

Relationship between the Use of Humor Styles and Innovative Behavior of Executives in a Real Estate Company

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between humor styles and innovative behavior of Thai executives in a chosen real estate company. Modified versions of Humor Style Questionnaire (HSQ) and Innovative Work Behavior Scale (IWB) were used as the instruments for data collection. Participants were collected from fifty-two executives in all hierarchical levels in a real estate company listed in Stock Exchange of Thailand. The results of multiple regression analysis indicated that humor styles of Thai executives in a selected real estate company explained 29% of variance ($R^2 = .285$, $F(4, 52) = 4.687$, $p < .01$). The results indicated that affiliative humor style had a significantly positive effect on innovative behavior ($\beta = .438$, $p < .01$). In addition, this present study found the significantly negative effect of aggressive humor style on innovative behavior of executives ($\beta = -.393$, $p < .01$). Discussion and recommendations for future studies were also discussed.

Keywords: *Humor Styles, Innovative Behavior, Thai Executives, Real Estate Company*

Introduction

Although humor is apparently viewed as a positive manner that can bring satisfaction and happiness to individuals, humor is indisputably a complex behavior because individuals with different perspectives and backgrounds might interpret the use of humor in the different meanings and purposes (Markey, Suzuki, & Mario, 2014). As Malone (1980) stated that humor can be two-edged of sword, if the use of humor by individuals is carried out effectively, it provides the benefits for the organization, and can increase productivity and outcomes. On the other hand, if humor is not expressed properly, it can lead the organization to the negative consequences. In a highly complex environment, humor sometimes can be viewed as an inappropriate behavior (Alatalo, Oikarinen, & Poutiainen, 2016). Yet, previous research discovered the impact of humor on organizational and employee performance (Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2009; Javadi, Salehzadeh, & Poor, 2013; Ünal, 2014). In particular, some studies found that various styles of humor were differently associated with innovative behavior, creativity, and productivity (Tang, 2008; Cayirdag & Acar, 2010; Ho et al., 2011; Pundt, 2015; Amjed & Tirmzi, 2016; Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, Atta-Owusu, & Oikarinen, 2016; Promsri, 2017).

According to these numerous findings, humor can have positive and negative influences on innovative behavior based on different groups, contexts, cultures, environments, and settings.

In Thai context, studies on the use of humor style by the managers and its effect on innovation have been neglected and scarce (Promsri, 2017). The work of Aurjiraponpan (1998) might be the latest article that suggested the use of humor as an influential tool for nursing organizations. Nonetheless, the use of humor in large corporations was not reported formally and had been in doubt whether or not listed firms had applied and taken advantages of using humor to productively enhance their organizational performance. Work Point Entertainment Public Company Limited has been viewed and recognized as a large company that might have used humor to benefit its work and performance. As numerous hilarious TV shows and programs being produced continuously, employees of this company are presumably required to use sense of humor through their work.

Real estate sector is one of the big machines that moves the country toward a good economy. In the meantime, this sector has been influenced by various factors such as political, economic, sociocultural, and technological forces. Finding a new management tool to encourage employees in the real estate sector deems very important for companies in this area to cope with the changing environment. Also, research on the use of humor in a real estate company has been overlooked in the past years. Thus, this present study aimed to examine the relationship between humor styles and innovative behavior in the different groups, settings, and cultures by focusing on Thai executives who presently worked at a chosen real estate company listed in Stock Exchange of Thailand.

Literature Review

Humor is originally perceived as a positive behavior that can enhance physical and psychological well-being (Cann, Sitwell, & Taku, 2010); however, some types of humor might have a negative effect on social interactions and relationships (Liang, 2014). Martin et al. (2003) proposed that humor styles of individuals are based on two dimensions – enhance the self and enhance relationship with others and benign/benevolent and detrimental/injurious. The combination of these two dimensions constructs the four different styles of humor, which are self-enhancing, affiliative, self-defeating, and aggressive. If individuals attempt to use humor to enhance the self, this refers to *self-enhancing humor style* whereas individuals who use humor to enhance one's relationships with others, this refers to *affiliative humor style*. On the other hand, if humor is used to increase the relationships with others by being detrimental to the self, this refers to *self-defeating humor style* while *aggressive humor style* refers to the use of humor that attempts to satisfy the self at the cost of others. These four humor styles have been widely used to measure the expression of humor of individuals in numerous studies through the instrument called HSQ.

