Effect of Humor on Employee Creativity with Moderating Role of Transformational Leadership Behavior

A. Amjed and S. H. S. Tirmzi

Abstract—This study examines the relationship of use of humor and employee creativity with moderating role of transformational leadership style among employees of software development houses of Pakistan. The results of this study indicate a positive relationship of Affiliative and Self-enhancing humor with employee creativity whereas, there is mixed effect of negative humor on employee creativity. It reveals that transformational leader can enhance positive effect of humor and creativity. It suggests that transformational leader should remain conscious while maintaining the level of humor at the workplace to ensure creative behavior.

Index Terms—Affiliative humor, aggressive humor, employee creativity, self-defeating humor, self-enhancing humor, transformational leader.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rapid advancements in information technology and its extensive use in business organizations have increased the competition in the world. Due to this increased competition and diverse environment, employees of IT organizations face many problems like meeting ever increasing demand and provide creative solutions. This valuable workforce can keep pace with the rapidly changing environment by presenting the innovative solutions to the problems for the betterment of the organization [1].

In organizational behavior studies, creativity is the ability of the employee to produce novel and constructive ideas which have the potential to contribute to organizational well being [2]-[4]. It also increases organization's ability to cope with today's increased turbulent environment [5]. Therefore creativity is very important factor to be considered in today's business world [6].

As the human capital is vital in gaining competitive advantage, therefore less stressful workplace environment must be provided to them [7], [8]. When employees will feel positive and relaxed, they will give positive outcomes [9]. One of the positive factors that influence the employee creativity is the use of humor. Humor is the use of any comic expression or gesture that can reduce the stressful impacts of any tough or worse situation. Effective use of humor results in higher creativity.

Creativity is a very complex phenomenon so there are a lot of forces affecting it [10], [11]. One of the important factors affecting creativity is supervisor's behavior because

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employees are in direct influence of their supervisors [12]. When leaders show a supportive style leadership, the strong ties develops among subordinates and supervisor which makes the employee enjoy performing the duties [13]. This positive approach towards work then enhances the positive outcome in the form of creative and unique ideas. There are two kinds of leadership styles common in organizational behavior studies which are transformational leadership and transactional leadership. Transformational leaders have more impact on the development of creativity among the employees and other positive organizational behaviors than transactional leaders [14] because transactional leaders do not allow freedom to think which hinders the progress of creative behaviors. Therefore transformational leadership style has an impact on the relationship between humor and creativity of the employee.

Componential Theory of Creativity proposes that the components of the work environment influence creativity [15]. This theory states that external and internal factors influence creativity. The Leader member Exchange theory also states that supervisors have direct effect on the employees [16].

As the effect of use of humor is not studied much in the context of Pakistan especially with the role of transformational leadership style, therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship of use of humor and employee creativity. This will also study the effect of leadership style on the relationship of use of humor and employee creativity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Creativity and Humor

Amabile defined creativity as idea that is new and appropriate for the organization [17]. Creativity is not just to present a novel idea but it can range from an idea to some major breakthrough [18], [19]. Humor is affected by use of humor at workplace.

Humor defines reality in a light mode [20]. Humor promotes the interpersonal relationships and plays a positive role in promoting creativity of group members. Herbold found that humor and creativity co-exists and harmonizes each other [21].

B. Aggressive Humor and Employee Creativity

Aggressive humor is hostile and might hurt somebody's feelings. It is a harmful style of humor which is adverse to others [22]. It focuses on the superiority of speaker over the others. It attempts to enhance the self on the expense of others. Teo [23] suggests that aggressive joking is detrimental to employees' creativity. If aggressive humor is

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used for important workers then overall creative behavior of these employees gets badly affected [24]. Therefore;

H1: Aggressive Humor is negatively related to Employee Creativity.

