LAUGH OUT LOUD: HOW ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE INFLUENCES WORKPLACE HUMOUR

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

PhD IN MANAGEMENT

AT MASSEY UNIVERSITY, ALBANY, NEW ZEALAND

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2007
Abstract

Workplace humour is an important component of organisational culture and social behaviour, yet this topic is under-researched and neglected within the field of organisational studies. This thesis explores the influence of organisational culture on workplace humour enactment.

Key research objectives are to contribute empirical data regarding the influence of organisational culture on humour and to create a model that explains and connects significant aspects of humour and organisational culture. A further aim is to explore the element of formality within organisational culture and its impacts on humour enactment.

Research was undertaken in four New Zealand companies from different industries. A mixed-method approach is used and methods include: interviews; participant observation and document collection. An assessment tool was created to compare levels of formality and/or informality in the studied organisations.

Findings show that the organisational culture and levels of formality and/or informality within the culture influence humour practices through the creation of boundaries that constrain or enable humour activities. A model was created to depict the influence of organisational culture upon humour enactment. The model shows that levels of formality or informality are key cultural elements and that formality/informality levels influence the boundaries that are created for humour enactment. Specific individuals (identified as either jokers or gatekeepers) assume dichotomous roles and within these roles either challenge or constrain the humour boundaries. Organisational members perceive that humour and organisational culture have both positive and negative impacts upon workplace outcomes such as: retention; satisfaction; performance and recruitment.

Humour at work is widespread and a significant component of modern working life. Humour manifests itself within workplace culture and understanding the influence of organisational culture on humour enactment is an important facet of organisational studies.
Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank the following people for their help during this project:

My fantastic family: Paul, my rock, thanks for your continuous patience, love, interest and belief in me. My kids, Riki, Maxine, Bjorn and Cinnamon, thank you all for your love, laughter and noisy confusion. You stopped me from going nuts and also drove me nuts at the same time! Panda (my dog) you sat supportively at my feet and kept me healthy by silently imploring me for walks.

My super supervisors: Mark Orams, Margot Edwards and Janet Sayers. Thank you all for caring so much about this work and for your whole-hearted involvement at every stage. Your guidance, wisdom and enthusiasm supported me through this entire process.

The participants: I can’t name you but thank you to all the wonderful, professional, zany and fabulously complex people in the studied companies. Thank you all for allowing me into your workplaces and sharing your work, humour, experiences and feelings.

Tertiary Education Commission (TEC): the people at TEC who facilitated and supported my research project by awarding me the Top Achievers Doctoral (TAD) Scholarship in the Bright Futures Scheme. This scholarship supported the research, allowed full-time engagement in the project and opened up some extra opportunities for presentation and publication.

John Monin (HOD) and colleagues at the Department of Management and International Business, Massey University: thank you for your support, funding, research days, space, and belief in the project. Your support and collegiality was greatly appreciated.

Massey University Library staff (Albany campus): thank you all for your help finding obscure and interesting publications. Thanks for all the renewals, requests and friendly assistance. I will bring all the books back now!

Massey University Doctoral Research Committee: thank you for your administrative support and the regular seminars.
Trish Dickinson: everyone needs a best friend especially one who’s known you since the age of five. Your jokes, giggles and teasing kept me humble and happy. Thanks for making me laugh out loud so many times.

The *handbag girls*: your friendship and coffee mornings were invaluable. Thanks for being there when I needed a laugh, cry or a big whinge.

Ralph Bathurst and Kaye Thorn: thanks so much for your advice and friendly support. You read, you discussed and you listened. Your wise counsel was highly valued.

Massey University Printery: you guys are always helpful, friendly and fast. Thank you for making printing issues easier and speedier.

Dina Cloete: your professional proof-reading was meticulous, thank you.

Tina Smith and Pageworks: your professional graphics skills improved my diagrams. Thanks for being so willing and cheerful when I bombarded you with changes.

Approval for the research was granted by Massey University Albany Human Ethics Committee (MUAHEC 05/013).
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