

Leader Humor and its double-edged effects, a Conservation of Resources Theory Perspective

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Abstract

Humor in the workplace is generally regarded as beneficial and highly valued. Nevertheless, scholars have pointed out that Leader Humor (LH) may not always bring about the expected outcomes. This study considers LH as a two-edged sword and directs to examine both its positive and negative sides. Based on the Conservation of Resources Theory, the current study elaborates on the beneficial and detrimental paths of LH on employees' emotional and psychological outcomes. I introduce two employees' emotion constructs to explain the process of resources generated and accumulated from LH experience and influence employee's psychological state. The results showed support for the proposed hypotheses and confirm the indirect effect of LH on employee outcomes via both beneficial and detrimental paths. By doing so, this study complements existing literature by providing an overarched picture of the LH's double-sided effect and thus contributes to the Humor literature.

Keywords: Leader Affiliative Humor, Leader Aggressive Humor, Vitality, Emotional dissonance, PsyCap, Conservation of Resource Theory

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Introduction

Humor behaviors are ubiquitous activities that occur in all kinds of social activities. The sense of humor is believed to be inherited in human-being and their interactions (Tabea & Christine, 2017). Engaging in humor behaviors is considered an important aspect of social interaction as well as necessary for an individual's psychological health (R. A. Martin & Ford, 2018). Studies have found the positive outcome of workplace humor such as reducing worker's tension, enhancing the interpersonal relationship, commitment and enabling more creative thinking and problem-solving (C. D. Cooper, Kong, & Crossley, 2018; Pundt & Herrmann, 2015; Pundt & Venz, 2017; Yam, Christian, Wei, Liao, & Nai, 2018). Nevertheless, researchers also pointed out that leader humor may be a two-edged sword which may bring about both beneficial and harmful effects. Neves and Karagonlar (2020) observed that certain types of leader humor are associated with employee's deviant behavior such as stealing or being late from work. Leader humor also prompts unfavorable consequences if the jokes are viewed as inappropriate or threatening (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). The inconsistent outcomes signify that the different uses of humor will generate varying results and thus promote a need for distinguishing each humor type and its distinct effects. As a result, recent researches have increasingly adopted the LH categorization introduced by R. A. Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir (2003). Accordingly, LH is classified into four types and are characterized as positive or negative, and interpersonal or intrapersonal focused. While the majority of the current humor research focuses on positive humor, few studies have attended to the negative humor's effect. A possible explanation is that humor traditionally has been viewed as an optimistic and cheerful construct (Robert, Dunne, & Iun, 2016). Scholars, therefore, have urged

more studies to explore an overall picture of leader humor rather than examine LH one-sidedly (Gockel & Vetter, 2017; Pundt & Herrmann, 2015). To bridge this gap, the current study is intended to provide a complete picture of LH's ambidextrous influences. I attend previous studies and examine the positive and negative LH's impact on the employees in the workplace.

Humor in the workplace has been observed and explained from various theories' points of view. Researchers have based on the social exchange theory, broaden and build theory, and affection theory to explain the linkage between leader humor and employee outcomes. Nevertheless, all of which sorely attend on the desired side of humor and overlook its possible detrimental path. This limits our understanding of how the negative type of humor may affect the receivers. Separated from other theories, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory asserts individuals' both resources lost and resources gain processes. Thus, COR theory fits well into the current study and is able to explain both the benefit and detrimental side of LH. Therefore I derive from COR theory and propose a more integrated framework of both positive and negative LH consequences on employee emotions and psychological state at work.

The current study is directed to answer the following research questions: Do different types of humor create different effects on employees? If so, through which mechanisms those humor types influence employees' outcomes? How does COR theory help explain the phenomenon? Thus, the study's contribution to the literature is twofold. First, while the majority of past research paid attention to leader humor as a unitary construct, I attend to its two sides in the current research. I specifically portray two workplaces' states of emotion as the results of these different types of humor. Instead of considering general emotions (for example anger, sadness, joyful, etc), this study is among the first to introduce workplace emotions as the outcome of LH. Thus the current research contributes to the understanding of humor and emotions in the workplace. Furthermore, as the

majority of past humor research focused on employee behavioral performance, the current study's pay attention to how humor affects employee Psycap, and thus enhance the understanding on employee's mental health at work.

Second, the current research draws from COR theory and proposes two paths of employees' resource gain/loss spirals. I contend that the positive/negative encounter with leader humor will either generate or consume employee psychological resources. This further leads to a cycle of resource gain/loss and determines employee's PsyCap. In so doing, I also answer for the call to employ COR theory to examine the ambidextrous characteristics of leader humor (C. D. Cooper et al., 2018). Thus, the current study is among the pioneers in examining leader humor from the COR theory perspective and paves the path for integrating COR theory in the humor literature.

Theoretical overview and hypotheses development

Leader Humor

Humor is a universal trait that exists in every culture, transcending any language, geography, and time. Humor has been linked to several mental and physical health benefits. Earlier researches declared that laughter, accompanied by uplifting emotional states, promotes helpful endocrine changes, and increases the immune system (R. A. Martin, 2004; McCreaddie & Wiggins, 2009). In the workplace, humor is believed to decrease depression, anxiety, and stress, while enhancing individual moods, and life satisfaction (Celso, Ebener, & Burkhead, 2003; Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, & Viswesvaran, 2012). Nevertheless, there is no consensus in a clear definition of workplace humor across the studies. As a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon, humor does not lend itself to a single generalized definition (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). A great amount of

effort has been spent to operationalize and clearly define humor in the past 20 years to gain more thorough knowledge about such phenomena (Mathew & Vijayalakshmi, 2017).