C. Affiliative Humor and Employee Creativity

Affiliative humor shows concern and care about others. Romero and Cruthirds said that affiliative humor creates positive environment in the organizations which supports positive thinking [25]. In such a relaxed environment, the employees get involved in creative problem solving as they have support from the environment and the peers [26]. Teo argued that affiliative humor promotes challenge and creativity in employees which makes an organization more responsive and enhances productivity. Therefore;

H2: Affiliative humor is positively related to employee creativity.

D. Self-enhancing Humor and Employee Creativity

Self enhancing humor refers to positive humor which is used by speaker about himself. It can be termed as coping strategy to deal with stress and anxiety which enhances employee confidence and creativity [27]. According to Kuiper and McHale, use of self-enhancing humor has positive effects on the organization environment which broadens employees' thought process and enhances creativity among them [28].

H3: Self enhancing humor is positively related to employee creativity.

E. Self- defeating Humor and Employee Creativity

Self defeating humor is defined by Janes and Olson as self disapproving humor. Employees who use this kind of humor want to gain attention of other employees by making fun of their own selves which negatively affects their self confidence in the people around. This humor is used by persons who want to make them prominent and do humorous things to attract the attention of others [29]. Janes and Olson suggests that this kind of humor can lead employees to under estimate themselves which will lead them to non innovative tasks [30]. Therefore,

H4: Self defeating humor is negatively related to employee creativity.

F. Leadership Style, Humor and Employee Creativity

Leadership style is important to consider while studying creativity because leadership is vital in creating supportive or non supportive work environment by being cooperative or non cooperative [31].

Transformational Leadership Style, Humor and employee Creativity:

Transformational leadership motivates the employees [32]. It supports creativity of the individuals as it is positive leadership [33]. This supportive behavior develops strong relationship between leader and followers [34]. This friendly and supportive relationship allows the employees to use humor to lower the worse effects of stress at workplace [35]. Not only use of humor but the transformational leader focuses on the frequency of its use at workplace for better performance and creativity [36]. Therefore, transformational

leadership style influences the relationship of humor and employee creativity [37]. Therefore it is proposed that;

H5: Transformational Leader moderates the relationship of Affiliative humor and employee creativity.

H6: Transformational Leader moderates the relationship of self enhancing humor and employee creativity.

H7: Transformational Leader moderates the relationship of Aggressive humor and employee creativity.

H8: Transformational Leader moderates the relationship of Self defeating humor and employee creativity.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants included the full time employees of software houses operating in Twin cities. Sample size for this study is 120 with response rate of 40%.

B. Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed in personal contact on convenience basis during the working hours. Participants were invited to participate on a voluntary basis and their privacy was maintained in all cases.

C. Material and Measures

The questionnaire contained two main parts. Part A contained questions related to the demographics (age, gender, education and job tenure) of participants. Part B of questionnaire consisted of three sections. In the first section, participants were asked to evaluate four styles of humor. In the second section, they were asked to assess the leadership style of their supervisors. In the third section, the participants were asked questions related to creativity. The responses are measured on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= "Strongly Disagree" to 5= "Strongly Agree".

Humor Style Questionnaire: The humor style questionnaire is referred to the humor style scale compiled by Martin *et al.* (2003). The scale compiled of 8 items of each humor style (affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor and self-defeating humor).

Leadership Style Questionnaire: Leadership style is measured using the shortened form of Northouse' scale, Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, form 6-S (MLQ- 6S), developed by Bass and Avolio in 1992. It is used to measure transformational leadership style systematically [38].

Creativity Questionnaire: Creativity is assessed by using 9-items based on Scott and Bruce scale from Janssen's (2000, 2001) for individual creative behavior in the workplace [39], [40].

