Social Loafing and Impression Management in an Organizational Context

Cem Harun MEYDAN
Turkish Army, Ankara, Turkey.
Email: meydan@alumni.bilkent.edu.tr

Çagdas Akif KAHRAMAN
Turkish Military Academy, Ankara, Turkey.
Email: cakahraman@gmail.com

Ufuk BASAR
Turkish Army, Ankara, Turkey.
Email: ufuk-basar@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT: The aim of this study is to find out relationship between behaviors of people who tend to loaf in organizational context and their impression management strategies, and to reveal specific impression management strategies applied by loafers. Our research is conducted with voluntary participation of 100 bank clerks, who work at a private bank located in Ankara, Turkey. Data were collected by means of questionnaires. Findings indicate that social loafers are engaged in impression management strategies. Loafers, who feel disconnected, behave distractive and disruptive. However, perceived results of loafing curtail their face saving efforts. Findings are further discussed and recommendations for future studies are emphasized.

Keywords: Social loafing; Impression management; Social loafer; Group; Behavior.
JEL Classifications: D23; M12

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly changing and developing organizational context, work groups became one of the essential managerial mechanisms. The basic reason behind forming groups is that when accomplishments of tasks require combination of several skills and work experience, group works outperform individual efforts, as one idiom indicates: "Many hands make light the work!" (Ülke and Bilgiç, 2011: 301). However one of well-known shortcomings of group works is tendency of some partners to exert less effort when they perform in a group than when they perform alone (Smrt and Karau, 2011: 267). The low profile of some group members may cause negative reactions of other group members. Therefore group members who perform less than their capacity may tend do engage in some impression management strategies in order to be perceived positively by other group members. These strategies are defined as behaviors that individuals perform and direct toward others in order to create desired apprehension of themselves and be perceived favorably by people around them (Gardner and Martinko, 1988: 321).

The aim of this study is to find out relationships between behaviors of people who tend to loaf in organizational context and their impression management strategies. To this end, firstly notions of social loafing and impression management are described. Later on their causal connection is explained. Following that methodology of this research explicated and findings are discussed.

2. Social Loafing

Social loafing refers to decrement in individuals' efforts when working in groups in comparison to individuals' efforts when working alone (Latane et al., 1979: 822). Preliminary studies on social loafing, which date back to 1881, were conducted by Ringelmann, who was a French agricultural engineer. Ringelmann's interest was on determination of efficiency of work done by men, horses, oxen and machines. His question was to find out which method and type of force was the most efficient one in actual use. In course of time during his experiments, Ringelmann realized performance

loss of workers, who pulled horizontally on a rope, when number of them increased. Ringelmann explained the decrease in performance with coordination loss, which was caused by lack of simultaneity of workers' effort, when number of them increase in groups (Kravitz and Martin, 1986: 937). Ingham et al. (1974) replicated Ringelmann's experiments both in actual and pseudogroups, and found same results with Ringelmann, which indicated decreased efforts of participants when number of them increased, except effects of participant size on individuals. Therefore Latane et al. (1979) held participant size constant and replicated similar type of experiments. Distinct from previous studies, they demonstrated that decrease of performance was due to individuals' reduced efforts, which was caused neither by coordination loss nor participant size. In this context they coined individuals' behaviors, which were directed toward reduction of effort, as social loafing (Karau and Williams, 1993: 682). In this study the notion of social loafing was examined under five dimensions, in terms of loafers' attitudes, behaviors and results of social loafing, referring to the study of Jassawalla et al. (2009: 47).

3. Impression Management

People always consider how they were perceived and evaluated by others. Spendings on cosmetics, diets and plastic surgeries all around the world support this idea. Even ordinary people pay attention to their way of talking, behaving and dressing considering impressions they made on others, which may effect their achievements and future objectives. In this context impression management refers to behavior types of people, by which desired impressions were created in others' minds (Leary and Kowalski, 1990: 34). In organizational context, impression management strategies can be engaged in by employees in order to be evaluated, perceived and treated favorably by their supervisors (Wayne and Ferris, 1990: 488). At the same time, supervisors can engage in impression management strategies in order to have their subordinates' support for their decisions or policies as well (Gardner and Martinko, 1988: 321). Besides, peers also can engage in impression management strategies among each other in order to be perceived compatible and benign (Turnley and Bolino, 2001: 352).

Commonly accepted classification of impression management strategies is examined under five dimensions, in accordance with Jones and Pittman's (1982) taxonomy. These dimensions are self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation and supplication. Individuals engage in self-promotion tactics and therefore express their distinguished qualities, such as successes, knowledge, abilities, skills in order to be perceived competent by others. People engage in ingratiation strategies and do favors and butter up others sometimes, in order to be perceived favorable. With engaging in exemplification strategies individuals try to gain devotion of others by acting beyond call of duty. Intimidation refers to individuals' behaviors directed toward others in order to threat them with punishment or other means. By supplication people try to be perceived insufficient, by this means they get others' help and attract their attention (Bolino and Turnley, 1999: 190).

