Exploring Image Management

Your Guide to a Birkman
Perspectives Scale

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Introduction and Report Overview

"Image Management is part and parcel of a person's total mindset, or belief system. In other words, it is more correctly described as attitudinal in nature, rather than behavioral... We can't directly see or observe a person's mindset, although we often get glimpses into it from behaviors we can observe– at least if we're paying close attention."

In the first part of this guide, we will introduce you to two key foundational concepts of Image Management: perspective and social desirability. These two concepts are fundamental to the Image Management report, which we will also explore in this section.

The Image Management report is a rich narrative that provides many meaningful starting points for coaching conversations. Each section describes the mindset of the individual in order to create discussion around their Image Management orientation within a context that is relevant to that person in that moment.

An Introduction to Perspectives

All psychometric instruments—every personality profile—is capable of producing a measure of ***individuality.*** And The Birkman Method is no exception, although it would not be unreasonable to say that The Birkman Method is exceptional in this regard, because thanks to Roger Birkman's brilliance, we are able to produce not just one, but six distinct measures of individuality.

Self-Affirming

Others-Affirming

Image Management

Distinctiveness

Alignment

Social Acuity

Very simply, individuality speaks to the relationship we have with the world around us. As such, measures of individuality don't provide specific behavioral indications, but rather information that reflects how we see ourselves fitting into and navigating our way around the complex phenomenon known as life.

At Birkman, we refer to these scales as ***perspectives.*** They are attitudinal in nature, as opposed to the behavioral nature of the Components. We can't directly observe attitudes (at least not in the same way we observe behaviors); however, sometimes we get glimpses into our belief systems based on observable behaviors. It is fair to say that our attitudes drive our behaviors, but without solid background information, it is easy to misinterpret the connection between our attitudes and our behaviors.

This is the primary reason that the Birkman Perspectives data are so valuable and helpful. Birkman Perspectives data provide us with kernels of information that facilitate making appropriate connections and understanding some of the thoughts and feelings that are associated with our attitudes.

This guide is devoted exclusively to exploring one of the Birkman Perspectives; a scale called ***Image Management.*** Throughout this guide, we will explore three key areas.

1. What is the Image Management scale and what is the Image Management report.

2. Some guidelines for interpreting the scale and tips on how to use it and the report.

3. Reasons the Image Management report might be useful to you, along with suggestions for deciding with whom to use it, and when to use it.

So, what is Image Management?

It probably sounds like some new leadership strategy, or perhaps a derivative of something an image management consultant would do, right? Well – not really, although the Image Management scale may well have some application to both those things – and definitely to other things as well… but let's start at the beginning.

Social Desirability

Ever since psychometricians started trying to put some structure to the issue of measuring personality, it has been well known that people tend to put themselves in *a positive light* when answering questions about their behavior. This phenomenon is known as *positive self-reporting.* Studies of positive self-reporting provide us with insights about something called *social desirability.*

Most of us instinctively know what society expects from us, behaviorally speaking, even though we may not spend much conscious time thinking about it. But when asked specific questions about ourselves, we reveal that knowledge to a greater or lesser extent when we say desirable things about ourselves as we answer the questions in a personality instrument. Some of these things we say include… **I'm friendly, I'm not emotional, I follow the rules, and I make decisions quickly.** Those are examples of socially desirable behaviors.

Since Dr. Birkman inquired not only about how we view ourselves but also about how we view others, we have the added advantage of being able to see how much social desirability is ascribed not just to ourselves, but to "most people" as well.

And to a greater or lesser extent, over 90% of the population claims more of those kinds of behaviors for themselves than they claim for most people! You're probably surprised at that last statement. A lot of people are when they hear/read it for the first time, but that's how pervasive the dynamic of social desirability is. We have the data to prove it. And it's a human trait, not a cultural one.

Almost all personality tests try to adjust the results to compensate for the tendency to positively self-report. However, Roger Birkman reasoned that doing so really makes no sense, not only because it is a guestimate at best, but also because how much of that a person does is, in essence, part of their personality.

So, let's don't try to fix it; but rather report it and use the information to help understand even more about the respondent's nature.

In the Birkman Mindset report, we utilize the Self-Affirming and Others-Affirming scales (two of the six perspectives) as the messengers of just how much social desirability has been reported by the respondent.

Those messages are incorporated into every element of Mindset, and each narrative page reflects that information, including the text about Image Management. You may rest assured that Dr. Birkman's vision of addressing social desirability is part and parcel of the Mindset report.

So how does this relate to Image Management, you ask?

The simple answer is that the amount of social desirability one attributes to self, versus the amount attributed to Most People, is the driver of the Image Management score. The more social desirability one attributes to Self than Most People, the higher their Image Management score is likely to be.

Fundamentally, then, ***Image Management is a measure of the extent to which we put energy into creating and maintaining a favorable public image.***

As the score moves from lower to higher, increasingly more effort is devoted to that outcome.

For very high scores, it is very important to the person that others see them as competent and always putting their best foot forward. Please hear this next statement, because it is very important: This is in no way intended to imply that people with lower IM scores don't care how others see them! It's a question of motivation.

Low scores simply aren't as motivated to put energy into creating a particular public image, while high scores are motivated – even if subconsciously – to do exactly that. Indeed, this is so important to them that their own sense of well-being is inextricably tied to accomplishing that goal.

As you might imagine, there are significant implications associated with such a mindset. We'll be exploring some of them shortly, but to stimulate your thinking, here are a few of them:

- How we give and receive feedback.

- How critical we tend to be, and how it is revealed publicly.

- How we handle successes and failures.

Yes, all of those and more are impacted by your Image Management perspective.

Before we review the Image Management report, let's be sure to make a note of the following important truths. Image Management is NOT:

- Behavioral in nature.

- An indicator of leadership effectiveness.

- A predictor of success.

However, it does influence a person's approach to such issues, especially how they interact with others in the context of those dynamics.