As mentioned previously, humor is perceived as “double-edged” that can have either positive or negative impact on individuals, groups, and organizations depending on how and when it is used. However, a recent research indicated that individuals who use a sense of humor during their work can maximize innovations and outcomes in the organization (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Various studies also found the similar relationships like the previous ones.

For example, Tang (2008) investigated the relationship between use of humor by leaders and innovative behavior of Taiwanese employees who worked at R&D department in various manufacturing firms. A total of 775 survey questionnaires were distributed to employees in fifty companies that had at least 10 employees worked in R&D department. Only 239 completed questionnaires were returned for data analysis. Internal consistency, composite reliability and convergent validity were conducted to ensure reliability and validity of the scale measurement. Hierarchical regression analyses were performed to test research hypotheses. The results demonstrated that leaders' use of humor had a significantly positive impact on employee innovative behavior. This was supported by the findings of a recent research conducted by Pundt (2015) who explored the relationship between humorous leadership and innovative behavior of employees and moderator effects of creative requirement and perceived innovation climate. German participants in different organizations in Germany were gathered by using the questionnaire. The major findings found that the more frequently leaders used humor in the workplace; the more likely employees were innovative. However, this study investigated only positive humor of leaders and focused on the perception of employees toward the humorous leadership. Thus, the researcher suggested that the different humor styles should be studied in the future research. Unlike the previous studies, Promsri (2017) attempted to focus on the correlation between the use of humor and innovative work behavior of Thai commercial bank employees. A total of 166 employees was participated in data collection by using a 5-point scale of humor style questionnaire and innovative work behavior questionnaire as the instruments. Results of this study demonstrated that only self-enhancing humor style had a positive influence on innovative work behavior of employees.

Ho et al. (2011) examined the effect of leaders' humor styles on the innovative behavior and leadership effectiveness. They collected data from Taiwan's corporate leaders by using a 6-point scale of humor style questionnaire, innovative behavior questionnaire, and leadership effectiveness questionnaire. The internal consistency of these scales was reported indicating the acceptable scores of Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. The results exhibited that only two humor styles had significant influences on innovative behavior of Taiwan's leaders. These two humor styles were self-enhancing humor style and aggressive humor style. The findings reported that self-enhancing humor style had a significantly positive influence on innovative behavior whereas aggressive humor style had a significantly negative effect on innovative behavior of corporate leaders. Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, Atta-Owusu, and Oikarinen (2016) also found that the different styles of humor could have both positive and negative effects on innovative behavior and innovation productivity of individuals. According to their findings, affiliative, coping, and reframing types of humor were positively connected to innovative behavior whereas aggressive humor had a negative relationship with innovative behavior. This study was consistent with the findings of Amjed and Tirmzi (2016) who found the relationship between software employees' humor styles and creativity. This study confirmed that the use of humor had both positive and negative effects on employees' creativity. They reported that affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor styles had significantly positive effects on creativity whereas self-defeating humor style had a significantly negative influence on employees'

creativity. Nevertheless, this study did not find the effect of aggressive humor style on creativity.

Based on the previous empirical evidences, this present study predicted that humor styles could have positive and negative influences on innovative behavior. Therefore, the research hypotheses were proposed as follows:

H1: Affiliative humor style had a significantly positive influence on Thai executives' innovative behavior.

H2: Self-enhancing humor style had a significantly positive influence on Thai executives' innovative behavior.

H3: Self-defeating humor style had a significantly negative influence on Thai executives' innovative behavior.

H4: Aggressive humor style had a significantly negative influence on Thai executives' innovative behavior.

Methodology

This study was a descriptive study. A total of 60 executives who worked at a selected real estate company in Bangkok, Thailand was chosen for data collection. Questionnaires were distributed to all executives of this company in a hard copy form during July-August, 2017 with the assistance of an MBA student of a government university who currently worked as an employee in this company. As of data collection process, 52 questionnaires were returned with completion indicating 87 percent of response rate. Humor Style Questionnaire (HSQ) originally developed by Martin et al. (2003) was modified to use for humor styles of Thai executives measurement. This version consisted of 26-item that asked respondents to rate each item of this scale to the extent in which they agreed or disagreed based on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). To assess innovative behavior of Thai executives, 10-item of Innovative Work Behavior Scale (IWB) developed by De Jong and Den Hartog (2008) was used. Participants were inquired to rate their innovative work behavior to the extent in which they always performed or never performed the behavior in each statement based on a 5-point scale. To ensure the meaning of these instruments when translated into Thai version, the reversed translation method was done by a professional translator. Additionally, the researcher used index-objective congruence (IOC) method to evaluate the content validity of each item of these scales by three experts in management field. The results of assessment demonstrated that no item of these scales had score lower than 0.5, which was satisfactory and being valid. Also, the internal consistency of these instruments was measured with Cronbach's alpha. The reliability of a modified version of HSQ and IWB was 0.628 and 0.885, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.6 or higher was acceptable (Zainudin, 2012). Also, the alpha score of HSQ in this present study was similar to Amjed and Tirmzi's work (2016) in which HSQ exhibited the average alpha score of 0.6 for this scale. For inferential statistics used to test research hypotheses, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and multiple regression analysis were performed to determine the relationship between humor styles and innovative behavior of Thai executives in a selected real estate company.

