

ABSTRACT

Humor and Leader-Member Exchange: How Can a Leader Use Different Types of Humor to Create In-Groups and Out-Groups?

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Leader Member Exchange theory has significance describing the dyadic relationship between leaders and members, but it fails to explain what communicative acts a leader can use to create high-quality exchanges with members. Humor is a communicative act that can elicit positive responses from others and has many positive consequences in organizational life. This study looks at how four different humor styles correlate with the quality of exchanges between leaders and members. The results indicate that positive humor styles are associated with high-quality exchanges between leaders and members. Humor styles that can elicit negative responses were found to be inversely associated with the quality of exchanges. This research contributes to the literature on LMX by illuminating a potential method that creates high-quality exchanges in the leader-member dyad. This study also adds to the literature on humor by providing an additional outcome or benefit to organizational life.

Humor and Leader-Member Exchange: How Can a Leader Use Different Types
of Humor to Create In-Groups and Out-Groups?

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Leadership continues to attract the interest of organizational communication scholars due to its significance and importance in organizations, groups and teams. Given its unique communicative focus, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory provides valuable insight into the dyadic relationship between leaders and members and has been the site of considerable research on leadership. Originally penned the Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) theory by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975), the main premise of LMX is that “effective leadership processes occur when leaders and followers are able to develop mature relationships (partnerships) and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring” (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1995, p. 225).

According to Graen and Uhl-bien (1995), these partnerships are constructed in either in-group or out-group relationships between leaders and members. The creation of in-groups and out-groups is the most theoretically valuable aspect of LMX and is the focus of this study. When looking at the dyad between leader and follower during VDL research, working professionals reported different levels of quality exchanges with their leaders (Dansereau et al., 1976; Graen & Schiemann, 1978; Graen Liden, & Hoel, 1982; Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982). Some members expressed that they experienced high-quality exchanges with their leader while others said that they had low-quality exchanges with the same leader. High-

quality exchanges are “characterized by a high degree of mutual trust, respect, and obligation” and low-quality exchanges are characterized by “low trust, respect, and obligation” (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1995, p. 227). Those who reported high-quality exchanges were said to be in the in-group and those who reported low-quality exchanges were placed in the out-group.

Acceptance into the in-group is based on factors such as how well the leader and member work together, the personalities of the member and the leader, and other characteristics (Dansereau et al., 1975). Members who are willing to negotiate their tasks and roles have an opportunity to join the in-group. These negotiations include any activities that the member does beyond his or her normal duties (Northouse, 2007).

The construction of in-group versus out-group relationships between leaders and members is foundational to LMX theory. However, while LMX has descriptive value in terms of delineating the phases in leader-making and accounting for the characteristics of in-groups versus out-groups, “...it fails to explain how high-quality leader member relationships are created” (Northouse, 2007, p. 160). Scholars need to examine the specific conversational abilities required of leaders to construct healthy relationships (in-group relationships) with their members. One opportunity is to investigate how leaders use humor.

Romero and Cruthirds (2006) define humor as “amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organization” (59). Clouse and Spurgeon (1995) claim that “humor is one of the key characteristics of leadership” (19). Given its connection to organizational and

leadership performance, humor may be an important conversational move which enables or disables leaders and members to construct healthy relationships. This study investigated humor within LMX to more fully understand how high-quality partnerships are constructed between leaders and members.

Review of Literature

Leader-Member Exchange

Graen and Uhl-bien (1995) argue that the voluminous amount of research on leadership has focused on only one domain of leadership: the leader. They propose three domains of leadership: the leader, the follower, and the dyadic relationship between the leader and the follower. Graen and Uhl-bien (1995) posit “even though use of one domain may generate specific and valuable information about that domain, relevant critical aspects of other domains may be overlooked, thereby reducing the predictive power and generalizability of the information” (p. 221). The domain overlooked in many leadership conceptualizations is the dyadic relationship between leader and member. LMX theory places itself in this domain.

