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Playing politics in performance appraisal: Unraveling the intricate role of impression management and the social context

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Resumo

A gestão de desempenho afeta as carreiras dos trabalhadores e, por isso, esses procuram obter a melhor avaliação de desempenho possível. Esse objetivo motiva-os a adotarem comportamentos políticos de forma a colocarem-se numa posição mais favorável e manipularem os avaliadores. Reconhecendo a natureza política da avaliação de desempenho, o contexto social dos que nessa participam, particularmente supervisores e trabalhadores, é um fator determinante das percepções e reações que os trabalhadores manifestam relativamente às avaliações.

Este estudo tem como objetivo compreender como a adoção de comportamentos políticos dentro das denominadas táticas de gestão de impressões (IM) – autopromoção, insinuação, exemplificação e suplicação – afeta as percepções da existência de política na avaliação de desempenho (OPPA). Adicionalmente, examino o papel mediador da relação entre supervisores e trabalhadores (LMX) nessa dinâmica.

Foi distribuído um questionário a trabalhadores antes do período de avaliação de desempenho (N = 203). Os resultados demonstram como a adoção de táticas de gestão de impressão aumentam as percepções da existência política na avaliação de desempenho. Ainda, a mediação da relação entre supervisores e colaboradores depende do tipo de comportamento político. Essa relação contrabalança o efeito que a autopromoção, insinuação e exemplificação têm nas percepções de política, enquanto o mesmo não se aplica à suplicação. Há, assim, a diferenciação entre as táticas positivas e as táticas negativas, respetivamente, apontando quais são as mais e menos relevantes no contexto da avaliação de desempenho.

Palavras-chave: Política organizacional, avaliação de desempenho, gestão de impressão, LMX

Classificação JEL:

L29 – Firm Objectives, Organization, and Behavior: Other

M54 – Personnel Economics: Labor Management

Abstract

Performance management impacts individuals' careers and, therefore, employees thrive to get higher scores in their performance appraisal. That desire motivates them to engage in political behavior in a way to put themselves in a better position and manipulate raters. Recognizing the political nature of performance appraisal, the social context of those involved in it, particularly supervisors and employees, is a relevant determinant of the employees' perceptions and reactions to ratings.

This study aims to provide an understanding of how the adoption of political actions in impression management (IM) tactics –self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, and supplication– impacts the perceptions of politics in performance appraisal (OPPA). Furthermore, I explore the mediating role of the relationship between supervisors and employees (LMX) in that dynamic.

A questionnaire was distributed amongst employees prior to completing their performance appraisal (N = 203). Findings show how adopting IM tactics increases OPPA. In addition, LMX's mediating role in that relationship depends on the type of political behavior. LMX offsets the impact of ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification on OPPA, while the same does not apply to supplication. It differentiates the so-called positive tactics from the negative tactics, respectively, dictating which ones are most and least relevant in the performance appraisal context.

Keywords: Organizational politics, performance appraisal, impression management, leader-member exchange

JEL classification:

L29 – Firm Objectives, Organization, and Behavior: Other

M54 – Personnel Economics: Labor Management

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I. Introduction

Attracting and acquiring top talents are difficult tasks and retaining and motivating them is even more challenging. Nowadays, and according to resource-based view theory (Barney, 1991), organizations need a robust workforce to ensure their competitive advantage and performance management (PM) has become a crucial human resource (HR) practice in ensuring employees' performance is aligned with organizational objectives.

PM is a process aiming to enhance performance. It integrates all HR strategies, complementing and strengthening each other (Gruman & Saks, 2011). An effective PM requires identifying and correcting performance gaps and problems, as well as planning future performance (Melnyk et al., 2014).

However, many organizations are struggling to implement effective PM processes. Chowdhury and others from McKinsey & Company (2018) surveyed multiple executives worldwide and found that 54% believe PM does not positively impact performance. Wigert and Harter from Gallup (2017) present a more pessimistic view, estimating that poor management and lost employee productivity in the U.S. generates annual costs of between \$960 billion and \$1.2 trillion. Moreover, it reveals that only two in ten employees (20%) feel their performance is managed in a way that motivates them to strive and perform. As so, it is crucial to understand how to improve PM and, thus, contribute to employee engagement.

Performance appraisal (PA) is a practice at the heart of PM and, perhaps, it is the most crucial one. The reality is that flaws in PA processes are a leading reason for negative reactions to PA. Several research studies support those conclusions: Viswesvaran and colleagues (1996) found that subjective evaluations are less reliable than objective ones, and Scullen and colleagues (2000) pointed that rater biases explain 62% of the variance in performance ratings. As a consequence of this situation, employees are less receptive to the PM practices carried out by their organizations. According to Gallup (2017), 29% of employees strongly agree that their PA is fair, and only 26% strongly believe it is accurate. A fair less amount (14%) views it as a motivation to improve performance. Hence, PA inaccuracy is and should be a serious concern for all enterprises with a PM process.

Considering those findings in PA inaccuracy, finding the root of the problem is essential. In a framework on PA, Levy and Williams (2004) define the social context, i.e., the

relationship and exchanges between rater and ratee, as a supreme driver of PA inaccuracy. To a certain extent, the two agents –rater and ratee– influence the PA process.

On the one side, there are raters who are likely to inflate ratings of ratees with whom they enjoy a good relationship (Dello Russo et al., 2017). The opposite goes for ratees with whom they have a worse relationship.

On the other side, there are ratees who desire to receive fair and reasoned PA ratings and, if possible, exceptional ones. To do so, they can exert influencing behaviors on raters to improve their relationship (Parker et al., 1995). Ultimately, better relationships can lead to inflated PA ratings.

Thus, there appears to be a political issue in PA. In fact, PA is by itself a political process as relevant outcomes –like compensation, promotion, and termination, among others– are in supervisors' and employees' interests (Brown et al., 2010; Kwon, 2020). Accordingly, politics is unavoidable.

Political behaviors towards others are impression management (IM) tactics. IM tactics are behaviors that impact others' perceptions and impressions (Treadway et al., 2007) with the purpose of having a more positive image. In this thesis, I consider Pittman's and Jones' (1982) self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, and supplication and how they impact perceptions of OPPA.

The relationship between raters and ratees –or supervisors and employees– is represented by the leader-member exchange (LMX) quality. LMX represents more than the relationship between people; it also exposes (1) the interactions between people and (2) how their relationship develops over time (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Brown and colleagues (2010) demonstrated how imprecise PA hampers organizational performance. Employees dissatisfied with PA report lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment levels. Also, their turnover intentions were substantially higher compared to their peers. Additionally, organizations' strategies become less effective. While it does not necessarily translate into decreasing organizational performance in the short run, it can be unsustainable in the long run (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017), building up a snowball effect and generating further losses and costs.

This study analyzes the impact of political behaviors on perceptions of organizational politics in PA (OPPA). It aims to determine whether those behaviors positively influence OPPA and to what extent the relationship between raters and ratees mediates that dynamic.

This thesis includes three main sections. First, a literature review section, where I expand on relevant concepts to disclose and introduce the research model and hypotheses. Second, a results section where I disclose the statistical outcomes of the study. Third, a section for discussion and conclusions, including the main practical implications, limitations of the research, and future avenues for research.

II. Literature Review

Performance Appraisal (PA)

PA is a formal process in which a rater, usually a supervisor, evaluates employees on performance criteria (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). PA occurs punctually, usually once a year. It integrates a strategic HR approach to improve performance and productivity (Brown & Benson, 2005). As such, PA is part of an HR practice known as PM.

PA delivers input to organizations to make crucial career and performance planning decisions. For example, they use it to consider pay and promotion, identify training needs, and signal performance gaps, among others (Elicker et al., 2006). That being so, it is essential to determine and implement the best PA and PM practices to ensure they are efficient and effective.

The appraisal process typically results from an objective view (Kuvaas, 2006) in which performance can be measured by different metrics, or from a subjective view (Kwon, 2020), in which raters attribute ratings to ratees in various dimensions. Either way, dyadic appraisal happens in a social context, which plays a central role in determining PA results (Levy & Williams, 2004).