Although the definition of humor is somewhat ambiguous, it is generally categorized into two main types: humor behavior and humor traits (Kong, Cooper, & Sosik, 2019). Psychologists define humor behaviors as mutually amusing verbal communication that is internally aimed at a target (C. D. Cooper, 2005; Lynch, 2002). On the other hand, the term sense of humor, a trait-like characteristic refers to the individual differences in behaviors, experiences, affects, attitudes and abilities relating to amusement, laughter, jocularly, and so on (R. Martin, 2003; R. A. Martin, 2001). Considering the workplace communication's characteristics as implicit and mixed-signaled, the present research contends that one's humor behaviors are observed more easily than his or her humor traits. Thus, this study treats humor as a set of behaviors that are directed toward others and regards the terms "humor" and "humor behavior" to be synonymous throughout the entire paper.

Given that leaders at the workplace have greater authority and in a higher hierarchical position, they are more likely to initiate the humor behaviors and set the humorous tone to the daily conversation (Yam et al., 2018). Leader humor (LH) is defined as the extent to which a leader expresses a set of humor behaviors in verbal or nonverbal format, and ranges from instinctive humor to the deliberate spreading of funny stories and jokes, toward a specific follower (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Leader humor, in general, is believed to enhance employee affective commitment, psychological well-being, trust, reduce burnout, increase creativity and performance (C. D. Cooper et al., 2018; Hu & Luo, 2020; Karakowsky et al., 2020; Kim, Lee, & Wong, 2016; Peng et al., 2020). Thus, the current research focuses on the leader's humor as it may cause more significant influences in the workplace context. I conceptualize the leader as the giver and

employees as the receiver and regard the terms “employee” and “follower”, “leader” and “supervisor” to be synonymous throughout this research.

A recent development in humor literature is that instead of seeing leader humor as a unitary construct, scholars have categorized it into positive and negative types. This classification enables studies to explore humor’s beneficial as well as detrimental facets. To define it further, R. A. Martin et al. (2003) depicted a 2x2 model of humor, which divided humor construct into intra-psychic or interpersonal-focused, with positive and negative effects. These four styles include Affiliative humor (positive, other-focused), Self-enhancing humor (positive, self-focused), Aggressive humor (negative, other-focused), Self-defeating humor (negative, self-focused).

Affiliative humor refers to the tendency to joke around with others, say witty things, laugh with others, and/or amuse others while self-enhancing humor is a tendency to maintain a humorous outlook on life and uses humor in emotional regulation and coping. On the other hand, aggressive humor contains compulsive expressions of humor without regard for the effects on others such as sarcastic remarks, teasing, or otherwise using humor to criticize or manipulate others. Finally, a self-deprecating humor individual is likely to use humor in an excessively self-disparaging and ingratiating way such as allowing oneself to be the victim of others’ jokes or using humor as a form of defensive denial to conceal negative feelings (R. A. Martin et al., 2003).

In contrast with intra-psychic focused humor, interpersonal-focused humor is believed to have the potential of affecting social interactions. Empirical researches have shown support for leader affiliative and aggressive humor’s influence on LMX, trust, and interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Guenzi, Rangarajan, Chaker, & Sajtos, 2019; Pundt & Herrmann, 2015; Tremblay, 2021). Leader affiliative and aggressive humor prompt to externally influencing others

rather than build up personal stress-coping or individual depression. This study, therefore, focuses on these two types and examines their interpersonal influence on the followers.

According to R. A. Martin et al. (2003) , affiliative humor refers to humor that enhances social interaction, which is non-threatening and non-hostile. Leader affiliative humor is believed to create an optimistic atmosphere at work. It subsequently builds up the followers' psychological capital, work engagement, OCB, and performance (Tremblay & Gibson, 2016; Wijewardena et al., 2017). Scholars have also pointed out that affiliative humor contributes to healthy and rewarding interpersonal relationships at work, strengthening one's trust and the relationship with his/her leader (Neves & Karagonlar, 2020; Pundt & Herrmann, 2015; Robert et al., 2016). On the contrary, aggressive humor is viewed as intentionally offending and expressing one's superiority. High aggressive humor is also associated with ignorance towards others' feelings (Howland & Simpson, 2014; Pundt & Herrmann, 2015). As discussed above, leaders usually set the expression tone of humor in the organization. Thus, aggressive humor can be a tool for the leader to show his or her hierarchical status (C. D. Cooper, 2005). Earlier researches demonstrated that a leader's aggressive humor may detrimentally influence employees inside and outside of the workplace such as decrease performances, increase employee's internet addiction, problem drinking, and smoking (Huo, Lam, & Chen, 2012; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). I thus contend that employees may exhibit either positive or negative emotions depending on the type of humor which the leader adopted (Wijewardena et al., 2017). Employees who feel cheerful and happy when experiencing leader humor may perceive comfort and induce positive emotion beside their leaders. On the other hand, employees who find the jokes from leaders are offensive or aggressive tend to feel intense and emotionally drained (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

Affiliative humor is an interpersonal-focused type of humor that intends to attract others or enhance social interaction (Pundt & Herrmann, 2015). According to Long and Graesser (1988), joking is a narrative tool that helps leaders to communicate with employees. Leaders who use affiliative humor are appealing to employees with benign jokes and reduce interpersonal tensions during communication (R. A. Martin et al., 2003; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). The current study depicts that employees who experience such interaction tend to possess happiness, feeling bursts of energy, and further enjoy vitality at work based on two reasons.

