($r = .08$). Future research is needed to clarify whether applicant nonverbal behavior can lead to positive interviewer evaluation.

The Moderating Effects of IM Tactics

The main purpose of this study was to examine the boundary conditions of the effects of applicants’ IM tactics. Much previous research has demonstrated the positive effects of applicant IM tactics on interviewer evaluation (e.g., Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kacmar et al., 1992; Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Whetten highlighted the importance of examining “qualitative changes in the boundaries of a theory (applications under qualitatively different conditions)” (1989: 493). Following Whetten’s suggestion, the present study extends Hazer and Jacobson’s (2003) and Howard and Ferris’s (1996) studies by examining the moderating roles of interview structure, customer-contact requirement, and interview length on the relationship between applicant IM tactics and interviewer evaluation. Results of this study partially confirmed the viewpoints of several scholars (Campion et al., 1997; Stevens & Kristof, 1995) and found that a higher level of interview structure reduced the influence of applicant nonverbal IM tactics on interviewer evaluation but had no comparable effect on self-focused tactics. Campion et al. (1997) pointed out that a high interview structure would encourage the interviewer to focus the conversation on aspects related to the job. Accordingly, the influence of extraneous information (e.g., applicant physical appearance, nonverbal behavior) on interviewer decisions can be minimized, and the criterion-related validity of the interview can be improved. Nevertheless,

this study showed that even in a structured interview, applicants' displays of self-focused IM tactics were still considered by the interviewer as an indication of possessing job-related characteristics (e.g., self-confidence; see Kanouse, Giacalone, & Pollard, 1988), thus leading to a favorable interviewer evaluation.

As expected, this study showed that a high level of interview structure could reduce the effects of applicant nonverbal tactics on interviewer evaluation. Motowidlo and Burnett (1995) argued that one important function of structuring formats is to focus the interviewer's attention on information that is believed to be job related, and visual cues like applicant nonverbal behaviors, which carry little information about the content of applicant's answers to questions, are extraneous to the job in question. Thus, a highly structured interview restricts interviewers' attention to what applicants say while neglecting what they can see about applicants' behavior as they respond to questions. Consequently, the effects of applicant nonverbal IM tactics on interviewer evaluation are reduced in structured interviews.

This finding has one practical implication. To reduce potential sources of error caused by applicant nonverbal IM tactics and enhance the quality of interviewer decisions, the level of interview structure in organizations should be increased. We suggest that interviewers generate interview questions based on job analysis, ask the exact same questions in the same order for all applicants, and evaluate applicants' responses to each question.

Consistent with the arguments made by several scholars (Ellis et al., 2002; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Stevens & Kristof, 1995), this study also found that when the extent of customer contact required for a job was relatively low, applicants' uses of self-focused IM did not influence interviewer evaluation. Alternatively, when the extent of customer contact required for a job was relatively high, applicant self-focused IM tactics positively influenced interviewer evaluation. The present findings to a certain extent solved an important yet unanswered question in the field of IM: "Is IM a job-related skill for some jobs?" Results of this study showed that, at least in the eyes of the interviewers, applicants' displays of self-focused IM tactics were considered to be a relevant skill for jobs that require employees to effectively interact with customers (e.g., sales or customer-service jobs). In light of these preliminary results, we encourage future research conducting criterion-related validation studies for applicants' self-focused IM tactics to better clarify this issue.

Results of this study also showed that customer-contact requirement was unable to moderate the relationship between nonverbal IM tactics and interviewer evaluation. Table 1 shows that applicants in this study made greater use of nonverbal IM tactics than self-focused IM ($M = 5.13$ and 3.91 , respectively), but the variation of nonverbal tactics (coefficient of variation = $.15$) was smaller than that of self-focused tactics (coefficient of variation = $.20$), suggesting that applicants in this study consistently demonstrated high levels of nonverbal IM tactics. In this case, interviewers may find it difficult to differentiate between applicants on the basis of their nonverbal behaviors. Therefore, regardless of different levels of customer-contact requirement, interviewers would not give favorable evaluations to applicants using more nonverbal IM tactics. In contrast, as applicants in this study showed a greater variation in their uses of self-focused IM tactics, it is more likely that interviewers would evaluate applicant self-focused IM tactics differently across various job requirements.

Alternatively, it may well be that interviewer evaluation is actually unaffected by applicants' uses of nonverbal IM tactics across different levels of customer-contact requirements. Kristof-Brown et al. (2002) demonstrated that applicants' nonverbal IM tactics were positively associated with their personality traits of agreeableness. However, Dunn, Mount, Barrick, and Ones (1995) found that no matter whether the job type was of sales or nonsales, the magnitude of the effect of applicant agreeableness on interviewer evaluation did not differ. Moreover, a meta-analysis by Hurtz and Donovan (2000) showed that the true validities of agreeableness for sales and skilled/semiskilled occupations were both quite small (true correlation = $.05$ and $.10$, respectively), indicating that interviewers may not

consider applicant nonverbal IM tactics and the corresponding agreeableness traits to be important for both high- and low-customer-contact jobs.

The above findings seem to suggest that applicant nonverbal IM may be a bias toward interviewer judgment. Several scholars also shared this view. For example, Motowidlo (1986) indicated that visual cues in selection interviews (e.g., smiles, clothing) are not relevant to interviewees' true scores on characteristics necessary for effective job performance. Burnnett, Fan, Motowidlo, and Degroot (1998) further argued that an interviewee who smiles a lot may be perceived as approachable and easy to get along with, when, in fact, they are simply trying to impress the interviewer. Their study showed that more nonverbal cues (i.e., maintaining eye contact, speaking softly) displayed by applicants would result in lower criterion-related validity for the interview. A concurrent validation study by Degroot and Motowidlo (1999) also found that applicants' overall visual cues shown in interviews (e.g., gaze, smile, and hand movement) were not significantly related to performance ratings rated by supervisors ($r = .14, p > .05$). More research is needed to clarify the role applicant nonverbal IM plays in interviewer decisions.