Academics emphasize research on the subjective view because the social context is a principal source of bias and inaccuracy in PA (Longenecker & Sims, 1987; Levy & Williams, 2004; Kwon, 2020). Even though organizations have concrete purposes for PA, raters and employees have different ones. For instance, raters may distort PA ratings to satisfy personal goals (Tziner et al., 2005) and employees may attempt to influence raters to obtain better PA ratings (Parker et al., 1995). Consequently, that reality affects the properties of PA and, thus, its focal motive, which is collecting accurate, reliable performance data and using it to plan future performance (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). Viswesvaran and colleagues (1996) argued that raters' appraisal is much less reliable than objective metrics, and, in a study, Scullen and colleagues (2000) observed that 62% of the variance in PA ratings arises from rater biases.

Organizations are trying to deal with such PA struggles in different forms. More recently, newer practices complement traditional PA to offset them. Aggarwal and Thakur (2013) highlighted the 360- and 720- degree feedback, which are techniques involving the comments from multiple stakeholders, ranging from colleagues to supervisors, to provide a

complete overview of employee performance. These techniques allow others to assess performance that is not always visible to raters. Additionally, in a review of more than one hundred years of PA literature, DeNisi and Murphy (2017) suggest organizations should provide raters with training to face PA more confidently and comfortable, making them better equipped to do so.

Regardless, employees' and raters' purposes will always affect PA. In that sense, researchers assume politics is present and unavoidable in appraisals (Rosen et al., 2017). Indeed, PA is political because its outcomes are in the participants' interests (Brown et al., 2010; Kwon, 2020).

Organizational Politics in Performance Appraisal (OPPA)

Organizational politics (OP) is an “intentional and strategic social influence” process (Parker et al., 1995; p. 892) seeking to promote relevant outcomes without being subject to sanctions or repercussions (Randall et al., 1999). It often occurs when one person has the opportunity and skills to persuade others and manipulate the distribution of such outcomes (Dello Russo et al., 2017). Therefore, OP results from the desire to fulfill one's self-interest (Latham & Dello Russo, 2009), even if at the cost of other people.

Parker and colleagues (1995) highlight that OP consequences can be either functional or dysfunctional. For instance, an executive can use political power to approve a strategy enhancing organizational efficiency, making it a functional outcome. Conversely, the same individual can abuse such power and generate dissatisfaction with management practices, making it a dysfunctional outcome.

Anyway, dysfunctional politics are the most impactful among employees. Randall and others (1999) report that when individuals are requested to describe political conducts in the workplace, they list *manipulative* and *self-serving* behaviors. Furthermore, since most political power lies in the hands of fewer people, a majority of employees is more sensible to OP (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). Thus, it is possible to define if politics are functional or dysfunctional from the employees' reaction and reception of political conduct. In that sense, OP is usually measured on perceptions rather than on what really happens (Parker et al., 1995).

Perceptions of organizational politics (POPs) describe the political climate in the organization. It counts “people’s attribution of others’ behaviors to self-serving intent” (Cho & Yang, 2018; p. 60). Thereof, POPs derive from the interpretation of personal experiences and others’ actions, regardless of whether it is correct. Despite the different research purposes on the topic of POPs, this thesis focuses on the nature of politics in PA by examining the social context and employees’ perceptions of its impact on PA.

Organizational politics in performance appraisal (OPPA) focuses on the concept of OP. However, more specifically, it describes the intentions to, directly or indirectly, influence PA. Perceptions are also the measure used for OPPA and translate into the understanding that a “supervisor manipulates PA ratings due to political considerations” (Dello Russo et al., 2017; p. 771), leading to inflation or deflation of ratings. Such phenomena accentuate distortions in PA and perceptions of unfairness among employees. Moreover, those feelings contribute to the unwillingness to accept appraisal ratings and feedback (Levy & Williams, 2004).

In a meta-analysis, Levy and Williams (2004) developed a framework for the factors affecting PA. It previews two, out of three, mirroring the social context. First, the proximal factors comprise both process and structural variables. The process variables directly impact PA, such as the relationship between raters and employees. The structural variables concern the arrangement of the process, like the frequency. Second, the rater/ratee behaviors factors regard the exchanges between raters and employees before and during the PA. Accordingly, it is explicit that the social context highlights the preceding rater-employee interaction, affecting how PA is conducted (Dello Russo et al., 2017).

Then, the social environment determines that raters and employees have, by definition, dissimilar interactions leading to and during PA. Such dynamics can dictate to what extent the interests of raters and employees are in the way of PA’s final goal. Ultimately, they can alter the truthfulness and fairness of appraisals. On that note, subjective assessments can eventually dilute the quality of the PA process leading to distortions (Brown et al., 2010). Exerting sway on PA represents a source of inaccuracy and, hence, should be avoided (Longenecker & Sims, 1987).

Brown and colleagues (2010) demonstrated how imprecise PA hampers organizational performance. Employees dissatisfied with PA report lower job satisfaction and

organizational commitment levels. Also, their turnover intentions were substantially higher compared to their peers. While that might not be seen as an issue in the short run, it can definitely be something that structurally impacts organizations and contributes to diminishing performance (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017).

Hence, it is vital to study how the social context couples with OPPA, where literature is quite scarce: On the one hand, understanding how the social environment –meaning, the exchanges and relationships in the PA context– allows participants to, directly or indirectly, influence PA; on the other hand, understanding the reactions to such social environment.

Impression Management (IM)

In all life contexts, people worry about how others view them. It is no exception in the workplace. One's image influences how others perceive, evaluate, and treat them (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). People constantly assess and monitor their image to ensure their reputation remains intact. Therefore, in some cases, they need to adopt behaviors to do so. Scholars refer to such behaviors as impression management (IM).

IM corresponds to the process by which people try to influence and manipulate others' perceptions and impressions of them (Harris et al., 2007; Treadway et al., 2007). In the organizational context, the process is composed of behaviors from employees aiming to shape, preserve, safeguard, and alter an image held by someone of their interest (Bolino et al., 2008; Bolino et al., 2016). While IM can be unintentional in the sense of being genuine and authentic, scholars have highlighted it as a conscious and strategic process (Bolino et al., 2016). Wayne and Ferris (1990) and Bolino and colleagues (2008; 2016) have shown that employees hold many interests in the workplace. Thereof, they can direct attitudes toward their colleagues, supervisors, and other employees to gain an advantage to achieve those interests.

According to Leary and Kowalski (1990), two dimensions explain the strategic intention behind IM behaviors. The first is impression motivation. People seek to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs associated with IM behaviors. However, it is impossible to predict the outcomes of an action. Thus, the motivation behind adopting IM strategies lies behind the expectancy-value framework (Schlenker et al., 1980). Since IM behaviors are common among employees whose outcomes others can control and manipulate, they must

assess three relevant criteria. One is the goal and its relevance, trying to comprehend what could be the right approach. Another is the expected outcomes, trying to understand if doing so is worthwhile. The other is who the target is to select the specific behavior. That due diligence is essential, given that impression motivation increases whenever people highly depend on the target to achieve the desired goal (Bolino et al., 2016). The second dimension is impression construction, referring to the process of selecting the best suitable behaviors for each occasion and considering those criteria.

PA dictates the distribution of work-related outcomes, such as salary, mobility, promotion, and termination, among others (Dello Russo et al., 2017), which are in employees' interests. Thus, a series of exchanges before and during PA can impact raters to alter ratings. Following the PA model by Levy and Williams (2004), IM suits as a rater/ratee behaviors factor influencing PA, fitting the impression construction dimension, which describes what type of impression people want to make and how to do it. Pittman and Jones (1982) describe five distinct IM behaviors within organizations that individuals involved in the PA process often adopt. For the sake of this thesis, I will only present four out of the five.

Ingratiation is a social behavior attempting to increase one's attractiveness by, for instance, conforming to and pleasing others. Even though regular throughout time, ingratiation is more efficient in the initial stage of relationships (Wu et al., 2012). Hence, it can be a relevant process for employees to build their desired image from the beginning.

Self-promotion is an action in which an individual highlights specific abilities, skills, or accomplishments to establish a reputation. A positive and successful image can be advantageous for employees as the target will be careful with any decision of importance to them (Den Hartog et al., 2020).