According to Graen and Uhl-bien (1995), research on LMX has been organized into four stages. Research at Stage 1 is centered on the acknowledgement and discovery of dyads within the work unit. Stage 2 research looks at the relationship between a leader and his or her members and the outcomes that are associated with the relationship. Stage 3 focuses on the idea of leaders creating partnerships with the members and participate in “leader-making” activities. The last stage, Stage 4, looks at the movement from researching the dyads in groups to

looking at dyads from a systemic perspective. Scandura and Lankau (1996) refer to each one of these network systems as an “assembly of dyads” (p. 245).

In Stage 3, researchers (Graen & Uhl-bien 1991; Uhl-bien & Graen, 1993a) created a Leadership Making Model that describes the different phases a leader-member relationship will go through over time. Early VDL research assumes that leaders develop high-quality exchanges with only a small number of members in the organization. Early LMX research examined how a leader develops high-quality exchanges with every member (Graen et al., 1982; Scandura & Graen, 1984; Graen et al., 1986).

Stage 3, the Leadership Making Model, has been the site of the vast majority of research on LMX. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991) outline three distinct phases of leadership making. The first phase of the Leadership Making Model is the “stranger” phase. Northouse (2007) describes the roles of the first stage as “rule bound, relying heavily on contractual relationships” (p. 152). The exchanges and interactions between the leader and member at this stage are low and members are only interested in themselves.

The second phase is called the “acquaintance” phase. The acquaintance phase is a period of testing where the leader and the member are interacting to find out whether or not the member wants to perform duties that extend beyond his or her normal activities. Northouse (2007) describes this phase as an offer from leader to member to take on more responsibility. The leader and member develop more trust in this phase and begin to develop medium-quality exchanges.

After more time passes, the member will progress into the third and final phase of the Leadership Making process: partnership. In this phase, the roles are negotiated and the leader and member develop high-quality exchanges. “The exchanges are not only behavioral but also emotional—mutual respect, trust, and obligation grow throughout the process” (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1995, p. 230).

Given the intersection of communication and leader-member development, researchers have looked into the role of communication frequency in LMX (Baker & Ganster, 1985) and interactive communication patterns between leaders and members (Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989; Fairhurst, 1993). Graen and Schiemann (1978) looked at agreement between leaders and followers and found that members who expressed high-quality exchanges had greater agreement compared with those who reported low-quality exchanges. The implications show that “leaders acquire more accurate information about their in-group than their out-group members partially as a by-product of their interactions on task-relevant activities,” (Graen & Schiemann, 1978, p. 211). The research has not only revealed insight into leader-member communication, but research also indicates the important benefits into developing high-quality exchanges between leaders and members.

The importance of looking at the communicative patterns permeating LMX is related to the overall impact that LMX has to leadership and organizational performance. Researchers have looked at how LMX is related to performance (Graen et al., 1982), turnover (Graen & Ginsburgh, 1977), job satisfaction (Graen et al., 1982), organizational commitment (Nystrom, 1990), job climate (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989), innovation (Sanders, Moorkamp, Torcka, Groeneveld, S., Groeneveld.,

2010), organizational citizenship behavior (Scandura, Graen & Noval, 1986), and empowerment (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1993b). If LMX can successfully explain leadership effectiveness, important organizational variables can be positively influenced by the research in LMX.

Humor

Clouse and Spurgeon (1995) define organizational humor as “any communication between two or more people that is intended to be pleasant and stimulate the working environment” (9). Some of the early organizational humor research was based on observations and rarely involved humor as a communicative function. Hatch and Erlich (1993) define humor as well and identify three main characteristics of humor: (1) it is a communicative act; (2) it recognizes incongruities in meaning or relationships; (3) it is normally accompanied by a smile or laughter (Berger, 1976; Duncan, 1984). In Berger’s (1987) research, humor is classified into four models. Berger (1987) attributes the basis of the four models to philosophers such as Aristotle, Kant, Hobbes, Freud, Jung, and Piaget. Berger (1987) developed four models of humor: superiority, incongruent, psychoanalytical, and cognitive.

