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The Power, Necessity and Cohesion of Humor at Workplace

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ABSTRACT

This research will define humor and the language which creates humor. The cohesion of humor in workplaces among different job positions will be shown and some of the reasons that humor is used for will be discussed. The way it works in different places and situations is going to be explored. It will be clear to recognize its usefulness, effectiveness and the way it works through analyzing some examples.

KEYWORDS Humor, Work Place, Power, Necessity, Cohesion

1. Introduction

We are all exchanging humorous stories in our daily life for various purposes like entertainment, but usuallythe reasons we are joking for and the way humor works are not focused on. There are some reasons for joking and the way it works may change: that is to say cultures, characters and different jobs have different types of humor. All they are used in specific places by certain groups. It is believed by most people that human beings use humor because they see it as a part of life which means they recognize it as a necessity to live happily.

Most people can feel better after humorous talks or expressions. It is mainly used to gain an increase in the motivation to work more interestingly or willingly. Humor is sometimes used in a workplace to hide or eradicate the power differences because when the participants think that there is not a huge gap in their relations, they may feel more comfortable in their workplaces.

2. Definition and Language of Humor

To date, there is not a clear and universally accepted definition of humor (Gockel, 2007). According toRoss (1998), humor is something which makes people laugh; however, exceptions can be found like all other theories and definitions: for example, some individuals may argue that a humor is not funny which is found humorous by some others. People should be aware of where a humor can be used regarding cultures, norms and places. For example, different expectations are expected from universities and schools; so a humor made at a university may not have the same effectat a school (Roth ***et al.***, 2006). That is to say, a humor made at a university might be too advanced for the participants at a school to understand. It is worth mentioning that laugh can also be a sign of fear or embarrassment; examining the language of a specific humor is the only way to know what it means (Ross, 1998).

Language is a very important function in humor as it gives the power to humor (Nash, 1985). That is to say, there are many facts which make a statement to function as a humor like gestures, but language is one of the most important ones. It is language which constructs a humor in a statement; it makes a differenceto be laughed at by people. Ross (1988) demonstrates that humors, which are chosen to be analyzed, should be verbal; in other words they must be in written or spoken forms to analyze their languages.

3. Humor at Workplace

There are many reasons to use humor in a workplace; Morreall (1991) argues that humor is the purveyor of health, social relations and mental flexibilities. People have different sources of motivation in their work places; those sources of motivation depend on someone's interests towards the type ofjob (Recepoğlu***et al***., 2011). If people are interested in a job which they have, that will be very helpful in their career improvement (ibid). In other words, people can be cooperative in the creation of a proper working environment for themselves and their coworkers in case of working in a type of job which they possessed by choice. People will be humorous if they work in their interested fields and humor is a necessity in a work place to make good teams (ibid).In a humorous team, all members can work in an excellent harmony with each other.

Humor in a workplace is very important because it can increase managerial and organizational effectiveness (Lynch, 2010). Through its use, the workers and employees can own a higher motivation degree when they do their works: that is to say people would be motivated in a workplace in which humor is used. Duncan and Fiesal (1989) argue that humor reduces tension and increases social relations in a workplace. Humor is also strengthens the relations among co-workers; they become more relaxed through exchanging humorous words while they work (Clouse and Spurgeon, 1995). Regarding these arguments, human beings prefer to work in a motivated and enjoyable workplace; they usually avoid from working in aggressive workplaces.

Decker (1987) claims that a manager with a sense of humor can be recognized as an effective manager at a workplace by the employees. Decker's claim is based on her study in which two hundred-and ninety male and female employees participated. The questions concerned about their managers' age, sex and sense of humor and it was asked that which function was the most important to call a manager effective. As a result, most employees chose the sense of humor as an important and main function which should occur in an effective manager. Through the research, the importance of the sense of humor in a workplace can be seen and it suggests that managers should have a sense of humor in some special occasions. It would be important sometimes for a manager to tease the employees because teasing usually makes a sense of humor and participants laugh.

According to research which was carried out by Kerkkänen-***et al.*** (2004), sense of humor effects physical health because they say people with a sense of humorengage with a healthier life style as a result of their cheerfulness and optimism; they may involve in regular exercises and avoid smoking and consuming alcohol. The data for the research collected in three

years: 34 Finnish police chiefs and 53 Finnish police constables were participated. As a result of this research, they came to that conclusion and they argue thathumor is usefulto have a healthy life and physic.

Humor is not always used in a workplace to increase people's motivation or to be beneficial for health. Additionally, it is also important to attract audience when a speaker presents a presentation. In formal places and long hour talks, audiences may lose the focus. It is humor which tries to bring the attentions back. It can be seen at the beginnings of the conferences and other talks that the first speaker tries to be humorous; the other speakers also may start with a humorous statement. This is a technique which should be used to help the audience to feel relaxed; laughing for a moment can lead them to adopt that specific atmosphere.

This situation could be felt in the Diversity Conference which was hosted by University of Central Lancashire. The venue was Preston in the United Kingdom and it took place on the 24th of November 2011. The speaker, who opened the conference, tried to be humorous when she was announcing health and safety rules of the place. There was a pond outside the hall; she humorously announced it even all participants were adults and there were no children. When the existence of the pond announced, all the participants started laughing. It could be seen how they became more relaxed after that short laugh.