Exemplification is a tactic by which employees display self-sacrificial behaviors (Bonner et al., 2017) to develop an image of reference to others around them. Examples of exemplification behaviors are staying at work late, being proactive, helping colleagues, and working on weekends (Bonner et al., 2017). Those fall under the extra-role performance, denoted by voluntary behaviors and attitudes beyond the required work roles (in-role performance). Therefore, exemplification is a means to create the perception of being devoted, hardworking, and desiring to succeed at work.

Supplication is a strategy highlighting one's weaknesses or dependence on others to complete a given assignment (Pittman & Jones, 1982). Usually, it is a last-resort action taken by employees as they avoid showing any vulnerability. The ultimate goal is to make others feel sorry for a specific circumstance and, consequently, be less strict when assessing them. Even though there is a lack of empirical evidence to understand the real impact of supplication (Pittman & Jones, 1982; Harris et al., 2007), academics have assumed two possible outcomes according to others' sensitivity. Pittman and Jones (1982) argued supplication has zero or negative impact on others when they are insensitive; while Harris and colleagues (2007) advocate the opposite when others are sensitive.

After all, IM behaviors are political acts. Leary and Kowalski (1990) underline that employers and supervisors commonly benefit those who cause a positive impression on them, distributing positive outcomes. Conversely, those who make a negative impression receive negative ones. For that reason, IM behaviors in the workplace are generally of upward influence, as employees try to impact supervisors' cognitive processes and perceptions (Wayne & Ferris, 1990). However, employees do not necessarily involve supervisors as their target in all IM behaviors. Bolino (1999) has shown that IM tactics directed at colleagues, such as complimenting them and providing support, also cause a good impression on others. As a result, for instance, the ones making a positive impression will likely obtain higher appraisal scores, and those making a negative impression will likely receive lower appraisal scores.

Nevertheless, IM tactics' success depends on one's political skills, which result from effectively interpreting the environment and using the extracted information to influence others' perceptions and behaviors (Epitropaki et al., 2016). Politically skilled employees use their abilities to enhance interaction with others and, in doing so, develop stronger relationships (Treadway et al., 2007).

Despite in-depth research on IM tactics, the isolated impact each has on PA ratings is unknown or uncertain because it depends on multiple factors. Den Hartog and colleagues (2020) point to meta-analyses showing that aspects like the relationship duration between rater and ratee, raters' and ratees' personality traits, and leadership styles are some of the other factors influencing such impact.

Impression Management and OPPA

Employees embrace IM tactics for different purposes. In the context of PA, they envision improving their appraisal scores. Consistently, the political core of IM tactics aims to alter one's image in the eyes of raters (Pittman & Jones, 1982) and, thus, persuade and motivate them to attribute higher ratings (Poon, 2004; Tziner et al., 2005).

IM behaviors are observable, yet their impact on PA is unclear in the literature. Still, employees develop opinions on IM's role in altering the PA ratings due to raters' political considerations (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Dello Russo et al., 2017). In other words, they have a perception of OPPA. Drawing from the literature on IM and OPPA and assuming IM tactics are effective, I hypothesize that the occurrence of IM behaviors increases employees' perceptions of OPPA, considering such behaviors are effective.

***Hypothesis 1:** Impression Management behaviors, namely (H1a) Ingratiation, (H1b) Self-Promotion, (H1c) Exemplification, and (H1d) Supplication, positively influence the (perceptions of) Organizational Politics in Performance Appraisal.*

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

Interactions between supervisors and employees in the workplace can be of countless types. From routine to intentional exchanges, the impact of those workplace relationships is evident at the individual, group and organizational levels (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Le Blanc & González-Romá, 2012). In literature, such interaction is denominated as leader-member exchange (LMX). Though formally related to leadership research (Dansereau et al., 1975), LMX has a pure social exchange facet. Leadership theories are valid under the assumption that supervisors adopt a common approach to all employees and, therefore, impact all in a similar way (Ilies et al., 2007). However, in a real context, there appears to be an explicit deviation from that assumption (Dansereau et al., 1975; Schriesheim et al., 1999). Instead, supervisors and employees have different relationships, which is at the root of the LMX theory (Hooper & Martin, 2008; Le Blanc & González-Romá, 2012; Epitropaki et al., 2016).

LMX derives from the social exchange theory (Homans, 1958), which states that a relationship between two people is built and sustained through costs, benefits, and expectations analyses associated with committing to it. The theory assumptions provide a clear picture of why distinct relationships take place. First, people pursue rewards and avoid costs, i.e., they desire to maximize benefits. Second, people estimate the benefits and costs before engaging in a relationship. Third and last, people understand that outcomes will change from one relationship to the other. The first two points highlight employees want to perform well in their jobs, while the last one indicates why people need to develop different connections to maximize their gains.

Thus, within an environment, people develop dyadic relationships through processes and outcomes supported by a sequence of social interactions (Ilies et al., 2007). Maslyn and Uhl-Bien (2001) point to separate yet related stages of dyadic relationships. First and essential to their success is initiation. Initiation corresponds to the first interactions between two people. It must be successful in terms that both must commit to it and start building on core relationship foundations, such as trust and communication (Schriesheim et al., 1999). Most likely, a strong relationship develops between both only if this stage is successful (Wayne & Ferris, 1990). Then, there is reciprocation, which results from consistent exchanges. Since LMX and the social exchange context are strictly connected, the responses

to each behavior will naturally occur. Actually, both sides of the relationship develop different expectations. One feels obliged to replicate a behavior, while the other expects a reaction (Hofmann et al., 2003). Reciprocation is what sustains and builds stronger relationships. Ultimately, it contributes to establishing core principles that only grow in further stages of relationships like support, information flow and transparency, confidence, and mutual respect, among others (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Schriesheim et al., 1999). On this approach, the likelihood of developing a strong LMX is higher when both stages are complete.

LMX mediating the relationship between IM and perceived OPPA

IM tactics aim to improve the relationship quality between raters and employees. In a study related to LMX and IM, Wayne and Green (1993) argued that behaviors framed in IM are informally rewarding through LMX rather than formally rewarding through any other way. They highlighted job-focused IM (tactics related to job roles and tasks) and other-focused IM (like ingratiation and self-promotion). Job-focused IM helps increase LMX quality because supervisors feel support in enhancing performance. Then, they observed that other-focused IM maintains the positive impression created on supervisors. Yukl and Michel (2006) and Dulebohn and colleagues (2012) concluded in their studies that ingratiation, self-promotion, and LMX are positively related.

Following the model by Levy and Williams (2004), LMX suits as a proximal process factor directly influencing PA processes. Such impact can unfold in two distinct ways.

First, high-quality LMX may contribute to rater biases during the PA process. Gooty and Yammarino (2016) found that raters attribute higher ratings to employees with whom they relate better vis-à-vis employees in low-quality relationships. Additionally, Vecchio (1998) showed that raters evaluate subordinates in high-quality relationships more independently of their performance, and the opposite happens for employees in poor LMX. Thus, there is clear evidence of leniency bias, as supervisors are easygoing and emotional with those with whom they enjoy a richer LMX.

Second, high-quality LMX can provide relative advantages to given employees. Even though the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) is a framework for work engagement and burnout, it can provide insight into how LMX and PA interact. Demerouti and others reason that all jobs have job demands – aspects of the job requiring

sustained physical or psychological effort and, therefore, contributing to specific physical or psychological costs –and job resources– features of the job contributing to greater engagement and performance. According to the JD-R model, job resources facilitate achieving performance objectives, offset the impact of job demands, and contribute to personal development. Bakker and colleagues (2004) mention that job resources derive from social exchanges with supervisors, colleagues, and work organization, among others. Along those arguments, Maslyn and Uhl-Bien (2001) observed higher mutual respect and influence (trust and participation in decision-making), more open communication, and greater access to resources (supervisor and colleague support) among individuals in high-quality relationships. Hence, the ones involved in higher-quality LMX may exhibit relatively higher performance levels (Feldman, 1981; Wayne et al., 1997), increasing the probability of receiving higher PA scores.

