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## THE IMPACT OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT ON TEMPORARY IMAGE RISK IN PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

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*Impression Management, Positive Perception, Leadership, Temporary Image, Education*

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### ABSTRACTS

**Background:** School principals play a strategic role in building a positive perception within an educational institution, which has an impact on improving trust, motivation, and organizational performance. One often-used strategy is impression management, which manages communication, leadership symbols, and interpersonal interactions. However, if not managed proportionately, this strategy can pose risks in the form of temporary imagery, negative biases, and manipulative perceptions, damage weak leadership credibility, and damage internal organizational relationships. **Purpose of the Study:** This study aims to analyze the role of impression management by school principals in building positive perceptions and identify risks arising from disproportionate and ineffective implementation. **Methods:** This study uses a library research approach by reviewing literature on impression management, perception, and leadership. The data was analyzed using content analysis to identify themes, patterns, and relationships between concepts. The analysis was also carried out using Karl Popper's falsification principle to test the dentist concept concepts' validity and avoid bias, the dentist concept concepts' validity and avoid bias. The mental idol Francis Bacon identifies and minimizes subjective bias in data interpretation. **Results:** The study shows that wise impression management can increase trust, motivation, and organizational performance. However, if not managed proportionally, it can create manipulative perceptions and reduce the trust of organizational members. This research makes theoretical and practical contributions to helping school principals manage impression management effectively to achieve more credible and sustainable leadership.

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## A. INTRODUCTION

In an educational institution, the role of the principal is the central element and the primary key in mobilizing resources to increase the effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity of the institution (Dini, 2021). In addition to carrying out the function of an administrator, the principal is responsible for building positive relationships among human resources, including all stakeholders in the educational institution. The role of school principals in building positive perceptions dramatically affects the performance of the institution (Jannah & Rasyid, 2023). The positive perception created by the principal towards its members encourages them to be more enthusiastic and motivated in carrying out their duties and functions. This happens because of the trust, respect, and family relationships that exist between members of educational institutions and school principals. Various pieces of literature have explained the urgency of this positive perception, which has been proven to significantly improve an educational institution's performance (Saputra et al., 2021).

Building a positive perception among members of an organization is not easy and cannot be achieved by just implementing one specific strategy. This process faces a variety of complex challenges. These complexities include demands on school principals to demonstrate competence, integrity, and innovation and facing external dynamics and high expectations from members (Rosalina, 2020). Therefore, school principals are required to have strong motivation, a solid philosophical foundation, and equilibrium knowledge and spirituality as support in facing the dynamics of the internal and external social situation of educational institutions (Suwardi, 2023). Suppose the principal succeeds in building and maintaining a positive perception among the members of his educational institution. In that case, the members' performance increases significantly due to the strong intrinsic and extrinsic encouragement. On the other hand, if a positive perception fails to form and what is created is a temporary positive image, this condition can lead to a decrease in members' work motivation (Giantoro et al., 2019). When the temporary image is lost, negative perceptions tend to develop, ultimately impacting the decline in educational institutions' performance. This situation can trigger a reluctance to work, laziness, frustration (*dongkol*), and low enthusiasm of members. This condition, in the terminology of organizational psychology, is known as "Emotional Dissonance.<sup>2</sup>," a term introduced by Leon Festinger. Emotional dissonance occurs when individuals feel a conflict between internally perceived emotions and emotions that must be displayed externally in the work environment, ultimately affecting the productivity and effectiveness of the organization as a whole (DuBrin, 2010).

In facing the complexity of the social dynamics of educational institutions and building and maintaining a positive perception of members, a comprehensive concept is needed to help school principals create these positive perceptions (Anggraeni, 2017). One approach that can be used is "Impression Management." Impression management is an individual's effort to influence other people's perception of him. This effort is carried out by managing the way of speaking, appearance, location and facilities, overall style, and individuals selected as part of the educational institution (Suhayat et al., 2023). In addition, meeting member expectations is also an essential step in building a positive perception, which in Total Quality Management (TQM) is known as the principle of "customer satisfaction." However, the management of positive perceptions

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<sup>2</sup> Employees feel pressured or discouraged because they have to work under a leader they don't like. This creates internal conflicts that reduce job satisfaction and the passion to contribute.

through impression management not only focuses on increasing the values of the factors excessively but must also be done wisely, taking into account the proportionality between space and time (Daniel et al., 2023).