You've already figured out that Image Management is part and parcel of a person's total **mindset, or belief system.** It is more correctly described as attitudinal in nature, rather than behavioral in nature, like the Components are. We can't directly see or observe a person's mindset, although we often get glimpses into it from behaviors we can observe—at least if we're paying close attention. Even then, it is relatively easy to infer incorrect judgments or make incorrect assumptions; so it's good to have scales like these to help us make better connections.

IMAGE MANAGEMENT

A measure of the extent to which an individual puts energy into creating and maintaining (and protecting) a favorable public image.

SOCIAL DESIRABILITY

A tendency for respondents to place themselves in a positive light when answering questions on a personality assessment.

PERSPECTIVES SCALES

Six distinct measures of individuality that describe the attitudes and mindset of the respondent, as opposed to specific behaviors.

Navigating the
Image Management Report

The Image Management report provides some very useful information, starting with the score itself. Like the Components, Image Management is reported as a percentile ranging from 1 to 99, where the norm is 50. The further your score is from 50, the more individualistic you are in this area. Also like the Components, having a high score is not better than having a low score, since all scores have positive and potentially negative characteristics. Unlike the Components, however, this report is not designed to be "debriefed" in the same way that we debrief the Signature Report, which we will review later. Below is a sample of the report, which includes four sections for discussion.

Image Management

Image Management reveals the extent to which you devote energy to managing and maintaining a favorable public image. The higher your score, the more you work toward ensuring other people see you in a socially acceptable way.

85

Understanding Your Perspective:

Your answers to the Birkman questionnaire reveal a significantly positive self-image, while simultaneously being very critical of others. This perspective has a number of interesting implications.

Strengths of Your Perspective:

You are very aware of your own strengths as well as your shortcomings, and you find it easy to highlight your strengths. It is important to you that others see you as a confident and competent person. This is because image means a great deal to you and you are highly motivated to present yourself in a positive light around others. At the same time, you have a critical eye that enables you to see the quirks or missteps of others but are slow to point them out in public. Your social skills are exceptional, and you find it easy to engage others in a warm and comfortable manner.

Challenges of Your Perspective:

Praising others comes naturally to you, but being outwardly or publicly critical does not. You are internally critical of others quite often, but you are reluctant to discuss their shortcomings in a public setting. However, there will be situations where you feel you cannot remain silent. In those moments, you can be surprisingly outspoken about your thoughts, and other people can be caught off guard since it happens so rarely. Your obvious enthusiasm, although a positive trait, can allow you to get too carried away and your effectiveness may suffer. Learning to balance your enthusiasm with a little realism can help minimize those situations.

How Others May Perceive this Perspective:

Your reluctance to engage in critical conversations can lead others to believe that you have a hard time accepting critical feedback. However, it can be equally difficult for you to accept public praise, even though it feels good inside. Try to remember that others are not judging you as a person in those moments and are not ascribing value to you either way. Such input can actually help you as you try to keep your best foot forward.

1) UNDERSTANDING YOUR PERSPECTIVE

This paragraph is intended to provide a brief and easy-to-understand statement about how the score came about. There is no interpretation involved with this as it is merely informative for the individual, and helps to "set up" what follows.

2) STRENGTHS OF YOUR PERSPECTIVE

This paragraph is designed to highlight the more salient positive aspects of having the particular score. If you have reviewed your own report, you likely noticed that a lot of information was crammed into this short paragraph. Further, the points are more akin to the headline of a news article, rather than the article itself. The "article" becomes fleshed out as you guide and direct dialog with the respondent. This is where your skill and competence as a consultant or coach comes into play. The points in these paragraphs are conversation-starters, and should be treated as such. They are not THE conversation.

3) CHALLENGES OF YOUR PERSPECTIVE

As with the second section, this paragraph contains aspects of Image Management that could represent hurdles or difficulties for the respondent. They will almost always be tendencies of which the respondent is aware, but the level of awareness can vary greatly from respondent to respondent. For example, a very self-aware person (or emotionally intelligent respondent) will usually acknowledge the reality of the statements, while someone else may deny that they deal with the issue at all (or that it is even present in their life). Always keep in mind that it is not Birkman's intent – nor should it be yours – to insist that the statements in the report absolutely apply to any particular respondent. They are presented as discussion points, and are intended to facilitate coaching, not to be a coach. As with all coaching, in all its various forms, we must start with where the coached person is, and assist them in moving to a better place. And even though you may be using the Image Management report for something other than coaching, the experience for the respondent is nevertheless "coaching."

4) HOW OTHERS MAY PERCEIVE THIS PERSPECTIVE

While we are always clear that Image Management is not a behavioral indicator, there are some aspects of IM that can appear to have behavioral tendencies. These are things that others may perceive or sense about us, while having no definite basis to couch them in behavioral terms.

There is no doubt that our belief systems account for the motivating drive behind our behaviors, and sometimes it is worthwhile to examine how those dynamics may be showing up to those around us. The statements in this paragraph surface some of the potential ways in which others experience our own Image Management score.

These tend to be the richest sentiments in the report, as they (are intended to) provide a safe way to explore how our mindset may be impacting those around us. As such, they can also be harder for the respondent to accept. In a following section, we will examine some ways to navigate through these dynamics.

Another important point: You may well find that two (or more) people with the same Image Management score will have very different narrative pages. This is because of the variety of "ways" that a particular score can result. The narrative pages take into account the Self- and Others- Affirming scores, and the similarities can sometimes outweigh the differences. This is not a "mistake." It is a function of the wonderful variety of mindsets that we can identify as a result of the great work that Roger Birkman did!

Before moving to the next section, it is worth repeating that **the narrative page is not the conversation.** It is a starting point for the conversation, indeed, for multiple conversations. Where the conversations go is largely in your hands, and the depth and breadth of the conversation depends on both your guidance and the respondent's willingness to take the journey. As I often tell people...

Birkman Perspectives are about increasing our understanding of the private conversation a person is having with themselves. Image Management is just one of those perspectives.

