

## Multivariate Analysis of Hierarchical Level Associated with the Use of Humor Styles of Thai Managers in a Real Estate Firm

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### Abstract

*This study aimed to scrutinize hierarchical level differences in the use of humor styles of Thai managers who worked at a selected real estate company in Bangkok, Thailand. Participants were collected from 52 managers in all hierarchical levels. Humor style questionnaire (HSQ) was used as the instrument for data collection. Validity and reliability of the scale measurement were reported with acceptable alpha's scores. Findings exhibited that the most preferred use of humor style of Thai managers was the affiliative humor style. Results of one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) indicated the statistically significant differences among hierarchical level groups on a combined dependent variables (Wilk's  $\Lambda = .70$ ,  $F(8, 92) = 2.26$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\text{partial}\eta^2 = .164$ ). The  $\text{partial}\eta^2 = .16$  indicated that approximately 16 % of multivariate variance of the dependent variables was correlated with the group factor. As a result, the main effects of independent variables were processed for further evaluation by using analysis of variance (ANOVA). The analysis revealed the statistically significant difference in self-enhancing humor style ( $F = 6.08$ ,  $p = .004$ ). A pair wise comparison of the Bonferroni correction revealed statistically significant differences of the use of self-enhancing humor between first-line managers and middle managers demonstrating that first-line managers reported significantly lower use of self-enhancing humor style than middle managers. Limitations and recommendations for future studies were also discussed.*

**Keywords: Humor styles, Hierarchical level differences, Thai managers, Real Estate Company**

### Introduction

Even though some serious businesses perceived humor as an inappropriate behavior, the examination of humor in the workplace has increasingly become widespread in the past years. The investigation of organization humor has been scrutinized in multi facets including individual level and organizational level (Liu & Wang, 2016). Various studies indicated the benefits of using humor at work related to the maximization of leader effectiveness, group cohesiveness, job performance, productivity, and organizational creativity and innovation (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, & Viswesvaran 2012; Promsri, 2017). In addition, past research attempted to investigate the relationship between the use of humor by leaders and employee performance (Tang, 2008; Lin, 2016). Despite the increasing attention on humor in organizations particularly the linkage between leaders and employees, the focus on some demographic variables relating to these target groups (e.g. hierarchical level or year of work experience) is neglected. Research on humorous leadership mainly focused on leaders did not realize the dissimilar use of humor that is associated with the different hierarchical levels. As stated in recent reviews, the different degrees of power based on the managerial levels can cause the distinguished consequences on individual's motivations, behaviors, biases, and social interaction within organizations (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015; Anicich and Hirsh, 2017). Hence, this present study aims to shed some light on this issue by examining the association between hierarchical levels and the use of humor by managers. Also, as past studies revealed the different use of humor in cross-cultural working environments and businesses (Amjed & Tirmzi, 2016; Michalik & Sznicer,

2017), this current study, therefore, places its emphasis on Thai managers who work at a real estate company.

## Literature Reviews

In the past decades, humor in the workplace was considered as an improper behavior. The case of Ford employee who was fired in 1940 because of laughing at work is a good example that can best describe how management perceived humor in the workplace in previous times (Michalik & Sznicer, 2017). Nevertheless, the managers' perceptions toward humor in the organization have changed over the years. Examples of numerous companies (e.g. Southwest Airlines, Yahoo, Ben and Jerry, Domino Pizza, Price-Waterhouse, and Hewlett-Packard, and IBM) that embedded humor as part of their corporate cultures have demonstrated the appreciation of humor in the workplace (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Morreall, 2008; Smith & Khojasteh, 2014). Many companies have encouraged their employees to use humor in the workplace as they have seen various advantages of using humor. Lyttle (2007) pointed out the benefits of humor in four kinds including physical benefits, psychological benefits, social benefits, and cognitive benefits. These perspectives are consistent with the definition of organizational humor proposed by Romero & Cruthirds (2006) as stated "*humor consists of amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organization.*" However, humor can be double-edged. If individuals use humor judiciously, they and their organizations can obtain fruitful benefits of humor such as increased productivity and reduced conflicts. Conversely, if humor is not used cautiously, it can bring undesirable outcomes to individuals and organizations (Malone, 1980). This statement can be supported by recent studies in which both positive and negative effects of humor on several aspects in the organization such as job design, job performance, team cohesiveness, and innovative behavior were found (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Holmes, 2007; Broeck et al., 2012; Jalalkamali, 2015; Robert, Dunne, & Iun, 2015; Promsri, 2017).