Results

As of 52 executives in a selected real estate company in Thailand who completed the questionnaires, there were 25 male executives (48.1%) and 27 female executives (51.9%). For their age, the average age of executives in a chosen real estate company was between 31-40 years (38.5%) following by aged between 41-50 years (28.8%), 20-30 years (26.9%), and 50 years up (5.8%), respectively. For their education, half of them hold a bachelor's degree (55.8%), and the rest of them obtained a master's degree (42.4%). Only 1.9 percent reported that they received just a vocational degree. According to their work experience, 17 executives (32.7%) reported that they had work experience with this company about 5-10 years. Fifteen executives (28.8%) informed that they had about 11-15 years of work experience, 14 executives (26.9%) had work experience less than 5 years, and 6 executives had more than 15 years (11.5%). For the hierarchical levels, 35 executives (67.3%) currently worked as a first-line manager whereas 13 of them (25.0%) served as a middle manager. Only 4 respondents (7.7%) reported that they were in a top level of management. Table 1 revealed that 'affiliative humor style' received the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.46$, S.D. = .552) among the four different humor styles. The second highest mean score was 'self-enhancing humor style' ($\bar{x} = 3.20$, S.D. = .490) following by 'self-defeating humor style' ($\bar{x} = 3.05$, S.D. = .479), and 'aggressive humor style' ($\bar{x} = 2.83$, S.D. = .643), respectively. For innovative behavior, the mean score was in the moderate level ($\bar{x} = 3.57$, S.D. = .660)

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Executives' Humor Styles and Innovative Behavior

Humor Styles	Mean	S.D.	Rank
Affiliative Humor Style	3.46	.552	1
Self-Enhancing Humor Style	3.20	.490	2
Self-Defeating Humor Style	3.05	.479	3
Aggressive Humor Style	2.83	.643	4
Innovative Behavior	3.57	.660	

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was performed to examine the relationship between four humor styles and innovative behavior of Thai executives in a selected real estate company. Table 2 demonstrated the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable. The results found a low positive correlation between affiliative humor style and innovative behavior ($r = .380$, $p < .01$), and a low negative correlation between aggressive humor style and innovative behavior ($r = -.288$, $p < .05$).

Table 2 Correlation between Humor Styles and Innovative Behavior

		Innovative Behavior
Affiliative Humor	Pearson Correlation	.380**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006
	N	52
Self-Enhancing Humor	Pearson Correlation	.206
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.142
	N	52
Self-Defeating Humor	Pearson Correlation	-.104
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.464
	N	52
Aggressive Humor	Pearson Correlation	-.288*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038
	N	52

*Significant at 0.5 level, **Significant at 0.01 level.

To conduct multiple linear regressions analysis, basic assumptions were verified to check the appropriateness of using this statistic. A normal Q-Q plot was also created to visually check normal distribution of dependent variable. The scatterplot showed that both sets of quantiles came from the same distribution as the points forming a line were roughly straight (Ford, 2015). As also confirmed by Shpiro-Wilk test, sample of this study was normal shaped. The p-value greater than .05 ($p = .223$) indicated that the sample distribution was shaped like a normal curve (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). The Durbin-Watson was tested to check autocorrelation in regression data, the value of 2.241 could be assumed that there was no linear auto-correlation (Groebner, Shannon, & Fry, 2014). Also, multicollinearity was checked to see the correlation between predictors. Results of tolerance and VIF assessments revealed no violation in conducting multiple regression analysis. Next, multiple regression analysis was calculated to measure if four humor styles significantly predicted Thai executives' rating of innovative behavior (See Table 3). The results showed that the four independent variables including affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating humor styles could explain 29% of variance to innovative behavior ($R^2 = .285$, $F(2, 52) = 4.687$, $p < .01$). In addition, the finding found that affiliative humor style had a significantly positive effect on executives' innovative behavior ($\beta = .438$, $p < .01$). On the other hand, the result indicated that aggressive humor style had a significantly negative effect on executives' innovative behavior ($\beta = -.393$, $p < .01$). In conclusion, the more executives could demonstrate their affiliative humor style, the more likely they had innovative behavior. In contrast, the executives who revealed the more aggressive humor style, the less likely they would have innovative behavior. Based on these findings, the research hypothesis #1 and #4 were confirmed.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Analysis of Four Humor Styles on Innovative Behavior