Research which has focused on the functionality of humor reveals that a leader or individual in the organization can use humor to reduce stress, enhance leadership (Decker & Rotondo 2001), increase group cohesiveness (Vaill 1989), improve communication (Meyer, 1997), foster creativity (Brotherton, 1996), boost subordinate satisfaction (Decker, 1987), and build organizational culture (Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995).

Clouse and Spurgeon (1995) also note that humor will “improve worker camaraderie, influence others, change behaviors, and increase productivity” (19). Humor has been linked with improving “problem solving, decision making, and mediating conflicts” (Schnurr, 2008, p. 302). Romero and Cruthirds (2006) identified two main functions of humor for leaders. First, they found that humor is used to secure power by maintaining job position in hierarchical organizations. Romero and Curthirds (2006) align the research with humor’s superiority function proposed by Berger (1987). Humor has been found to be more common among individuals who have higher-status roles in organizations (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001). Higher-ranking employees and individuals also most often select lower-status individuals to be the objects of their jokes and humor (Coser, 1959). Humor is a privilege of being in a position of power (Goffman, 1961) and leadership often provides position and expert power.

The second main function of humor proposed by Romero and Cruthirds (2006) is the ability leaders to use humor to reduce social distance with members. In some cases, distance from members may be beneficial, but in most situations, individuals gain from reduced social distance. If a leader participates and works with his or her subordinates, a shorter social distance results in more organizational benefits. Humor can help eliminate distance by identifying similarities (Graham, 1995) and by promoting identification with individuals (Murstein & Brust, 1985). It is pertinent to show that humor has the ability to impact the dyadic relationship between leaders and members. This study seeks to extend the research that proposes that humor will reduce social distance between leaders and members.

Rationale and Hypotheses

Due to the social nature of humor, it is intuitive that humor exists in organizations in a variety of forms. Berger's (1987) foundational theories on humor can be observed in social settings such as an organization. Organizational humor does not deviate much from the definition of humor, but it is important to look at the limitations to the types and appropriateness of humor in an organization as opposed to humor in a social setting.

Humor is a social construction used for many purposes in interpersonal dyads and groups. But where does humor fit in an organization? Are organizations aware of how humor is being used in their places of business? The most intuitive place for humor belongs in the development of a company's culture. Companies have reportedly created departments and teams of people whose main job involves bringing fun into the work environment. For the purpose of this study, the functions of humor must be discussed in order to establish the purpose and use of humor in organizations.

Research has yet to show how a leader creates high-quality and low-quality exchanges. LMX theory continues to be useful in explaining the dyadic relationship between members and leaders, but there is not much predictive capability to LMX. Considering the discursive nature of leadership, humor has the potential to influence the interactions between leaders and members. This study investigates how leaders use humor to create in and out groups and the correlations between a leader's particular humor style and the quality of exchanges between the leader and member.

For the purpose of this research, different types of humor are investigated to identify how they influence the development of leader-member exchanges. Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray and Weir (2003) identify two main functions of humor: (a) to enhance the self or (b) to enhance one's relationship with others. Martin et al. (2003) intersect these two functions of humor with a necessary distinction between (a) humor that causes no harm or hostility, and (b) humor that can cause hardship to one's self or one's relationship with others. The researchers develop this conceptual grid and create four main types of humor: self-enhancing, aggressive, affiliative, and self-defeating (Martin et al., 2003).

The four types of humor are not all-inclusive, but they cover a broad range of humor that is expected to be experienced in interpersonal dyads in the workplace. Martin et al. (2003) also note that it is important to remember that these four styles of humor are not exclusive categories. A joke or expression of humor can be affiliative and also include aspects of self-defeating humor. Jokes and expressions of humor are to be measured by the amount a specific humor style is utilized, not whether or not the joke is wholly affiliative or self-defeating. The measure inspects at the intensity of a particular style an individual uses on a regular basis. The next section describes the four humor styles used in this study.

