

The Impact of Leader's Humor on Employees' Creativity: The Moderating Role of Trust in Leader^{*}

DEOG-RO LEE^{*}

*Seowon University
Cheongju, Korea*

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how leader's humor styles influence employee creativity, and the moderating effects of trust in leader on the relationships between leader's humor styles and employees' creativity. The results using 316 valid leader-subordinates pairs (71 leaders and 316 subordinates) from five telecommunication companies in South Korea showed that leader's self-enhancing humor was positively associated with subordinates' individual creativity, and leaders' aggressive humor was negatively associated with subordinates' individual creativity. In addition, trust in leader significantly moderated the relationship between self-enhancing humor and employee creativity. Specifically, the relationship between self-enhancing humor and employee creativity became stronger as trust in leader increased.

Keywords: humor, humor style, individual creativity, trust in leader

INTRODUCTION

Research on humor can be traced back to the era of the Greek philosophers. Humor has always been of great interest to philosophers and scholars from various disciplines because of its pervasiveness in our lives (Chapman and Foot 1976; McGhee 1979). Since the 1970s, humor has received significant attention from management researchers because it can enhance individual and

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^{**} Department of Business Administration, Seowon University, email: drlee@seowon.ac.kr

organizational effectiveness at work (Cann et al. 2009; Gkorezis, Hatzithomas, and Petridou 2011; Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, and Viswesvaran 2012; Romero and Cruthirds 2006; Romero and Pescosolido 2008).

The appropriate use of humor can reduce interpersonal conflict and improve communication, and thus can be an effective management tool for managers to motivate their subordinates (Duncan 1982; Lyttle 2007; Romero and Cruthirds 2006; Yoo, Ahn, and Lee 2006). Thus, there is an undisputed belief that humor, if appropriately used, has a positive impact on the body and the mind. Humor leads to joy and freshness in all aspects of our lives which in turn leads to increased creativity (Benjelloun 2009). Indeed, many organizations such as Yahoo, Southwest Airlines, Domino Pizza, Brady Corporation, Ben and Jerry's, Odetics, Sun Microsystems, and Kodak use humor as a business strategy to enhance the organizational commitment of employees, cohesion, and organizational effectiveness (Avolio, Howell, and Sosik 1999; Caudron 1992; Hof, Rebello, and Burrows 1996; Smith and Khojasteh 2014).

Although management researchers have demonstrated the effects of humor on individual and interpersonal outcomes, several issues have to be addressed. First, only a few studies focused on examining the effects of leader humor on employee outcomes. Several researchers demonstrated that leader humor was positively associated with employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Decker 1987), psychological empowerment (Gkorezis et al. 2011), and job performance (Avolio et al. 1999), as well as interpersonal outcomes, such as supervisor satisfaction (Decker & Rotondo, 2001) and group cohesion (Cann et al. 2009). However, no study examined the association between supervisor humor and employee creativity. This relationship is an important gap in the humor literature given that employee creativity enables the organization to perform and survive within rapidly changing and highly competitive environments (Lopez-Cabrales, Pérez-Luño, and Cabrera 2009) a close conceptual relationship exists between humor and creativity (Murdock and Ganim, 1993), and several researchers (e.g., Filipowicz 2002; Ghayas and Malik 2013; Hughes 2009; Lang and Lee 2010; O'Quin and Derks 2002) showed that individual sense of humor (or use of humor) was positively associated with his/her own creative performance. Therefore, one of

the goals of this study is to examine how various types of leadership humor are associated with employee creativity.

Second, under certain contexts, supervisors' humor may have a positive effect on employee outcomes, but the same humor may also be harmful under other situations (Decker 1987). Therefore, to better understand the effects of leader humor on employee creativity, interpersonal contexts within which employees are embedded should be considered. Research shows that trust in supervisor may influence how subordinates interpret supervisor behavior (Cook and Wall 1980). Theoretically, when subordinates trust their supervisors, they tend to interpret the behavior of their supervisors more positively (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995; Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis, and Winograd 2000). Therefore, the effects of leader humor on employee creativity may vary according to the level of trust in the supervisor. This "social interaction" perspective offers an important and complementary perspective on how leader humor is associated with employee creativity.

In addition, research on leader humor and its demonstrated effects on employees has primarily been conducted in the advanced economies of the West, specifically the United States. Therefore, this study aims to cross-validate the linkage between leader humor and employee creativity in an Asian country, that is, South Korea. Research in a new cultural setting is important because cultural preferences may affect the type of humor that is appropriate, although humor is a universal human phenomenon (Nevo, Nevo, and Yin 2001), and thus culture can contribute to the assessment of the generalizability of the humor theory developed in Western settings.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Humor Styles

Scholars have categorized the types of humor in various ways. An early attempt divided humor styles into positive and negative types (Duncan et al. 1990). Negative humor styles tend to use superiority theory (i.e., a sense of triumph over another); that is, people laugh when they feel superior to others. Positive humor is a style of

humor that follows the format of incongruity theory (i.e., deliberate violation of rational language or behavior patterns). The incongruity of the punch line is somewhat unexpected, ambiguous, illogical, or inappropriate (Duncan et al. 1990). The incongruence is usually at the end of the story line in which the story is abruptly switched to another path (Cruthirds et al. 2012).