The impression management approach applied by school principals in organizations has a double impact, namely the potential to create positive perceptions and the risk of negative bias or a temporary image that is less authentic (Pratiwi, 2013). The potential for positive perceptions can have implications for increasing trust, motivation, and performance and strengthening the effectiveness of school principals' leadership (Estrada et al., 2019). On the other hand, negative bias or temporary image risk can result in a decrease in enthusiasm and motivation and the emergence of laziness and unwillingness to work among organizational members, which ultimately forms a negative perception of the principal's leadership (Aimang, 2017). Therefore, school principals need to manage impressions wisely by paying attention to the key underlying values, such as how to communicate, site management, provision of facilities, and other relevant factors. This management must be carried out proportionally so that the potential for positive perceptions can be appropriately formed (Romadhan & Pradana, 2021). On the other hand, if the management of these values is carried out excessively or disproportionately, it can create a temporary image risk that negatively impacts the effectiveness of leadership (Alfiyah & Jannah, 2017).

There are various studies that have been conducted, but to the author's knowledge, there has not been a study that comprehensively examines the two sides of impression management, namely the potential for positive perception and the risk of the emergence of temporary images. Most previous research has focused only on how impression management can build positive perceptions in organizations. Romadhan, (2021) highlights the role of impression management in creating a positive image for leaders. Saputro & Diniati (2017) examined the effectiveness of impression management tactics in increasing organizational trust, while Juniarti (2018) examined the relationship between impression management and leaders' self-image in organizations. In addition, Mulyana et al. (2020) highlighted the impact of impression management on interpersonal relationships in building subordinate loyalty, and Saragih et al. (2020) focused on the role of this strategy in strengthening positive perceptions of leaders. However, all of these studies are limited to the constructive aspects of impression management and have not thoroughly explored the risks that come with it, such as the potential for temporary imagery that can create manipulative perceptions or negative biases. This study tries to fill this gap by offering a new, more holistic perspective, namely analyzing the two sides of the impact of impression management. The urgency of this research lies in the importance of providing guidance for leaders, including school principals, to implement impression management wisely to maximize its positive impact while minimizing adverse risks.

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the application of impression management by school principals in building positive perceptions in the educational institution environment, as well as identify potential risks in the form of temporary images that can arise if impression management is not managed proportionally. This study also explains the two sides of the impact of impression management, namely the positive side related to increasing trust, motivation, and organizational performance, and the negative side which includes the emergence of manipulative perceptions, negative biases, or decreased work enthusiasm. Thus, this research is expected to make

theoretical and practical contributions, especially in guiding school principals to manage impression management wisely, effectively, and sustainably to achieve more credible leadership and positively impact the school organization. The theory used to achieve the research objectives is through in-depth and critical analysis using impression management, social and communication psychology, and organizational leadership.

## **B. METHOD**

This study uses a library research approach (Afan Faizin, 2020; Darmalaksana, 2020), which aims to review and analyze various literature related to impression management, positive perception, and temporary image risk in the context of school principal leadership (Harahap, 2020). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore various theories, concepts, and previous research results relevant to the research topic and compare and criticize various views in the literature (Sugiyono, 2021). The data collection process is carried out by tracing literature sources, including books, scientific journals, articles, research reports, and other sources related to impression management and leadership (Sidiq & Choiri, 2019).

In this study, researchers used content analysis to analyze and organize data from various literature (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). This method allows researchers to identify the main themes, patterns, and relationships between concepts in the literature (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2020) so that it can provide a deeper understanding of the two sides of impression management, namely the positive side and the risk of temporary image (Asfar, 2019). To increase the objectivity and credibility of the analysis, this study also adopts the principle of falsification put forward by Karl Popper, who emphasizes the importance of testing and refuting hypotheses to obtain more objective scientific knowledge (Popper, 2011). In addition, Francis Bacon's theory of the four idols is used to identify and avoid biases or prejudices that can affect the analysis process to ensure that the interpretation of the literature is carried out objectively and free from the influence of subjectivity (Bertrand Russell, 2002).