4. Social Loafing and Impression Management

The behaviors or attitudes that social loafers express cause negative motivation among other group members. When members of groups perceive actual social loafing they may react negatively and disapprove social loafers (Mulvey and Klein, 1998: 64). Therefore perception of actual loafing behaviors of group members cause decreased group performance and low satisfaction of a group member. In this case other group members may choose to reduce their effort and expectations for group success as well (Tata, 2002: 293). Similar to Bolino's (1999) logic, in which he differentiated individuals who sincerely engage in extra role behaviors from others who engage in impression management strategies by this means differentiating good soldiers from good actors, we want to reveal the group members who actually loaf and engage in impression management strategies in order to cover their loafing behaviors and attitudes. In parallel with this approach we think that social loafers may tend to save their faces, when other group members perceive social loafing and react negatively. Earlier studies showed that there is a negative relationship between extra role behaviors and social loafing (Tan and Tan, 2008). On the other hand there is a positive relationship between extra role behaviors and impression management tactics (Bolino, 1999; Bolino et al. 2006; Finkelstein, 2006; Finkelstein and Penner, 2004). Therefore, social loafers may tend to save their faces, when other group members perceive social loafing and react negatively. As a result, social loafers may try to win other

group members' approval and respect by making favorable impressions on them. Hence it was hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1: There is significant relationship between social loafing and impression management.

Hypothesis 2: Social loafing causes implementation of impression management tactics.

5. Method
5.1. Participants
The survey was conducted with voluntary participation of 100 bank clerks, who work at a private bank located in Ankara, Turkey. Out of participants 74 (74%) are males and 26 are females (26%). The average age of participants is 40 years (*SD*=7.32) with minimum of 27 years and maximum of 63 years. The average tenure of participants is 9 years (*SD*= 7.01) with a minimum of 1 year and maximum of 35 years.

5.2. Data Collection Instruments and Procedure
All data were collected by means of questionnaires. The questionnaires were filled manually by participants. A brief verbal explanation about scope and aim of our survey was given to participants prior to delivery of the questionnaires. All permissions were taken verbally from management staff about voluntary participation of participants on condition that confidentiality of organizations identity was provided.

5.2.1. Measure of Social Loafing
In order to measure social loafers' behaviors, attitudes and results of social loafing the scale developed by Jassawalla et al. (2009) was used. Five point Likert-type scale (5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree) consists of 16 items and measures social loafing within four dimensions of *loafer's apathy, loafer's distractive and disruptive behavior, loafer's disconnectedness, loafer's poor work quality and results of social loafing.* Ascending points indicate strength of each dimension. Validity of scale was tested with confirmatory factor analysis, ($\Delta\chi2/SD$=2.28, *CFI*=.90, *NFI*=.84), which verifies its five-factor structure. Factor loadings of scale vary between 0.60 and 0.93. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's coefficient alpha of α=0.95.

5.2.2. Measure of Impression Management
In order to measure impression management the scale developed by Bolino and Turnley (1999) was used. Five point Likert-type scale (5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree) consists of 19 items and measures impression management within four dimensions of *ingratiation, supplication, exemplification and self-promotion.* Ascending points indicate usage of this impression management strategy. Validity of scale was tested with confirmatory factor analysis, ($\Delta\chi2/SD$=2.29, *CFI*=.91, *NFI*=.85), which verifies its four-factor structure. Factor loadings of scale vary between 0.56-0.91. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's coefficient alpha of α=.97.

5.3. Results
Findings indicate that there is a significant relationship between social loafing and impression management (*r*=.28*, p=< .01*), which support our first hypothesis. Other significant relationships, which are presented in Table 1, among some impression management strategies and social loafers' attitudes and behaviors, also support yhe hypothesis, which purposes possible tendency of social loafers toward engaging in impression management strategies in order to save their faces.

The uncorrelated results between social loafing and impression management strategies may be due to the consequences of loafing, which comprise overload of work on other group members. That's why loafers tendency to create favorable impression over other members don't change the consequence of work overload on other members, which proves absence of relationship.

