

# Studying the Relationship between Humor and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

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**Abstract** *The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between humor and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). The study took place at Isfahan's banks in Iran. A random sample of 276 employees was selected. This research was conducted using two separate questionnaires. Humor was assessed using the sense of humor questionnaire developed by Sadat Khoshouei et al. (2009). This Questionnaire uses 25 items to measure the five subscales. For OCB, questionnaire suggested by Bell and Menguc (2002) has been used. Structural equation modeling was conducted to test the hypotheses. The finding showed that the "sense of humor in stressful conditions", "sense of humor in social relations" and "enjoyment of humor" (with a significant coefficient at 0.56, 0.27 and 0.39) had a significant effect on OCB and humor influences on OCB with a significant path coefficient at 0.68. The result of this study showed that humor can be considered as a predictor of OCB.*

**Key words** Humor, Sense of humor, Laughter, OCB

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## 1. Introduction

Organizational citizenship behavior has become one of the most investigated subjects in the field of organizational behavior in recent years and has attracted critical concern of both scholars and practitioners (Hongyu et al., 2012; Cohen et al., 2012; Cun, 2012). OCBs are referred to as extra-role and pro-social behaviors (Chen & Kao, 2012). It seems one of the factors that effects on OCB are humor. Humor is "any communicative instance which is perceived as humorous" (Martineau 1972, p. 114). Humor is verbal and nonverbal communication which produces a "positive cognitive or affective response from listeners" (Crawford, 1994, p. 57). Much humor research is focused on humor's effects on four personal outcomes: burnout, stress, coping, and health (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2012). There is little shared understanding as to the role of humor in the workplace (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2012). In the 1980s, researchers began to explore the possibility that sense of humor may also contribute to workplace effectiveness (Decker, 1987; Parsons, 1988; Remington, 1985). The subject of humor has been used in a range of literatures like applied psychology (Cooper, 2005; Ford and Ferguson, 2004); advertising (Hatzithomas et al. 2011; Limbu et al. 2012; Alden et al. 2000; Beard, 2005; Beard, 2008); relationship to team or group effectiveness (Romero and Pescosolido, 2008); communications (Wanzer et al., 2005); neurology (Bartolo et al., 2006; Coulson and Williams, 2005); leadership style and performance (Hughes and Avey, 2008) and product innovation (Ekvall, 1996).

Although there are examples of studies of humor, the literature is most often conceptual, and does not empirically examine the value of humor for service organizations (Slåtten et al. 2011). With respect to this

issue, the purpose of this paper is investigating the relationship between humor and organizational citizenship behavior among banks' employees.

## 2. Organizational citizenship behavior

OCB can be defined as individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988). These behaviors “lubricate the social machinery of the organization”, “provide the flexibility needed to work through many unforeseen contingencies”, and help employees in an organization “cope with the otherwise awesome condition of interdependence on each other” (Smith et al., 1983). There are almost 30 different forms of OCB; but generally, OCB consists of five dimensions: sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy, altruism and conscientiousness (Organ, 1988; Organ, 1990b; Organ, 1994; Podsakoff et al., 2000; Kim, 2006): Sportsmanship is a form of citizenship behavior that has received much less attention in the literature. Organ (1990b) has defined sportsmanship as “a willingness to tolerate the inevitable inconveniences and impositions of work without complaining.” Civic virtue represents a macro-level interest in, or commitment to, the organization as a whole. This is shown by a willingness to participate actively in its governance to monitor its environment for threats and opportunities and to look out for its best interests. Courtesy involves helping others by taking steps to prevent the creation of problems for coworkers. Altruism captures behavior that is directly and intentionally aimed at helping a specific person in face-to-face situations. Conscientiousness is a pattern of going well beyond minimally required levels of attendance, punctuality, housekeeping, conserving resources, and related matters of internal maintenance

## 3. Humor

In the literature has been proposed different definition of humor (Robert and Yan, 2007) for example Romero and Cruthirds (2006, p.59) define humor as “amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organization” or Lynch, (2002, p. 423) defines humor as “a communicative activity”. In the management literature, humor is defined as a message whose ingenuity, verbal skill, and/or incongruity has the power to evoke laughter (Lee and Kleiner, 2005; Bergeron, and Vachon, 2008). A review of the extant theoretical literature on humor suggests there are at least four contributing factors that make defining and operationalizing humor difficult (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran , 2012, p.156):

- (1) the terms “humor” and “sense of humor” are often used interchangeably;
- (2) humor is multi-dimensional and the dimensions are seemingly diverse;
- (3) humor is quantified in various ways; and
- (4) there are numerous humor styles, some positive and some negative

In figure 1 the five humor styles has been displayed.