Although humor has several typologies (e.g., liberating humor, stress-relieving humor, and controlling humor (Lang and Lee 2010)), this study used the more comprehensive typology of Martin et al. (2003) (self vs. others and adaptive vs. maladaptive). This typology has been most commonly used in humor research (Romero and Cruthirds 2006; Ünal 2014). Martin et al. (2003) proposed a multi-dimensional conceptualization of humor. One dimension pertains to the purpose of expressing humor, whether the use of humor to improve the self or the relationship with others. The other dimension pertains to the content, whether the humor is benign and benevolent to the self or to others, or detrimental and injurious to the self or to others. The composition of these two dimensions forms four humor styles, namely, self-enhancing, affiliative, aggressive, and self-defeating.

Self-enhancing humor style

Self-enhancing humor focuses on the self and is benevolent to the self. This style involves a humorous outlook in life even when confronted by stressful events or adversity (Kuiper, Martin, and Olinger 1993). Examples include cheering oneself up with humor and thinking of something funny about the situation to feel better. People who exhibit self-enhancing humor have a humorous view of life and are not overly distressed by its inevitable tribulations. This humor style is a coping mechanism to deal with stress to maintain a positive perspective. Self-enhancing humor is negatively related to neuroticism and positively related to self-esteem and favorable emotions. I posit that, when this type of humor is used in organizations, the intention of the initiator is to enhance his/her image relative to others in the group or organization. Moreover, this humor style is centered more on the individual compared with affiliative humor (Martin et al. 2003, 59-60).

Affiliative humor style

Affiliative humor focuses on interpersonal relationships and is

beneficial to others. Examples include joking around with other people and making other people laugh by telling them funny stories. People who use affiliative humor joke around with others and attract them with forms of humor that aims to enhance social interaction. Examples of affiliative humor include funny stories particular to a group, insider jokes, cheerfulness, psychological well-being, social intimacy, and good-natured practical jokes that are traditionally played on people during social events. Individuals who exhibit this behavior are liked by others and are usually perceived as non-threatening (Vaillant 1977). By using this non-hostile and affirming humor style, one can amuse others to enhance social interaction and reduce interpersonal tension (Lefcourt 2001). Affiliative humor is similar to a social lubricant that facilitates interpersonal interaction and creates a positive environment. I assume that, when affiliative humor is used in organizations, the intention of the initiator is usually to unite people.

Aggressive humor style

Aggressive humor focuses on others and is maladaptive and potentially detrimental to others. Examples include teasing someone about his/her mistake and laughing or joking about something to offend someone. Aggressive humor can be described as a type of humor that is used to ridicule, defeat, or exclude individuals or groups (Martin et al. 2003). Individuals who use aggressive humor often aim to manipulate others by means of an implied threat of humiliation (Janes and Olsen 2000). Aggressive humor can be used to victimize, belittle, and cause others some type of disparagement (Zillman 1983). This style of humor is consistent with superiority theory, which postulates that people feel better at the expense of others to achieve or perceive that they have achieved higher rank or status (De Koning and Weiss 2002). Aggressive humor is negatively related to agreeableness and conscientiousness but positively related to neuroticism (Martin et al. 2003).

Self-defeating humor style

Self-defeating humor focuses on the self and is potentially detrimental to the self. Examples include allowing people to laugh at oneself and saying funny things to demean oneself. Self-defeating humor pertains to a person whose predilection toward humor is defined by excessive self-deprecating and ingratiating humor. To

illustrate, self-defeating humor entails excessive and inappropriate self-disparaging humor to gain the approval of others (Tümekaya 2011). People who use self-defeating humor humiliate themselves in an attempt to amuse and seek acceptance from others to enhance their interpersonal relationships at their own expense (Kuiper et al. 2004, Martin et al. 2003). My position is that people who use a moderate amount of this humor style in organizations usually desire to reduce their status level and be more approachable. Specific information on how this level is achieved will be provided in subsequent sections (Romero and Cruthirds 2006).

Humor Styles and Creativity

Employee creativity not only helps organizations to become more efficient and more responsive to opportunities but also assists organizations to gain competitive advantage for organizational innovation, survival, and long-term success in the global environment (Amabile 1997; Runco 2004; Scott and Bruce 1994; Shalley 1995; Woodman, Sawyer, and Griffin 1993). Employee creativity is the creation of valuable, useful new products, services, ideas, procedures, or processes by individuals working together in a complex social system (Amabile 1983; Oldham and Cummings 1996; Unsworth 2001; Woodman et al. 1993).