Through this approach, this study is expected to provide a strong theoretical basis to analyze the application of impression management in the leadership of school principals and provide a deeper insight into the impact of impression management on organizational perception (Sugiyono, 2013). This study also seeks to provide more objective and systematic guidance, which can be used as a reference for further research in organizational psychology and educational management (Suyitno, 2018).

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Temporary Image Risks in Principal Leadership**

#### **Factors that do not value equilibrium/proportionality**

The main difference between perception and imagery lies in their nature and influence. Perception is internal and subjective, while image is external and collective, making it easier to control by its constituents (Arroisi et al., 2024; Frondizi & Wijaya, 2001). Although the principal cannot wholly control the individual's perception, they can influence it through a strategic approach. However, if factors such as communication, integrity, and authenticity are applied inauthentically or only for momentary gain, this can give rise to manipulative perceptions and undermine members' trust (Bahm, 1993; Feng & Bodde, 1983). Therefore, to build a sustainable

positive perception, school principals must apply these factors authentically, honestly, honestly, fairly, and proportionately (Dewey, 2004; Rawls, 2009). Proportionality ensures alignment and consistency, creating a harmonious and credible relationship between leaders and organization members (Rawls, 2009).

Principals who focus too much on managing leadership symbols without balancing them with performance and actions risk creating negative biases or temporary images (Feng & Bodde, 1983; Ivancevich et al., 2014). Initially, members of the organization may be impressed and put in trust, but without a balance between leadership symbols and concrete actions, positive perceptions can turn into negative distortions (Elsbach, 2014). If it continues, this can trigger a more profound negative perception of the principal and his leadership as a whole (Elsbach, 2014).

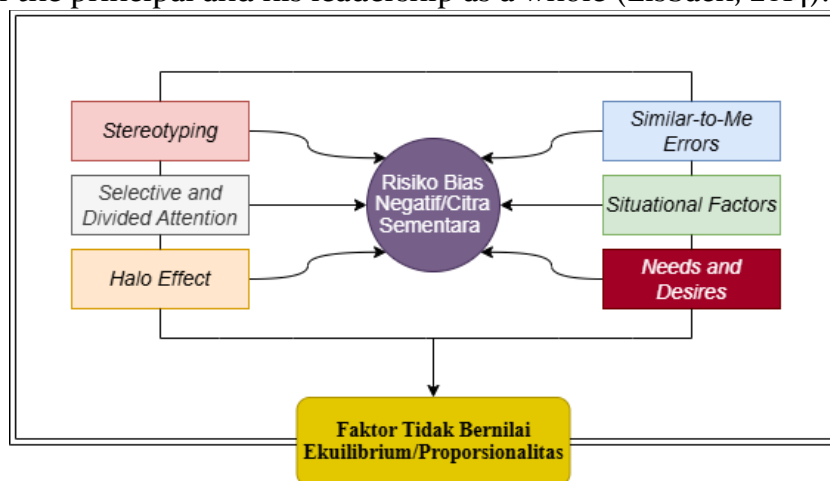


Figure 1: Diagram Analisis Factors that do not value equilibrium/proportionality

### Stereotyping

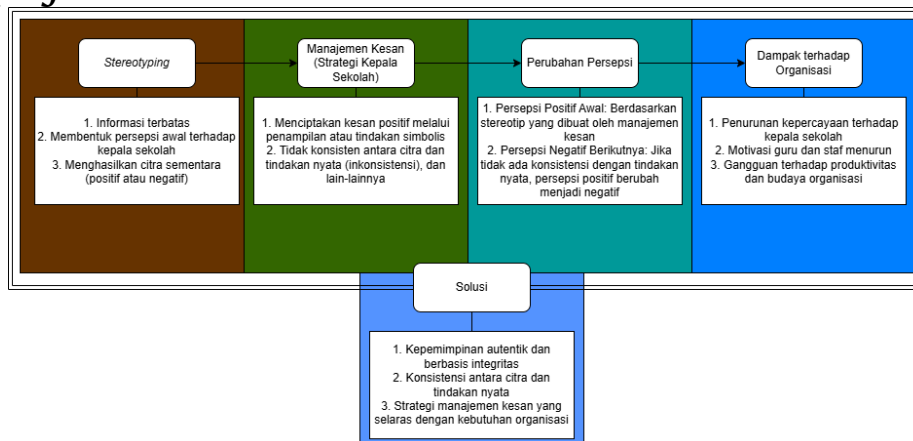


Figure 2: Stereotyping Analysis Diagram with Perception Using a Social Psychology Perspective