To clearly understand the use of humor, Martin et al. (2003) proposed a multi-dimensional conceptualization of humor. The humor can be divided into four different styles based on the combination of two dimensions – enhance the self and enhance relationship with others and benign/benevolent and detrimental/injurious. Individuals who try to make jokes and funs or tell tasteful joke stories to fascinate others and increase the social relationships are considered utilizing *affiliative humor style*. For those who have a hilarious view of life and can cope with stress in unavoidable situations are considered using *self-enhancing humor style*. These two styles are viewed as a positive humor style or a non-hostile style. In contrast, if individuals try to use humor in order to manipulate others by teasing them with their inferiority, and to satisfy the self when they see others' distress according to their sneers and ridicules, this implies that they are using *aggressive humor style*. Lastly, if people attempt to make joke to seek acceptance from others, this implies to *self-defeating style*. The last two styles are perceived as a negative humor style.

In Thailand, there was a little evidence relating to the use of humor in the workplace. The latest article on the use of humor in Thai organizations backdated to 20 years ago when Aurjiraponpan (1998) proposed the concept of humor as a tool of nursing management. For the large corporation, empirical evidences and studies on the use of humor in the workplace have been scant and underdeveloped. Based on the comprehensive research, it found that only a listed company like Work point Entertainment Public Company Limited where many hilarious programs being produced on channel 23 of digital TV can be implied as a company that has encouraged the use of humor at work (Work point, 2015). As employees in this company need to work on gags development for each TV show, they have been encouraged to make jokes during their work. In the light of limitation of the evidences relating to the use of humor in the workplace in Thailand, the empirical studies of organization humor in Thai contexts and settings, therefore, needed to be explored. This current study is the first study in its field that attempts to shed some light of humor in the workplace particularly the use of humor by managers with a different power. Therefore, this study places an emphasis

on the use of humor style of managers in the different hierarchical levels and tries to examine the association between managerial level differences and humor styles. Based on this main objective, the research question is proposed as *does hierarchical levels influence the use of humor styles of Thai managers in a select real estate company?*

## Methodology

### *Participants:*

Fifty-two executives in all hierarchical levels of a selected real estate company were participants in this study. The participants were gathered from managers who worked at the head office only. All of these managers agreed to participate in the data collection of this study.

### *Measures:*

Humor Style Questionnaires originally developed by Martin et al. (2003) was modified to use as the instrument for data collection. The modified version of a 5-point scale of humor style questionnaire consisted of 26-item that inquired respondents to rate each item of this scale measurement to the extent in which they agreed or disagreed. Content validity was conducted to ensure the meaning of each item in this scale by using index-objective congruence method (IOC). The IOC score of each item based on the evaluation of three-expert assessments showed no score lower than 0.5, which indicated the validity of the scale. The internal consistency of this scale was measured with Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability of this scale showed an alpha score of 0.628, which was acceptable (Zainudin, 2012).

### *Procedures:*

The researcher contacted the HR department for the data collection permission. Thereafter, an MBA student at RMUTP who currently worked as an employee in this selected real estate company was officially contacted to assist in distributing the survey questionnaire (self-report) for data collection. Questionnaires were dispersed to all managers who worked at the headquarters of this company in a hard copy form during July-August 2017. Fifty-two questionnaires were returned with completion. After receiving the returned questionnaires, the researcher keyed all data in the statistical analysis software and run statistical analyses. One-way MANOVA was used with the measures of basic assumptions to explore the research question.