Creativity researchers have investigated the antecedents of employee creativity. For example, Andriopoulos (2001) highlighted five factors, namely, leadership style, organizational climate, organizational culture, resources and skills, and organizational structure and system. Aside from these factors, psychological empowerment (Zhang and Bartol 2010), personality traits (George and Zhou 2001; Kim, Hon, and Lee 2010; Zhou 2003), intergroup competition (Baer et al. 2010), work environment (Amabile et al. 1996), leader-member exchange and team-member exchange (Liao, Liu, and Loi 2010), job creativity requirement (Shalley, Gilson, and Blum 2000), and intrinsic motivation (Zhang and Bartol 2010) have also been identified as antecedents of creativity.

Humor can be one of the important antecedents of employee creativity. Some researchers demonstrated that individual sense of humor could be positively related to his/her creative performance. For example, Rouff (1975) and Gilbert (1977) found a positive relationship between humor comprehension and creativity among

undergraduates and first graders, respectively. Conversely, Lang and Lee (2010) examined the effect of the three types of humor (liberating, stress-relieving, and controlling humor) on organizational creativity. They found that liberating humor and controlling humor were positively and negatively significant to organizational creativity, respectively, whereas stress-relieving humor was not found to be significant in organizational creativity.

Leader humor can also positively affect leadership effectiveness. For example, Decker and Rotondo (2001) examined the relationship between workplace humor and leadership outcomes by using data from business school alumni. They found that positive humor was associated with improved ratings of all leader outcomes, whereas the use of negative humor was associated with reduced ratings in task behavior and relationship behavior. Priest and Swain (2002) also demonstrated a positive association between good supervisors and perceived use of warm humorous style.

These studies have enhanced our understanding on how humor (or various types of humor) affects individual creativity, and leader humor positively and effectively influences leadership. However, studies that examine the effect of the different types of leader humor on employee creativity are scarce. In this study, I aim to fill this gap by examining the various types of leader humor and their association with employee creativity based on the four humor styles proposed by Martin et al. (2003). However, generating a clear pattern to link self-defeating humor to employee outcomes seems to be difficult. As described previously, self-defeating humor is used to amuse others and to enhance interpersonal relationships, but this type can be detrimental and may negatively influence others. The effects of self-defeating humor on employee creativity can be neutral because of this self-defeating humor characteristic. Therefore, I developed our hypotheses only for self-enhancing, affiliative, and aggressive humor.

Self-enhancing humor and employee creativity

Previous research provided significant evidence for the benefit of self-enhancing humor in individual outcomes. For example, self-enhancing humor is negatively related to depression and other stress symptoms (Chen and Martin 2007; Dozois, Martin, and Bieling 2009) and positively related to psychological well-being (Martin et al. 2003). Self-enhancing humor can also enhance creativity by de-

emphasizing the consequences of the potential failure of creative ideas (Romero and Cruthirds 2006).

I propose that the self-enhancing humor of supervisors may also positively affect employee creativity. People unconsciously imitate the mood of others, and mimicking facial, vocal, or postural behavior creates a congruent mood state. This mood contagion effect has received general support from a wide range of individuals in natural and experimental settings (Kelly and Barsade 2001). In particular, the mood of supervisors can be contagious to subordinates (Sy, Côté, and Saavedra 2005). Supervisors substantially influence the well-being of subordinates at work; therefore, subordinates are sensitive to the moods of supervisors to get along well with them and to more likely imitate and experience a congruent mood state with their supervisors. Extrapolating from this idea, the self-enhancing humor of supervisors can elicit the positive emotion of subordinates that may trigger less rigid thinking and enhance the ability to relate and to integrate divergent material, resulting in more creative performance. To summarize, I predict the following:

H1: The leader's self-enhancing humor is positively associated with employee creativity.

Affiliative humor and employee creativity

The affiliative humor of leaders also has beneficial effects on employee creativity in several ways. First, as the function of affiliative humor is to facilitate interpersonal relationships, leaders who use affiliative humor can develop a close and favorable social relationship with their subordinates. Consistent with this idea, Kuiper et al. (2004) found that the affiliative humor of leaders could enhance effective communication with their subordinates by increasing interpersonal attraction. Such a favorable relationship between leaders and subordinates can subsequently facilitate the exchange of ideas and information between leaders and subordinates, and thus help subordinates produce more creative ideas (Pan, Sun, and Chow 2012; Volmer, Spurk, and Niessen 2012). Moreover, the use of affiliative humor will create a pleasant and positive atmosphere for the team, and the employees will fear failure less and feel comfortable to work in new ways, resulting in an increase in their individual creativity (Romero and Cruthirds 2006). Therefore, I predict the following:

H2: The leader's affiliative humor is positively associated with employee creativity.