First, given that the leader is not obligated to initiate the humorous interaction, leader affiliative humor signals that the leaders are spending effort to communicate and building relationships with the followers. The presence of leader affiliative humor implies that the working atmosphere is friendly and conclusive, therefore stimulating the feeling of safety at work. Additionally, the joy from the benign joke and interaction act as a relief and serve as short breaks during work hours, through which employees can recover from the pressure endured from the work and fulfill their psychological needs. Both feelings of psychological safety and stress recovery conditions play critical roles in forming a state of vitality at work ((Kark & Carmeli, 2009).

Second, being focused at work is psychologically demanding. As employees are constantly looking for solutions for work problems or handling the assigned tasks, they are facing the threat of losing personal resources in the process. As discussed earlier, leader affiliative humor is a kind of interpersonal resource which is transmitted from leader to members. The exchange of benign jokes and moments of relaxation can be the source of resource replenishment for employees. In other words, leaders' affiliative humor, as a socio-emotional interpersonal resource, can replenish employee's lost resources during work. The affiliative humor thus helps maintain a state of vitality which enables the employees to be awake and energetic at work. R. A. Martin et al. (2003) also

stated that employees who are exposed to leader affiliative humor tend to have positive emotions such as happiness and relaxation at the workplace. Such resources (in the form of positive emotion) were transferred from leader to follower via the humor exchange in the workplace.

Furthermore, affective theories of humor indicate that leader positive humor operates by inducing positive emotion (C. Cooper, 2008). A vast number of prior researches have relied on this emotion-related logic to suggest that humor drew forth favorable emotion (Baron, 1984; Carnevale & Isen, 1986; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). In line with prior studies, this study maintains that leader affiliative humor, as a type of positive humor, will induce member's positive emotions. Therefore, I hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Leader's affiliative humor will be positively related to employee's vitality at work.

According to Nix, Ryan, Manly, and Deci (1999), vitality refers to a kind of positive and vivid feeling which is marked by surges of energy. Employees experience vitality as a type of mood, with a feeling of alive, awake, alert, and bursts of energy (Christianson, Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, & Grant, 2005; Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). On the other hand, employee PsyCap is defined as a positive psychological state of development and is characterized by having confidence, optimism, hope, and resilience (Luthans, 2002; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007). PsyCap is differentiated from other human and social capitals by emphasizing developing toward the possible self, aiming at improving performance in an organization (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, & Combs, 2006). PsyCap is considered as a result of the long-term induction of personal psychological resources that are intra-generated rather than being influenced by outside factors. Thus, based on COR theory, the current study proposes that employee vitality at work will be related to the generation and accumulation of employee PsyCap.

According to COR, employees are motivated to invest more of their resources to protect, maintain and gain more resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Furthermore, the resource gain spiral derived from COR theory holds that individuals with more resources are better positioned for resource gains. In line with this statement, high vitality employees are more likely to invest their resources (e.g. effort and energy) and actively seek information or guidance from others in their workplace. Employees who enjoy vitality at work tend to be more awake and aware of the available resources, obtainable skills, and knowledge necessary for their tasks. High vitality employees are inclined to invest greater amounts of resources into their actions such as spending more time and effort in seeking information or learning new skills. Thus, their processes of gaining more resources (e.g. know-how) could be more efficient than those with lower vitality at work. Such information, know-how, and the confidence of those successful attempts will gradually induce employee's confidence (self-efficacy), and maintain their positive attitude toward success (optimism). The processes also provide employee experience in handling difficult situations at work, enabling them to be flexible while pursuing the goals. Furthermore, the bursts of energy from experiencing vitality enable the employee to constantly try on new methods, while persisting in achieving the goal (hope). Finally, inspiring emotions such as cheerfulness, as part of the vitality feeling, can help one rebound from his/her stress and strive for better results (resilience) (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). In short, high vitality employees are more likely to accumulate personal psychological resources and develop PsyCap.

On the other hand, low vitality employees are prone to preserve their energy and effort rather than spend them willingly. Low vitality individuals possess insufficient resources and tend to wait for allocated resources or seek through slower progress to preserve their current energy. As a result, they are more passive in finding additional resources or gaining more know-how at

work and are less effective in gathering and accumulating PsyCap (Dagar, Pandey, & Navare, 2020). Based on the established arguments, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: Employee vitality at work will be positively related to employee PsyCap.

Past researches have established the linkage between leader positive humor and employee emotion states as well as the induction of positive emotions on employee PsyCap (Carmona-Halty, Salanova, Llorens, & Schaufeli, 2019; Goswami, Nair, Beehr, & Grossenbacher, 2016; Li, Dai, Chin, & Rafiq, 2019; Siu, Cheung, & Lui, 2015; Wijewardena et al., 2017). The current study directs to provide a complete picture of how leader positive humor transfers its effect to employee PsyCap via the bridge of employee emotions. Furthermore, the majority of past research has attended to general emotions such as happiness, cheerfulness, and anger rather than specifically considering the distinction of emotions at work. To bridge those gaps in current literature, the current study is based on COR theory and proposes the mediation roles of employee vitality, a type of positive emotion at work.