## Results

Amongst participants who completed the questionnaire, 48.1% of them were male executives and 51.9% of them were female executives. For their age, 38.5% of these executives had average age between 31-40 years, 28.8% of them were between 41-50 years 26.9% of them were 20-30 years, and 5.8% of them were 50 years up, respectively. More than a half of them obtained a bachelor's degree (55.8%) and 42.4% of them received a master's degree. Only 1.9% of this group reported that they obtained a diploma. For their work experience, 32.7% of these managers had work experience with this company about 5-10 years, 28.8% of them had about 11-15 years of work experience, 26.9% of them had work experience less than 5 years, and 11.5% of this group had more than 15 years of work experience. For the hierarchical level, 67.3% of this group presently served as a first-line manager, 25% of them were a middle manager, and 7.7% of this group was a top manager. The mean score and standard deviation of four humor style variables demonstrated that 'affiliative humor style' received the highest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 3.46$ , S.D. = .552) following by 'self-enhancing humor style' ( $\bar{x} = 3.20$ , S.D. = .490), 'self-defeating humor style' ( $\bar{x} = 3.05$ , S.D. = .479), and 'aggressive humor style' ( $\bar{x} = 2.83$ , S.D. = .643), respectively.

To ensure the appropriateness of using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) for data analysis, the basic assumptions were conducted. First, Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was checked to confirm multivariate normality. As p-value of dependent variables were greater than 0.5, multivariate normality was approved. The Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices was also tested to check the assumption of homogeneity of covariance across the group using  $p < .001$  as a criterion. The results indicated that Box's M (12.529) was not significant ( $p = .370$ ). In addition, multicollinearity was checked to ascertain whether dependent variables were highly correlated to each other. The results showed the absence of multicollinearity as no correlation was above .90 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). Hence, the assumption was not violated. Besides, Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variance was checked to determine that the variances of each variable were equal across the groups. The Levene's Test exhibited that all dependent variables were not significant (affiliative humor style,  $p = .141$  self-enhancing,  $p = .127$ , self-defeating humor style,  $p = .426$ , and aggressive humor style,  $p = .154$ ), which indicated that the assumption was met. As a result, Wilks' Lambda was a suitable test to use. The results of Wilk's Lambda test revealed the statistically significant differences among hierarchical level groups on combined humor style variables (Wilk's  $\Lambda = .70$ ,  $F(8, 92) = 2.26$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\text{partial}\eta^2 = .164$ ). The  $\text{partial}\eta^2 = .16$  indicated that approximately 16% of multivariate variance of the humor style variables was associated with the group factor (Table 1).

**Table-1** Multivariate Tests

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept Pillai's Trace	.987	844.800	4	46	.000	.987
Wilks' Lambda	.013	844.800	4	46	.000	.987
Hotelling's Trace	73.461	844.800	4	46	.000	.987
Roy's Largest Root	73.461	844.800	4	46	.000	.987
Management Pillai's Trace	.320	2.237	8	94	.031	.160
Wilks' Lambda	.699	2.257	8	92	<b>.030*</b>	<b>.164</b>
Hotelling's Trace	.404	2.274	8	90	.029	.168
Roy's Largest Root	.321	3.772	8	47	.010	.243

Consequently, the main effects of independent variables needed to be processed for further assessment by using analysis of variance. The results of ANOVA exhibited the statistically significant difference in the use of self-enhancing humor style ( $F = 6.08$ ,  $p = .004$ ).