In the context of impression management, stereotyping shows how individuals shape perceptions based on limited information (Ivancevich et al., 2014). This phenomenon illustrates that school principals, through impression management strategies, can create certain impressions that focus on positive appearances or behaviors. However, the stereotyping process often results in images that are not entirely accurate and temporary. If consistent concrete actions do not accompany the impression built, the positive perception can become a more lasting negative (Atlis et

al., 2024; DuBrin, 2010). Unbalanced image management, which focuses too much on imagery without basing it on substantial performance, can lead to negative bias against school principals. The mismatch between the displayed image and the reality of the performance creates a negative perception, such as the assumption that the principal is only oriented toward symbolism. When members of the organization detect this discrepancy, their trust and motivation toward the principal's leadership tend to decrease, which can impact the organization's overall performance. To avoid the trap of destructive stereotyping, school principals must ensure that impression management strategies reflect authentic leadership based on integrity and are aligned with organizational needs (DuBrin, 2010). Consistency between the image displayed and the real action is key to building long-lasting organizational trust. With this approach, school principals can not only mitigate the adverse effects of stereotyping but also create positive perceptions that have a long-term impact on the culture and productivity of educational organizations (Rosenfeld et al., 1995).

### ***Selective and Divided Attention***

In the impression management perspective proposed by Erving Goffman, selective attention is an effort to highlight certain aspects, such as academic achievement or school awards, which often aim to form a positive image in the eyes of external audiences (Goffman, 2021). However, if these strategies are used disproportionately, they can trigger manipulative perceptions from internal organization members, such as teachers and staff, who feel their needs are being ignored. Through the confirmation bias mechanism, external audiences tend to believe in the success highlighted by the principal as a representation of the entire organization. However, negative biases can arise for internal members aware of this inequality, especially if they feel that the principal prioritizes symbolic importance in the external eyes over internal needs. In addition, divided attention, which requires the principal to divide the focus between internal and external needs, can also lead to fragmentation of attention. The inability of school principals to prioritize needs effectively can lead to dissatisfaction and lower work motivation (Leary, 2019).

From the perspective of organizational leadership and management, selective attention is often used to build a symbolic image that is quickly accepted by the public. However, this strategy must be balanced with the principles of authentic leadership, which emphasize the importance of honesty, transparency, and attention to the organization's internal needs. In practice, attention too focused on external imagery can undermine internal support, as teachers and staff feel neglected. In addition, fragmented attention due to divided attention can hinder strategic decision-making, impacting overall organizational performance (Leary, 2019). Ethically, selective attention used to hide organizational weaknesses indicates a lack of integrity in leadership. Similarly, the fragmentation of attention due to divided attention can sacrifice the internal relationships that should be the foundation of the organization's success. In the long run, this strategy can undermine internal trust and create an unhealthy work environment (Gregory, 2019).

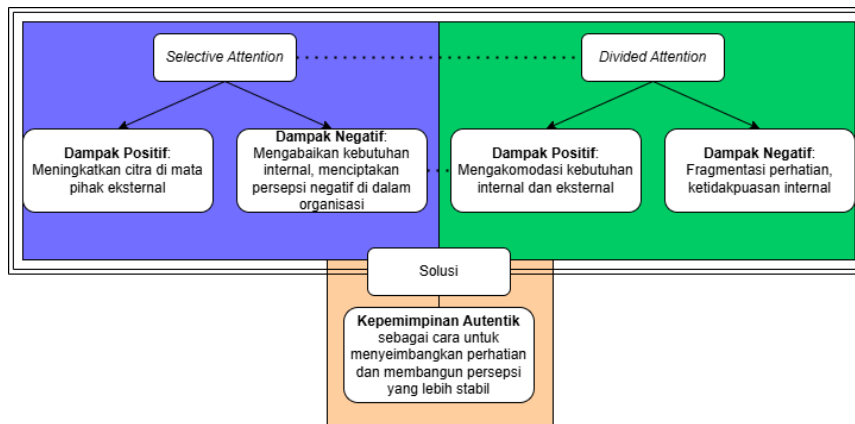


Figure 3: Diagram of Selective and Divided Attention Analysis with Perception Using a Social Psychology Perspective