(1) Affiliative humor. Individuals who have a high level of affiliative humor use expressions of humor and jokes to amuse others. For the most part it is a style that is concerned with entertaining or putting others at ease. Individuals who use affiliative humor are also more likely to use self-deprecating humor to make others feel more comfortable while maintaining a sense of self-acceptance (Vaillant, 1977).

The affiliative humor style is not aggressive and is often used to enhance cohesiveness and attraction (Martin et al., 2003). Affiliative humor is also correlated with extraversion, cheerfulness, self-esteem, intimacy, relationships satisfaction, and positive moods (Martin et al., 2003). Considering the positive influence that affiliative humor has had in other studies, a leader who uses affiliative humor should have higher-quality exchanges with his or her employees.

Hypothesis 1: A significant positive correlation exists between a leader's perceived use of affiliative humor and quality of exchanges with employees.

(2) Self-enhancing humor. People who have a humorous view of life and turn to humor as a coping mechanism (Martin, 1996) are high on the self-enhancing humor dimension. The nature of the humor itself is introverted and is thus not closely related to extroversion. Although this seems to be something that is unique and not social, the effects of self-enhancing humor in the workplace will be measured in this study. Martin et al. (2003) attribute this style as being closest to Freud's definition of humor as a defense mechanism in response to a negative situation (Freud, 1928). Martin et al. (2003) presume that self-enhancing humor is negatively related to negative emotions and positively related to openness to experience, self-esteem and psychological well-being.

Self-enhancing humor is an introverted style of discourse by definition, but there should be significance between the quality of exchanges of leaders and members. Martin et al. (2003) show that self-enhancing humor has positive results and this study posits that a leader's use of self-enhancing humor will be positively associated with higher quality exchanges between leaders and members.

Hypothesis 2: A significant positive correlation exists between a leader's perceived use of self-enhancing humor and quality of exchanges with employees.

(3) Aggressive humor. Aggressive humor is described by Martin et al. (2003) as negative humor that is directed toward others. Aggressive humor is related to any sarcasm, teasing, ridicule, derision, or disparagement humor (Zillman, 1983). This style of humor is also related to any attempt to manipulate through an expression of humor (Janes & Olson, 2000). Martin et al. (2003) describe aggressive humor as compulsive and often used with a complete disregard for its negative impact on others. This dimension of humor will be particularly important in the purpose of this study. The impact of aggressive humor is intuitively negatively related to relationship satisfaction, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Martin et al., 2003).

Aggressive humor has the most negative qualities of all the other styles of humor and it is negatively related to relationship satisfaction, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Martin et al., 2003). A leader's use of aggressive humor should be associated with lower quality exchanges.

Hypothesis 3: A significant negative correlation exists between a leader's perceived use of aggressive humor and quality of exchanges with employees.

(4) Self-defeating humor. This style looks at humor that is used at one's expense. Individuals who use self-defeating humor can be viewed as silly, social comedians, but they often have underlying emotional issues that explain why they are using this style of humor (Fabrizi & Pollio, 1987). People who predominantly use this style of humor are positively related to depression and anxiety, and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction and self-esteem (Martin et al.,

2003). Self-defeating humor is a compelling style that certainly plays a role in organizational humor.

Self-defeating humor is the most difficult phenomena to predict for this study. Since individuals using this humor style tend to be depressed (Martin et al., 2003), it may be difficult to find leaders and managers who use self-defeating humor.

Individuals who are depressed and anxious are rarely placed in positions of power.

For the leaders who use self-defeating humor, there should be lower quality exchanges with members.

Hypothesis 4: A significant negative correlation exists between a leader's perceived use of self-defeating humor and quality of exchanges with employees.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study were men and women who have worked and are currently working in an organization (N=1450). 913 participants were male (63%) and 250 were female (36%).

The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 80 (M=50.07 , SD=9.92) and 1,279 (88.2%) were Caucasian; 51 (3.5%) Hispanic ; 50 (3.4%) African American; 37 (2.6%) Asian; 15 (1.0%) Native Hawaiian/Alaskan Native; and four (0.2%) did not respond to the question. The education levels of the participants comprised of the following: Master's Degree (40.9%); Bachelor's Degree (37.9%); Professional Degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D. and et al.) (13.9%); Associates Degree (3.9%); and High School (3.5%).