Employees engaged in a high-quality LMX are more likely to have fewer perceptions of OPPA (Abbas & Bashir, 2017). Different arguments explain why that is so. First, employees have greater trust and respect levels, leading them to believe PA is fair and free of political intentions (Abbas & Bashir, 2017; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Second, and as a consequence, employees are less judgmental about the PA process and supervisors' roles (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Davis & Gardner, 2004). Third and last, the PA process becomes less ambiguous and uncertain in employees' eyes (Kane-Frieder et al., 2014). Contrarily, employees engaged in a low-quality LMX are more skeptical about politics in PA due to the lack of trust and respect between them and their supervisors (al Jisr et al., 2020).

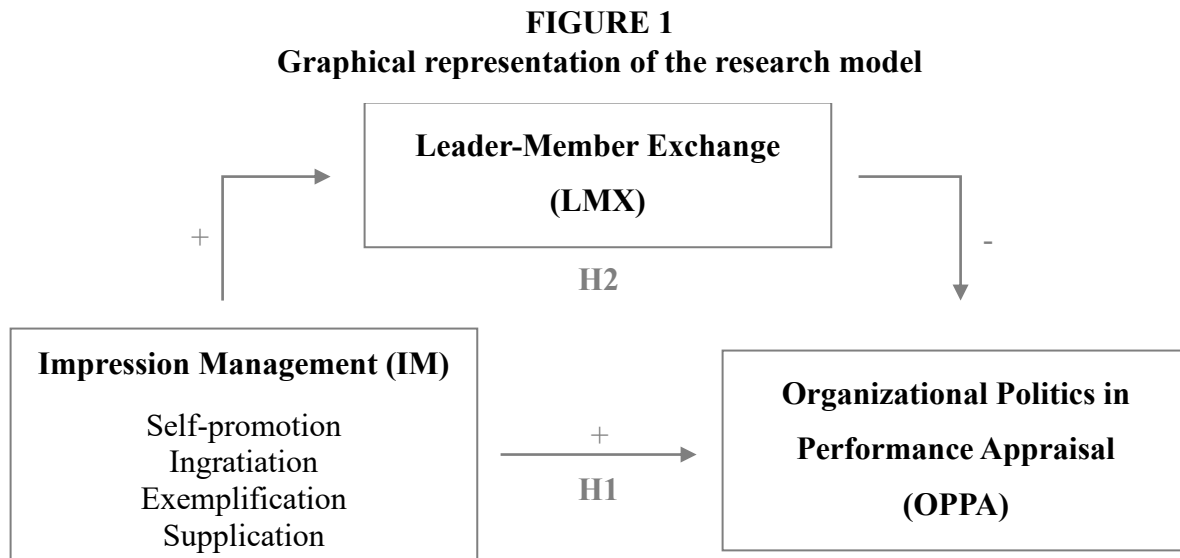
Research on the dual relationship between IM, OPPA, and LMX is somewhat scarce (to my knowledge). LMX has been dissected as a mediating component in IM and OPPA studies but never in the same investigation nor with the same model tested in this thesis.

Still, literature documents how IM tactics can strongly influence LMX quality (Yukl & Michel, 2006; Dulebohn et al., 2012) and how LMX quality strongly influences perceptions of OPPA (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Davis & Gardner, 2004; Kane-Frieder et al., 2014).

Thus, based on the research above, LMX may explain the relationship between IM and OPPA; hence:

Hypothesis 2: LMX quality negatively mediates the relationship between Impression Management behaviors, namely (H2a) Ingratiation, (H2b) Self-Promotion, (H2c) Exemplification, and (H2d) Supplication, and (perceptions of) Organizational Politics in Performance Appraisal.

Figure 1 represents the research model of this thesis.



III. Methodology

Data Collection Procedure

In this quantitative research, the questionnaire was designed in Qualtrics for data collection. Since the goal was to measure reactions to PA, it was sent to participants who were soon to have a PA period in their current organization.

I made several posts on social media (LinkedIn and Instagram) and directly contacted my personal and professional network to seek their collaboration on this project. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, complying with GDPR (Regulation (EU) N° 2018/1725) governing the European Union. Afterward, I distributed the questionnaire to participants through LinkedIn or WhatsApp private and group messages.

Additionally, to diversify and strengthen the database, I resorted to *Clickworker*, an online platform to target research participants. The possibility of selecting criteria made it easier to target participants familiar with PA periods in their current organization.

Overall, the number of answers from my network amounted to fifty-four (54), while the remaining 149 resulted from a targeted audience.

Also, note that the questionnaire was distributed both in English and Portuguese. All measures, items, and scales were translated from English to Portuguese, and vice-versa, with the assistance of an English high-school teacher. Participants whose mother tongue was Portuguese answered the questionnaire in Portuguese. The remaining participants answered the questionnaire in English.

The data collection period lasted eight weeks, starting on April 22nd, 2023, and ending on June 16th, 2023.

The answers to the questionnaire had a duration ranging from 8 to 12 minutes. The questionnaire had eight sections. The first section contextualized the research, explaining its goals and relevance (Appendix A). The following six referred to study measures. The last section included socio-demographic information, such as gender, age, and organizational tenure, among others.

The questionnaire aimed to assess participants' adoption of IM tactics, LMX quality, and perceptions of organizational politics in the context of PA.

Sample and Participants

A total of 272 participants completed the questionnaire. Only 203 (74.63%) answers were valid after assessing data quality, mainly through identifying missing or unspecified information. The main criteria to clean data were (1) missing answers to any item, (2) repeated respondents (identified through attributed codes), and (3) incomplete or incoherent answers to open questions (e.g.: participants writing that they would not share any details about their PA process because it is private).

During the data collection period, participants were working in public and private organizations based in Portugal, Spain, Germany, France, Belgium, and Italy. The most represented industries were governmental entities (32), engineering and technology (31), management and consulting (23), and commercial (22).

Of these participants, 50.2% were male (102), 48.8% were female (99), and 1.0% (2) preferred not to mention their gender. Their ages ranged from 18 to 57, with a mean of 36.02 years old ($SD = 8.908$), and the average organizational tenure was 67.44 months ($SD = 70.288$), which is 5.62 years. 77 (37.9%) completed a bachelor's degree, 56 (27.6%) a master's degree, and 24 (11.8%) a post-graduation. Also, 42 (20.7%) had the lowest educational level, i.e., high school, while a minority of 4 (2.0%) held a Ph.D.

Measures

Impression Management (IM)

For IM, Bolino and Turnley's (1999) 20-item-scale on IM tactics was used, which measures to what extent participants engage in influential, political behaviors. It evaluates four (out of five) Pittman and Jones' (1982) IM tactics –self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, and supplication– by asking participants to what extent they are likely to adopt them. As per Hinkin's (1998) recommendation, answers follow a five-point Likert scale: (1) *never behave this way*; (2) *very rarely behave this way*; (3) *occasionally behave this way*; (4) *sometimes behave this way*; (5) *often behave this way*.

Examples of items are "*talk proudly about your experience or education*" for self-promotion, "*complement your manager so be seen as likable*" for ingratiation, "*arrive at work*

early in order to look dedicated" for exemplification, and "act like you need assistance so your manager will help you out" for supplication.

In this study, IM had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.904. Self-promotion (0.890), ingratiation (0.856), exemplification (0.721), and supplication (0.921) had different reliability results. All are relevant given they are higher than 0.7.

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) *LMX 7-scale* questionnaire measures the participants' perception of relationship quality with the supervisor. Each item response follows a five-point Likert scale, and, in the end, I took their average. One item is *"How would you characterize your working relationship with your supervisor?"* and answers range from (1) *extremely ineffective* to (5) *extremely effective*.

The relationship quality in this study was defined by the average of the five items instead of adding them up. The LMX 7-scale has proven to be a reliable measure of LMX quality with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.8 to 0.9 (Hanasono, 2018). In this study, the LMX variable had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.869.

