

The Impact of a Corporate System on Impression Management: Implications from an Ethnographic Research Study

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要旨

本論文の目的は、企業制度の仕組みが如何に従業員の印象管理 (impression management) に影響を及ぼすのか、解明することである。多くの既存研究は、従業員個人の観点から印象管理を分析するケースが多く、彼らの行動に影響を及ぼすと思われる企業制度に関する研究が限られていた。本論文では、香港における日系小売業 (Ichi とする) のエスノグラフィーを事例に、企業の昇進制度が現地従業員の印象管理に及ぼす影響を考察する。その結果、本研究では主に四つの発見があった。第一に、現地従業員の印象管理は、一貫しておらず、彼らが如何に企業の求める人材像を理解しているのかによって変動する。第二に、現地従業員の印象管理が意図的か否かは、一概に言えず、該当の企業がもつ理念や戦略を理解したうえで、分析する必要がある。第三に、現地従業員の印象管理を分析する際、香港の慣習や信条を理解する必要がある。最後に、現地従業員による印象管理の有無にかかわらず、評価する側が如何に企業昇進の制度を理解しているのかによって、その結果を左右することがある。このように、本研究では、印象管理を分析する際、企業制度に限らず、ローカルの文化やそのコンテキストといった外部的要因の重要性も考慮する必要があることを示唆している。

キーワード：印象管理、企業、制度、エスノグラフィー、参与観察

1. Introduction

This paper examines the impact of the corporate system on impression management based on ethnographic research concerning a Japanese multinational company, here called Ichi; it aims to explore how the corporate system has been cultivated in the context of its historical development, business strategies, and missions, how it influences employees' impression management, and what the outcomes are. "Multinational company" here refers to those companies who provide services in more than one country or region other than their home country.

The concept of impression management has been widely known since Erving Goffman's prominent work in 1959, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. His research offers insights into how people behave in front of others and it has made an enormous contribution to social psychology. Impression management has various definitions, but one of the commonalities is that most scholars claim impression management indicates how an individual (an actor) is trying to create their image in a way that will impress another individual (the target). This paper borrows Schlenker's idea (1980) that impression management describes how individuals behave in a way

that protects their image and how to influence the other's perceptions of them.

This paper will use the data gathered through long-term participant observation, which is a methodology that requires scholars to observe an organization's members for a relatively long period of time so as to holistically examine what is *really* happening on site. Participant observation was chosen because the laboratory setting has been the major methodology for previous studies meaning participants were deliberately placed in a specific environment to order to identify causal relationships (Wayne and Liden 1995).

The author conducted participant observation in Ichi's several Hong Kong retail shops and has mainly focused on shop floor employees, such as store employees and their supervisors. This paper discusses how subordinates attempt to impress their supervisors as many studies suggest that the lower-status agents have a higher tendency to impress higher-status agents (Pandey 1981; Suzuki et al. 2015; Yukl and Tracey 1992).

This paper will first review the early literature and point out how the context of the corporate system has been missing from these studies. It then introduces the background of Ichi explaining how the company's development and its interpretations have contributed significantly to constructing its corporate system. This paper will then explain the corporate system in detail so as to point out its characteristics and introduce several cases based on participant observation; it aims to point out the real picture concerning impression management and its relations with the corporate system. In the final section, it addresses the implications and makes practical suggestions based on these.

2. Research on Impression Management

Influenced by the work of Goffman, many scholars, and particularly social psychologists have conducted extensive research on impression management in the past decades (Wayne and Liden 1995). Subsequently, this concept has been analyzed in the context of various organizations (Ashford and Northcraft 1992; Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, and Shaw 2007; Vecchio and Sussmann 1991; Yukl and Falbe 1990). Empirical studies of the impression management in organizations could be divided into various categories but many discussed impression management tactics and their effects.