Aggressive humor and employee creativity

The use of aggressive humor by leaders hurts interpersonal relationships with their subordinates. To support this claim, Kuiper et al. (2004) found that aggressive humor was negatively associated with the ability to provide emotional support to others and to manage interpersonal conflicts. As a result, subordinates who work with leaders who use aggressive humor tend to stay away from their leaders. Poor interpersonal relationships caused by the aggressive humor of leaders may also result in a communication barrier between leaders and subordinates. Lack of communication between leaders and subordinates would harm the job performance of subordinates because subordinates would not obtain the appropriate feedback and support from their leaders to solve their job-related problems. Moreover, employees who work with a leader who uses aggressive humor fear that their new ideas will be criticized and mocked by the leader. Therefore, the use of aggressive humor can suppress the creativity of employees by preventing risky behavior. Based on this idea, the following hypothesis is developed:

H3: The leader's aggressive humor is negatively associated with employee creativity.

The Moderating Role of Trust in the Leader

Although leader humor is logically related to employee creativity, this linkage may be enhanced or mitigated by the relational context within which individuals operate. Specifically, I theorize that trust in the leader creates a relational context, resulting in the positive interpretation and reaction of employees toward leader humor. Trust is "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other party" (Mayer et al. 1995). Kouzes and Posner (1987) claimed that the basic element of leadership is trust, and that the leader could not lead to his/her full competency level without developing trust between leader and employee. Moreover, in "Anyunpyun" of the main Eastern classic *The Analects*

of Confucius, Zigong, a disciple of Confucius, asked Confucius about the principles of ruling a nation. Confucius replied, “among financial stability, national security, and trust of society, ruler must have the trust of his people.” This principle emphasizes the importance of trust. Therefore, trust in the leader is a critical leadership factor in the interpersonal relationship between the leader and employees (Jones and Geroge 1998; Solomon and Flores 2003).

Trust in the leader has been linked to a variety of individual and organizational outcomes (DeConinck 2011). At the micro level, trust in the leader has been associated with outcomes such as employee satisfaction, effort and performance, organizational citizenship behavior, collaboration and teamwork, leadership effectiveness, human resource management, and negotiation success (Olekalns and Smith 2007). At the macro level, trust is a driving force in organizational change and survival, entrepreneurship, strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions, and even national-level economic health (Fukuyama 1995; Fulmer and Gelfand 2012).

I propose that trust in the leader significantly moderates the relationship between leader humor and employee creativity. When subordinates trust their leaders, they tend to believe that their leaders are willing to do something good for them (Molm, Takahashi, and Peterson 2000). As a result, trust in the leader enables subordinates to interpret leader humor (whether adaptive, such as self-enhancing and affiliative humor, or maladaptive, such as aggressive humor) more positively. Moreover, when subordinates have a strong emotional bond with their supervisor, the positive or negative emotion experienced by the leader from leader humor (e.g., self-enhancing humor) can be contagious and easily transferred to subordinates (cf. Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1994; Wild, Erb, and Bartels 2001). By contrast, without trust in the relationship between subordinates and the leader, subordinates are more suspicious about the motives of humor used by the leader. As a result, subordinates with low trust in the leader may react more negatively toward the aggressive humor and less positively toward the affiliative humor of the leader. Taken together, I predict the following:

H4a: Trust in the leader moderates the relationship between self-enhancing humor and employee creativity, such that the relationship between self-enhancing humor and employee

creativity becomes stronger as trust in the leader increases.

H4b: Trust in the leader moderates the relationship between affiliative humor and employee creativity, such that the relationship between affiliative humor and employee creativity becomes stronger as trust in the leader increases.

H4c: Trust in the leader moderates the relationship between aggressive humor and employee creativity, such that the relationship between aggressive humor and employee creativity becomes weaker as trust in the leader increases.

METHOD

Sample

Using a mailed questionnaire, data were collected from employees and their leaders who work for 71 research and development teams in 5 telecommunication companies in South Korea between November 19, 2012 and December 7, 2012. The human resources manager of each company compiled the list of employees who have no subordinates and their immediate supervisors. Participation was voluntary, and the respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The surveys were completed during working hours. To avoid the problems of common source variance, the employees reported on the humor styles of their leaders and trust in their leaders, whereas the leaders reported on the creativity of their subordinates. The surveys were translated to Korean according to the back-translation procedure (Brislin 1986).

According to the final list of employees and their team leaders, 446 employee-leader dyads in the target organizations were invited to participate in this study. A total of 339 completed employee-leader pair questionnaires were returned, resulting in a high response rate of 76.0%. Among the received questionnaires, 23 were excluded because either the survey was not completed or the same answer was given to all questions. Thus, the usable number of questionnaires was 316.