**Table-2** Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
<b>Corrected Model</b>	Affiliative	.697	2	.348	1.149	.325	.045
	Self-enhancing	2.438	2	1.219	6.086	.004	.199
	Self-defeating	.599	2	.299	1.318	.277	.051
	Aggressive	1.183	2	.591	1.453	.244	.056
<b>Intercept</b>	Affiliative	319.230	1	319.230	1053.394	.000	..956
	Self-enhancing	265.656	1	265.656	1326.066	.000	.964
	Self-defeating	244.608	1	244.608	1077.066	.000	.956
	Aggressive	255.181	1	255.181	553.489	.000	.919
<b>Hierarchical</b>	Affiliative	.697	2	.348	1.149	.325	.045
	Self-enhancing	2.438	2	1.219	6.086	<b>.004**</b>	.199
	Self-defeating	.599	2	.299	1.318	.277	.051
	Aggressive	1.183	2	.591	1.453	.244	.056
<b>Error</b>	Affiliative	14.849	49	.303			
	Self-enhancing	9.816	49	.200			
	Self-defeating	11.128	49	.227			
	Aggressive	19.935	49	.407			
<b>Total</b>	Affiliative	639.612	52				
	Self-enhancing	545.375	52				
	Self-defeating	495.609	52				
	Aggressive	439.102	52				
<b>Corrected Total</b>	Affiliative	15.546	51				
	Self-enhancing	12.255	51				
	Self-defeating	11.727	51				
	Aggressive	21.118	51				

Next, a pair wise comparison was performed to discover the mean differences of independent variables. Post hoc test using the Bonferroni correction demonstrated statistically significant differences of the use of self-enhancing humor between first-line managers and middle managers indicating that first-line managers ( $\bar{x} = 3.08$ ) reported significantly lower use of self-enhancing humor style than middle managers ( $\bar{x} = 3.58$ ).

**Table-3** Post Hoc Test for Self-Enhancing Humor with Bonferroni

Hierarchical Levels	$\bar{x}$	First-line Manager	Middle Manager	Top Manager
		3.08	3.58	3.06
<b>First-line Manager</b>	3.08	-	<b>-.50*</b>	.016
<b>Middle Manager</b>	3.58	<b>.50*</b>	-	.514
<b>Top Manager</b>	3.06	.016	.514	-

### Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

The aim of this present study was to examine the association between hierarchical level differences and the use of humor styles by managers in a Thai real estate firm. Results of this present study demonstrated that managers preferred to mostly use affiliative humor style rather than the other humor styles. On the other hand, aggressive humor style was reported as the least preferred humor style of Thai managers. These findings were consistent with Promsri's study (2017) in which affiliative humor style was reported as the

most preferred style used by Thai employees in the commercial bank whereas aggressive humor style was the least preferred style. This may be because both executives and employees who worked in the large corporation realized that in order to succeed in their works, they needed to build and promote healthy social relationship in the office. Using aggressive humor style in the workplace is less likely to bring the cooperation from other people because those being teased with their inferiority might feel embarrassing, awkward, and hurtful leading to withdrawal from individuals who joked around them. To answer the research question, this current study found that approximately 16% of multivariate variance of the humor style variables was associated with the group factor, which means that hierarchical level has an influence on the use of humor styles of Thai managers in a selected real estate company. In addition, the results of ANOVA exhibited the statistically significant difference in the use of self-enhancing humor style. After conducting pair wise comparison, the finding demonstrated statistically significant differences of the use of self-enhancing humor between first-line managers and middle managers. Specifically, middle managers preferably use self-enhancing humor style more than first-line managers. This finding supported the premise that the different levels of management can result the diverse outcomes on individual's social interaction within organizations (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015). The use of humor in the workplace is perceived as one of key social interactions and relationships. Thus, the difference of using humor between first-line and middle managers confirms this notion. Moreover, as the middle managers must inevitably change their behaviors when dealing with higher and lower colleagues in the organization, they might feel distressed and stressful, and need to inspire themselves with the humorous view of life to get through the circumstances and endeavors.

This present study has some limitations. The sample size was small and not sufficient to generalize findings to the other studies. Thus, the sample should be expanded in the future research. As this study focus on only a real estate company in Thailand, a further study should be placed more emphasis on other businesses or industries in the same or different countries. In addition, other demographic variables such as work experience, salary, and educational levels should be investigated to examine the relationship between these variables and the use of humor by managers. The comparative study of the use of humor styles between managers and employees in Thai context should also be conducted in the future study.

### Acknowledgement

I am very thankful to Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon for research sponsorship.

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