Impression management tactics were widely studied for the purposes of making better impressions during interviews, performance appraisal, and career success (Coget 2014; Hayashi 2007; Jones and Pittman 1982; Schmidt and Wilkinson 1980; Vilela et al. 2007; Wayne and Ferris 1990). Jones and Pittman (1982) found five tactics are used: self-promotion, ingratiation, intimidation, supplication, and exemplification. Wayne and Ferris, on the other hand, pointed out three tactics: being supervisor-focused, job-focused, or self-focused. Vilela et al. (2007) also examined

impression management tactics, and found that while supervisor-focused tactics worked well for evaluations as many supervisors were eager to accept being praised, the performance of job-focused tactics such as self-promotion and self-enhancement had a negative influence (Vilela et al. 2007: 632).

Many have already studied the effects of impression management, such as the correlation between performance ratings and impression management (Becker and Martin 1995; Bolino 1999; Wayne and Ferris 1990; Wayne and Kacmar 1991). For instance, Bolino (1999) indicated that when employees attempt to make themselves look “good” and they value that phenomenon, this also has a positive influence on group effectiveness. Becker and Martin (1995) examined how impression management influences the allocation of work and responsibilities, and Wayne and Kacmar (1991) explored how impression management influences performance evaluations. Some scholars have studied its negative aspects as well (Fukuchi 2009).

Many scholars in organization studies as well have pointed out the importance of impression management from the perspectives of its actual practices, business ethics, risks and various strategic skills (Giacalone and Rosenfeld 2013; Hooghiemstra 2000; Rosenfeld et al. 1995). These studies help us better understand employees’ tactics of impression management and their outcomes in organizations; however, these results seem to overlook the context, such as who the employees and the supervisors are, where they work, and in what kind of situations the impression management was conducted. These questions need to be answered because individuals may react in a different ways in various contexts created by the targets and the environment.

Some studies have tried to answer these questions from the perspective of gender and culture. Bolino and Turnley (2003) examined the combinations of different impression management tactics and suggested that women are less aggressive than men in using impression management; moreover, people who did not use impression management or used it less than others were considered more favorably than those who used it extensively. Singh, Kumra, and Vinnicombe (2002) had similar conclusions noting that many women seem to largely rely on extra high performance and commitment rather than the self-promotion strategies used more by men; they conclude that this is one of the disadvantages caused by women who chose not to employ the impression management strategies used by the majority of male employees.

Mtshelwane, Nel and Brink (2016) explore how the culture of the Zulu, a South African ethnic group, influences the impression management of people working there and concludes that conscientiousness, integrity, relational action, and skillfulness are the major elements used to impress their supervisors; they show that the cultural practices of the Zulu correlate closely with their performance in the workplace, where (younger) subordinates respect and show honor to their superiors (elders). Their research incorporates the cultural influence on people’s impression management; however, their conclusion seems unsurprising as many cultures believe in similar

virtues.

The above impression management research has to some extent covered the important issues; however, it does not fully incorporate the fact the company is an institution. Employees who are eager for career development need to understand the company's system, such as the promotion criteria, procedures, and assessment so as to make sure their tactics lead to the results they desire. A multinational company's promotion-related systems are, in general, written and shared by overseas branches as well; however, how employees practice the rules of the system might not be apparent from the outside. In order to reveal what is *really* happening on site and how people adapt to various situations based on their different interpretations of the company, this paper uses the methodology of participant observation.

3. Participant Observation as Methodology

Of the various methodologies, anthropological research conducted through long-term field work has most influenced our understanding of the organizational nature of culture (Moeran 2013: 2). In-depth participant observation allows researchers to understand the human behaviors behind the superficial phenomenon in order to gain a broader and more holistic picture (Zhu 2015). This type of ethnographic approach allows us to illuminate specific organizational phenomena and provide a rich understanding of them (Barley 1983). Through long-term participant observation, scholars are able to observe what employees do on a daily basis and how they change according to various situations involving first hand materials. It is necessary for us to become "insiders" to discover what is hidden beneath behaviors because some people may, intentionally or unintentionally, manipulate their words and behaviors to an "outsider" to hide their actual feelings.