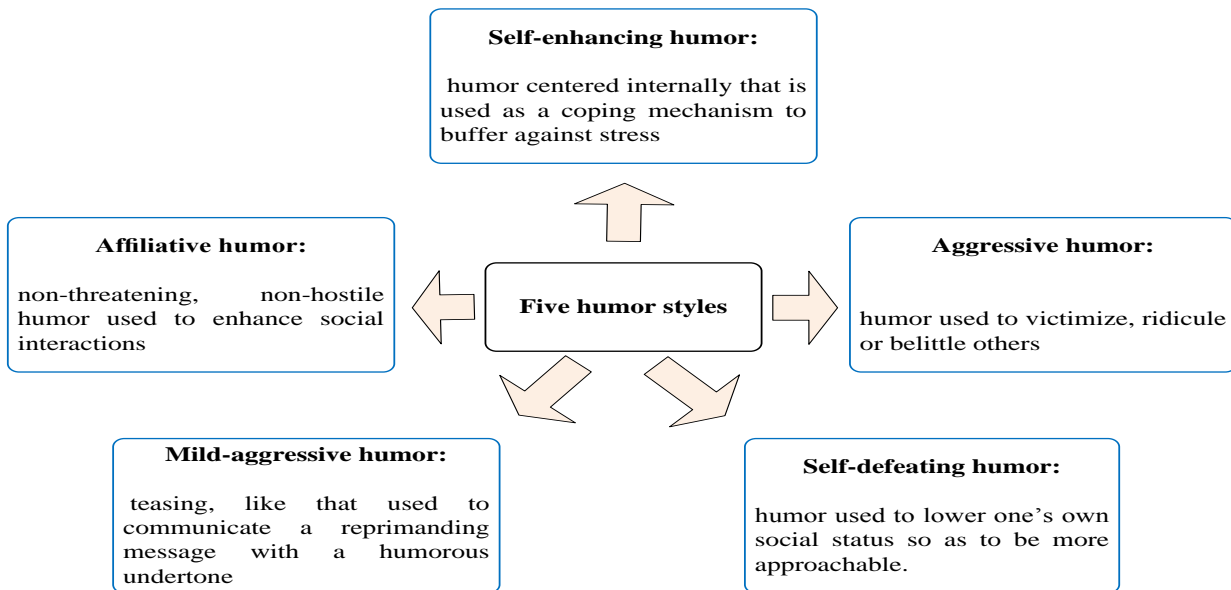


Figure 1. Five humor styles (adapted from Holmes and Marra, 2002; Romero and Cruthirds, 2006)

#### 4. Methodology of research

This paper used an empirical research design by questionnaire survey method to test the research hypothesis. The study took place at Isfahan's banks in Iran. A random sample of 315 employees was selected and 315 questionnaires were distributed, of which 276 were yielded completed. This research was conducted using two separate instruments. The instruments were completed using a self-report method. Humor was assessed using the Sense of Humor Questionnaire (SHQ) developed by Sadat Khoshouei et al. (2009). The SHQ uses 25 items to measure the five subscales: Laughter (five items); Enjoyment of humor (five items); Verbal humor (five items); Sense of humor in social relations (five items) and Sense of humor in stressful conditions (five items). Respondents were asked to select the suitable point on a 5 points Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability of these subscales has been found to be satisfactory; the Cronbach's alpha was 0.82. For OCB, questionnaire suggested by Bell and Menguc (2002) has been used. This questionnaire includes 20 questions, and each dimension (altruism, courtesy, sportsmanship, conscientiousness and civic virtue) has four questions. Respondents were asked to select the suitable point on a 5 points Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability of these subscales has been found to be satisfactory; the Cronbach's alpha was 0.89 which is reasonably high. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted to test the hypotheses and to examine the relationships between the humor and OCB. An important strength of SEM is its ability to incorporate the psychometrician's notion of constructs and measurement error in estimation procedure (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). We relied on several statistics to evaluate the goodness-of-fit of the models that includes CMIN/df, RMSEA, CFI, NFI, NNFI and GFI. Two statistical programs, SPSS 18 and Amos 18, were utilized to conduct the data analyses. The conceptual model has been displayed in figure 2.