Scoring Implications

"Because the Image Management scale is more attitudinal in nature than behavioral, I would like to invite you to adopt a mental model for Image Management that is more about exploring than interpreting."

In the second part of this guide, you will learn how to explore Image Management scores and better understand the mindset of individuals with low, moderate, and high scores.

- High scores: 66-99

- Moderate scores: 35-65

- Low scores: 1-34

As you explore the spectrum of scores, you will quickly experience the detail and depth used to describe each. Luckily, the Image Management report takes these nuances into account to create a customized report narrative based on the individual's unique score.

From Interpretation to Exploration

As you're no doubt aware, we in the Birkman community often use the word "interpret" when referring to what we do with the information in the Birkman Signature Report. Nothing wrong with that, even though it's more of a convention than an actual reality. Because the Image Management scale is more attitudinal than behavioral in nature, we may be tempted to utilize a similar convention when engaged with clients around this score. I would like to invite you to adopt a mental model for IM that is ***more about exploring than interpreting.***

There is simply no way that we can reduce to one page all the pertinent facets involved with even a single Perspectives scale. This, in turn, means that the ultimate value of the report lies in taking what is there as a starting point and extrapolating it to specific areas that are of importance to the client. In this way the process becomes a journey of exploration and discovery – and hopefully of growth in some key way or ways.

Also, you will notice that individual acceptance of the text will vary considerably. There are several reasons for this, but it is a good idea to manage your own expectations in this regard. Among the reasons for this variation is ***context.*** With Perspectives, context always matters! It is entirely likely that a particular characteristic of Image Management routinely reveals itself in certain contexts, yet in a different context may not be much in play, or even present. The respondent typically won't be aware of this dynamic, and therefore be somewhat antagonistic if the conversation is around a context in which it has little or no effect, yet grab it enthusiastically when considering a different context. This is part of the exploration with the respondent.

Please be aware that not every statement in a particular report will automatically be accepted by a given respondent. You will definitely get resistance or pushback from some people about some comment they read in their report. That is both reasonable and acceptable, and in some cases even desirable. Sometimes the most important breakthroughs come from fully exploring the reasons why a particular statement resonates negatively. And for the final disclaimer – because Image Management–as a perspective and attitudinal descriptor – is not directly observable, people tend not to be conscious about the reality of the things they do as a direct consequence of what they feel and think. *How* they do it (the actual behavior) **is** observable, but not the underlying driver of the action.

You will remember I stated earlier that the Image Management scale is closely related to the amount of social desirability a person attributes to Self and to Most People.

Very simply it is like this: a person's Image Management score goes up as they simultaneously claim desirable behaviors for Self and not desirable behaviors for Most People.

Let's say for the sake of illustration that the statement, "I am not very emotional" is deemed by society to be a socially desirable behavior. If I agree with that statement for myself (desirable) and disagree for Most People (less desirable), that combination pushes my Image Management score up. The more of that I do as I answer the questions, the higher my Image Management score will be.
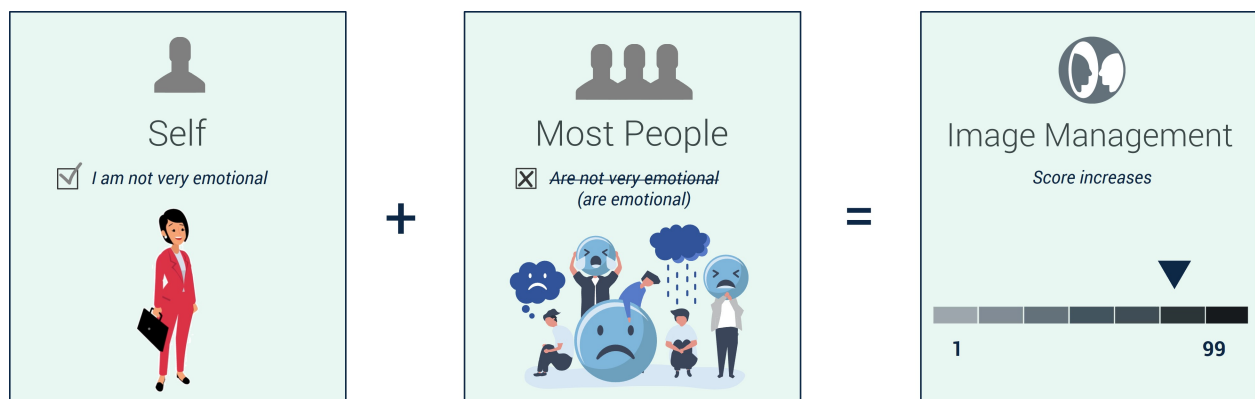
Keep in mind that "less desirable" does not equate to "undesirable."

For the sake of convenience, we routinely refer to those who report lots of social desirability as **Affirming**, and those who report lower amounts of social desirability as **Critical**. You can readily see that the word "Critical" is a bit of a misnomer, and is not to be taken literally. It's just easier to say "Critical" than "less or not Affirming."

Now that you're an expert on scoring Image Management, let's get on with the most important part, understanding what the score is saying to us. We generally consider scores above 65 as high, and scores below 35 as low. Scores between 35 and 65 are therefore moderate, having characteristics of both high and low scores, but typically not as forceful or intense.

Low
1-34

Moderate
35-65

High
66-99

Understanding High Scores (66-99)

The higher a person's score, the more they have attributed desirable behaviors to self and not to others. In other words, they have been *Affirming about themselves,* and *not affirming (Critical) of Most People.* It's not too hard to figure out part of that attitude, which is that they are letting the world know that they can be counted on to show up in appropriate and even desirable ways pretty much all the time. This perspective carries several implications.

Here are some of the more significant implications of higher scores:

- Have a strong desire to be seen by others as they see themselves.

- Put a lot of energy into creating and maintaining (and protecting) a socially desirable public image.

- Exhibit a natural charm, perhaps even charisma.

- Lead with their strengths while keeping their shortcomings under wraps.