This paper is based on ethnographic data obtained through long-term participant observation from 2009 to 2011 at Ichi's several retail stores in Hong Kong. The stores where the authors conducted field work were located both in Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Island, the two large islands in Hong Kong. In general, the author worked at the stores for several months with similar work schedules to other full-time staff. The names, including those of the company and the employees, are anonymized, and as there might be some sensitive information regarding the company, the study refrains from citing any sources that might reveal its identity.

In the next sections, this paper will describe the case study. First is the general introduction of the company, and in particular, how it constructed an agenda which influenced the content of the corporate system. This paper will later move to a description of the corporate system, and then discuss some employee promotion cases to show the impact of the corporate system on individual impression management.

4. Introduction to the Company

The Japanese multinational company, Ichi is a worldwide apparel retailer. It has survived not only the recession in the domestic market but has grown rapidly and continuously since its opening in the 1980s. In Japan, the mother company of Ichi, here called Ichi Group was the tenth largest retailer and the most profitable apparel company in 2016. Among the worldwide fashion retailers with a similar business model, Ichi Group was ranked within the global top five. Ichi Group has various fashion brands but the major pillar of Ichi Group's business has been its operations of Ichi in Japan and overseas.

By December 2016, Ichi had more than 840 stores in Japan, and had achieved approximately 45% of total net sales of the mother company; meanwhile the company had also opened approximately 800 stores in 15 countries and regions, and these dominated around 36% of the group's operation. The operations of Ichi Japan have been the dominant segment for the Ichi Group for a relatively long time, but the overseas segment has increased rapidly in these years and is expected to take over a dominant position in the near future. The majority of the profit of Ichi overseas came from the Asian region while the business in Europe and America has also been growing but at a slightly lower rate.

Tracing back the development of Ichi's missions, this study focuses on discussions of Ichi's two main strategic pillars: continuous yet rapid growth, and a "Made in Japan" branding strategy. The first strategy, to keep on rapidly earning profits is a common goal for many companies. Ichi is unique in the sense that it places emphasis on the speed of growth and its continuity. The company announces its five or ten year business plan including the goal for its net sales and, when it became public, many Ichi employees feel it will be very hard or even impossible to achieve. With slight delays from the original plan, Ichi has achieved these goals in the past years; therefore, these mission statements are still very important.

Second is the company's "Made in Japan" branding strategy. Ichi has invested considerably in its promotional activities since its establishment, but it was after its entry to the overseas markets that the company came to believe that "Made in Japan" was influential to its branding. Right after its first expansion to Europe in 2001, Ichi's operations were not prospering because of various reasons including insufficient communication and sharing with local representatives, lack of a constructive business plan, and so on. Ichi then entered one of the largest markets in the world—China—expecting to have some positive results; however, the operations in both Europe and Asia resulted in huge losses and later closures. When the company faced challenges to overcoming these business failures, the key turning event happened—huge success in Hong Kong. An Ichi manager who was in charge of the operation at that time recalled that long before Ichi's entry to the region, many locals were aware of the brand and their positive feelings toward this Japanese brand facilitated their incentive to buy. The manager who made such a comment stressed that the way Ichi shows its "Japaneseness"

to the local people was another important key strategy in its success. After the successful achievements in Hong Kong, the company's overseas expansion, and especially its operations in Asia received prosperous results as well. The company gradually started to believe in the potential of being a Japanese company and started a series of changes in the corporate system, the results of which influenced employee behaviors including their impression management practices.

Presenting the “essence” of Japan in an Ichi retail shop has been one of the main goals since 2009 and later various corporate policies, missions, and actual system were announced and implemented. Among the number of elements that could represent the image of Japan, the company has a strong tendency to stress cleanliness, organization, and Japanese-style customer service. These elements show Ichi's emphasis on the “presentation of the store,” meaning that while the company does hope to increase sales and profits, it is also important to create a shopping environment that could represent Japan so as to construct a strong and attractive brand. A local store manager from Hong Kong who had experience working in both Japanese and American apparel retails once said to me,

The American retail shop that I used to work as Store Manager did not care if the products were well organized or if the floor was clean. Even when the products were touching the floor or were lying there, it did not matter because the only thing the company cared about was the number, the sales. But these situations were not acceptable in Ichi. They do value the sales but the company will also put more emphasis on the other things, especially how the store “looks” a particular way. There are countless requirements for making the store look “good” and it is impossible to learn these in a short period of time.