Organizational Politics in Performance Appraisal (OPPA)

Tziner and colleagues' (1996) *OPPA 25-item-scale* measures to what extent employees believe political factors impact supervisors' decisions on PA periods. Only twelve items were used in this study given their relevance. Two examples are *"give performance ratings that reflect the supervisor's personal liking or disliking of the employees"* and *"inflate performance ratings in order to maximize rewards offered to his or her employees."*

The answers were recorded on a six-point Likert scale from (1) *very unlikely* to (6) *very likely*. The higher the score on each item, the greater the perception participants have of the role political factors play in PA. In this study, the OPPA variable had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.914.

IV. Results

Bivariate Correlations

Pearson's coefficients of association, reported in Table 1, were analyzed before further checking the research results.

There was a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation between IM and OPPA ($r = .42$, $p < .001$), meaning employees adopting IM tactics perceive more politic in the PA process than others who rarely do so. Thus, the greater the IM score is, the more employees perceive OPPA.

IM and LMX are positively correlated ($r = 0.20$, $p = 0.018$). In other words, employees who adopt more IM tactics typically are associated with higher LMX quality. Self-promotion ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$), ingratiation ($r = 0.31$, $p < .001$), and exemplification ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$) are positively correlated with LMX. Contrarily, supplication has no significant correlation with LMX ($r = -0.08$, $p = 0.250$). Hence, the more employees adopt self-promotion, ingratiation, and exemplification tactics, the greater their LMX with their supervisors.

Also, there is a statistically significant negative correlation between LMX and OPPA ($r = -0.19$, $p = 0.007$), meaning the higher the LMX quality of employees, the less they perceive political intentions in the PA process.

Concerning the sociodemographic variables, only the employee's gender has a statistically significant correlation with certain variables, such as IM ($r = -0.16$, $p = 0.020$), supplication ($r = -0.25$, $p < .001$), and OPPA ($r = -0.17$, $p = 0.013$). Accordingly, female participants adopt fewer IM tactics and perceive fewer political factors than male participants. Other sociodemographic variables lack significant statistical correlation with IM, LMX, and OPPA ($p > 0.05$).

Factor and Reliability Analyses

In this study, it was relevant to understand the impact of each IM tactic on the relationship between IM and OPPA. As such, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was run on all IM items, which procedure is explained in detail in the Appendix.

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 IM	2.73	0.66											
2 Self-promotion	3.32	0.88	.62**										
3 Ingratiation	2.84	0.89	.84**	.49**									
4 Exemplification	3.09	0.87	.70**	.30**	.61**								
5 Supplication	2.02	0.97	.72**	.11	.40**	.34**							
6 LMX	3.31	0.73	.20**	.28**	.31**	.23**	-.08						
7 OPPA	3.09	0.93	.42**	.09	.25**	.23**	.54**	-.19**					
8 Gender	1.52	0.56	-.16*	-.01	-.09	-.11	-.25**	-.04	-.17*				
9 Age	36.02	8.91	-.11	.01	-.03	-.03	-.18**	-.01	-.13	0.3			
10 Education level	2.52	1.16	.03	.09	.01	.00	.02	.02	.13	.01	-.05		
11 Tenure ^a	67.44	70.29	.04	.01	.02	.04	.02	-.03	-.07	-.04	.46**	.08	
12 Supervisor's age	46.36	9.83	-.01	-.02	.02	.10	-.06	-.03	-.01	-.07	.37**	-.03	.32**

Note: n = 203

* p < .05

** p < .01 (all tests two-tailed)

^a Tenure is measured in months

Hypotheses Testing

Linear regressions were used to assess the impact of IM tactics on OPPA among participants. Control variables, such as age, and gender were also included in the models.

The first model includes the general construct of IM to determine such an effect (Table 2). It is statistically significant ($F = 16.321$, $p < 0.001$), with IM being a relevant predictor of OPPA ($b = 0.56$, $t = 6.106$, $p < 0.001$). Neither gender ($p = 0.097$) nor age ($p = 0.174$) were significant predictors of OPPA.

TABLE 2
Multiple regression models on OPPA

Variables	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)
(Constant)	2.16 (0.42)	2.14 (0.41)
IM	0.56 (0.09)**	
Self-Promotion	-	0.02 (0.07)
Ingratiation	-	0.01 (0.09)
Exemplification	-	0.05 (0.08)
Supplication	-	0.48 (0.07)**
Gender	-0.18 (0.11)	-0.08 (0.10)
Age	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
F	16.32	13.70
R ²	0.20	0.30
<i>Note:</i> n = 203		
* $p < .05$		
** $p < .01$ (all tests two-tailed)		

The second model contains the IM components obtained from the PCA (Table 3). It is statistically significant ($F = 13.697$, $p < 0.001$). Only supplication is a relevant predictor of OPPA ($b = 0.48$, $t = 7.164$, $p < .001$), while self-promotion ($b = 0.02$, $t = 0.247$, $p = 0.806$), ingratiation ($b = 0.01$, $t = 0.109$, $p = 0.913$), and exemplification ($b = 0.05$, $t = 0.617$, $p = 0.538$) are not so.

Lastly, we tested different models (Table 3) with only one of the IM tactics alongside the control variables.

TABLE 3
Multiple regression model on OPPA using each IM tactic

Variables	with SP	with I	with E	with S
	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)
(Constant)	3.69 (0.40)			
Self-promotion (SP)	0.09 (0.07)	-	-	-
Ingratiation (I)	-	0.24 (0.07)**	-	-
Exemplification (E)	-	-	0.23 (0.07)**	-
Supplication (S)	-	-	-	0.50 (0.06)**
Gender	-0.28 (0.12)**	-0.25 (0.11)*	-0.25 (0.11)*	-0.08 (0.10)
Age	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
F	3.85	7.53	6.72	27.38
R ²	0.06	0.10	0.09	0.29

Note: n = 203

* p < .05

** p < .01 (all tests two-tailed)

Overall, there was significant statistical evidence supporting Hypothesis 1, meaning that participants who often adopt more IM tactics tend to have greater perceptions of OPPA. At the component level, the regression models led us to reject Hypothesis 1b as self-promotion had no significant effect on OPPA ($b = 0.09$, $t = 1.279$, $p = 0.202$) and to support Hypotheses 1a, 1c, and 1d concerning the positive significant effects ingratiation ($b = 0.24$, $t = 3.489$, $p < .001$), exemplification ($b = 0.23$, $t = 3.139$, $p = 0.002$), and supplication ($b = 0.50$, $t = 8.300$, $p < .001$) had on OPPA.

The mediating effect of LMX on the relationship between IM and OPPA was assessed resorting to the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2022). Similarly, we considered IM as a general construct (Table 4) and each type of IM (Tables 5 and 6).

TABLE 4
Mediation effect of LMX on IM-OPPA

Variables	LMX (M)		OPPA (Y)	
	<i>b</i> (SE)	p	<i>b</i> (SE)	p
(Constant)	18.77 (2.52)	0.000	3.13 (0.45)	0.000

IM (X)	1.58 (0.55)**	0.004	0.64 (0.09)**	0.000
LMX (M)	-	-	-0.05 (0.01)**	0.000
Gender	-0.10 (0.65)	0.875	-0.18 (0.10)	0.073
Age	0.01 (0.04)	0.843	-0.01 (0.01)	0.173
F	2.85		18.84	
R ²	0.04		0.28	
Direct effect (X-Y): c' = 0.639; 95% CI = [.464 ; .814]				
Indirect effect (X-M-Y): ab = -0.081; 95% CI = [-.157 ; -.020]				

Note: n = 203

* p < .05

** p < .01 (all tests two-tailed)

Considering the general construct of IM, there is statistical evidence to conclude there was a partial mediation effect of LMX on the IM-OPPA relationship. LMX offset the positive effect IM had on OPPA.