Among the 316 respondents who participated in the study, 68% (215 employees) were male and 32% were female. Regarding age,

the majority (78%) of the respondents ranged from 30 to 45 years old, and the average age of the employees was 34.4 years ($sd = 6.4$). The average job tenure of the respondents was 7.6 years ($sd = 6.1$). Among the leader samples, approximately 89% were male, and the average age was 44.7 years ($sd = 4.8$). The average working experience was 20.1 years ($sd = 5.9$).

Measures

Perceived humor styles of leaders

To measure the humor styles of leaders, I used the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) (Martin et al. 2003). HSQ is a 32-item self-report measure to assess four dimensions related to individual differences in the use of humor in everyday life. Respondents rate each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). HSQ contains eight-item subscales to measure each of the four dimensions of humor (self-enhancing, affiliative, aggressive, and self-defeating).

The three humor styles used in this study were (1) self-enhancing humor (e.g., "If my supervisor is feeling depressed, he/she can usually cheer himself/herself up with humor" and "Even when my supervisor is by himself/herself, he/she is often amused by the absurdities of life"), (2) affiliative humor (e.g., "My supervisor laughs and jokes a lot with his/her closest friends" and "My supervisor enjoys making people laugh"), and (3) aggressive humor (e.g., "If someone makes a mistake, my supervisor will often tease him/her about it" and "If my supervisor does not like someone, he/she often uses humor or teasing to put this person down").

Trust in the leader

Trust in the leader was measured using the five cognition-based trust items of McAllister (1995) to assess the trustworthy behavior on the job of the target employees. Subordinates were asked to assess the extent to which they agree with the five items on a seven-point scale (1 = "Strongly disagree," 7 = "Strongly agree"). Sample items include "I can talk freely to my immediate supervisor about difficulties I am having at work and know that (s)he will want to listen," "If I share my problems with my immediate supervisor, I know (s)he would respond constructively and caringly," and "My immediate supervisor approaches his/her job with professionalism

and dedication.”

Employee creativity

I measured employee creativity using the 13-item scale of Zhou and George (2001). This scale is commonly used to measure creativity. Leaders were asked to assess the extent to which each of the 13 behaviors characterize the work behavior of their subordinates on a five-point scale (1= “Not at all characteristic,” 5 = “Very characteristic”). Sample items include “Suggests new ways to achieve goals or objectives,” “Comes up with new and practical ideas to improve performance,” and “Searches out new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas.”

Analysis

The data were not independent because the same supervisor assessed the multiple employees. To deal with the data interdependency issue, I conducted multi-level analyses using HLM 6.08 to test the hypotheses (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, and Congdon 2004; Rasbash, Steele, Browne, and Goldstein 2009). Specifically, I used three-level models, with employees at level 1, supervisors at level 2, and companies at level 3 (intercept-only model at the company and supervisor levels), to control for any possible confounding effect of company- and supervisor-level factors on the relationships I tested. The following equations show the error structure of a HLM analysis using employee creativity as a dependent variable and self-enhancing humor as an independent variable as an example.

$$Y_{ijk} = B0_{0jk} + B1_{0jk} * X_{ijk} + e_{ijk} \text{ (Level 1)}$$

$$B0_{0jk} = \beta_{00k} + r_{0jk} \text{ (Level 2)}$$

$$\beta_{00k} = \gamma_{000} + u_{00k} \text{ (Level 3)}$$

Here, Y represents employee creativity and X represents self-enhancing humor.

RESULTS

Reliability and Validity of the Measurement

To verify the reliability of the measurement tool, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which indicates the internal consistency of the data, was used. Table 1 shows the reliability coefficients of the three kinds of humor style, trust in the leader, and individual creativity. As shown in the table, all reliability estimates exceeded 0.75, with an average reliability of 0.83, higher than the commonly used criterion of 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

I conducted confirmatory factor analyses to assess the discriminant validity of the five variables used in this study (i.e., three humor styles, trust in the leader, and employee creativity). The results show that the five-factor model (χ^2 [314, 188] = 360.12, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = 0.06; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.94) fit the data better than the one-factor model (χ^2 [314, 212] = 2008.47, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = 0.26; CFI = 0.44; TLI = 0.23), thus providing support for the discriminant validity for the constructs used in this study.

Descriptive Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations for all measures are reported in table 1. The means for self-enhancing and affiliative humors were significantly higher than those for aggressive humor (i.e., 4.62 and 4.70 vs. 3.42, mean difference = 1.28, $p < 0.01$ and 1.20, $p < 0.01$, respectively). This result indicates that Korean leaders tend to use more adaptive rather than maladaptive humor (Kuiper et al. 2004).