(Personal communication 2009,
translated by the author from Cantonese to English)

Strong emphasis on the “presentation of the store” influenced how the company designs its system and enables the employees to create a store that is desirable. Ichi created a standard manual describing the requirements store employees were expected to satisfy and an evaluation sheet based on this. In the next section, these practices will be discussed in detail in accordance with the company's promotion system, and then how each individual attempted to impress their supervisors within this context will be analyzed.

5. Corporate System

This section describes Ichi Hong Kong's background information, such as its job ranking system and then moves to discussions of its promotional practices. Ichi entered

Hong Kong in 2005, and it had 24 stores by January 2017. The promotion system in Hong Kong basically follows that in Japan, which is considered the standard. When a new policy is implemented, it may take some time to be introduced abroad, but the basic structure is very similar.

The ranking of full-time staff, who are involved in the store operations, (from top to bottom) is: Operations Manager, Supervisor, Store Manager, Deputy Store Manager, Assistant Store Manager, Senior Salesperson/Management Trainee, Advanced Salesperson, and Full-time Salesperson. Operations Manager and Supervisor belong to headquarters staff but they will visit stores on a regular basis to check up so they have a relatively strong impact on employees' impression management. Operations Managers are in charge of the entire store operations while Supervisors are in charge of three or more stores, and they frequently visit stores for supervision. During my fieldwork, the Operations Manager was Japanese while most of the Supervisors were local and, except in rare cases, the others were all local as well. Management Trainees refer to those who have just graduated from university and who frequently climb the promotion ladder faster than those who start their career from the bottom. Some local employees who joined Ichi in the beginning were recruited as mid-career staff and were mostly in the position of Advanced Salesperson or higher. As a result they were promoted faster than those who started their career as Full-time Salesperson. The number is limited but there is some portion of employees who joined the company as part-time salespeople aiming to gain regular status.

The basic procedure for promotion is a regular evaluation, supervisor's recommendation, and approval, a written examination, and finally a face-to-face interview. There are two major types of check sheets for every employee for the regular checkup. One is to assess their skills in general and another is specifically designed to check the level of their customer service. Employees have to satisfy most of the requirements in these two sheets. Some checkup contents in Ichi require employees to behave in superficial ways. For instance, the customer service checkup sheet lists various behaviors employees have to follow in the store and most of these behaviors are externally apparent, such as smiling, using polite words, and so on. Ichi's method of assessment requires an evaluator to assess employees' performances in two ways: one is correct, and the other is incorrect.

The supervisors were expected to check their subordinates' performance on a regular basis according to the evaluation check sheets to ensure every one of them felt that they had been paid appropriate attention. Owing to the limited time for daily assessment, Store Managers were expected to combine their own daily evaluation with the feedback from other managers. After making a list of recommendations, Store Managers report their list to the Supervisor and the Operations Manager who will then make the final decisions although the last two were too busy to visit the store on a regular basis.

As I described above, some of Ichi's checkup contents require a particular form of self-presentation and supervisors had limited time for assessment. These assessments, in fact, increased the opportunities for impression management and encouraged employees' in it. The uniqueness of the evaluation check sheets allowed the evaluators to assess their subordinates "instantly," which also made the employees manipulate their performance more easily. Even though the evaluators were not familiar with one's daily performances, they could evaluate them based on the first or instant impression if they were doing it right at that specific time. Employees, on the other hand, were also able to manipulate their performance "instantly" as long as they understood the "standard" well. In other words, employees who could figure out to what degree the company was eager to create a Japanese store and how they evaluate employees could relatively easily manipulate their behaviors on site.

This section described the company's promotion system and its unique features: the strong emphasis on self-presentation according to the company's promotional criteria, and the instant evaluation by superiors owing to the limited time for evaluation.