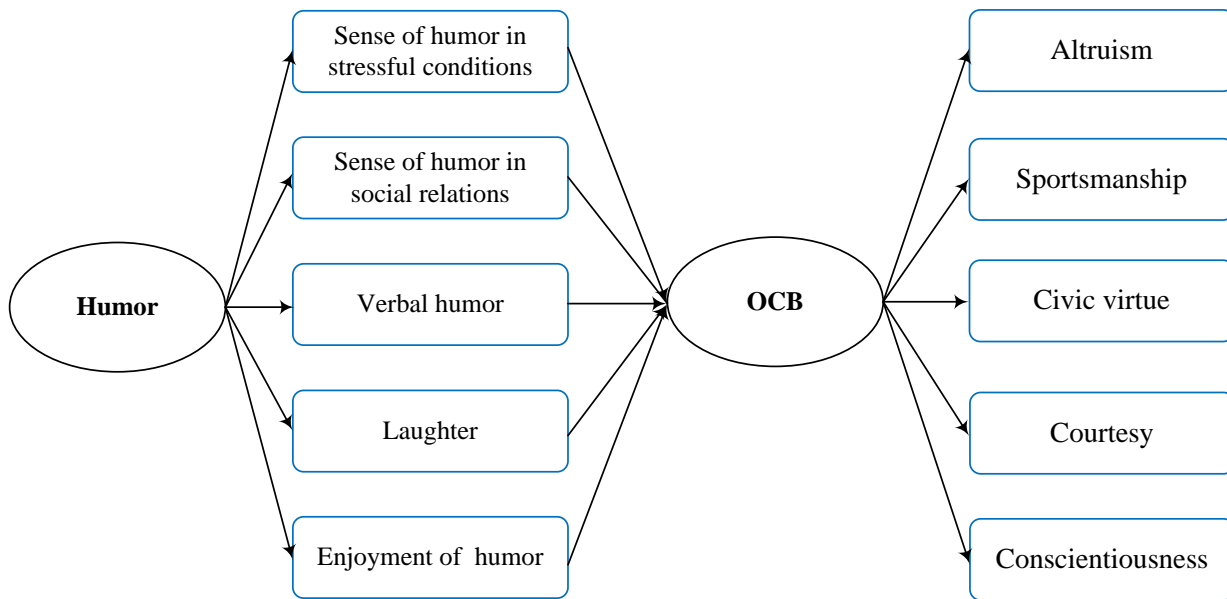


Figure 2. Conceptual framework

Hence, hypotheses are formulated as follow:

H1: Humor has a positive impact on OCB

In addition, sub-hypotheses are:

H2: Sense of humor in stressful conditions has a positive impact on OCB

H3: Sense of humor in social relations has a positive impact on OCB

H4: Verbal humor has a positive impact on OCB

H5: Laughter has a positive impact on OCB

H6: Enjoyment of humor has a positive impact on OCB

## 5. Results

First, measurement models were separately analyzed. Fit indices of the measurement models have been displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Fit indices of the measurement models

RMSEA	CFI	NFI	NNFI	GFI	CMIN/df	Model
0.08	0.925	0.948	0.914	0.92	2.13	Humor
0.035	0.946	0.93	0.929	0.931	1.68	OCB
<10%	>90%	>90%	>90%	>90%	<3	Suitable fit

As you can see in table 1 these indices meet all of the selected criteria and suggest that, overall fit of the measurement models is reasonable and acceptable.

### Hypotheses testing

For testing the sub-hypotheses two indices, named CR and P are used. If  $CR > 1.96$  then in the significance level of 0.05 are confirmed the hypotheses. In table 2 the sub-hypotheses and regression coefficients has been displayed.

Table 2. Sub-hypotheses and regression coefficients

Result	P	CR	Regression coefficients	Hypothesis
Confirmed	0.01	6.372	0.56	Sense of humor in stressful conditions has a positive impact on OCB
Confirmed	0.03	2.05	0.27	Sense of humor in social relations has a positive impact on OCB
Not confirmed	0.67	1.21	0.08	Verbal humor has a positive impact on OCB
Not confirmed	0.53	1.09	0.04	Laughter has a positive impact on OCB
Confirmed	0.02	4.86	0.39	Enjoyment of humor has a positive impact on OCB

SEM has been used for testing the main hypothesis of research. The fit indices of the structural model were reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Fit indices of the structural model

RMSEA	CFI	NFI	NNFI	GFI	CMIN/df	Model
0.058	0.962	0.943	0.924	0.957	2.81	structural
<10%	>90%	>90%	>90%	>90%	<3	Suitable fit

In table 4 the main hypothesis of research and regression coefficient has been displayed.

Table 4. Main hypothesis of research and regression coefficient

Result	P	CR	Regression coefficients	Hypothesis
Confirmed	0.002	4.681	0.68	Humor has a positive impact on OCB

As Table 4 shows humor has a strong influence on OCB with a significant path coefficient at 0.68.

## 6. Conclusion

Organizational citizenship behavior has become one of the most investigated subjects in the field of organizational behavior in recent years. The main objective of this research was to determine the effects of humor on OCB. In this research, it is hypothesized that employees who have sense of humor would be more engaged in OCBs. The finding showed that the “sense of humor in stressful conditions”, “sense of humor in social relations” and “enjoyment of humor” (with a significant coefficient at 0.56, 0.27 and 0.39) had a significant effect on OCB and humor influences on OCB with a significant path coefficient at 0.68. The result of this study showed that humor can be considered as a predictor of OCB.

This research creates an important implication for organizational practice. The results of this study state that having a sense of humor is a powerful way to enhance OCBs. Creating a humorous workplace is an important factor that must be considered by leaders of organizations so based on the research results we suggest that managers pay attention to enhance employee’s humor because of useful outcomes of it.

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