IV. RESULTS

A. Demographics and Frequencies

Table I exhibits the composition of the respondents. Majority of the respondents are male. Most of them have less than 10 years job tenure in their current organizations. Majority of them have Masters Degree which is considered to be the high level of qualification in non academic organizational settings.

n= 120			
Description		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	104	88
Gender	Female	14	12
	25-35	66	55
A	36-45	36	30
Age	46-55	18	15
	56- above	0	0
	Bachelors	7	6
Q1:6	Masters	110	92
Qualification	M.Phil	3	2
	PhD	0	0
Job Tenure	1-5	83	69
	6-10	37	31
	11-15	0	0
	16- above	0	0

TABLE I: DEMOGRAPHICS AND FREQUENCY

B. Cronbach's Alpha, Means, Standard Deviation and Correlation Analysis

Table II reports that the scale used in this study is reliable as Affiliative humor has α =62%, self-enhancing Humor has α =62%, aggressive humor has α =63%, self-defeating humor has α =60%, transformational leadership has α =99% and creativity has α =98%.

The Table II shows the correlation among the variables. It can be seen that Affiliative humor is not significantly correlated with employee creativity ($\gamma = .018$, p = .846). Self enhancing humor style is strongly correlated with employee creativity ($\gamma = .573$, p = .000). Aggressive humor style and employee creativity are also correlated ($\gamma = -.221$, p < .05). Self Defeating is correlated with employee creativity ($\gamma = .843$, p = .000). Transformational leadership style is correlated with employee creativity ($\gamma = .978$, p = .000). Therefore table 2 explains that all variables except Affiliative humor are strongly correlated with dependent variable of this study, employee creativity.

TABLE II: CRONBACH'S ALPHA, MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION AND CORRELATION ANALYSIS

	α (%)	Mean	S. Dev	AF	SE	AG	SD	L	С
AF	62	3.0	.69	1					
SE	62	3.4	1.0	147	1				
AG	63	3.0	.32	.045	002	1			
SD	60	3.2	1.1	.176	399***	.317***	1		
L	99	2.8	1.4	.007	.604***	185*	864***	1	
С	98	2.7	1.4	.018	.573***	221*	843***	.978***	1
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, n=120									

AF= Affiliative humor; SE= Self-enhancing humor; AG= Aggressive Humor; SD= Self-defeating humor; L= Transformational Leadership Style; C= Creativity

C. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Table III shows that model presented in this study is significant (F = 125.9, p = .000). It means that independent variables explain the dependent variable well. In this study,

the value of R-Square (.81) shows that 81% of the variation was explained by independent variables.

Table III shows that Affiliative humor style is positively related to employees' creativity (B = .401, T = 4.755; p = .000). Therefore, H1 is accepted. Self-enhancing humor style is positively related to employee creativity (B= .405, T = 6.696 p = .000). So, H2 is accepted. The table denies the proposed relationship of aggressive humor and employee creativity in this study (B = .057; T = .297; p > 0.05). Therefore, H3 of this study is rejected. It is further shown that there is negative relationship of self-defeating humor style and employee creativity (B = -.972; T = -16.209; p = .000). So, H4 is accepted.

TABLE III: MULTIPLE REGRESSIC	N ANALYSIS
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ent				
В	R	\mathbf{R}^2	F-stat	Т
	.9	.81	125.9*	
	0		**	
.40***				4.75***
.41***				6.69***
.057				.297
97***				-16.20***
	B .40*** .41*** .057	B R .9 0 .40*** .41*** .057	B R R ² .9 .81 0 .40*** .41*** .057	B R R ² F-stat .9 .81 125.9* 0 ** .40*** .41*** .057

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001, n=120

AF= Affiliative humor; SE= Self-enhancing humor; AG= Aggressive Humor; SD= Self-defeating humor; C= Creativity

D. Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Table IV shows the results of moderation regression analysis with transformational leadership style. The value of B for transformational leadership shows that it has significant positive relationship with employee creativity (B=1.04; T=18.494; p=.000). The value of F-stat (403.36; p=.000) shows that research model with moderated relationship of transformational leadership style, is fit for studying.