TABLE 5
Mediation effect of LMX on the relationship between Self-Promotion and Ingratiation and OPPA

Variables	with SP				with I			
	LMX (M)		OPPA (Y)		LMX (M)		OPPA (Y)	
	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	18.55 (2.15)	0.000	4.50 (0.45)	0.000	18.47 (0.18)	0.000	4.22 (0.43)	0.000
SP (X)	1.64 (0.40)**	0.000	0.16 (0.07)*	0.027	-	-	-	-
I (X)	-	-	-	-	1.75 (0.39)**	0.000	0.34 (0.07)**	0.000
LMX (M)	-	-	-0.04 (0.01)**	0.001	-	-	-0.05 (0.01)**	0.000
Gender	-0.38 (0.63)	0.541	-0.30 (0.11)**	0.008	-0.16 (0.62)	0.793	-0.26 (0.11)*	0.017
Age	-0.01 (0.04)	0.884	-0.01 (0.01)	0.050	0.00 (0.04)	0.990	-0.01 (0.01)	0.059
F	5.83		6.01		6.85		10.96	
R ²	0.08		0.11		0.10		0.18	
	Direct effect (X-Y): c' = 0.164; 95% CI = [.019 ; .310]				Direct effect (X-Y): c' = 0.338; 95% CI = [.199 ; .477]			
	Indirect effect (X-M-Y): ab = -0.071; 95% CI = [-.126 ; -.026]				Indirect effect (X-M-Y): ab = -0.093; 95% CI = [-.157 ; -.041]			

Note: n = 203

* *p* < .05

** *p* < .01 (all tests two-tailed)

TABLE 6

Mediation effect of LMX on the relationship between Exemplification and Supplication and OPPA

Variables	with E				with S			
	LMX (M)		OPPA (Y)		LMX (M)		OPPA (Y)	
	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	19.39 (2.24)	0.000	4.12 (0.45)	0.000	25.77 (11.69)	0.000	3.04 (0.43)	0.000
E (X)	1.32 (0.41)**	0.002	0.29 (0.07)**	0.000	-	-	-	-
S (X)	-	-	-	-	-0.54 (0.39)	0.167	0.48 (0.06)**	0.000
LMX (M)	-	-	-0.05 (0.01)**	0.000	-	-	-0.03 (0.01)*	0.012
Gender	-0.17 (0.64)	0.786	-0.25 (0.11)*	0.022	-0.63 (0.67)	0.350	-0.10 (0.10)	0.363
Age	-0.00 (0.04)	0.991	-0.01 (0.01)	0.062	-0.01 (0.04)	0.720	-0.00 (0.01)	0.492
F	3.59		9.07		0.77		22.71	
R ²	0.05		0.15		0.01		0.31	
	Direct effect (X-Y): c' = 0.289; 95% CI = [.147 ; .431]				Direct effect (X-Y): c' = 0.482; 95% CI = [.365 ; .599]			
	Indirect effect (X-M-Y): ab = -0.061; 95% CI = [-.117 ; -.016]				Indirect effect (X-M-Y): ab = 0.015; 95% CI = [-.006 ; .042]			

Note: n = 203

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$ (all tests two-tailed)

The mediation analyses on self-promotion, ingratiation, and exemplification were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and demonstrated the partial mediation effect LMX had on the relationship between IM and OPPA. In all cases, LMX offset the positive effect IM has on OPPA, but not enough to change its total impact (Equation 1), i.e., transforming from positive to negative. The total impact can be obtained from the following equation:

$$\text{Total effect} = \text{Direct effect} + \text{Indirect effect} \quad (1)$$

Thus, self-promotion (0.093), ingratiation (0.245), and exemplification (0.228) all had a positive total effect on OPPA.

The mediation analysis on supplication was not a statistically significant predictor of LMX ($p = 0.510$). Therefore, it was impossible to conclude whether there is a full or partial mediation effect of LMX on the supplication-OPPA relationship.

In conclusion, Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c were supported by the results, and Hypothesis 2d was rejected.

Since the model with supplication had no relevant results in the mediation analyses, I calculated a new IM construct without it (Equation 2). In other words, I included only self-promotion, ingratiation, and exemplification. Using such, another mediation analysis was run (Table 7).

$$\text{IM without Supplication} = (\text{Self-promotion} + \text{Ingratiation} + \text{Exemplification}) / 3 \quad (2)$$

TABLE 7
Mediation effect of LMX on IM (without Supplication)-OPPA

Variables	LMX (M)		OPPA (Y)	
	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>
Constant	16.67 (2.39)	0.000	3.72 (0.45)	0.000
IM w/o S (X)	0.15 (0.03)**	0.000	0.03 (0.01)**	0.000
LMX (M)	-	-	-0.05 (0.01)**	0.000
Gender	-0.15 (0.63)	0.810	-0.25 (0.11)*	0.019
Age	0.01 (0.04)	0.906	-0.01 (0.01)	0.078
F	6.47		12.47	
R ²	0.09		0.20	

Direct effect (X-Y): $c' = 0.032$; 95% CI = [.020 ; .044]
Indirect effect (X-M-Y): $ab = -0.008$; 95% CI = [-.014 ; -.003]

Note: $n = 203$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$ (all tests two-tailed)

The mediation analysis using the new construct was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and demonstrated the partial mediation effect LMX had on the relationship between that new construct and OPPA. Similar to the cases in ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification, LMX offset the positive effect IM without supplication had on OPPA, but with a relatively smaller direct ($b = 0.032$, $t = 8.234$, $p = 0.000$) and total effect (0.024).

Other relevant results

Given the analysis of each IM tactic for both hypotheses, it is relevant to understand how participants answered the IM topics. Statistics (Table 8) revealed that the tendency among respondents was to adopt self-promotion ($M = 3.32$), exemplification ($M = 3.09$), and ingratiation ($M = 2.84$) tactics. Supplication was the least preferred ($M = 2.02$, Mode = 1.00).

TABLE 8
Statistics on Self-Promotion, Ingratiation, Exemplification, and Supplication

	Self-Promotion	Ingratiation	Exemplification	Supplication
N	203	203	203	203
Mean	3.32	2.84	3.09	2.02
Median	3.40	2.75	3.00	1.80
Mode	3.00	2.75	3.00	1.00
Skewness	-0.229	-0.070	-0.243	0.657
SE Skewness	0.171	0.171	0.171	0.171
Kurtosis	-0.459	-0.719	-0.408	-0.709
SE Kurtosis	0.340	0.340	0.340	0.340

Note that the distribution of supplication results was high and positively skewed (0.657), meaning most answers were below the mean value (Figure 2). In other words, most participants (at least 74%) answered they never or rarely adopt (average below 3.00)

supplication behaviors (Table 9). Contrarily to supplication, fewer participants never or rarely adopt self-promotion (30.5%), ingratiation (50.2%), and exemplification (34.5%) tactics.

TABLE 9
Frequencies on Self-Promotion, Ingratiation, Exemplification, and Supplication

	Self-Promotion	Ingratiation	Exemplification	Supplication
[1.00 ; 2.00[	11	35	16	107
[2.00 ; 3.00[	51	67	54	45
[3.00 ; 4.00[	83	74	87	42
[4.00 ; 5.00]	58	27	46	9
Total	203	203	203	203

Also, fifty-eight (28.6%), forty-six (22.7%), and twenty-seven (13.3%) participants reported using self-promotion, exemplification, and ingratiation, respectively, tactics with high frequency (average equal or above 4.00). Only nine (4.4%) did so with supplication. Hence, participants were more likely to engage in self-promotion, ingratiation, and exemplification than supplication.

V. Discussion and Conclusions

Considering that PA and PM are critical HR practices to manage any workforce, the study aimed to understand how the social context within organizations impacts employees' reactions to PA. More specifically, I considered IM tactics as social interactions within the organization and the perceptions of politics in PA as reactions. Furthermore, I tried to ascertain the mediating role of LMX –complementing IM to define the social context, but between supervisors and employees– in offsetting such a relationship.

I used multiple regression models to test the IM-OPPA relationship (Hypothesis 1). The general construct of IM supports Hypothesis 1, which aligns with the literature stating employees develop perceptions of politics in PA considering the impact of IM tactics on raters' political considerations (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Dello Russo et al., 2017). However, when considering IM tactics by type, I obtained different results.

First, considering all IM tactics together in a single model, supplication was the only statistically significant predictor of OPPA. Note that no previous research, to my knowledge, has studied the relationship between supplication and OPPA. Pittman and Jones (1982) only mention that supplication is a last-resort IM tactic. In this sample, most participants were unlikely to adopt supplication behaviors, and that tendency might explain the outcome.