As discussed earlier, leader affiliative humor is transmitted in the form of socio-emotional resources, which are converted to an employee's energy and positive mood at work. As such, followers who experience leader affiliative humor will be aroused and induced with surges of energy. According to COR theory's spiral of resources gain/loss, there are reciprocal effects among resources. In other words, initial resource gain may lead to the generation of other resources (Hobfoll, 2011). Furthermore, it's suggested that employee well-being resources (e.g. vitality) and enrichment resources (e.g. personal psychological resources) can have spiral gaining effects (Hakanen, Peeters, & Perhoniemi, 2011). In line with this argument, I assert that employees acquired psychological resources through leader initiated affiliative jokes will be transformed into employees' mindfulness and energy, which subsequently enable employees to be more engaged

and focused at work. These resources enhance employee's capability of finding additional resources for their jobs. The successful attempts will generate and accumulate employee's psychological resources.

In contrast, employees who receive fewer resources via lower leader affiliative humor prefer to conserve their resources rather than willing to spend them on other activities. Since they experience little joy, relaxation, and safety signals from the leader, they rarely experience uplifting emotions and bursts of energy. According to COR theory, employees who receive lesser resources are less effective in generating and obtaining other resources. Thus, employees who encounter low affiliative humor are more likely to prioritize their resources in merely completing the task or waiting for guidance rather than actively seeking additional resources. This passiveness hinders the process of generating psychology resources and impedes the accumulation of employee PsyCap. Based on the above argument, this study postulates that leader affiliative humor will indirectly affect employee PsyCap via employee vitality.

Hypothesis 3: Employee vitality will mediate the indirect effect of leader affiliative humor on employee PsyCap.

Aggressive humor is referred to as having an intention to mock, ridicule, or put people down, criticize and tease others for their mistakes (R. Martin, 2003). Aggressive humor is deemed as hostile behaviors which convey disapproval, contempt, and hurt others (Pundt & Herrmann, 2015; Yam et al., 2018). Aggressive humor has also been reported to be used as a means for emphasizing one's status in an organization and securing a leader's power over his or her subordinates (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Indeed, past research has empirically shown that leader aggressive humor signals employee the existence of hierarchical order in the workplace because the sarcasm and ridicule are often initiated by the more powerful party (Kim et al., 2016).

Employees who are exposed to leader aggressive humor, as the victim, may feel awkward or humiliated in front of the leader and other coworkers. Nevertheless, due to the awareness of hierarchy status differences, employees who are exposed to aggressive humor are prone to endure mockery and disapproval jokes rather than react discontentedly toward their leaders (Molino et al., 2016; Wegge, Van Dick, & Von Bernstorff, 2010). Thus, this study hypothesizes that leader aggressive humor will incite the followers' emotional suspension, and induce a state of emotional dissonance in the followers.

According to COR theory, people are motivated to obtain, retain, protect and foster resources that they value (Hobfoll, 1989; Smelser & Baltes, 2001). Given that employees depend on the leaders for resources, the action of talkback, confrontation, or even showing the disagreement expression toward the leaders will put the followers in disadvantageous positions (Langan-Fox, Cooper, & Klimoski, 2007). This study further contends that emotion controlling is one form of the employees' effort to protect their resources (e.g. leader's information, opportunities for promotion) when suffering victimization and humiliation from leader aggressive humor. Thus, employees who sustain leader aggressive humor tend to prioritize psychological resources to put on acceptable reactions to be accepted by leaders. Employees may choose to retain their emotion and play along (such as laughing with the aggressive joke) even when it is against their value to please the leader (Huo et al., 2012). This ensures the employee's survival from job insecurity, chances of attainment of resources and opportunities of promotion (Hewlin, Kim, & Song, 2016).

Aside from fearfulness, employees may choose to inhibit their opposite reactions to leader aggressive humor on account of being professional at work. Being grounded in the desired attitude in social interaction within the workplace, employees prefer to put on an appropriate emotional

display and avoid making a fuss or inconvenience when triggered by leader aggressive humor (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). According to theory of emotional labor, the more frequently the employees need to put on the desired emotion, the higher the chance they develop the cognitive awareness of the difference between their feelings and exhibit emotions (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Hence, I expect that leader's aggressive humor will trigger an employee's tendency of constraining emotion and lead to emotional dissonance, which is the state of the discrepancy between felt and displayed emotions. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 4: Leader aggressive humor will be positively related to emotional dissonance.

Throughout the earlier discussion, emotional dissonance is portrayed as a state of emotional dysfunction while PsyCap is described as a resource pool that results from a long-term induction of self-accumulated resources. To be clarified, this study considers employee emotional dissonance as a psychological state of the cognitive incongruence, rather than a magnification of stress nor the behavior of surface acting. This study is based on COR theory and proposes that employees' enduring emotional dissonance will be negatively related to the generation and accumulation of PsyCap, a type of positive personal-psychological resource.

Employees who undergo emotional dissonance are having the incongruence between the felt and displayed emotion (Bakker & Heuven, 2006). They are prone to spend psychological resources on the tasks of concealing the actual feeling and carry on the looks they desire. As such, employees who suffer from high emotional dissonance are predisposed to lose more resources to balance such cognitive dissonance compared to those who experience lower emotional dissonance. COR theory posits that initial resource losses lead to future resource losses, which is referred to as the spiral of resource losses (Hobfoll, 2001). Once the employees prioritize their resources on the task of hiding their actual emotions, few resources are left to generate or seek other forms of

resources. The employees, therefore, are less efficient in maintaining and expanding their psychological resources for self-improvement.