- Have a generally positive and upbeat demeanor.

- Show contagious enthusiasm in key situations.

Confident on the outside. Critical on the inside.

It's easy to miss the amount of energy being deployed to accomplish these things, because to the observer they seem so natural and so smooth, almost as though the person is on autopilot. What is not obvious, of course, is what's going on deep inside. This same person who looks so confident on the outside is quite critical on the inside. And they are critical not just of others, but of themselves as well. They typically don't make a point of publicly voicing their criticism, but they are definitely thinking critically. It makes sense when you think about it, because always lurking is the opportunity to do or say something that betrays the image they have worked so hard to create, and that is one of the things a person with a high Image Management score fears the most.

So, they're in an almost constant and critical private conversation designed to make sure they don't expose their frailties. This is why, when faced with that prospect, they often adopt defensive tactics in order to deflect potential blame or accusations of somehow screwing up. And that, in turn, is precisely what others DO observe. In those moments, the third-party observers become convinced that our high Image Management friend can't handle criticism, or "never does anything wrong," or well, you get the picture. But let's look more closely at what's really going on with this situation.

Believe they have an innate sense of value.

For high Image Management people, there is an innate sense of value. Part of their "attitude" is that they have value independently of both their successes and failures. This is different for low scores, but more about that in a bit. The problem is that they think that other people judge them as a person based on those very successes and especially failures, so any criticism of a mistake in performance is presumed – by them – to be a criticism of them as a person. That's what causes the defensiveness. This is also why the rest of us need to be cognizant of these tendencies, and couch our critical feedback so that there is no doubt we're talking only about what happened, not about who did it. To an extent, the following is true of most people, and is absolutely true of high IM people: they shut down immediately when someone prods them with "why did you…" A better, or at least more likely to be effective approach is "help me understand…" This approach has the intended effect of inviting them into the conversation rather than putting them on the defensive.

Tend to "get in front" of bad situations.

High Image Management individuals will often get out in front of a bad situation when there is no doubt that they are somehow culpable, and others either know, or are about to know about that culpability. It's a similar dynamic as in the previous section, but with clearly observable actions or statements designed to minimize the slings and arrows almost certainly about to come their way. Any or all of the following are likely to occur in such a situation: They may:

• Own it as quickly as possible, so as to shut down any negative conversation;

• Identify external forces that are/were in play that couldn't be controlled;

• Otherwise deflect any perceived blame;

• Try to spin things so as to look better.

Remember that all of those are almost subconscious efforts to protect the public image.

Engaging, yet surprisingly private.

Another characteristic of high scores is a very private nature. This may seem strange, since they appear to be so naturally engaging and easy to get to know. They can work a room with the best of 'em! Underneath that friendly, engaging style is a person who prefers to keep others at a distance, relationship-speaking. If you get too close you might notice the inadequacies, so better to keep you at just the right distance. The unspoken message with this and many other dynamics is, ***"what is the risk to my image of doing...?"*** Actually, that question is omnipresent in the mind of a high Image Management person, and we must always remember that.

Set goals that enhance their image.

There are some goal setting issues that should be addressed here, since that dynamic frequently arises in the workplace, and for the high Image Management person that last question (risk to my image) represents a big part of their approach to goal-setting and goal attainment. First and foremost is the issue of confidence.

A high Image Management person will take on pretty much any task and pursue any goal that they feel confident about being able to complete successfully. After all, that will serve to enhance their image. However, the reverse is also true. They will be reluctant to take on any charge that they feel has a limited chance of success, especially to the extent that they have a primary role in the execution of the charge. In their mind, the issue is, "I will look bad if I fail." And as we've shown, they can't be seen to fail. In some, if not many instances, coaching them around that belief can have enormous benefit. Helping them to understand that others will, in fact, not think less of them as a person if they experience the occasional failure can make a huge difference for them personally. After all, to be human is to fail – sometimes.
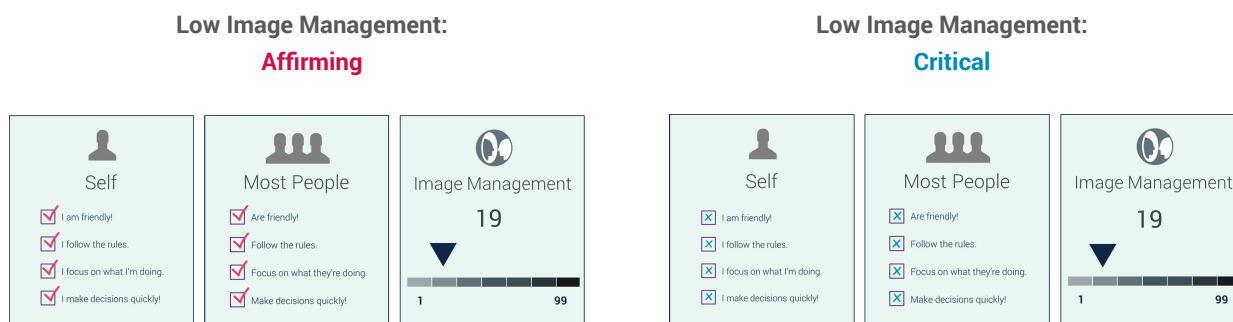
Understanding Low Scores (1-34)

Let's now turn our attention to the low side of the scale (a score of less than 35). Our conversation about low scores will be different than that of the high, and one reason is because **_there are two different types of low Image Management perspectives._** That's an over-simplification, to be sure, but the point is that, as with any Birkman scale, we're talking about a matter of degree or intensity, not absolutes. The good news is that the report page provides you with sufficient information to know which of the two types is being described, and uses language that communicates the level of intensity.

Let's look at how these two different types of low scores can come about. Remember that respondents with high scores have more frequently said desirable things about Self than they have said about Most People. In other words, in terms of social desirability, there is a significant gap between their perceptions of Self, compared to their perceptions of others.