Procedures

The survey was distributed through variety of different means and provided a large snowball sample. The primary researcher emailed a link to all of his contacts in his address book and asked each recipient to pass the email along to as many friends and co-workers as possible. The primary researcher was also able to use the email system of a company with whom he had an internship. The company distributed the survey to a large number of recipients and that resulted in a large

number of completed surveys. The mass email through the company went out to working individuals all across the U.S.

More than 2,000 people started the survey, but all of the incomplete surveys were removed from the survey. Participants were asked to identify a past or current manager or leader. A leader or manager was defined as someone who the participant has regular interaction with and is by definition, the participant's manager.

Using an online survey tool allowed the researcher to maintain the confidentiality of the participant. The researcher had no way of linking the survey responses to a name or individual. The researcher closed the survey after receiving a number of surveys that was fitting for the research and then downloaded the data. Since so many participants opened the survey, but didn't start it, the surveys that had no data in the responses were filtered out before the analysis.

Measures

The online survey used for this study contained and measured two variables: humor style and quality of exchanges between leaders and members. Humor styles were measured by the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) and two different LMX measures were used: the one-dimensional LMX-7 and the LMX-Multi-Dimensional Model (LMX-MDM).

Humor Styles

Humor styles were operationalized using a seven-point, thirty-two item scale called the Humor Style Questionnaire (HSQ). The measure was developed by Martin

et al. (2003), and contains four sub-scales of eight-items each and instructs participants to evaluate the degree to which their manager uses (a) affiliative (b) self-enhancing, (c) self-defeating, or (d) aggressive forms of humor. Internal consistency coefficients between .77 and .81 and test-retest correlations between .80 and .85 have been reported in the literature for this measure (Martin, et al., 2003).

The HSQ was initially subjected to a principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation (Table 1) in this study. In order for an item to load on a factor, a primary loading of at least .50 and no secondary loading within .30 of the primary loading was required. Three factors accounting for 48.3 percent of cumulative variance emerged from this analysis and approximated closely the four factors reported by Martin et al. (2003).

The first factor, *benevolent humor*, accounted for 26.7 percent of the variance and comprised both the affiliative and self-enhancing humor items of the HSQ. The second factor, *aggressive humor*, accounted for 11.3 percent of the variance. The third factor, *self-defeating humor style*, accounted for 10.3 percent of the variance. The internal reliabilities for these three factors were .94, .72, and .68 respectively (Cronbach's Alpha). Factor scores were then computed for each factor for subsequent analysis.

The reasoning behind affiliative and self-enhancing humor both being placed in the same component finds its roots in the design of the measure itself. Martin et al. (2003) created the scale based upon a model that looks at humor's ability to enhance one's relationship with self and others, and the distinction between humor

that is “benign and benevolent” (p. 52). Affiliative and self-enhancing humor are both humor styles that would be considered “benevolent.” The results of the measure indicate the closeness between the two humor styles.

Table 1

*Principal Components Factor Analysis of Humor Styles Questionnaire
with Varimax Rotation*

Question	F1	F2	F3	F4
My leader usually doesn't laugh or joke around much with other people.	.67	-.03	.01	.31
If my leader is feeling depressed, he/she usually cheers himself/herself up with humor.	.68	-.17	.21	-.06
If someone makes a mistake, my leader will often tease them about it.	.19	.52	.19	.03
My leader lets people laugh at him/her or make fun at his/her expense more than he/she should.	.14	.04	.53	.15
My leader doesn't have to work very hard at making other people laugh—My leader seems to be a naturally humorous person.	.78	-.08	.18	.15
Even when my leader is by himself/herself, he/she is often amused by the absurdities of life.	.75	-.05	.22	-.00
People are never offended or hurt by my leader's sense of humor.	-.27	.61	-.02	.08
My leader will often get carried away in putting himself/herself down if it makes his/her family or friends laugh.	.11	.10	.72	.10
My leader rarely makes other people laugh by telling funny stories about himself/herself.	.44	-.18	.09	.43