Indeed, employees who engage in emotional dissonance are facing the threat of losing more resources. High emotional dissonance employees tend to be more passive as their strategy is to adapt to the psychological disproportion. They are less inclined to anticipate the future nor believe that they can create success, therefore possess lower hope for the future. Moreover, individuals may feel desperate when unable to act in line with their core beliefs, values or unable to be with their core self at work (Emmerich & Rigotti, 2017; Song, Wang, & Zhao, 2020). Scholars have described that employees who are unable to be true to themselves in terms of emotions and behaviors are less likely to generate higher PsyCap (Song et al., 2020). On the other hand, employees who experience lower emotional dissonance are supposed to spend fewer resources on self-control and are more effective in maintaining and expanding their PsyCap. Based on the above argument, I argue that:

Hypothesis 5: Employee's emotional dissonance will be negatively related to employee's PsyCap.

I have postulated the relationship between leader aggressive humor and employee emotional dissonance as well as the effect of emotional dissonance on employee PsyCap. Derived from COR theory's principles, this study further proposes that employees who endure leader aggressive humor will spend their resources on putting on the desired emotions rather than exhibit the feeling as they wish. The process of losing resources will hinder the process of gathering and accumulating personal psychological resources, hence impeding one's PsyCap.

Leader aggressive humor, as being discussed above, may be intentionally used to remind employees of the power distance and status difference between the dyad. When employees perceive the aggressive humor from their leader, they tend to conceal the resistance and put on the desired displays to please the leader. As the subordinates act along and keep their professional emotions at work, they must invest more psychological resources to maintain the desired looks and suppress the unpleasant emotions they feel.

The resources loss spiral, which derived from COR theory, proposes that when individuals find themselves in chronically stressful conditions, they tend to lose the chance to acquire additional resources that are necessary for their future development (Hobfoll, 2011). When employees are spending resources on the task of emotionally pretending, their focus is on day-by-day basic tasks rather than anticipating and hoping for the future. Constantly being threatened by the possibilities of resource loss, employees who frequently endure leader aggressive humor may suffer from low self-confidence. They also are more vulnerable to further pressure and demand, which lower their resilience. Consequently, I assert that leader aggressive humor will be indirectly and negatively related to employee PsyCap via employee emotional dissonance.

Hypothesis 6: Employee's emotional dissonance will mediate the negative indirect effect of leader Aggressive humor on employee's PsyCap.

The research framework adopted in the present study is shown in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Method

Samples and procedures

The data was collected from full-time employees and supervisors in a dyad structure via multiple-time surveys. The potential participants were contacted via alumni and working networks. After explaining the procedure and assuring anonymity to the connection who showed interest, I sent the online-survey link together with an assigned code to the participant via email. At the first wave of data collection, I asked the respondents to provide their demographic information, Leader Aggressive Humor and Leader Affiliate Humor.

The data collection processes were designed to address the possible common method bias of cross-sectional, single-sourced methods. Prior research suggested that the interactions between the dyads need at least two weeks to manifest their effect (Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993; Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Ilies, 2009). Thus I proceeded with the second wave of data collecting 4 weeks after the first one to minimize the possible bias resulting from the cross-sectional data collection method. I asked the respondents at the second wave of data collection to provide information on their Vitality at work, Emotional Dissonance, PsyCap and their leaders' demographic information.

Measures

While the current study is conducted in Taiwan, the original scales are all in English. Therefore I employed the back-translation process to ensure the validity of the scales (Brislin, 1980). For all the following scales, participants were required to rate using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'Never' or "Strongly disagree" to 7 'Always' or "Strongly agree".

Leader's aggressive humor and leader affiliative humor were assessed by the scale developed by R. A. Martin et al. (2003). The employees were asked to rate their leader's degree of affiliative and aggressive humor. An example item of affiliative humor is: "My leader does not

have to work very hard at making other people laugh – he/she seems to be a naturally humorous person.”. Example items of aggressive humor include “When telling jokes or saying funny things, my leader is usually not very concerned about how other people are taking it”.

Follower’s vitality was assessed using 5 items from Kark and Carmeli (2009)’s developed scales. An example includes: “When I am at work, I feel mentally strong.”. Emotional dissonance was measured by a seven items scale from Shih, Jiang, Klein, and Wang (2013). An example item is “In interacting with other people in the office, I must suppress irritation I may feel”. Finally, employees were instructed to rate their PsyCap. To develop a more compact questionnaire, this study adopts a 12 items based PsyCap scale which was developed by Luthans and Youssef (2007). Accordingly, PsyCap consists of four dimensions, namely hope, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy. In this study, I select the three highest factor loading items in each category to measure the employee PsyCap. The literature suggests that PsyCap as a higher-order factor would have a synergy effect and greatly influence the outcome (Hobfoll, 2002; Luthans et al., 2007). The current research thus follows this direction and treats PsyCap as a single dimension, higher-order construct.

Individual demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and education, organization tenure were shown to be related to employee emotional and psychological states in the workplace (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Evans, Slaughter, Ellis, and Rivin (2019) additionally posited that gender affects how one assesses others’ humor behavior. Therefore, I controlled for these variables in our analyses. Gender was coded with 0 (male) and 1 (female). Age was recorded in years while education was measured by asking for the highest degree obtained (0 is high school or below, 1 is bachelor’s degree, 2 is master’s degree and 3 is higher). Past research also pointed out that individuals tend to use humor within their same-gender group to create solidarity (Hay, 2001).

Thus, this study controls for leader-follower gender similarity. Dyads that have the same gender were coded 1, meanwhile 0 represents gender dissimilarity.

Results

As described above, the data was collected from working employees via multiple-time surveys. The correspondents are full-time employed workers in Taiwan. 170 volunteers were recruited in the first wave of data collection. There were a total of 152 responding to our second wave's survey. Excluding incomplete answers, the final data consists of 143 participants, obtaining a response rate of 84%.