However, as that gap gets smaller, so too does the Image Management score. And when there is a small gap, there is much more room on the social desirability continuum for placement of those revelations. This is how these two different types of low scores originate.

For example, you can see how a small gap (Low Image Management) may present itself on **Affirming** side of the world, and you can see how a small gap may present itself on the more **Critical** side of the world.

Low Image Management:
Affirming

Self	Most People	Image Management
☑ I am friendly!	☑ Are friendly!	**19**
☑ I follow the rules.	☑ Follow the rules.	▼
☑ I focus on what I'm doing.	☑ Focus on what they're doing.	
☑ I make decisions quickly!	☑ Make decisions quickly!	1 99

Low Image Management:
Critical

Self	Most People	Image Management
☒ I am friendly!	☒ Are friendly!	**19**
☒ I follow the rules.	☒ Follow the rules.	▼
☒ I focus on what I'm doing.	☒ Focus on what they're doing.	
☒ I make decisions quickly!	☒ Make decisions quickly!	1 99

For sake of clarity, allow me to make that last point using some slightly different terminology. A person who ascribes a lot of social desirability to both themselves and to most people would end up with a small gap between their perceptions of self and others. Similarly, a person who attributes little social desirability to both self and others would also have a small gap in those same areas. The predictable result – in both cases – is a low Image Management score! What that means is that we can't really tell the difference between those two people just based on the Image Management score. Yet they are clearly very different, with very different perspectives.

For example, two individuals may have the same low Image Management score; let's say a score of 19. Even though these two individuals have the same Image Management score, the way their low Image Management presents itself may be very different based on how Affirming or Critical they tend to be. One of them may have a pattern similar to the first pattern described above (lots of affirming answers for both self and others) – we'll call it the Affirming pattern; while the other may have something closer to the second pattern described above (not much affirmation for either self or others) – we'll call that one the Critical pattern. These terms are used for convenience, not necessarily to describe the respondent.

To address this important distinction, the report libraries are customized to reflect the individual's lens of positivity or criticality. What is key for you to understand here, is that these individuals will have some shared beliefs by virtue of being low Image Management and also some different beliefs because of their very different perspectives concerning social desirability.

Going forward, we will refer to these two different types of low Image Management as Low Affirming and Low Critical. In both cases, the word "low" refers to the Image Management score.

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If people with high Image Management scores have an "I have value independently of my results" mindset, people with Low scores tie their sense of self-worth directly to their results. It's almost an "I have value commensurate with my performance" mentality. In other words, they feel better about themselves (as a person) when they succeed, and feel somehow less about themselves when they don't.

What are some of the implications of such a mindset?

Here are a few implications associated with lower scores:

- Public image is less important than for the high score, so not much energy is devoted to that.

- "What you see is what you get." They generally reveal externally what they feel inside.

- Enthusiastically embrace challenging tasks and goals, sometimes even "impossible" ones.

- "I am my results." Critiquing their performance is by definition critiquing them as a person, because they don't consciously distinguish between the "person" and their "performance." They are one and the same in their mind.

Please don't infer from this that they don't care about how they are perceived by others. Indeed, some of them care a lot about that! It's just that they don't put much energy into making sure that their public image is such-and-such. It just is, and they will live with whatever that is in the moment. It has little bearing on their self-esteem.

Regarding personal criticism, low Image Management scores, for the most part ***own their shortcomings***, and are the first to point out where things went wrong, and how they should have done something different or better. Indeed, in some instances (if not many) they will appear to be taking responsibility for something they had little or nothing to do with. While high scores tend to point fingers outwardly, low scores tend to point to themselves first.

A little more discussion of the fourth bullet above is in order. Because Low Image Management scores (of either type) tend to ***associate their value as a person with their performance***, they naturally tend to feel better about themselves when they do well, and somehow feel less value when they don't perform so well. This attitude makes it easier for them to accept critical feedback from others, because they've likely already beaten themselves up about it. "I feel so bad (about) . . . ," so it's okay if you feel bad about it, too.

With High scores, however, the dynamic is quite different. As noted, they **DO** make the distinction between person and performance, but are afraid that others don't. Subconsciously they believe that others DO (or will) judge them as a person, meaning that their image is tarnished with every little screw-up. And all the defensiveness is an attempt to minimize the damage to their image, **NOT** to rationalize the screw-up.

In a sense, the distinction is like this: Low Image Management scores are concerned with living up to their own expectations, while High scores are concerned with living up to others' expectations. This is not something they can (typically) articulate, or even agree with, but it's true. And it is in part why they devote so much energy to protecting their image.

Now for making distinctions between the two types of Low scoring Image Management individuals.

Lower Scores: Affirming Mindset

- These folks are among the most *optimistic*. They believe in the ultimate "goodness of man," (in terms of desirable behavior, that is), and generally embrace a positive outlook for the future.

- Sometimes their optimism becomes *overly idealistic* and even naive, and they can find themselves disappointed when their optimism creates *unrealistic expectations*.

- At the same time, they tend to be among the most *judgmental* of people. They are quick to notice when others behave in less-than-desirable ways, and equally quick to place judgments on those behaviors. They may or may not verbally express their feelings in those moments, but you can be sure they are thinking with disdain.

- The optimism and generally agreeable demeanor of this style simultaneously makes for good company, and a penchant for becoming *strong-willed* and sometimes stubborn.

- They have considerable *strength of character,* and are for the most part unwilling to bend the rules or make exceptions.

- Their interpersonal communication includes a lot of *"should's" and "ought's"* because they are so clear about how everyone should comport themselves. Ironically, they can become dispirited in the face of strong opposition which itself is unwilling to bend just to suit the Low Image Management. They are so adamant that others should fit into their expectations that when they are unsuccessful at making that happen, they do not handle it very well — and may express anger or, at a minimum, outwardly reveal their frustration.

Lower Scores:
Critical Mindset

In contrast to the previous pattern, the less affirming individual is much more accepting of a wider range of behaviors, even though they do notice both desirable and less desirable behaviors.