Consequently, all other speakers of the conference were trying to make a jock before starting to present or during their presentations. For instance, when a guest speaker - the Vice-Chancellor of University of Glamorgan, was talking, she said something humorous about her husband. She said that when she was working in a very busy position, her husband had to learn how to use washing machine which is something usually males cannot do. As a result of telling something not common and relevant to a diversity conference, audiences started laughing. That jock was a kind of refreshing for the audience as they started to listen to her more carefully. It is worth mentioning that in such places, humor can be also useful to bring audiences from different organizations and positions to the same level to decrease the matters of class differences.

4. Ways of Using Humor at Workplace

As far as some reasons of using humor have been shown, now it is time to find how humor is used in a workplace. Porcu (2005) says that humor sometimes can be used for a further business; that is to say it can be used in businesses when deals and agreements are made. He gives an example in a fish market where a buyer tries to decrease in the quality of a kind of fish to buy it in a very cheaper price. In the response, the fisher man makes a sexual jock to avoid selling the fish in a cheap price:

Retailer: This mullet is not fresh, it's very soft.

Wholesaler: Hum! Keep on touching it and it'll get hard!!

(Porcu, 2005: 85)

In this conversation,it can be seen how the retailer tries to disparage the fish to get it in a great discount, while the wholesaler is aware of the situation and picks up the remark on his fish and turns it against the clever retailer by making a sexual joke. Here, humor is used in a business contact when two people are trying to make a business deal. The humor helps the fisherman to sell the fish in a good price while the retailer attempts to buy it in a cheap price; anything else except humor can hardly be used here by the wholesaler to turn the situation against the fish buyer. Humor is the most effective to be used as a support to the wholesaler to continue or win bargaining with the retailer.

Holmes and Marra (2006) demonstrate that skillful leaders should have a sense of humor. According to their arguments and examples, a leader can be successful in case of using humor skillfully. A leader should not communicate distantly with the workers in lower positions; it will be better if that leader communicates humorously sometimes. In the following example, it can be seen how humor is used in a work place which makes communication more desirable:

Penelope: are the clients expecting you to pay anything

Ingrid: the clients know that it it's their responsibilitybut they also know that affordability is a key

Penelope: so would so you didn't answer me very directly [laughing] there did you

Ingrid: [laughs]

(Holmes and Marra, 2006: 120)

This example shows the way in which humor can be used to get good effects in a meeting. This conversation is between Penelope, a team leader, and Ingrid, a member of the team; Penelope asks a question to Ingrid and she is teasing him through her question. The teasing is humorous because it is not supposed to ask a team member in this style which is very direct. It is commonly expected by a team leader to ask team members in more polite styles, but here she communicates in an indirect way. As a result, Ingrid feels the indirectness and he answers the question in the same style which has been asked. He comments when he answers the question because it has been asked informally. Because of the indirectness and adding comments to the answer, this conversation is considered as a humorous one (Holmes and Marra, 2006). If the question was asked formally, he had to answer the team leader's question without any comment (AttardoSalvatore in Holmes and Marra, 2006). The used humor can strengthen the team members' relations, if it is used well andcautiously (Mallet, 2008). That is to say, when a leader teases a team member, that team member should not be bullied. According to research which was carried out by Decker ***et al.*** in China and the U.S., positive humorappears to have beneficial effects in both countries, while negative humor yields some differences (Decker ***et al***., 2011). They argue that the negative humors' effects may vary from a country to another and between different genders, but it seems negative humor should be generally avoided in China.

Lynch (2010) carried out research in a kitchen of a restaurant in which Lynch stayed there for a while and started working as a trainee. After three months working, the head chef asks him to bring his own tool box. Bringing an own tool box, which contains expensive knives and other kitchen tools, means that this person's position in the kitchen is changed from a trainee to a chef. In such kitchens, all chefs have their own tool boxes and trainees are not allowed to use them without permission. The chefs' names are written on their own boxes followed by aslogan which is set by the owner of the boxlike "Chef 's Art Box," "Do the Job Don't be the Job," and "Any Foolcan Cook." One day, Sea Bass (a training chef) is left alone in the restaurant during a dead time (when the restaurant is closed). He strategically adds some letters to the mottos of the boxes. He adds an "F" to the "Chef 's Art Box" and "blow" to the slogan "Do the job'. When the prank is discovered, the kitchen group celebrates these jokes. These changes become jokes for the chefs and trainees; they joke each other in their dead times to release the stress of work. For example when some chefs ask Sea Bass to go to the Head Chef's box to bring some tools, they ask him to go to the "Chef 's Fart Box" and they get a quick laugh.

In this example, the chefs and trainees are joking among themselves in the kitchen to increase their motivations and to release their tensions. The way they are joking is accepted by all the members of the group and the jokes are mainly related to their job area. Sea Bass's humor facilitates a richer experience for him because he feels that he has a position in

a group as he can joke with other members of the team. In such cases, team members work better because of realizing their role in the team which is recognizable. The Sea Bass's joke is very important for him because it proves his acceptance by other chefs as a member of the group and the Head Chef's power does not change when he is joked; in contrast, Sea Bass's responsibilities increase as he is accepted as a group member (Lynch, 2010).

5. Conclusion

To sum up, humor is very important which should occur in human beings' life. It is mostly defined as something unusual or something which makes people laugh. Language has a major role in creating humor from an ordinary statement. Humor is used in the workplaces for many purposes like increasing motivation, releasing stress, strengthening relations and the like. It works in a way which is different from a work place to another.

A kind of humor might work in a specific workplace, but it is not necessary to have the same effects in some other workplaces. All people in different working positions need to have a sense of humor to obtain success and their career achievements. It can be possible to gain all these with a successful team; in order to have a good team, all the team members should work in a good harmony with each other. In case of humor existence in a team, the members of that team can be socially tied which leads tosuccess and working in harmony.

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