Of the participants, 62 (43.4%) were men. 47 respondents (32.8%) belonged to the age group of 20 to 29 years, 37 (25.7%) were 30 to 39 years old, 39 (27.3%) were 40 to 49 years old and 20 (14%) were older than 50 years old. Meanwhile, 91 (63.6%) of the leaders were men. About one-fifth (38 individuals) of the leaders were 30 to 39 years old, 50 (35%) of them were between the ages of 40 and 49, and 53 leaders, which accumulated for 37%, were older than 50 years old. The average time the pair has worked together was 3.5 years, ranging from 1 to 15 years.

I conducted Cronbach's alpha test to examine the internal consistency of all items belonging to a focal construct that was involved in this study. The Cronbach's alpha is suggested to be acceptable at 0.7, while the item to total correlation should be greater and 0.5 to demonstrate the adequate reliability (Cortina, 1993). The results demonstrate that all items loaded significantly on their intended constructs. To test the validity of the theoretical framework, all of the constructs were put into one model for CFA testing. According to the results in Table 1, the proposed model with 5 factors (model 1) was the best fitted into the data when compared with alternative models

such as 4 factors models or 3 factors model. This reconfirms the distinctiveness of the constructs involved in the current study.

Insert Table 1 about here

Non-response bias is the situation in which people who do not participate in a research survey have opinions that are systematically different from those who participated. The standard method to assess non-response bias is to compare the early and late responses. Both Levene's test and t-test of all the considered constructs are insignificant. This demonstrates that both groups (early and late response) were indifferent and thus the possible non-response bias is not severe in the current study.

To further reconfirm the validity of the dataset, I compared each construct's square root AVE with all other possible correlations. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the square root AVE for each construct should be greater than all other correlations involving the focal construct to prove the construct's discrimination validity. The results in Table 2 depict that all variables' AVE square roots are higher than all the correlation values between itself and other variables. Thus the data was assured to have good discriminant validity and is best fitted in the theorized model.

Insert Table 2 about here

This study employed linear regression in SPSS to test the direct effect of Leader Affiliative humor on Vitality, and Vitality on Employee PsyCap (i.e. H1 and H2). Results in Table 3, model 1 demonstrate that Leader Affiliative humor positively related to employee Vitality ($\beta = .18, p < .05$). Similarly, Vitality is shown to have a significant and positive effect on employee PsyCap (model 2 Table 3, $\beta = .32, p < .00$). Thus these results support H1 and H2.

Model 3 of Table 3 demonstrated that Leader Aggressive Humor is significant and positively related to employee Emotional Dissonance ($\beta = .30, p < .00$). Likewise, Emotional Dissonance negatively and significantly predicts employee PsyCap (model 4 Table 4.14, $\beta = -.36, p < .00$). Thus Hypothesis 4 and 5 are supported.

Insert Table 3 about here

To test the indirect effect of Leader Affiliative humor and Aggressive humor on employee PsyCap, this study conducted bootstrapping with sample size of 10000, using PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2017). The Bootstrapping results in Table 4 reveal that Leader Affiliative humor positively influences employee PsyCap via employee Vitality ($\beta = .04, CI [.01; .07]$). Likewise, Leader Aggressive humor is found to have negative indirect effects on employee PsyCap ($\beta = -.08, CI [-.15; -.03]$). Thus Hypothesis 3 and 6 are supported. The path model results are shown in Figure 2.

Insert Table 4 about here

Insert Figure 2 about here

DISCUSSION

The current study mainly discussed and explored the effects of leader humor on employee PsyCap via the mediating effects of employee vitality and emotional dissonance. The data obtained from 143 employees showed support for the direct and indirect effects of Leader Humor on employee emotional and Psycap.

The current study derives from humor literature and Conservation of Resource theory and makes two important contributions to the current literature. First, while a majority of past research portrayed Leader Humor as a unitary construct, or mainly focused on the positive side of humor, the current study attends to both sides of Leader Humor by including both leader Affiliative and Aggressive humor in the research framework. Although scholars have acknowledged that humor may be categorized into four distinguished types, little effort has been spent to understand the effect of negative humor. This is due to the notion that humor is generally considered cheerful and brings about positive outcomes. Nevertheless, by exploring both sides of leader humor, the research framework provides a systematic view of the construct and its distinguished effects in the workplace. This study further contributes to the literature by examining the effect of leader Humor on employees' psychological health at work, i.e. PsyCap. As the majority of past Humor research focused on employee behavioral performance, the current study's findings would enhance the understanding on employee's mental health at work.

Second, to shed light on the process of how leader humor's two-sided effect asserts its influence on employee behavior, this study is among the first to root from Conservation of Resource theory to propose the two paths of employees' gain and loss spiral. Separated from other theories adopted to explain the Humor effect, COR theory addresses individual's both paths of resources loss and gain. Several past researches have adopted COR theory to explain the path of resource gain and loss simultaneously (Neves, 2018; Witt & Carlson, 2006). The COR theory fits well into the two-sided effect of Leader Humor and is able to explain its' beneficial and deleterious effects. I argued that the experiences of positive humor initiate a cycle of resource gain via employee positive emotion at work and accumulated PsyCap, which subsequently enhance employee's proactive behavior. On the other hand, the encounter with negative humor will occupy

the employee with a cycle of resource loss, starting with the experience of negative emotion at work and the insufficient PsyCap, which finally hinders the employee from participating in proactive behaviors. Thus this study answers the scholars' call to be a pioneer in adapting COR theory to explain the ambidextrous nature of leader humor (C. D. Cooper et al., 2018).