The following section introduces various cases regarding promotion practices and impression management to show how the company's system and goals influence employees' attitudes and behaviors.

6. Impression Management by the Employees

Cases that are introduced in this section are based on the data gained from long-term participant observation at several Ichi retail shops. In many Ichi Hong Kong stores at that time, the net sales were prospering, which was apparent from a scene I observed at the store. In the winter season of 2010, many products were sold out so employees were busy filling the empty spaces on the shelves. We were often out of stock and I remembered that "Sorry, we are out of stock," was one of the phrases I often used during that season.

The following pages introduce three stories that happened in different situations, with various Store Managers and stores; these point out how impression management was largely influenced by the company's system and how evaluators interpret it. Case 1 discusses how an employee obtained a promotion opportunity by drastically changing her self-presentation to the Supervisor. Case 2 explores an employee's journey in career development by doing "nothing" special but receiving a high evaluation from the Operations Manager. Case 3 describes a picture of how two full-timers competed to impress the Store Manager (and failed) but got what they wanted in the end. After discussions of the three cases, this paper will discuss how the corporate system has an impact on impression management.

Case 1: Impressing a Supervisor with an "Ichi Smile"

The first case is about how a female store employee, Sabrina, who successfully received her promotion after impressing the Supervisor with her “Ichi smile.” Sabrina joined Ichi in 2007 as a Full-time Salesperson when the store was newly opened. Sabrina considered Ichi as a temporary job but she preferred working in Ichi compared to her last job, which was a restaurant waitress. During my one-day on-the-job training at the store, I recalled that a manager introduced me to Sabrina by saying that she was one of the most senior salesperson there and she was basically in charge of all kinds of tasks.

The Store Manager at that time had once recommended Sabrina for promotion; however, Mark, the Supervisor did not approve it. The Store Manager felt badly for Sabrina because she believed Sabrina was capable of being promoted; however, the Store Manager also said that promotion at Ichi was getting more difficult because there were not enough positions; therefore, applicants had to be “qualified.”

One of the reasons why Mark rejected the Store Manager’s recommendation was because Sabrina’s performance did not achieve the Ichi standard, and in particular, the smile. Ichi expected every employee to be able to perform Japanese-style customer service and one of the requirements is to smile. Mark found that Sabrina did not smile to colleagues, including him, or to the customers on the shop floor. Mark believed that employees who cannot smile to colleagues cannot smile to customers. Mark understood the company’s requirements very well and attempted to apply these in his evaluations. He had joined Ichi at the beginning and was involved in various start-up operations, including the translation of various corporate regulations. With his long experience of work and rich understanding to the corporate system, he had extensive knowledge of what the company expected from the employees.

Sabrina received advice in regarding to this issue not only from the Store Manager but also from her colleagues who kept telling her that as long as you want to be promoted in Ichi, you have to smile and greet not only the customers, but also the superiors to “show” you understand the Ichi requirement and you are “willing” to practice it on site. Sabrina was reluctant to follow this advice at first because, as she once said to me, “Why do we have to smile? The customers will buy our products as long as they are good. It doesn’t matter if we smile or not. And, does the company have any proof that the smile actually increases the sales? I don’t think so.”

Even though Sabrina was not happy about how subordinates have to do something they do not believe in, she gave up fighting, and started to smile and greet on the shop floor whether or not Mark was around. Sabrina kept on trying and finally Mark “saw” her efforts. She successfully received approval from Mark and was subsequently promoted. The case of Sabrina shows how employees had to satisfy the expectations of their superiors even though they did not believe in the necessity of doing so. Sabrina did not use complicated tactics but simply smiled and greeted the supervisor, which was part of the promotion criteria, an institutional requirement at

Ichi.

The following discussion describes how an employee could “unintentionally” impress their supervisor because her actions fit perfectly with the company’s requirements.