- They are far ***less likely to place judgments on others***, even for what some might describe as egregious actions or inappropriate statements.

- Where the Affirming mindset tends to be cautious and careful by nature, these folks are adventuresome, potentially throwing caution to the wind just to have a new/thrilling experience.

- They are loathe to feel boxed in, and can strongly resist others' efforts to control them or even place boundaries on them, especially when they feel those efforts are arbitrary or capricious.

- It is far easier for this individual to ***take liberties in social situations***, perhaps saying or doing things just for effect or to enjoy others' reactions. Since they aren't necessarily bound by social expectations, they sometimes believe that those who are so inclined are not authentic, perhaps even phony or fake. They have little patience for people who won't get out of their comfort zone, typically in the misguided belief that such folks conform just for the sake of conformity.

- More inclined than others to ***ask for forgiveness*** than for permission.

- Where some people (Affirming individuals) relish the predictability of routine and process, this pattern tends to find such things monotonous and boring, if not downright annoying.

- They are much more interested in the potential excitement of the unknown, and actively seek out opportunities to experience something new or different. They are among the more ***individualistic*** of us, and thus may find it difficult to fully engage in collaborative assignments.

- While some of these folks might seem a little quirky at times, they are also among the most ***inventive and creative***. They are endless sources of ideas, some of which are outré, but many of them genuinely innovative and ultimately useful. They make tremendous change agents, bringing a palpable enthusiasm to bear on most efforts to effect significant change and improvement.

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LOW SCORES

There are two types of low Image Management individuals; those who have an Affirming mindset, and those who have a Critical mindset. The reason they have the same numerical score is because they are both putting the same amount of energy into managing their image, which in both cases is not a lot.

LOW SCORES: AFFIRMING

Ascribe a lot of social desirability to both Self and Most People.

LOW SCORES: CRITICAL

Do not ascribe much social desirability to either Self or Most People.

REPORT NARRATIVE

The report narrative reflects either their Affirming or more Critical perspective.

Understanding Moderate Scores (35-65)

Just as with other Birkman scales, it can be difficult to use specific words and phrases to describe the people who live in the moderate range on Image Management. But since we're exploring rather than interpreting, it's not as much of an issue here.

Moderate scores really do exhibit elements of both sides of the scale, to a greater or lesser extent. And it's likely to be ***very contextual*** (audience, environment, importance, etc.). In one instance they will show the traits of a high score, and in another will be more like the low side. Public image is important to them, but not so much so that they are likely to exert a lot of energy protecting it like a high score does, but neither will they not seem to give a flip about it. If that sounds wishy-washy, it's because it is.

Their "sometimes up sometimes down" approach works for them, but it also has the effect of catching others off guard, or keeping them guessing. Quite unintentional, of course, but others are never quite sure which person is going to show up at any given moment or in any particular situation. This is perhaps the most perplexing style of all, simply due to the unpredictability that accompanies it. Obviously the farther from the center one is, the less of that should occur. But for those within the 40–60 range this is a real and present conundrum.

At the same time people in this category are generally more flexible, certainly more so than the high scores. Life tends not to be as "black and white" for them as it is for the Affirming pattern, but perhaps a bit more predictable and structured than what the Critical pattern tends to enjoy. Our primary advice to you when working with a moderate Image Management person is to follow their lead as much as practicable, and by all means, use the text page of their report as the basic guide because it will be specific to their score.

Image Management Scores Summary Page

Low Scores

- "I am my results."

- Public image is less important, so not much energy is devoted to that.

- "What you see is what you get."

- Reveal externally what they feel inside.

- Enthusiastically embrace challenging tasks and goals, sometimes even "impossible" ones.

- Critiquing their performance is by definition critiquing them as a person, because they don't consciously distinguish between the "person" and their "performance." They are one and the same in their mind.

High Scores

- "I am my image."

- Have a strong desire to be seen by others as they see themselves.

- Put a lot of energy into creating, maintaining, and protecting a socially desirable public image.

- Exhibit a natural charm, perhaps even charisma.

- Lead with their strengths while keeping their shortcomings under wraps.

- Generally positive and upbeat in public settings.

- Show contagious enthusiasm in key situations.

- Know how to work the room.

- Are surprisingly private and inwardly critical.

- Always consider, "What is the risk to my image by doing ____?"

- Try to get in front of things because it helps them manage the situation.

- Reluctant to set goals that could damage their image.

Audience and Application

"The bottom line is that if a situation involves people, the Image Management report very likely has the potential for beneficial application."

In the final part of this guide, we will provide best practices for using the Image Management report and ways you can assess if an individual is ready for this type of conversation. You will also get a glimpse into five potential areas of application:

- Emotional Intelligence

- Leadership Development

- Performance Evaluations

- Developmental Conversations

- Conflict Interventions

Now that you have been exposed to the report and explored the mindset beneath different Image Management scores, it's time to bring it to life. Now, it's time to talk about how you want to bring this information to life for the individuals you work with.

Tips for Effectively Using the Report

Earlier I opined that there is no one right way to make use of the Image Management report. We fully expect that how consultants use it will be almost as varied as the consultants themselves. To help you get started, however, here are a few tips and techniques that you may want to consider while you are experimenting and exploring.

For the most part, the overriding objective any time the Image Management report is employed is assessing and enhancing self-awareness. Obviously that can be done in myriad ways, and the report is designed to guide and support purposeful dialog with the client toward that end, and is not intended to be an end in itself. Indeed, it cannot be. Keeping in mind that Image Management reflects a mindset or attitude, a good first step is to explore with the client how their perspective has both served and possibly hindered them in their own personal and professional development up to the point of your first conversation with them. *Clearly, this process is not a "debrief."*

Probably the most important thing you can do before having an Image Management conversation is prepare for it. Read the text yourself in advance, and let the information percolate for a while. Formulate your thoughts around what you've read and your current knowledge of the client and their situation. Remember the importance of context! How is their mindset showing up within the framework of the current context? (It might well be different in a different context.) As much as possible, anticipate potential objections from the client – again, in context.