TABLE IV: MODERATION REGRESSION ANALYSIS WITH TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE

Independent				С	
Variables					
	В	\mathbb{R}^2	ΔR^2	F	Т
Step 1					
- Control		.28		10.96***	
Variables					
Step 2		.96	.68	292.57***	
AF	.025				.476
SE	04				903
AG	23				-1.942*
SD	.042				.642
L	1.04				18.494***
Step 3		.98	.02	403.36***	
AF_L	.135				2.723**
_ SE_L	.577				10.067***
AG_L	.323				2.703**
SD_L	.018				.407

*p< 0.05, **p< 0.01, ***p< 0.001 , n=120

AF= Affiliative humor; SE= Self-enhancing humor; AG= Aggressive Humor; SD= Self-defeating humor; L= Transformational Leadership Style; C= Creativity

Table IV shows that transformational leadership style moderates the relationship of Affiliative humor style and employee creativity (B=.135; T=2.723; p< 0.01). So, H5 is accepted. Transformational leadership style also moderates

the relationship of self-enhancing humor style and employee creativity (B=.577; T=10.067; p=.000). H6 is accepted. Transformational leadership style moderates the relationship of aggressive humor style and employee creativity (B=.323, T=2.703; p<0.01). H7 is accepted. Transformational leadership style does not moderate the relationship of self-defeating humor style and employee creativity (B=.018; T=.407; p> 0.05). Therefore H8 is rejected.

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that positive style of humor (affiliative and self-enhancing) enhances creativity. This is because of the reason that positive humor does not hurt anyone and lower the stress. It further shows that negative humor style has a mixed effect on employee creativity. Self- Defeating humor hinders employee creativity. The reason of this may be that the individual alone has to bear the negative effects of such humiliating humor and sometimes it becomes difficult for him to cope with all the worse effects. On the other hand, aggressive humor does not hinder the creativity of employees. The reason of this may be that the employees are so close to each other that they do not take any effect of negative style of humor or may be that the employees have strong and positive capacities of mind that stops them to take any negative effect of aggressive humor.

It is further seen that transformational leadership style moderates the relationship of all humor styles except self-defeating humor. This may be due to the fact that the person who is consciously making fun of himself is least bothered about his personality development. And transformational leader cannot sometimes help such a person who does not understand the value and respect of his self.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

This study has many implications for the organizations who believe in creativity as the means of development especially the managing authorities of IT industry and software houses of Pakistan.

This study reveals that human force should be provided with the conditions for the use of humor. This will make them enjoy their working and produce creative solutions. Their task demands long sitting and doing programming for hours to produce creative and customized solutions. Therefore, they want freedom to use humor at their workplace. Furthermore, they should be provided with supportive leadership. Otherwise, the extensive use of humor may have negative impacts. The most appropriate leadership style is transformational leadership which gives them freedom to use humor and involve with them to control any negative use of humor. Therefore, the managers of software houses should get involved at the workplace to the extent that they must know if there is any disgraceful discussion or unproductive use of humor is done. Managers should be alert that there should not be any use of self-defeating humor as this negatively affects creativity. There should not be any use of aggressive humor so that no employee feel dishonor and everyone works enthusiastically. The findings of the current study show that affiliative and self-enhancing humor enhances employee creativity. Therefore, the managers should encourage such kind of humor.

Therefore, this study proposes the managers to remain conscious while maintaining the level of humor at the workplace to ensure creative behavior because positive humor if aggressively used can become negative humor which is not desirable.

VII. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

First, future researchers can include more factors like personality traits (introvert/extrovert) as possible antecedent of use of humor. They can study the impact of humor styles on other Positive Organizational Behaviors like organizational citizenship behavior, employee performance etc. They can study the impact of use of humor on negative organizational outcomes like deviant work behavior and cynicism etc. Second, future researchers can use longitudinal study on the same variables to establish more strong relationships on these variables.

Third, future research is required to see if our results generalize beyond the present sample size.

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