As a critical reflection, selective attention and divided attention strategies can be used effectively if they are based on the principles of transparency and inclusivity. School principals need to adopt a more holistic approach to integrate internal and external needs in a balanced manner. Authentic leadership, which focuses on honesty, openness, and inclusive communication, is key to building a sustainable positive perception without sacrificing internal relationships. With the right approach, school principals can create a stable positive impression while maintaining the integrity and trust of organizational members (Gibson, 2014; Goldstein, 2009).

### ***Halo Effect***

The halo effect in the context of principal leadership is the result of perception management aimed at building a positive image (Ivancevich et al., 2014). Theoretically, school principals often utilize personal attributes such as charisma, rhetoric, or social relationships to create a convincing initial impression. However, the success of this impression depends heavily on the consistency of the real performance that supports it. In the organizational communication theory perspective, the principal's communication style is essential in shaping the perception of organizational members and the public (Ruben & Stewart, 2006). The ability of the principal to communicate the vision and goals of the organization through persuasive communication can reinforce the initial impression, but it also carries the risk if the message is more focused on external imagery without adequate attention to the internal needs of the organization (Ruben & Stewart, 2006). In this case, such a communication style has the potential to create a manipulative impression and can undermine the trust of members of the organization. From the point of view of organizational psychology, the halo effect creates cognitive biases that affect the initial perception of organizational members toward the principal. This bias often gives rise to high expectations, but if those expectations are not offset by real performance, the initially formed positive perception can turn into a deeper negative perception (Ivancevich et al., 2014; Jussim, 2012). To overcome this risk, mitigation is needed in the form of consistency between the initial impression created through the halo effect and concrete steps in meeting the internal and external needs of the organization.

In conclusion, the halo effect is a phenomenon that can be a leadership strategy to build an initial positive perception of the principal. However, if not managed carefully, this phenomenon can give rise to manipulative perceptions that risk reducing

the loyalty and trust of organizational members. Therefore, principals must ensure that the positive impression created is not only temporary or visual, but is supported by tangible actions that reflect the integrity and competence of the leadership as a whole. This strategy ensures that the halo effect transforms into sustainable trust capital, preventing rifts in the organization's internal relationships (Hinton, 2015).

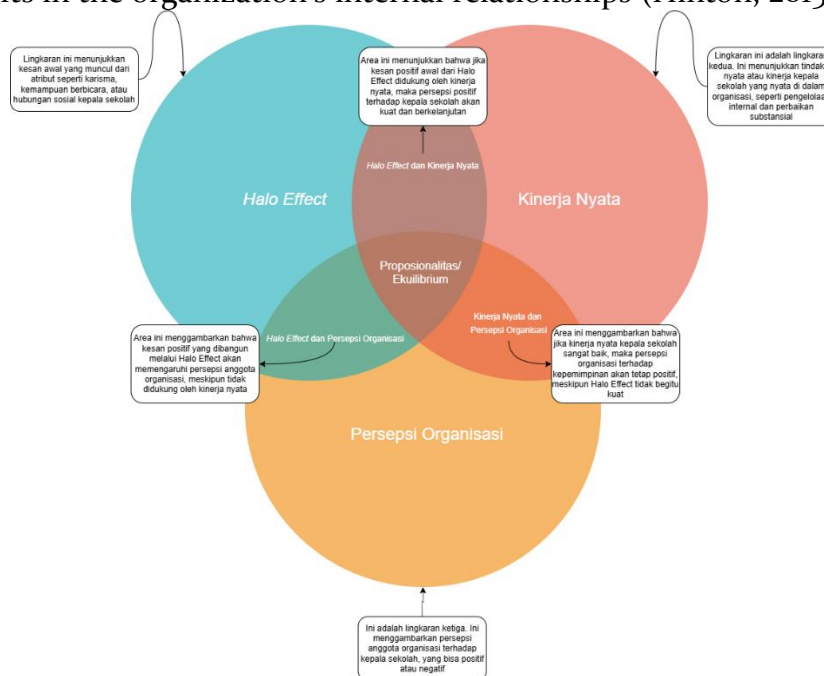


Figure 4: Halo Effect Analysis Diagram with Perception Using the Perspective of Organizational Psychology