It's generally a good idea to draft questions that you might ask in advance of the conversation as well, just to help get things started and then to keep things on track (see page 36 for a list of possible questions). These, of course, would be questions that relate to the current issues they are facing, and that tie as much as possible to the dynamics of the report, not necessarily the words. Be prepared to both dialog about their answers, and also to use follow-on questions to probe more fully and deeply into how their perspective is playing out. One method of doing that is to ask for more, as in, "say more about that please," or "tell me more about that, especially the part about…"

You may or may not choose to share the report with the respondent. That's completely up to you, and you are under no obligation either way. Generally we opt for sharing it, but there are circumstances under which it may be preferable not to do so. Sharing the report does provide you with options you otherwise may not have. For example, you can (actually should) let them read it before you start the conversation, and ask them to highlight both statements that they agree with and statements that don't resonate so well, or not at all. Then your first dialog can be around the choices they made, and explorations of the reasons why they chose to highlight those particular statements. Depending on their level of self-awareness and their willingness to go with you on this journey, some of the most meaningful dialogue can come from this exercise alone (especially the part about what they disagree with). At a minimum, this conversation starter becomes fodder for future dialog. On that note, please always remember that the report is only to initiate meaningful dialogue, and inform anyone involved how to optimize conversations with the respondent.

Whether you share the report or not, it can definitely help you be more effective with the client. It provides you with insights about their preferences for getting (if not giving) feedback, especially critical feedback, and also how to handle sensitive issues. You will definitely be less surprised when they exhibit a characteristic associated with their score. This same dynamic may well apply to them, as well. Sometimes it's good for a person to have a realization that something they said or did has a direct tie to their "attitude" or perspective. And if that moment passes without some acknowledgment of what just happened, it's lost forever in terms of awareness. When it's all said and done, you are the one making the operational decisions. It might be a good idea for you to ask and answer a couple of other questions before you proceed.

1. Is the person emotionally ready to have this kind of conversation?

2. Are they sufficiently self-aware that most of this will come as no surprise?

3. Am I ready to have this conversation with this person? Likely you are, even if it's your first time, but only you can provide the answers.

Assessing
the Audience

You may be thinking at this point that all this sounds good, and you are probably even feeling a little excitement at the thought of incorporating this report into your practice. I certainly hope that is the case. It's also possible – if not probable – that you are also wondering how you gauge the appropriateness of using the report. And you are wise to be thinking that way, because not everyone is a perfect candidate for productively handling the information. With that in mind, let's explore some of the more important considerations associated with deciding whether or not to utilize the Image Management report.

Generally speaking, the respondent should be of some reasonable level of maturity. This implies that younger folks might not be good candidates for this report (such as individuals just entering the workplace). Beyond that you will want to assess the respondent's readiness to engage in legitimate ***developmental dialog.*** If it seems to you that the respondent is either not sufficiently self-aware already, or expresses unusual levels of resistance when receiving critical feedback, or perhaps is not emotionally mature enough at this point, you might choose to either not use the report at all, or to not process it with the respondent (letting it inform you but not the respondent).

The majority of Birkman professionals work with people who have been in the workplace for some time. It would be a rare occurrence that a respondent from that population would not be a candidate for productively utilizing the Image Management information. Certainly, executives, high-potential employees, and anyone working to develop their organizational value or leadership potential would profit from the Image Management information. Consider using the report for all your ***formal coaching engagements.***

A couple of other thoughts just for you. There is no particular recommended approach or order to when and how you use the report. Over time you will flesh out two or three processes that work for you and your business. It can prove very useful even when a Signature Report is not provided (in other words, you can use an Image Management report without using the Signature Report). And of course, you can always run an Image Management report that you opt not to share with the respondent at all, using it strictly to inform you and your approach to interacting with your client.

Applications of
Image Management

Why would I use the Image Management report? It would probably be easier to answer the question, "why would I not use the Image Management report?" At the very least, the information therein can significantly help you work with a client (or clients, including teams) by providing insights on such mundane things as communication, approaches to giving feedback, building rapport, and other "stylistic" preferences. It will help you get yourself "out of the way" and deal more effectively with others, especially in situations involving any kind of coaching, as stated earlier. The bottom line is that if a situation involves people, the Image Management report very likely has the potential for beneficial application.

To further stimulate your own thinking, let's spend a few minutes looking at how the Image Management report might impact some of the more popular issues in today's world.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EQ)

Enhancing one's self-awareness is always a good thing, and the Image Management report can facilitate significant progress in this respect. To illustrate, consider this: It's one thing to understand that I tend to resist others exerting too much control, and quite another thing to truly understand what motivates me to behave (or react) that way. Making appropriate behavioral decisions is far easier when I can consciously comprehend what's going on inside me and be more deliberate than reactive. Earlier I insinuated that we need to "get out of our own way" when we are wearing a coaching hat, and gaining more insight about yourself and your perspectives can only help you be more effective. Ask and answer such questions as: "What about my own mindset is influencing my approach to this engagement?" and "Do my own filters help or do they hinder what I'm trying to accomplish here?" Again, the IM report can really offer some key insights for you. And of course, all this applies to your clients, as well!