By adopting two emotional constructs: Vitality and Emotional Dissonance, and employee pool of resources PsyCap, the current study further clarifies the paths by which Leader Humor influences employee behaviors. Although past researches have considered Leader humor's resource transfer effect, none of them have investigated what type of resources, how they are formed and transferred to the others. This study proposes Vitality and Emotional Dissonance as two paths of resources gain and loss, and employee PsyCap as the resources pool, to explore and illustrate the process of forming, transferring, and accumulating/depleting resources. The results demonstrated support for all of the direct and indirect effect hypotheses. This demonstrates support for the current research's proposal of separating the process of resources forming and transferring, and thus contributing to the Humor literature.

Practical Implications

In addition to the discussed theoretical contributions, the current study's findings also have several important managerial implications. First, the findings show that different humor styles affect employees' psychological and behavioral reactions differently. Thus, managers should be aware of their humor style and tune their humor interactions according to each situation in order to maximize the benefit of humor as a management tool. To be more specific, benign and harmless jokes can be used to lift up the workplace, engage employees in energetic states and enhance the

positive outcomes, while teasing and attacking humor should be limited to avoid the situation of employee's emotional imbalance.

Limitation and Future research

The present paper conducts a 4 weeks-lagged survey with two sources of data: leader and employee. It thus extends scholarly understanding of the dual-sided effect of Leader Humor on the employees. Although the current study has several new contributions to the humor literature, there remains a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. Nevertheless, I believe that those limitations may pave the path and provide insightful suggestions for future research. In the next section I will discuss the current study's limitations and derive future research suggestions.

First, the data was collected from a single source, which processes the risk of CMV bias. Although our CMV results showed that the bias was not severe in the current study, future studies are encouraged to employ other research designs to address this potential bias. Additionally, data collection was confined to Taiwan, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Thus future research may account for underlying factors which may influence the resources in samples from other countries or cultures. For instance, past research has suggested that employees may exhibit greater humor behaviors in low power distance cultures or organizations (Lu, Martin, Usova, & Galinsky, 2019). Thus, it may be that employees in low power distance cultures may appreciate leader humor more than those in high power distance cultures. Future research should explore the boundary effect of the organization culture and employees' perception of the power distance on the usage of humor in the workplace.

Second, the current research collected the employee's emotions and PsyCap at the same time in second wave data collection. Even though the research has deliberately collected the data

through a time-lagged survey, it cannot guarantee the absence of common method bias. Furthermore, several past researches suggested that employee PsyCap may be a source of employee's feeling of vitality at work and able to reduce employee's stress or burnout (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009; Kataki, Rezaei, & Gorji, 2013; Liu, Chang, Fu, Wang, & Wang, 2012; Moyer, Aziz, & Wuensch, 2017; Wang, Liu, Wang, & Wang, 2012). Although the data were collected through multiple-wave surveys, the study cannot rule out the reversible causal effect of employee PsyCap on employee vitality and emotional dissonance. Thus, future research may adopt a longitudinal approach to clarify alternative causality.

Third, the current study draws on Conservation of Resource theory to posit the two paths of Leader Humor assert its effect on employees' psychological states and subsequently engage in proactive behavior. I postulated that the positive/negative encounter (by experience leader Affiliative/Aggressive humor) will generate or consume the resources under the form of emotion (i.e. vitality and emotional dissonance). The generated resources will be accumulated into employee PsyCap. Future research may explore other forms of resources which are generated and transferred by leader humor (e.g. perceived inclusiveness, emotional as information etc).

Finally, future studies should also seek to explain the dual-sides impact of leader humor on employees' outcome from different theoretical perspectives in order to complement the understanding of this influence. For instance, social exchange theory (SET) proposes that people generally like and appreciate those who invest into the relationship with them (Blau, 1964). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that employees who experience leader humor will return the favor by engaging in desired behaviors.

Conclusion

By applying Conservation of Resource Theory into Humor literature, this study has demonstrated how and when leader humor in the workplace influences employees' psychological states and behaviors. The study is one of the first to rigorously examine the dual-sided effects of humor under the lenses of Conservation of Resource Theory by introducing two forms of emotions and PsyCap as the accumulated resources generated by leader humor. Overall, the current study makes contributions to both humor literature and Conservation of Resources theory literature and has important theoretical and practical implications.

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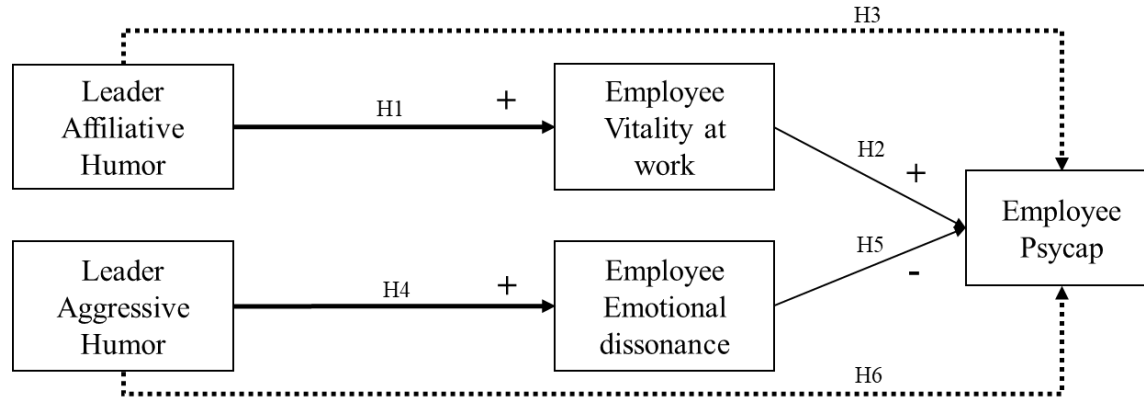
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Figure 1. Research Framework



Note: Dashed arrow indicates serial mediation effects.