Although the mean for trust in the leader was moderately high (i.e., 4.52), the data revealed considerable variance in trust in the leader (i.e., SD = 1.03), permitting meaningful tests of the moderating effects of trust in leader on the relationships between humor styles and employee creativity. As expected, the self-enhancing humor of leaders was positively correlated with employee creativity ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$), whereas aggressive humor was negatively correlated ($r = -0.11$, $p < 0.10$).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations and Coefficients for Variables in All Data

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	32.57	6.01	—									
2. Sex	.27	.44	-.30**	—								
3. Organizational tenure	6.60	5.20	.71**	-.11	—							
4. Tenure with supervisor	3.48	4.03	.28**	-.03	.39**	—						
5. Self-enhancing humor	4.63	.84	.05	-.08	.91**	-.05	(.84)					
6. Affiliative humor	4.69	.96	-.08	.03	-.08	-.16**	.51**	(.86)				
7. Aggressive humor	3.44	.83	.02	.09	-.01	.00	-.38**	-.18**	(.75)			
8. Self-defeating humor	3.36	.94	.07	-.09	.05	-.07	.07	.09	.23**	(.82)		
9. Trust in supervisor	4.52	1.03	.07	-.18**	.04	-.05	.50**	.34**	-.31**	.10	(.87)	
10. Employee creativity	3.35	.72	-.16**	.10	.13*	.12*	.18**	.05	-.11	.06	.13*	(.95)

Note. (N = 316). Reliabilities are in parentheses.

* p < .05; ** p < .01

Table 2. Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results for Employee Creativity

Predictor	Employee creativity		
	M1	M2	M3
Intercept	3.17**	3.17**	3.24**
Control variables			
Age	.00**	.00**	.00**
Sex	-.12	-.11	-.14
Organizational tenure	.00	.00	.00
Tenure with supervisor	.01	.01*	.01
Self-defeating humor (SDH)	.03	.03	.02
Self-enhancing humor (SEH)	.12**	.11*	.09
Affiliative humor (AFH)	-.01	-.01**	-.02
Aggressive humor (AGH)	-.01	-.01**	-.03
Affective trust in supervisor (Trust)		.01	-.00
SEH × Trust			.12**
AFH × Trust			-.03
AGH × Trust			.03
pseudo R ² _{within-supervisor} ^a	.06	.01	.04
pseudo R ² _{between-supervisor} ^a	.91	.99	.94
pseudo R ² _{between-organization} ^a	.88	.66	.61
Deviance	615.41	615.37	607.50

Note: (N = 316 for surbordiantes, 71 for supervisors, and 5 for organizations)

* p < .05; ** p < .01

^a These are R-square difference compared to the previous model. Model 1 was compared with the null model.

Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis 1 states that the self-enhancing humor of leaders is positively associated with employee creativity. As shown in table 2, self-enhancing humor positively and significantly influenced employee creativity ($\gamma = 0.12, p < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2 states that the affiliative humor of leaders is positively associated with the individual creativity of their subordinates. Unlike in hypothesis 2, affiliative humor was not significantly associated with employee creativity ($\gamma = -0.01, n.s.$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposes that the aggressive humor of leaders is negatively associated with employee creativity. Table 2 shows that

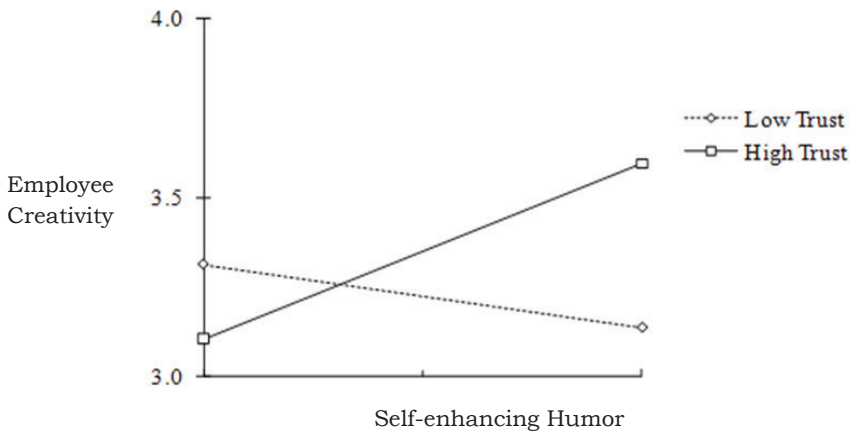


Figure 1. Simple Slopes of Self-enhancing Humor on Employee Creativity at Levels of Trust within a Supervisor

aggressive humor negatively and significantly influenced employee creativity ($\gamma = -.001$, *n.s.*). Therefore, hypothesis 3 is not supported.

To examine the interactive effects of the independent variables and employee creativity, I tested three regression models (table 2). Model 3 adds the hypothesized interaction terms to the equation that has main predictors. Therefore, Model 3 presents the results of the analysis used to test whether trust in the leader moderates the relationship between leader humor style and employee creativity.