Model 1	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	1.682	.938		1.793	.079		
AFFIL	.525	.162	.438	3.245	.002**	.833	1.201
SEF_EN	.154	.171	.114	.900	.373	.946	1.057
SEF_DF	.237	.200	.172	1.184	.242	.720	1.389
AGGES	-.403	.143	-.393	-2.826	.007**	.787	1.270
n = 52							
F = 4.687		df = 4	p-value < .01	R² = .285	Adjusted R² = .224		
Durbin- Watson = 2.241							

*Significant at 0.5 level, **Significant at 0.01 level. AFFIL = Affiliative Humor, SEF_EN= Self-Enhancing Humor, SEF_DF = Self-Defeating Humor, AGGES = Aggressive Humor.

Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

This study aimed to examine the relationship between humor styles and innovative behavior of Thai executives in a chosen real estate company. The results revealed that Thai executives of a real estate company preferred to use ‘affiliative humor style’ more than the other styles. This is because a manager needs to get the job done through other people, thus using humor that can enhance the relationships with their subordinates is a vital key to increase work environment and enjoyably work together to accomplish the organizational goals. In contrast, ‘aggressive humor style’ was reported as the least preferred humor style of executives to use in the workplace. This because of insulting or making fun with the inferiority of employees to enhance the executives’ satisfaction is considered as the obstacle to the organizational success. To test the research hypotheses, this present study used multiple regression analysis to test if the four different humor styles could predict innovative behavior of real estate executives. The findings exhibited that humor styles of Thai executives explained 29% of variance. This suggested that there were other variables that could explain innovative behavior of executives in a selected real estate company that had not been included in this present study. The results also indicated that affiliative humor style had a significantly positive effect on innovative behavior. In addition, this present study found a significantly negative effect of aggressive humor style on innovative behavior of executives. Hence, these findings confirmed research hypothesis #1 and #4. These discoveries partially supported Amjed and Tirmzi (2016) who reported that affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor had positive effects on innovation and creativity while self-defeating humor had a negative impact on creativity. Also, this present study’s findings were partly consistent with Ho et al. (2011) who found the effect of self-enhancing and aggressive humor styles on innovative behavior. However, the findings of this present study was inconsistent with Promsri (2017) who indicated that self-enhancing humor had a positive influence on innovative work behavior of Thai employees. To put all types of humor together, this present study confirmed previous findings that the use of humor had both positive and negative effects on innovative behavior (Ho et al.,

2011; Amjed & Tirmzi, 2016; Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, Atta-Owusu, & Oikarinen, 2016). The appropriate reason to explain these findings is based on the need of supports from employees. Thai executives needed to rely on the support and assistance of their subordinates to move forward the organization to accomplish the goals. Using the positive humor style at work is not only enhancing the relationships between executives and their team, but also increasing new ideas that have gained from their employees. In contrast, the use of negative humor style can result the poor relationships between executives and employees leading to the minimization of employees' willingness to provide new ideas and efforts to the executives. As new ideas are the initiating factor for developing innovative behavior, this can cause the low innovative behavior of executives in return since they did not get useful ideas or benefits from their colleagues and subordinates. The relationships between both positive and negative humor styles of managers and innovative behavior found in this present study not only confirm the previous research's findings relating to the consequences of the different use of humor styles on innovative behavior, but also contribute new knowledge in Thai businesses and management fields.

This study has some limitations. The samples were solely collected from a chosen real estate company in Bangkok, Thailand. Hence, the generalization of these findings is not applicable, and the expansion of the sample size is suggested for the future research. Executives in different businesses and industries should be investigated in order to explore the relationship between the use of humor styles and innovative behavior in a further study. Additionally, other independent variables rather than humor styles should be studied to explain the consequence of innovative behavior. As affiliative humor is positively correlated to innovative behavior, Thai executives should be trained to develop affiliative humor and be aware of using aggressive humor since this style had a negative effect on innovative behavior.

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