Case 2: Impress Operations Manager with Daily Practices

Unlike Sabrina, the promotion of Helen, an Advanced Salesperson was smoother although Helen seemed to try less intentionally to impress her superiors; rather her daily behavior “fit” Ichi’s expectations. Helen used to work in various apparel shops and joined Ichi in 2009. Her career started from working in a small-size store although she gained various opportunities for better career prospects thanks to the strong support from two Japanese expatriates, Mizuno and Taguchi, who worked as Operations Managers in Hong Kong.

When Helen was working in the first store, Mizuno has already noticed her presence. Mizuno evaluated her highly and once he told me that he had given her a “Thank You Card,” a type of square card that on which an employee could write their gratitude to their colleagues, several times to show his gratitude for her hard efforts and good performance, especially in terms of how she served customers in a way the company desired. An Operations Manager giving the Thank You Card to a non-managerial store employee was not common and I have never seen or heard of a similar event during my fieldwork or afterwards. Mizuno also said that the company needed to transfer the talented staff like Helen to the newly opened store so that the store could welcome customers with the best they have. When Mizuno was observing Helen’s performance, she was not aware of the attention and her customer service skills did not change much when she began at Ichi although she was aware that Ichi valued the type of customer service she was good at, which starts with smiles to the customers, greetings, asking them if they need any help, and so on.

Soon Mizuno recommended Helen for the transfer and later she was promoted to Advanced Salesperson. After several months, she was relocated to a larger store again with the support from the Store Manager there. Transferring from one store to a new store or a larger one in Ichi generally indicates a prospective future career move because the company believes that employees with rich experience working in various stores are potentially capable to work as Store Managers someday.

Here, I would like to introduce another occasion when Helen “unintentionally” gave a good impression to the Operations Manager, Taguchi who succeeded Mizuno. One day when Helen was an Advanced Salesperson at a newly opened store, the Store Manager took a day off and the Assistant Store Manager was left in charge of the night shift. The Assistant Store Manager needed to take control of every staff member’s work progress to finish the task on time. However, he spent too much time on his own tasks in the back room; therefore, no manager was on the sales floor. When Helen

noticed the situation, she decided to undertake some of the tasks on behalf of the Assistant Store Manager and finish her own work at the same time. At the time she was managing subordinates and checking the store operations when Taguchi suddenly arrived at the store and thought Helen was concentrating on her work, serving customers very warmly, and earnestly keeping things in order. Taguchi was surprised to learn that Helen was just an Advanced Salesperson but one who helped with the tasks of the Assistant Store Manager. This good impression made Taguchi pay more attention to Helen, which accordingly resulted in her successful promotion from Advanced to Senior Salesperson. Taguchi did not feel Helen was using impression management tactics but assumed that Helen always worked in this way. Helen, on the other hand, knew that Ichi valued the talent who could proactively work on the shop floor although it was a coincidence that Taguchi saw her at that moment.

The case of Helen shows that, in Ichi, evaluators assessed their subordinates based on first impressions or an instant glance. Therefore, employees at Ichi need to be aware that they have to “present” in a way that satisfies the company to prepare for their superior’s visits, and if the evaluator suddenly sees an unqualified performance, such as a poker face or unorganized products, the possibility of promotion would diminish, which happened in many cases in Ichi. Another implication is that Helen’s behaviors were not specifically unique; however, she was paid attention to and evaluated highly because, in Hong Kong, there were not many employees who could perform in the same way Helen did. In another words, if Helen worked in a place where these behaviors were not special, she might not get the same attention she got in Hong Kong.

The final case is about two full-time staff members’ competition to make a good impression to their supervisor and how their supervisor’s agenda and the company’s mission determined the outcomes.

Case 3: Competing for “Better” Impression Management

The final case is about Gina, Assistant Store Manager, and Roy, a Full-time Salesperson, who worked with the Store Manager Lisa, and how they competed to obtain a better evaluation from Lisa. This case attempts to show the limited influence of the impression management tactics Gina and Roy used because Lisa had her own agenda.