### Similar-to-Me Errors

In social psychology, this phenomenon is explained through the similarity-attraction hypothesis, which states that individuals tend to feel more comfortable and connected to others who have something in common with them, both in values, background, and personal preferences (Ivancevich et al., 2014). These preferences can trigger interpersonal biases that lead to injustice, as affirmed in equity theory, where individuals evaluate fairness based on the balance between contributions and rewards received (DuBrin, 2010). In the context of an organization, a principal's preference for members who are perceived as "similar" to them can create a negative perception, especially for members who feel they don't get equal attention. This condition lowers work motivation and weakens trust in the principal because interpersonal bias is considered to hurt leaders' principles of justice and integrity. Social psychology also highlights the importance of authenticity in leadership. When the principal's image strategy is considered manipulative, it damages interpersonal relationships and reduces the effectiveness of impression management as a leadership instrument (DuBrin, 2010; Rosenfeld et al., 2002).

From the perspective of organizational management, the theory of leader-member exchange (LMX) emphasizes that the relationship between leaders and members of the organization is divided into two groups, namely in-group and out-group. The principal's preference for certain members who are considered "similar" to him strengthens the position of the in-group group, while out-group members feel marginalized (Miller, 2012). This imbalance creates a risk of organizational



fragmentation characterized by conflict, jealousy, and dissatisfaction, which hinders collaboration and team cohesion. In addition, this interpersonal bias creates the risk of the emergence of a "transient image," in which positive impressions are perceived only by certain groups, while other groups have opposite perceptions. Long-term risks of this phenomenon include a decrease in trust in the principal and a weakening of the effectiveness of impression management strategies (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 2013). To address these risks, principals need to develop a meritocracy, and transparency-based approach. Principals can build a more authentic and sustainable positive perception by ensuring that attention and recognition are given based on tangible contributions, not personal preferences. Leadership training emphasizing awareness of interpersonal bias is also essential to creating an inclusive and harmonious work environment (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 2013).

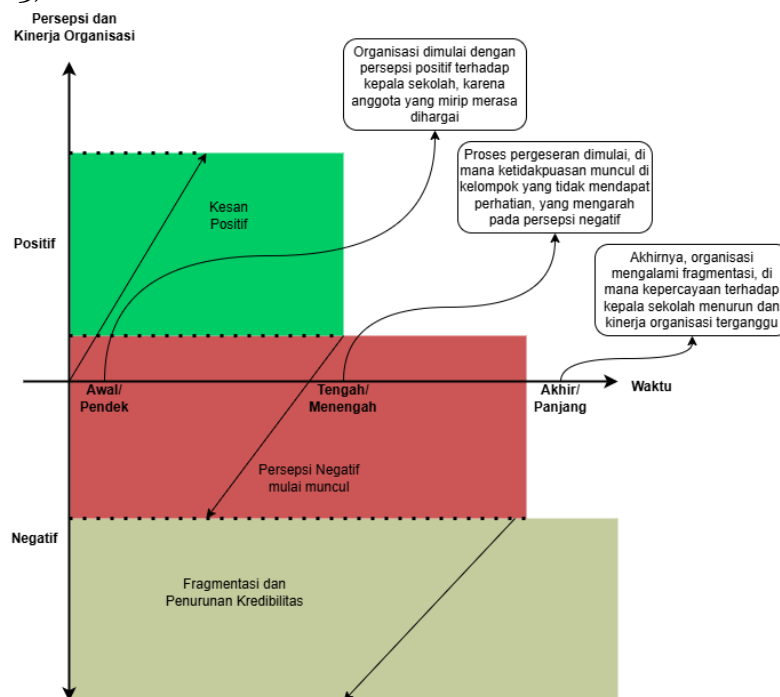


Figure 5: Diagram of Analysis of Similar-to-Me Errors with Perception Using a Social Psychology Perspective

### **Situational Factors**

Situational factors like time pressure, surrounding attitudes, and other conditions significantly impact the principal's image in impression management (Ivancevich et al., 2014). These pressures often push principals to make quick decisions, but their long-term effects require careful analysis. According to attribution theory and cognitive dissonance, organizational members' perceptions of decisions made under pressure can shift from positive to negative, especially if the actions don't align with the organization's broader needs (Elsbach, 2014). This gap between image and action can create negative bias or a manipulative perception. For instance, if a principal appears focused on personal reputation through symbolic acts, it may lead to skepticism among the organization's members, harming motivation, trust, and work dynamics (Elsbach, 2014).