Second, considering all IM tactics separately, self-promotion was the only IM tactic that was not statistically significant, hence did not predict OPPA. The fact self-promotion is a tactic to highlight *competence and performance* instead of *accommodation and solidarity* (Godfrey et al., 1986) might explain the result. To rephrase it, self-promotion is a tactic in which a person promotes an ability or achievement. Therefore, it can be seen as a way of showcasing aptitudes rather than trying to influence others. From that perspective, self-promotion may not be considered as a political act.

Both ingratiation and exemplification significantly predicted perceptions of politics in PA among the participants. Tactics like ingratiation aim to increase a person's likeability by directly influencing others with compliments or pleasing behaviors (Pittman & Jones, 1982). Godfrey and colleagues (1986) emphasized that the impact of different tactics mostly depends on the reception of the target. In their experiment, ingratiation was a much more effective tool than self-promotion to reach agreements in participants' interactions due to how

each received and retributed each action. Accordingly, the social context between raters and ratees is essential to explain the impact of IM tactics on OPPA (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992).

Tactics like exemplification aim to increase a person's appreciation by influencing others with behaviors that show commitment to the organization, coworkers, and performance (Bonner et al., 2017). It has a similar purpose as ingratiation since the actors try to put themselves in a positive position (Bolino and Turnley, 1999).

The mediating role of LMX on the relationship between IM and OPPA supports Hypothesis 2. However, each IM tactic has its own facet, which may have different weights on participants' perceptions of OPPA. In fact, when considering each IM tactic separately, the mediating role of LMX in the relationship between self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification and OPPA was statistically significant and supported three out of the four sub-Hypotheses 2. Only supplication's effect on OPPA is not significantly mediated by LMX.

Scholars have different findings that can explain those situations. Maher and colleagues (2018) mention that supplication is a negative IM tactic in the sense that (1) it aims to create an unfavorable impression and (2) it is of low-frequency use. Creating such an impression, like pretending to need assistance from others or being unable to complete a task and avoid that workload, can be seen by others in a negative way and with the purpose of disturbing an individual's or organization's well-being (Kelloway et al., 2010). Contrarily, tactics like self-promotion, ingratiation, and exemplification (1) aim to create favorable impressions and (2) are of high-frequency use due to having higher efficacy. Thus, those being positive IM tactics are often associated with higher LMX quality (Bolino, 1999).

Hence, supplication behaviors are typically directed at coworkers instead of supervisors (Chuang et al., 2018; Maher et al., 2018) to avoid the latter from developing negative perceptions about their subordinates. In the questionnaire, participants were asked about supplication behaviors towards their supervisors and very few admitted adopting them. That does not allow to confirm whether supplication effects LMX in a positive manner as Pittman & Jones (1982) and Harris and others (2007) previously argued in their studies.

A significant difference was explicit when analyzing the mediating role of LMX on the relationship between IM and OPPA using the three positive IM tactics, i.e., IM without supplication. With LMX quality being similarly impacted by all those three, it becomes easier to understand that participants with higher LMX tend to perceive fewer politics in PA, which

aligns with the initial hypothesis based on several findings (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Davis & Gardner, 2004; Kane-Frieder et al., 2014). However, the effect of the positive IM tactics on OPPA and the total effect considering LMX's mediation is significantly lower compared to the general IM construct. While there is little literature that might explain that outcome, I argue that excluding supplication, which had a clear tendency among participants, and including self-promotion, which may not be considered as a political act, contribute to the small effect.

Hereafter, this thesis advances relevant findings on how not only IM tactics impact perceptions of politics in PA, but also on how it varies depending on the type of influencing tactic adopted by the employees. That is the case because contextual factors, such as the social context between supervisors and employees (LMX), end up playing a crucial role in how employees receive ratings and perceive the PA process.

Practical Implications

The results of this thesis have significant implications for PA and PM practice. It is clear from previous literature that the social context between supervisors (raters) and their subordinates (ratees) is a relevant feature of PM systems, including PA (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Dello Russo et al., 2017). This study recognizes the impact of different rater-ratee scenarios, particularly concerning the context of PA and employees' reactions to it.

Concerning management, supervisors should set the stone on what behaviors are more and less acceptable within the workplace. In other words, supervisors should create a culture that does not promote the adoption of IM tactics since they increase OPPA and not always positively impact LMX quality. One clear example is supplication, which does not improve LMX quality and significantly increases OPPA. The other tactics –the positive ones– are not favorable, but do increase LMX quality and reduce OPPA, which is good for the reputation and reliability perception of PA processes. Overall, political acts should be avoided to prevent any potential negative reaction to PA processes and ratings.

Also, understanding the reason why employees adopt IM tactics is important for organizations when designing PM systems. In this thesis, I consider the context of PA, but there can be other reasons. For instance, employees might be discontented at work, struggling to perform, or trying to improve their relationships with supervisors or peers. In that sense, supervisors should strive to build and sustain better relationships with their subordinates, as doing so can help understanding those reasons.

Concerning PA, it is fundamental that supervisors are transparent about it and emphasize its seriousness and significance. It will also create a sense of understanding among employees, which should manage their expectations and reaction to PA. Furthermore, supervisors should have access to PA training or workshops to be more efficient when assessing their subordinates' performance. It should contribute to better use of the existing evaluating mechanisms, as well as identifying potential sources of bias like the political behaviors directed at them from their subordinates.

Lastly, organizations must design PM systems that minimize bias in performance assessments, depending on the concerns employees and supervisors report concerning the existing practices. One way can be diversifying the appraisal sources, i.e., complementing

supervisors' evaluations with peers', 360-degree, or even self-appraisals methods (Latham et al., 2005).

Limitations and Future Research

As with any study, the contributions provided have limitations. Considering them, I will make recommendations to contribute to relevant future research.

In the questionnaire, all the items regarding IM are about the assessment of the participants' own behaviors. Most times, people are less keen to admit their acts, mainly in this case since they are political. That is the so-called common-method bias, in which there is the risk of deviation between the accurate and self-reported realities. To minimize the associated risk, I used temporal (e.g.: time delays between measures) and proximal (e.g.: physical distance between measures) separations. Nonetheless, such self-assessment can be a good predictor of their perceptions of the relationship quality with their supervisor. Perhaps, the same cannot be said concerning the perceptions of OPPA. That is because such can also derive from observing coworkers' behaviors, relationships with supervisors, and reactions to PA. Thus, including items about IM behavior observation may be a relevant implementation in future research. Consequently, additional features of the social context within organizations can be considered.

Furthermore, the items on IM are all regarding actions directed at supervisors. IM behaviors can be directed at colleagues, which may also indirectly impact supervisors. For instance, results proved supplication is a tactic used with a lower frequency to target supervisors vis-à-vis other IM tactics. Existing research mentions supplication mostly targets coworkers (Maher et al., 2018). Once again, that complementing approach provides a broader picture of the social context within organizations. Therefore, future research can look into IM tactics used in relation to coworkers in contexts where 360-degree evaluations are practiced.

Finally, one limitation is the analysis of mediation in this study. Mediation relates to causality, in which time lags are important. As such, longitudinal studies are a better fit for mediation analyses. So, in my view, the distribution of an extra questionnaire, in a similar format, after the PA process would improve the results and provide more reliable conclusions. The additional questionnaire would illustrate how the participants' attitudes, such as IM behaviors, and perceptions, such as LMX and OPPA, change after completing the PA process and receiving their ratings.

VI. References

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VII. Appendix

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Consent and Introduction

Dear participant,

This research is part of a larger project, conducted by the researchers listed below. The purpose of this research is to better understand different events that may occur at work, and how individuals react to them and think about them.

Your participation is **voluntary** and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, during or after the completion of the survey. However, please consider that your participation is essential to the success of the project, so we highly appreciate your help. Your answers will be completely **anonymous** as the data are intended merely for statistical processing and no answer will be analyzed or reported individually.

In the first part, you will find questions which you can answer based on your experience at work. In the second part, we will ask basic demographic questions. This survey should take around 10 minutes to complete. Please read the instructions of each question carefully and be honest in your responses. To answer the questions, it is important that you have working experience.

There are no expected significant risks associated to the participation in the study and if you have any questions about this study please contact us. If you agree to participate please click on the box below.