Hypothesis 4a states that trust in the leader moderates the relationship between self-enhancing humor and employee creativity, such that the relationship between self-enhancing humor and employee creativity becomes stronger when trust in the leader is higher. Consistent with this finding, table 2 shows that the interactive term between self-enhancing humor and trust in the leader was significant for employee creativity ($\gamma = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$). Tests of the simple slopes show that the relationship between self-enhancing humor and employee creativity was positive and significant when trust in the leader was at high levels (simple slope = 0.26 , $p < 0.01$), but the relationship was not significant at low trust levels (simple slope = -0.09 , *n.s.*). As shown in figure 1, self-enhancing humor did not play an important role for the respondents who had low trust in their leaders. However, self-enhancing humor of leaders was a significant factor of employee creativity for

the respondents who had high trust in their leaders. Therefore, hypothesis 4a is supported.

Hypothesis 4b states that trust in the leader moderates the relationship between affiliative humor and employee creativity, such that the relationship between affiliative humor and employee creativity becomes stronger when trust in the leader is higher. Table 2 shows no significant interaction effect of trust in the leader on the relationship between affiliative humor and employee creativity ($\gamma = -0.03$, *n.s.*). Therefore, hypothesis 4b is not supported.

Hypothesis 4c proposes that trust in the leader moderates the relationship between aggressive humor and employee creativity, such that the relationship between aggressive humor and employee creativity becomes stronger when trust in a supervisor is higher. Table 2 shows no significant interaction effect of trust in the leader on the relationship between aggressive humor and employee creativity ($\gamma = 0.03$, *n.s.*). Therefore, hypothesis 4c is not supported.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study lead to several conclusions. First, the self-enhancing humor of the leader has a positive effect on employee creativity. Second, the affiliative humor and aggressive humor of the leader are not significantly related to employee creativity. In addition, trust in the leader significantly moderates the relationship between the leader's self-enhancing humor and employee creativity, such that the latter relationship became stronger as trust in the leader increases.

These findings offer some important theoretical implications for humor and creativity research, as well as suggest several opportunities for more in-depth research. First, given the scarcity of research on leader humor and employee outcomes, one important result from this investigation is establishing the link between leader humor and employee creativity. As expected, leader self-enhancing humor was significantly related to employee creativity. This finding extends the current researches on the effects of supervisor humor on employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Decker 1987), psychological empowerment (Gkorezis et al. 2011), job performance (Avolio et al. 1999), supervisor satisfaction (Decker and Rotondo 2001), and group cohesion (Cann

et al., 2009), by examining cognitive outcomes.

Second, the results reveal the multidimensionality of humor. Moreover, the effects of leader humor on employee creativity can vary depending on the type of humor. For example, the leader's self-enhancing humor was positively associated with employee creativity, but affiliative humor and aggressive humor were not significantly related to employee creativity. These findings suggest that the leader's self-enhancing humor, as an amusing communication tool, has an important role in the improvement of employee creativity, but other types of humor cannot stimulate employee creativity. These results extend the study of Lang and Lee (2010), which demonstrates the different effects of various types of humor on creativity by showing the different effects of various types of leader humor on employee creativity.

Notwithstanding the general positive link between leader humor and employee creativity, perhaps the most important implication of our findings is that trust in the leader significantly moderates the latter link. For example, the link between the leader's self-enhancing humor and employee creativity becomes stronger as trust in the leader increases. In general, these findings extend the current research on leader humor that focuses on the main effects of leader humor on employee outcomes. These results also support the propositions of Decker (1987) and Wyer (2004): the effects of supervisor humor on employee outcomes can vary by contextual factors. Moreover, the moderating effects are important to develop and refine humor theory on the conditions under which supervisor humor affects employee outcomes, although additional research is needed on this issue. For example, Hypotheses 4b and 4c are not supported (i.e., trust in the leader does not significantly moderate the effects of affiliative and aggressive humor and employee creativity) because trust in the leader and interpersonal humor (i.e., affiliative and aggressive humor) have similar effects on employee creativity, such that both positively affect interpersonal interactions rather than be complementary or supplementary to each other to enhance employee creativity.

These findings also contribute to the literature on creativity. The role of humor on employee creativity has been noted by some researchers (e.g., Lang and Lee 2001; Romero and Cruthirds 2006). Despite the importance of understanding how leader humor facilitates employee creativity, few studies have examined the

dynamics of this relationship. Accordingly, I developed and tested the hypotheses that the effectiveness of various types of leader humor on employee creativity depends on how much employees trust their leaders. One of these hypotheses is supported by the data.

Finally, the unique context of the present investigation offers important cross-cultural information on the effects of leader humor on employee outcomes. For example, this finding suggests that the positive linkage between leader humor and employee outcomes found in Western cultures may be generalized to non-Western cultures. This finding confirms that the positive effects of leader humor on employee outcomes generalized to cultures outside of the United States, particularly the prevailing social norms and expectations for subordinate-supervisor relationships in South Korea, are different from those in Western societies. This study can contribute to humor research by enhancing our confidence in cross-national generalizability and the robustness of the phenomenon (Pillutla and Thau 2013).