Gina was eager for the promotion because as a Management Trainee, her goal was to become Store Manager someday, and she expected this to happen soon. Gina joined the company after she graduated from a local university and, within one year, she was promoted to Assistant Store Manager, which was considered fast compared to the fact that it might take at least three years or more for a Full-time Salesperson to be promoted to the same position. Even though the promotion was fast, Gina was not confident about her work skills, which made her believe that one of the qualifications

that distinguished her from others was her education. This resulted in Gina's frequent disagreements with Roy because she thought Roy was neither rich in experience nor degrees.

Roy had also been fighting for his promotion since he joined the store. He felt he was not gaining enough attention from the Store Manager, especially in on-the-job training although it was his second year at Ichi. He felt uncomfortable seeing Gina climb the career ladder so quickly without, from his perspective, gaining actual skills. Roy proactively approached Lisa and asked to learn more about store operations. Lisa appreciated Roy was motivated and regularly gave him assignments to help with his promotion. Lisa gave all employees a relatively fair number of assignments so that they could learn practical skills such as stock control, store layout, and so on.

Seeing the opportunities in the near future, Gina and Roy were eager to show off their capabilities to Lisa. One day, the conflict that had long existed between the two surfaced. Lisa was away that day so Gina was in charge of the store operations. Lisa gave both Gina and Roy some tasks to finish within the day. While Roy was mainly in charge of improving the customer services on the shop floor because of his outstanding performance in this area, Gina was assigned to take care of managerial issues, such as the work scheduling, stock control, and so on. Roy said that he was very tired that day because he had to work relatively long hours that week. While he was on the shop floor checking the performance of customer service, he suspected that Gina was "*hea*" (being lazy in Cantonese) in the Manager's Room.

Roy said that he was trying to control his anger toward Gina the whole day; however, he could not help but use a word that was perceived by Gina as an insult. Gina reported it to Lisa by phone right away and wanted Roy to give an explanation of his behavior. The second day, Gina, in tears, made a direct plea to Lisa to try to explain how badly Roy had been treating her and to give Lisa the impression that she was trying hard at her job even though she might not be very good at it. Roy was not ready to accept the request from Gina, but he chose to apologize to her so that he could show Lisa that he understood the mistake and was willing to cooperate with Gina, or anyone else for that matter.

Gina and Roy used different tactics to try to give a better impression to Lisa; however, it had very limited effects because Lisa understood both of their characteristics and how eager they were for promotion. Before even arriving at the store, Lisa determined that she was going to promote as many of her subordinates as possible, no matter their actual skills, because one of her motivations for working at Ichi was promotion so that she could get a stable job and better pay to support her family. After the "incident," Lisa recommended both of them for promotion and they passed the exams. Lisa believed that both Gina and Roy could be promoted because she knew what kind of talent the company wanted and she had been giving different assignments to them to fulfill these expectations. For instance, Lisa gave Gina a

number of managerial tasks hoping she would gain more experience in this area, while Lisa expected Roy to perform well in the area of customer service.

The case of Gina, Roy, and the reactions of Lisa show that the tactics of impression management do not always have the expected results, because sometimes the manager's personal agenda and their understanding of the company's expectations have more impact on the store managers' decisions. The next section will incorporate all of the above points to further discuss the impact of the corporate system on impression management.

7. Discussion

The introduction concerning the company, the explanation of its promotion system and the cases of actual promotion practices were discussed to point out the impact of the company's system on the individual's impression management and its outcomes. Let us further review the three cases above.

The first case shows how an employee, Sabrina, changed her behavior toward her supervisor and positively influenced her promotion. If we analyze this phenomenon without considering the context of the company, we might suggest that her behavior gave the supervisor a "good" impression, which led to the promotion. However, if we take into account the company's goal, namely, practicing the unique style of customer service under consideration, we may conclude that the supervisor's liking is related to the company's expectations. Supervisors have to know what kind of talents the company wants so that they can promote qualified employees, which may eventually benefit them. This implies that we should not underestimate the context of the company when we analyze the effects of one's impression management.