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Impression Management Items

Considering that you work in an organization, how likely is it that you engage in the following behaviors:

- Talk proudly about your experience or education.
- Make your manager aware of your talents or qualifications.
- Let your manager know that you are valuable to the organization.
- Let your manager know that you have a reputation for being competent in a particular area.
- Make your manager aware of your accomplishments.
- Compliment your manager so be seen as likeable.
- Take an interest in your manager's personal life to show your manager your friendliness.
- Praise your manager's accomplishments to be considered as a nice person.
- Use flattery and favors to make your manager like you more.
- Do personal favors for your manager to show your friendliness.
- Try to appear like a hard-working, dedicated employee.
- Stay at work late so your manager will know you are hard working.
- Try to appear busy, even at times when things are slower.
- Arrive at work early in order to look dedicated.
- Come to the office at night or on weekends to show that you are dedicated.
- Act like you know less than you do, so your manager will help you out.
- Try to gain assistance or sympathy from your manager by appearing needy in some area.
- Pretend not to understand something to gain your manager's help.
- Act like you need assistance so your manager will help you out.
- Pretend to know less than you do so you can avoid an unpleasant assignment.

Leader-Member Exchange Items

- Do you know where you stand with your manager and do you usually know how satisfied your manager is with what you do?
- How well does your manager understand your job problems and needs?
- How well does your manager recognize your potential?

- Regardless of how much formal authority your manager has built into his/her position, what are the chances that your manager would use his/her power to help you solve problems in your work?
- Regardless of the amount of formal authority your manager has, what are the chances that he/she would "bail you out", at his/her expense?
- I have enough confidence in my manager that I would defend and justify his/her decision if he/she were not present to do so?
- How would you characterize your working relationship with your manager?

Opinions on Performance Appraisal

- What was the recent performance rating you received from your manager?
- What do you estimate your performance rating will be in the upcoming performance appraisal?

Organizational Politics in Performance Appraisal Items

In your opinion, how likely is it that your manager - as rater in the upcoming performance appraisal - will engage in the following behaviors when appraising the performance of each and everyone in your team?

- Avoid giving performance ratings that may antagonize employees (i.e. a low rating).
- Give low performance ratings because he/she fears that the employees will try to be transferred to another boss.
- Inflate performance ratings of those employees who are able to procure him/her special services, favors or benefits.
- Inflate performance ratings of employees who have access to valuable sources of information.
- Give performance ratings that reflect in part his/her personal liking or disliking of the employees.
- Give performance ratings that are affected by the extent to which employees are perceived as sharing the same basic values as he/she does.

- Give performance ratings to employees that are affected by their ability to inspire their enthusiasm to him/her.
- Give performance ratings that will make him/her look good to his/her superiors.
- Give performance ratings that reflect the quality of the manager-employee personal relationship throughout the rating period (e.g., tense-relaxed, trusting-distrusting, friendly-hostile).
- Give an inflated performance rating in order to avoid negative/uncomfortable feedback sessions with his/her employees.
- Avoid giving performance ratings which may have negative consequences for the employee (e.g. demotion, lay-off, no bonus, salary freeze, etc.).
- Inflate performance ratings in order to maximize rewards offered to his/her employees (e.g., salary increases, promotions, prestigious assignments, etc.).

Demographic Information Items

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

Age

Education level concluded

- High-school degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Post-Graduation degree
- Master's degree
- PhD degree

What is your tenure (in months)?

How long have you been working with your manager (in months)?

What is the gender of your manager?

What is the age of your manager? (approximately)

Which work sector best describes your organization?

- Accounting, Finance, or Banking
- Business, Management, or Consultancy
- Energy
- Engineering
- Hospitality or Tourism
- Marketing, Advertising, or PR
- Public Services
- Recruitment or Human Resources
- Sales or Commercial
- Science
- Other (open answer)

Appendix B: Factor and Reliability Analyses: Principal Component Analysis

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) is a statistical procedure that simplifies data by reducing the number of variables and grouping items with a strong mutual relationship. It is a commonly used technique when variables in the research model cover sub-variables of different natures. PCA was applied to IM items to assess the impact of each IM tactic: self-promotion (SP), ingratiation (I), exemplification (E), and supplication (S).

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic tests the adequacy of the sample size for this procedure. Its value of 0.888 validates the suitability. Moreover, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity measures the correlation between IM items. The significance level was 0.000, meaning there is strong statistical evidence that all those items are correlated.

Three components should result given the number of variables with Initial Eigenvalues higher than 1. Such three explain approximately 62% of the total variance of the initial twenty variables.

The rotated component matrix (Table 10) displays which items fall into each component.

TABLE 10
Rotated Component Matrix for
Impression Management

	Component		
	1	2	3
IM_S3	.872	.105	.035
IM_S4	.869	.228	.019
IM_S5	.841	.029	.026
IM_S1	.830	.206	-.009
IM_S2	.822	.212	.102
IM_E5	.606	.379	.046
IM_I3	.110	.709	.355
IM_E2	.174	.676	.065
IM_I5	.389	.660	.156
IM_I1	.152	.653	.380
IM_E4	.278	.643	-.024
IM_I2	.137	.620	.335
IM_E1	-.079	.612	.183
IM_I4	.461	.579	.158

IM_E3	.365	.479	-.009
IM_SP2	.030	.113	.856
IM_SP3	.028	.124	.831
IM_SP4	-.002	.228	.831
IM_SP5	.055	.213	.775
IM_SP1	.047	.124	.747

The rotated component matrix suggests the removal of three items. One is item IM_E5 because it weakly correlates with other component 1 items. Also, it is an item related to exemplification and should not be associated with supplication behaviors. Another is item IM_I4 because it moderately correlates with both component 1 and component 2 items. The last one is item IM_E4 since it weakly correlates with the other component 2 items. Once all are excluded, the factor analysis should be re-run.

The new factor analysis exhibits valid results ($KMO = 0.882$, $p = 0.000$) and the continuity of three components explaining approximately 65.3% of the total variance of the seventeen considered items. The rotated component matrix (Table 11) shows the distribution of each item per component.

TABLE 11
Rotated Component Matrix for
Impression Management after
deleting items IM_E4, IM_E5, and
IM_I4

	Component		
	1	2	3
IM_S4	.873	.014	.239
IM_S3	.871	.037	.103
IM_S5	.857	.020	.053
IM_S2	.835	.096	.225
IM_S1	.831	-.003	.198
IM_SP2	.019	.855	.128
IM_SP3	.024	.847	.131
IM_SP4	-.008	.828	.246
IM_SP5	.054	.768	.238
IM_SP1	.047	.749	.127
IM_I3	.112	.340	.716
IM_E2	.172	.049	.691

IM_E4	.279	-.041	.663
IM_I1	.149	.365	.662
IM_I5	.384	.146	.654
IM_I2	.147	.314	.646
IM_E1	-.056	.170	.628

Even though the factor analysis recommends the consideration of three components, we decided to proceed with four to align with the IM theory. Component 1 concerns supplication tactics and includes all initial items. Component 2 regards self-promotion tactics and has all initial items. Component 3 references both ingratiation and exemplification tactics. Therefore, it splits into two constructs. One is for ingratiation with items IM_I1, IM_I2, IM_I3, and IM_I5. Another is for exemplification with items IM_E1, IM_E2, and IM_E4.

Then, the reliability of each component was tested (Table 12) to ensure each is measuring the same construct and, thus, validating internal consistency.

TABLE 12
Reliability test of self-promotion (SP), ingratiation (I), exemplification (E), and supplication (S)

Component	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Self-promotion	IM_SP1, IM_SP2, IM_SP3, IM_SP4, IM_SP5	.890
Ingratiation	IM_I1, IM_I2, IM_I3, IM_I5	.827
Exemplification	IM_E1, IM_E2, IM_E4	.657
Supplication	IM_S1, IM_S2, IM_S3, IM_S4, IM_S5	.921

Appendix C: Results

FIGURE 2

Histogram of the average of Supplication scores

Note: IM_S stands for Supplication tactics.

Description: The histogram shows how most participants rarely adopt supplication tactics, making the distribution of supplication scores highly skewed (0.657 as shown in Table 8).