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Just to be clear, the report is not intended to be a leadership assessment, so we're not necessarily talking about using the report as part of such an effort (nor any of the perspectives, for that matter). However, we can categorically assert that the report gives very insightful information regarding our natural proclivities and tendencies in a leadership role. It turns out that those tendencies are different for low Image Management people than for high Image Management people. Truly understanding and embracing those tendencies allows us to be more proactive and purposeful about the decisions we make as leaders. A self-aware person is better equipped to climb above their natural impulses and be more open to choices they might otherwise ignore. Even people who are not in a formal or designated role as a leader often find themselves in situations where they are called upon to take on an ad hoc or temporary leadership role. They can profit from this information just as much as an existing leader, so perhaps it would be a good idea to have these conversations with high-potential folks *before* they assume more responsibility.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

A key element of most performance appraisals is the conversation around the appraisal itself – what's working; what's needing improvement; setting goals for the next period, etc. Those conversations must not be a one-size-fits-all situation. Having the discussion with a low IM person may go quite well, so obviously it makes sense to use a similar approach with everyone, right? Emphatically, NO! Trying to have a successful discussion with a high IM person using the same approach as we use with the low IM person will most assuredly not go as well, and may even create additional difficulties for both parties. The good news is that this scenario can be avoided, simply by having a different sort of discussion; one more tailored to the individual. Let's presume for a moment that the goal is to have a good outcome, in which the parties align on what is being evaluated, the measures against which the person is evaluated, and agreement on a developmental plan. It is almost vital to that outcome that the appraiser utilize an approach that encourages engagement and involvement in the process by being true to the person's perspectives. This starts with IM. Honoring where a person is on the IM scale makes all conversations more productive, most especially those which involve direct, personalized feedback. It is imperative that we understand how high IM people hear such feedback, and how it is different from the way a low IM person hears the same feedback.

DEVELOPMENTAL CONVERSATIONS

Clearly, the dynamics involved here are similar to those listed in the previous section, but since these conversations can be held "on the fly" just as well as in a formal setting, some additional comments are in order. Effectiveness in this domain is contingent on framing a discussion appropriately for the person being developed. Sometimes an incident calls for immediate feedback, without sufficient time for a thorough evaluation of what actually happened to trigger the event or incident. Even in those instances, a prepared leader can make the difference between success and failure vis-a-vis the conversation. And as is almost always the case, context matters. Are we talking about the need to improve specific skills, or perhaps to avoid (or eliminate) a bad habit or other egregious behavior, or maybe even to publicly acknowledge a particularly noteworthy achievement? Yes – even positive feedback needs to be tailored to the individual. In all these situations, how the message is delivered can make all the difference! Failure to couch the message appropriately to the individual can – and often does – result in the message being completely lost.

CONFLICT INTERVENTIONS

What you're about to read may or may not resonate with you, and unfortunately we can't engage in dialog about it. But here goes: ***conflict originates with mindset.*** It's true! Most of the time when we are in the throes of a conflict we don't realize that the ultimate source of the conflict is something that threatens our belief system(s). Joe did x; or Sally said y; and off we go in the mistaken belief that those actions (words) triggered the problem. In a sense, yes, the whole thing would have been avoided if only they hadn't said or done something that offended me. Very few people pause to think about "why" they are/were offended. And the answer is always because they perceived a threat to some deeply held belief, even though they may not be consciously aware that they even hold that belief. For example, a manager may hold the belief that their public image is extremely important to their success in their role as a manager. If a director should make a candid statement that challenges that belief in front of the team, the leader is likely to be offended, perhaps deeply so.

Now we may think that the resulting conflict happened because the director said it in an overly direct or blunt way (and therefore could have been avoided if he had said it more tactfully), but it was the threat to the manager's belief that actually caused the conflict, not necessarily the way the message was delivered. Even a tactful delivery would likely have resulted in conflict. Such beliefs are part of our total mindset, and any time we sense a threat to those beliefs – however small – we are likely to get defensive about them. That's how most conflict originates.

A lot, if not most, "conflict management" programs approach the issue of conflict behaviorally, which of course makes some sense. They typically don't, however, make the connection with the "attitudinal" aspects of the situation. Each person brings a different perspective to the party, as well as a different "personality." This is where tools like this report can be particularly valuable – helping us make the connection between belief system and conflict, or at least providing insights into why we behave the way that we do, especially in times of conflict. ***How I handle conflict, and how I react to others during times of conflict, are very much affected by my Image Management orientation.***

These are but a few of the applications for which Image Management has value. No doubt you have already thought of situations or circumstances in recent memory for which you would have been very happy to have the additional information that is available with the Image Management report. And by all means don't limit your thoughts to only the issues we discussed here. There are many other topics for which Image Management can provide important insights. For example, think about how your Image Management perspective impacts your **_risk orientation; how you exert influence on others; your approach to strategizing for the future; prioritizing; delegating; and certainly your approach to innovation and change._**

Insights about these applications and many others all stem from **_exploring the private yet powerful conversation that someone is having in their head… and beginning to examine the associated implications of that conversation._** How is their Image Management mindset enhancing or inhibiting their success… or quite possibly, both? The Birkman Method can bring your clients to a new level of awareness – and ultimately effectiveness – by looking beyond the behaviors you can see and exploring the perspectives and attitudes that lie much deeper. By helping others explore the why behind these behaviors, and acknowledging the subconscious mindset behind their actions, they can be more intentional and purposeful in the ways they lead, make decisions, take risks, and shape their careers and lives.

And of course, as with any new tool or skill – becoming comfortable and confident with Image Management will require some practice and a commitment to exploring and learning. Remember how you learned to ride a bicycle? It sure wasn't by reading a book or watching a video. Reflecting on your own Image Management orientation and how it relates to the topics and themes we've covered here will be of enormous help to your own learning as you go forward. Be open to trying new techniques; experiment a little with people you know; and maybe even review this guide a few more times. Sometimes we need to hear things multiple times before they really sink in.

Finally, please know that I and everyone at Birkman wish you success. Now get ready to effect positive changes in both your toolbox, and your results.

Image Management Exploration Questions

1. What about your report resonates with you most?

2. Are there any statements in your report that surprised you? Why was this the case?

3. Are there any strengths of your perspective that you could leverage more often?

4. Are there any challenges of your perspective that you may need to be more mindful of?

5. How do you see your mindset towards Image Management influencing _____ situation?

6. How does your mindset towards Image Management influence the way you lead?

7. What aspects of your Image Management do you think are helping you in your career?

8. Which aspects may be holding you back?

9. For high scores: Are there any instances where you may benefit from letting go of the importance of your image?

10. For low scores: Are there any instances where you may benefit from putting more effort into intentionally managing your image?

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