Results of regression analysis, which are presented in Table 2, support our second hypothesis, which indicate causal relationship between social loafing and impression management (β=.28, *p*< .01) in spite of its low effect size. That is, social loafers tend to engage in impression management strategies in order to save their faces against other group members.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Coefficients

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Social Loafing	3.35	.86	(.95)										
2. S.L.'s Apathy	3.31	1.04	.92**	(.81)									
3. S.L.'s Dist. and Disrp. Behavior	3.18	.90	.90**	.81**	(.66)								
4. S.L.'s Disconnect.	3.15	1.06	.64**	.53**	.55**	(.84)							
5. S.L.'s Poor Work Q.	3.34	1.00	.93**	.85**	.85**	.49**	(.85)						
6. Results of S.L.	3.64	.93	.86**	.75**	.69**	.42**	.74**	(.90)					
7. Impression Man.	2.20	1.03	.28**	.29**	.31**	.40**	.23*	.08	(.97)				
8. Ingratiation	2.47	1.00	.28**	.28**	.33**	.37**	.22*	.10	.95**	(.91)			
9. Supplication	1.99	1.13	.30**	.31**	.32**	.44**	.26**	.10	.96**	.87**	(.94)		
10. Exemplification	2.10	1.13	.22*	.23*	.26**	.36**	.16	.04	.95**	.88**	.90**	(.90)	
11. Self-Promotion	2.05	1.12	.25*	.29**	.26**	.35**	.22*	.06	.92**	.81**	.89**	.88**	(.85)

**p<.01, *p<.05, The values in parenthesis show internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha)., S.L. = Social Loafer

Table 2. Results of Linear Regression Analysis: Effects of Predicting Variables on Impression Management Strategies

Variables	Impression Management			Ingratiation			Supplication			Exemplification			Self-Promotion		
	B	β	ΔR²	B	β	ΔR²	B	β	ΔR²	B	β	ΔR²	B	β	ΔR²
Social Loafing	.34	.28**	.08**												
S.L.'s Apathy	.26	.27		.19	.20		.26	.24		.28	.26		.42	.39*	
S.L.'s Dist. and Disrp. Behavior	.30	.26	.23**	.41	.37*	.20**	.20	.23	.25**	.36	.29	.20**	.10	.08	.20**
S.L.'s Disconnect.	.31	.32**		.24	.26*		.39	.11**		.33	.31**		.29	.28**	
S.L.'s Poor Work Q.	-.13	-.12		-.19	-.19		.00	.00		-.25	-.22		-.04	-.04	
Results of S.L.	-.37	-.33*		-.29	-.27		-.42	-.35**		-.38	-.31*		-.45	-.38**	

**p<.01, *p<.05, S.L. = Social Loafer

Findings indicate that social loafers' apathy causes implementation of self-promotion strategy (β=39, p< .05), which can be because of loafers' feeling of superiority over other group members. Therefore by continuously expressing their successes and achievements loafers try to cover their lack of effort. Another finding indicates that social loafers' distractive and disruptive behaviors cause implementation of ingratiation strategy (β=37, p< .05), which can be explained social loafers' attempts to cover their negative behaviors by doing favor or buttering up other group members. In this way loafers would try to be perceived favorable. In addition, existence of effects of social loafers' disconnectedness, which are also presented in Table 2, on each impression management strategy is remarkable. That is, social loafers may behave disconnectedly in common and cannot adapt others intentionally or unintentionally. That's why this common and frequent behavior type of social loafers may cause them to engage in each impression management strategy in order to compensate their lack of contribution and in this way be approved by other group members. Another remarkable finding is negative effects of results of social loafing, which are presented in Table 2, on impression management strategies. This can be interpreted as futility of attempts of social loafers by engaging in impression management strategies, on other group members, which don't change overload of work on other members' shoulders.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Individuals and employees consider their impressions on other individuals. Therefore individuals want to shape and control these impressions in order to be perceived favorable by others and in this way gain promotions (Gardner, 1992: 34). On the other hand, in organizational context accomplishment of many works require establishment of groups in order to combine individuals' capabilities toward a common goal. However individuals reduce their efforts when they take part in groups and their contributions are pooled in evaluations (Shepperd & Taylor, 1999: 1147). That's why other group members experience difficulty; feel dissatisfaction and inequity when they compensate for

loafers reduced efforts. In this context social loafers may tend to engage in impression management strategies in order to save their face and get respect of other group member.

In this article as distinct from other studies we analyzed relationships between social loafing and impression management as well as the predictive effect of social loafers' behaviors, attitudes and results of social loafing on implementation of impression management strategies in organizational context. Research data were collected by means of questionnaires from bank clerks. Findings of our study reveal significant relationship between social loafing and impression management, in addition to causal ties between social loafers' behaviors, attitudes and impression management strategies. In this way, our findings filled a gap in field of organizational behavior.

Our study may have managerial implications as well. Organizations can pay attention to our findings when they form groups and evaluate group performance. They can consider evaluating each group member for their assigned task accomplishment quality instead of evaluating whole group members together in order to prevent occurrence of social loafing or control it to acceptable levels. In addition they can realize loafers' impression management strategies beforehand by paying attention to our findings and take precautions.

As well as the results our study has some limitations, By using questionnaire, collected data were limited to answer choices therefore participants might not have expressed all of their thoughts about research topic. Absence of prior studies, which prevented us compare the results, is another limitation.

Possible future studies may provide results to be compared with this study. Performing similar studies in larger and different samples, using quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, may provide evaluation of the topic more comprehensively.

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