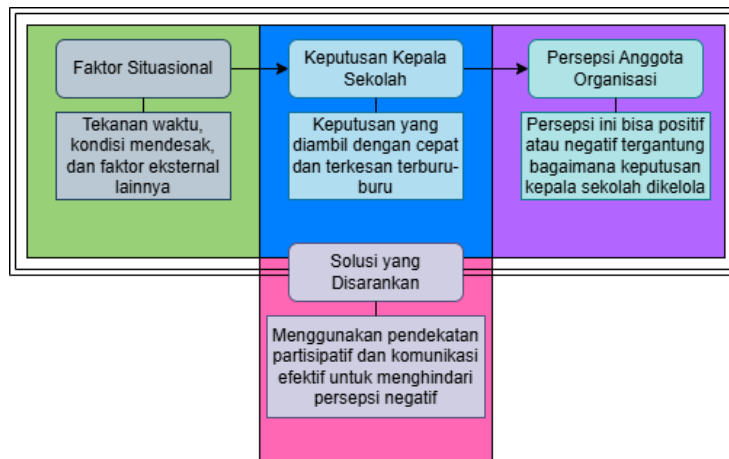


Figure 6: Situational Factors Analysis Diagram with Perception Using a Social Psychology Perspective

A participatory decision-making approach can mitigate this risk by involving members, fostering ownership, and reducing the mismatch between actions and expectations. Effective communication also helps bridge perception gaps, ensuring impression management produces authentic, sustainable positive perceptions without risking transient negativity (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 2013; Keller & Swaminathan, 2019).

### ***Needs and Desires***

In social psychology, selective perception influences individuals' tendency to accept or reject information based on personal needs and experiences (Aronson et al., 2015; Myers, 2010). School principals aiming to build a positive image must align this image with the basic needs of organizational members, such as support, recognition, and fairness. A mismatch between images and actions can lead to negative cognitive biases, distorting perceptions of the principal's leadership (Aronson et al., 2015). Maslow's perspective emphasizes meeting these needs to foster positive perceptions (Ivancevich et al., 2014; Myers, 2010). However, neglecting internal needs in favor of external recognition can cause cognitive dissonance, leading to negative perceptions (DuBrin, 2010).

In organizational management, McClelland's theory of achievement, power, and affiliation provides insight into school principals' motivations (Robbins & Coulter, 2010). Overemphasizing external imagery risks creating manipulative perceptions that harm leader-member relations (Ivancevich et al., 2014). Authentic leadership theory highlights the need for consistency between actions and image, as lack of integrity erodes trust, diminishing motivation and credibility (Gregory, 2019; Ivancevich et al., 2014; Rosenfeld et al., 1995). Therefore, effective impression management requires balancing the principal's image with organizational members' need to feel valued and supported. This ensures that actions align with the image to maintain trust, improve relationships, and boost organizational productivity (Elsbach, 2014; Hinton, 2015).

### **D. CONCLUSION**

This study reveals that impression management is an essential strategy in school principals' leadership to build a positive perception in the educational institution environment. The right approach to managing communication, integrity, and authenticity can improve trust, motivation, and organizational performance. However,

if impression management is not applied proportionately, temporary image risks can arise, potentially undermining leadership trust and effectiveness. To create credible and sustainable leadership, principals must integrate impression management with concrete actions that reflect the values of fairness, honesty, and transparency. This approach creates harmony between the positive perceptions built and the reality perceived by the organization's members, thereby minimizing the risk of manipulative perceptions or negative biases. This research provides a theoretical and practical foundation for applying thoughtful impression management in educational leadership. On the other hand, the results of this study are also a reminder of the importance of balancing external image management and internal organizational needs.

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