Finally, this study found that the length of the interview moderated the effects of self-focused IM. Kristof-Brown et al. (2002) showed that applicants who used high levels of self-focused IM tactics (e.g., describing one's skills and abilities in an attractive way) would produce perceptions of competence and, as a result, received higher evaluations from the interviewers. As interviewers often obtain more information about the applicants' job-relevant qualifications when the interviews are of long duration, the interviewers would have less need to rely on the information provided by applicants' self-focused IM tactics in making their hiring decisions. As a result, applicants' uses of self-focused IM tactics would become less effective in influencing interviewer evaluations.

Limitations and Future Research

A few limitations of this study should be noted. First, although the construct of interview structure contains as many as 15 components (see Campion et al., 1997), our measure has only incorporated 5 components (e.g., ask the exact same questions and in the same order for all applicants) that have been widely seen as building blocks for the interview structure construct (Barrick et al., 2000; Campion et al., 1997). Future research should include additional components (e.g., note taking; see Burnett et al., 1998) and make an attempt to measure the interview structure in a more comprehensive way.

Second, in this study, we asked applicants rather than interviewers to rate applicants' uses of IM tactics. Stevens and Kristof (1995) argued that the interviewer might be the most appropriate source of data when the research interest is to examine the impact of applicant IM tactics. Nevertheless, if we followed Stevens and Kristof's suggestion and had both IM tactics and interviewer evaluation rated by interviewers, the possibility that the relationship between applicant IM tactics and interviewer evaluation being inflated by common method variance cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, Stevens and Kristof (1995) showed that applicants' self-reports of IM tactics are fairly similar to those rated by observers, indicating that the use of a self-reported measure of applicant IM should be appropriate.

Third, the present study did not examine the variable of applicant other-focused IM tactics. As past findings pertaining to the relationship between other-focused IM and interviewer evaluation appear inconsistent, future research is needed to identify potential moderators. When conducting such research, we encourage researchers to examine all three IM tactics (self-focused, other-focused, and nonverbal tactics) simultaneously.

Fourth, similar to findings in past research (e.g., Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995), Cronbach's alpha of the nonverbal IM measure as rated by applicants was relatively low. Perhaps applicants in this study have used other nonverbal IM tactics in job interviews that have not been fully captured by our initial three-item measure (or by the two-item measure developed by Kristof-

Brown and colleagues). Future research is needed to develop a better measure for this construct by taking more nonverbal cues (e.g., tone of voice) into consideration.

Finally, in the present study, there were multiple data points that were linked to the same interviewer and the same organization. Although we had included three interviewer variables (i.e., interviewer experience, training, and sex) in the regression, we still could not control for all interviewer effects and, of course, the organization effects. This might violate the statistical assumption of independent observations (Kenny & La Voie, 1985) and result in biased estimates of the relations between variables (Dreher, Ash, & Hancock, 1988). We encourage future research to use larger sample sizes and take appropriate actions (e.g., standardize interviewer ratings before pooling across interviewers) to deal with such issues.

To expand on the current findings, future research may explore additional moderators. For example, Fletcher (1989) indicated that individuals would modify their self-presentation when they know their answers will be subject to subsequent checking. Chapman and Rowe (2001) further noted that when applicants are told that the information they provide in the interview would be verified by reference check, applicants would be less likely to embellish their credentials. Thus, it seems that when interviewers provide warnings of reference check for applicants, the interviewers are more likely to believe that the verbal information provided by applicants (e.g., self-focused IM) are representing their true selves. As a result, the effects of applicant IM tactics may become stronger.

Another moderator is the use of multiple interviewers. Arvey and Campion (1982) suggested that involving multiple interviewers in the interview might be beneficial, as sharing perceptions with one another may help interviewers become more aware of irrelevant inferences that are not job related. Furthermore, knowing that other interviewers are involved could increase feelings of accountability (Huffcutt & Woehr, 1999), which may force the interviewers to pay more attention to relevant information (Eder, 1999). As such, the effects of applicant IM may be reduced.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature by providing results in real employment interviews for actual job openings. As a result, this study provides a greater realism for the participants in the context within which IM behaviors were observed (McGrath, 1982). In addition, the present study extends previous research by exploring boundaries of the effects of applicant self-focused and nonverbal IM tactics. Results showed that interview structure reduced the influence of applicant nonverbal IM tactics on interviewer evaluation. Results also demonstrated that when the extent of customer contact required for a job was relatively low, the effects of applicant self-focused IM were minimized. Moreover, results showed that when the interview was of longer duration, the effects of applicant self-focused IM became insignificant. Future research should explore additional moderating variables to further clarify boundaries of the effects of applicant IM tactics.

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Biographical Notes

Wei-Chi Tsai is an associate professor in the Department of Business Administration at the National Chengchi University. He received his Ph.D. in industrial relations from the University of Minnesota. His research interests are in the areas of personnel recruitment and selection, employee affective delivery, and antecedents of employee training motivation.

Chien-Cheng Chen is an assistant professor in the Department of Business Administration at the Chung Kuo Institute of Technology. He received his Ph.D. from the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology. His research interests include employee selection with an emphasis on impression management, workplace emotion, and organizational citizenship behavior.

Su-Fen Chiu is an associate professor in the Department of Business Administration at the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Her research interests include organizational citizenship behavior, employee participation, profit sharing, and flexible work arrangements.