Table 1. CFA Results – theoretical model and alternative models

CFA Results – theoretical model and alternative models

	Models	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMR	RMSEA
1	Theoretical model (5 factors)	1.16	.96	.95	.03	.09
2	4 factors model (Affiliative humor and vitality were combined)	1.45	.86	.85	.07	.09
3	4 factors model (Aggressive humor and Emotional dissonance were combined)	1.61	.87	.86	.07	.10
4	3 factors (Affiliative humor, vitality and Psycap were combined)	1.77	.83	.82	.07	.12

Table 2. Validity, mean, standard deviation, and correlation matrix.

		Cronbach's alpha	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Age		36.61	10.65										
2	Gender		.56	.49	-.35**									
3	Education		2.47	.74	.37**	-.22**								
4	Dyad tenure (months)		53.71	49.70	.44**	-.26**	.34**							
5	Gender Similarity		.50	.50	.23**	-.27**	.09	.01						
6	Leader Affiliative humor	.97	4.87	1.47	.08	-.23**	.24**	.11	.04	.89				
7	Leader Aggressive humor	.94	1.87	1.13	-.03	.17*	-.26**	-.15	-.10	-.05	.82			
8	Vitality	.97	5.99	1.05	.35**	-.24**	.35**	.19*	.29**	.26**	-.15	.94		
9	Emotion dissonance	.91	3.05	1.02	-.27**	.22**	-.14	-.15	-.18*	-.13	.32**	-.24**	.80	
10	Employee PsyCap	.94	6.04	.88	.40**	-.24**	.27**	.18*	.10	.18*	-.18*	.43**	-.44**	.80

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Regression Results

	Vitality	PsyCap	Emotional Dissonance	PsyCap
Control variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	.20*	.28*	-.24*	.27*
Gender	-.01	-.09	.07	-.06
Education	.20	.06	.05	.14
Dyad Tenure	.00	-.05	.00	-.05
Gender Similarity	.21	-.08	-.08	-.06
Independent variables				
Leader Affiliative humor	.18*			
Leader Aggressive humor			.30***	
Vitality		.32***		
Emotional Dissonance				-.36***
PsyCap				
R^2	.26	.27	.19	.31
Adjusted R^2	.23	.24	.15	.28
F	5.42	15.12	14.12	22.36
P-value	.02	.00	.00	.00
D-W	2.03	1.93	2.31	1.69

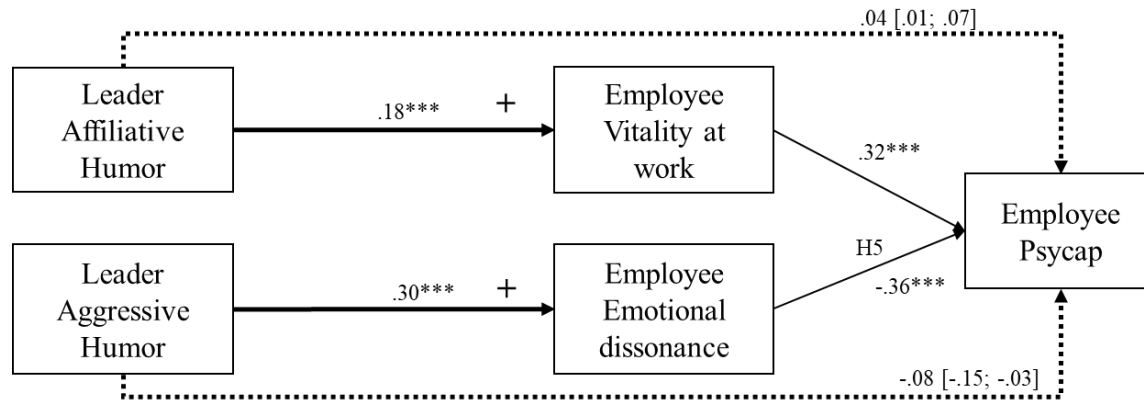
Note: $N=143$; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4. Mediation bootstrapping Results

Control variables	PsyCap					
	Coeff	LLCI	ULCI	Coeff	LLCI	ULCI
Age	.02	.01	.04	.03	.01	.05
Gender	-.15	-.45	.15	-.16	-.45	.14
Education	.15	-.05	.35	.13	-.07	.34
Dyad Tenure	-.00	-.00	.00	-.00	-.00	.00
Gender Similarity	-.03	-.31	.25	-.06	-.34	.22
Direct effect						
Leader Affiliative humor	.06	-.03	.16			
Leader Aggressive humor				-.11	-.23	.01
Indirect effect						
Leader Affiliative humor → Vitality → PsyCap	.04	.01	.07			
Leader Aggressive humor → Emotional Dissonance → PsyCap				-.08	-.15	-.03

Note: $N=143$; bootstrap sample size = 10,000

Figure 2. Path model of the research framework



Note: Dashed arrow indicates serial mediation effects. All lines are significant