Helen's case was quite different in comparison to Sabrina. Helen seemed to practice in a way the company preferred on a daily basis rather than trying to change her performance for particular reasons. Previous studies have concluded that the superior will like or dislike something according to the situation and the degree to which their subordinates use impression management tactics; behaving in a way that was not intentional was claimed to have a positive influence on the supervisor's evaluations (Bolino and Turnley 2003). However, how could we know that they were trying to use impression management tactics less? Participant observation shows that how Helen behaved at the store was not only influenced by her personality but also by how she interpreted the role of the manager or the customer service fit with the company's expectations. Therefore, less obvious impression management tactics might not always derive from a less strong intention.

Another implication from Helen's case is that we need to consider the factors of the surrounding environment, in this case, Hong Kong. The two Operations Managers evaluated Helen's performance highly because she was outstanding in the context of Hong Kong, which may not apply in other locations. This implies that the

effects of impression management might change according to the external circumstances.

The third case of Gina and Roy shows another picture. Two full-time employees were eager for promotion for various reasons and so used their impression management tactics. Interestingly, the Store Manager, Lisa, who they were trying to impress cared less about employees' strategies because she believed that the role of Store Manager was to promote as many of their subordinates as possible. Therefore, no matter how Gina and Roy tried to show their competency, they both got what they wanted in the end. Lisa's behaviors were largely influenced by how she portrayed the image of Store Manager through her own experiences at Ichi. This implies that sometimes impression management has very limited effect on supervisors because the decisions of the supervisors were largely influenced by their personality and interpretation of the company's requirements.

8. Conclusions

This paper attempts to reveal the impact of the corporate system on impression management based on long-term participant observation at a Japanese multinational company, Ichi, in Hong Kong. Previous literature on impression management is mostly from the perspective of psychoanalysis that has focused extensively on its practice at the personnel level. This study attempts to take a broader view of how an individual's impression management is influenced by various systems in a company and what the outcomes are.

Ichi's historical development largely influenced the company's mission and so did its corporate system. This paper focuses on the company's promotion system and explores its distinctive feature, which is the strong emphasis on self-presentation. Three examples were introduced to better understand the impact of corporate systems and there are four implications derived from these cases. First, the evaluation criteria of the evaluators or the target of the impression management reflects the company's expectations because the evaluators were also largely influenced by the institutional control. Second, the process of impression management has to be examined carefully and individually; because employees sometimes hide their intentions very well does not mean that they have less intention to use impression management tactics. Third, we need to consider the external factors, such as how people in a particular location work differently because if the location changes the effects of the same individual's impression management might change accordingly. Fourth, it is highly possible that impression management has very limited effects, and instead the evaluators' personality, agenda, and how they interpret the company's requirements largely influence their decisions.

This study has contributed to further understanding how the company's system allowed employees to construct particular attitudes and behaviors, and how impression

management's effects could be diverse according to the evaluators and external environment. As previous studies have extensively focused on the perspective of the personnel, this study offers a more holistic and broader perspective on impression management.

This study may also have some practical implications for the company's managerial system as well as employees' impression management tactics. There are two suggestions for companies. First, a company could consider increasing the opportunities for sharing the company's mission in the form of meetings and trainings so that staff could have the same basic consensus. This paper found that sometimes supervisors may have different approaches or even use different criteria in the evaluations. This may lead to some problems; for instance, the company may promote employees who have limited skills while qualified personnel are not promoted. Second, the company could increase the frequency of regular evaluations. This study found that the supervisors had very limited time to evaluate employees on a regular basis and this might be a problem because it requires the evaluator to assess their subordinates in a relatively short time, a practice which may increase the success rate of being deceived by subordinates.

This research also has some suggestions for employees concerning opportunities of promotion. One of the important agenda items for employees who are eager for promotion is to carefully analyze their supervisors in terms of how they interpret the company's requirements and to clarify the power balance existing among the supervisors. Employees also need to take into account the unique external situation, such as the general business situation of the company in that area, expatriates' perceptions, and so on. This study suggests that employees in Ichi were promoted in various ways. Some had to change their behavior drastically while others did not or their tactics had limited impact. By making these careful observations, the employees may have more chances for future career development, including promotions.

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