Although some of the humor styles influenced employee creativity as expected, others behaved in unpredictable ways. For example, affiliative humor and aggressive humor did not significantly influence employee creativity. Affiliative humor and aggressive humor, which focus on interpersonal relationships, may positively affect interpersonal outcomes, such as leader-member exchange quality, but may not benefit the cognitive processes of employees to produce creative ideas. Moreover, other contextual variables may influence the link between affiliative humor and employee creativity. For example, leaders who use affiliative humor but have low expertise may not help employees meet the job requirements and stimulate new ways of thinking. Future studies should consider some situational factors that may enhance or mitigate the link between affiliative and aggressive humor of the leader and employee creativity.

The results of this study also have some interesting practical implications. First, managers who want to use humor to improve the creative performance of their subordinates should be careful in using appropriate humor. Our findings suggest that managers should use more adaptive and constructive humor (i.e., self-enhancing humor) rather than detrimental humor (e.g., aggressive and self-defeating humor).

Second, not all leaders of each team can benefit from expressing constructive humor; only leaders who have a high-trust relationship with their subordinates can obtain the most benefits from using constructive humor. In this sense, gaining the trust of their followers is important for leaders. The use of humor without trust can fail and even hurt employee creativity. Therefore, leaders should develop a high-trust relationship with their subordinates to obtain the full benefits of using humor.

Third, leadership training and development programs are necessary because a better understanding of the link between the humor style of the leader and employee outcomes enables the design of more effective training programs. In particular, we need to highlight the importance of teaching managers to use constructive rather than destructive humor. Even if managers have a high level of sense of humor, they may erroneously use humor to harm individual and organizational effectiveness by disparaging the mistakes of others.

Limitations and Future Studies

The current study has several limitations. First, the leaders were asked to evaluate the creativity of their employees using subjective scores. Although the leader's evaluation as the measure of creativity is generally used (Shin et al. 2012), future studies need to validate our findings by measuring individual creativity with objective indicators, such as the number of patents and the number of research-related journals and proposals completed by an individual.

Second, data were collected at a single point in time, raising questions regarding the direction of causality. Therefore, a rigorous test of causal directionality is necessary in future studies. A longitudinal study design that closely observes the changes in social phenomena at regular time intervals is necessary (Emory and Cooper 1991).

Third, this study did not use leader-reported humor; instead, the subordinates were asked to evaluate the humor styles of their leaders. Although the perceived (or experienced) supervisor humor may play an important role in employee outcomes (Ünal, 2014), evaluating the underlying motivation of the supervisor humor may not be easy for subordinates, whether the humor was intended for self-enhancement, affiliation, or aggression. Future studies should

validate our findings using supervisor-reported humor.

Fourth, the failure to examine some key variables that have been shown to influence employee creativity is another limitation. For example, I did not consider the role of intrinsic motivation in the process and whether it could mediate the relationship between leader humor and employee creativity. Although I controlled for between organization effects using multi-level analyses, I did not measure specific organizational context variables that could affect the consequences of leader humor. The demonstrated support for our theoretical predictions should enhance confidence in my findings, although future research that controls for such key variables could provide a more rigorous test for my model. However, I did not measure positive or negative emotion (or a moderate level of stress), the favorable relationship between a leader and subordinates, and risk-taking behavior that could be potential mediators for the link between leader humor and employee creativity. Future research should measure them directly and disentangle different mediators to determine the effect of each type of leader humor on subordinate creativity.

Fifth, an important theoretical issue in the literature is whether the determinants of individual-level creativity suppress or facilitate the group-level creativity. For example, Duncan (1982) suggested a positive association between humor and group cohesion. Nevertheless, strong influence by others, which likely arises from cohesive groups, is expected to suppress individual creativity. At the same time, several empirical studies (e.g., Craig and Kelly 1999; Moore 1997) have shown that group cohesion is positively related to group creativity. Group cohesion can stimulate knowledge and information sharing among team members, which can positively affect individual creativity. However, I did not measure group cohesion and group creativity. Thus, I could not determine how leader humor is related to individual and group creativity and how leader humor, group cohesion, and a favorable working relationship between a leader and followers caused by the leader humor are related to individual and group creativity.

Finally, my sample was not randomly drawn; that is, subject randomization was not conducted in our study. To minimize omission biases in my analyses, I controlled for the age, sex, and organizational tenure of the follower, as well as the dyadic tenure between supervisor and follower. However, the failure to control for

other related variables, such as leadership styles and personality of the followers, could have undermined the subject randomization. I suggest that future research should use the random sampling method to validate my findings.

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