(Continued)

Question	F1	F2	F3	F4
If my leader is feeling upset or unhappy, he/she usually tries to think of something funny about the situation to make himself/herself feel better.	.71	-.15	.35	-.14
When telling jokes or saying funny things, my leader is usually not very concerned about how other people are taking it.	-.17	.71	.08	-.10
My leader often tries to make people like or accept him/her more by saying something funny about his/her own weaknesses, blunders, or faults.	.32	.01	.64	.14
My leader laughs and jokes a lot with his/her closest friends.	.75	.17	.07	.08
My leader's humorous outlook on life keeps him/her from getting overly upset or depressed about things.	.78	-.18	.19	-.03
My leader doesn't like it when people use humor as a way of criticizing or putting someone down.	-.07	.45	.18	.48
My leader doesn't often say funny things to put himself/herself down.	.32	-.06	.50	.56
My leader usually doesn't like to tell jokes or amuse people.	.73	.09	.11	.35
If my leader is by himself/herself and he/she is feeling unhappy, my leader makes an effort to think of something funny to cheer himself/herself up.	.70	-.11	.26	-.19
Sometimes my leader thinks of something that is so funny that he/she can't stop himself/herself from saying it, even if it is not appropriate for the situation.	.12	.71	.25	-.03
My leader often goes overboard in putting himself/herself down when he/she is making jokes or trying to be funny.	-.02	.27	.68	.01
My leader enjoys making people laugh.	.81	.02	.15	.13

(Continued)

Question	F1	F2	F3	F4
If my leader is feeling sad or upset, he/she usually loses his/her sense of humor.	.37	-.42	.09	.19
My leader never participates in laughing at others even if all his/her friends are doing it.	.06	.52	.05	.44
When my leader is with friends or family, he/she often seems to be the one that other people make fun of or joke about.	.02	.24	.52	-.08
My leader doesn't often joke around with his/her friends.	.73	.08	-.03	.31
It is my leader's experience that thinking about some amusing aspect of a situation is often a very effective way of coping with problems.	.74	-.10	.26	-.09
If my leader doesn't like someone, he/she often uses humor or teasing to put them down.	-.13	.70	.14	-.14
If my leader is having problems or feeling unhappy, he/she often covers it up by joking around, so that even his/her closest friends don't know how the leader really feels.	.34	.15	.49	-.09
My leader usually can't think of witty things to say when he/she is with other people.	.66	-.06	-.15	.23
My leader doesn't need to be with other people to feel amused – He/She can usually find things to laugh about even when he/she is alone.	.66	-.13	.04	-.10
Even if something is really funny to my leader, he/she will not laugh or joke about it if someone will be offended.	-.08	.66	.03	.29
Letting others laugh at him/her is my leader's way of keeping his/her friends and family in good spirits.	.54	-.13	.46	.13
Eigen values	8.6	3.6	3.3	
% of variance explained	26.7	11.3	10.3	

Note: **Bold** factors meet loading requirements.

Leader-Member Exchange

Quality exchanges between leaders and members were operationalized using a five-point, seven-item unidimensional scale called LMX-7. The measure is a highly reliable measure used in many different studies that investigate the leader-member dyad.

The LMX-7 was subjected to a principle components factor analysis (Table 2). In order for an item to load on a factor, a primary loading of at least .50 and no secondary loading within .30 of the primary loading was required. A single factor emerged on this measure which confirmed previous research on the LMX. The factor that emerged from the analysis, quality of leader-member exchange, accounted for 68 percent of the variance, and the internal reliability for this factor was .92 (Cronbach's Alpha).

Table 2

Principal Components Factor Analysis of Leader-Member Exchange-7 Scale (LMX-7) with Varimax Rotation

Question	F1
Do you know where you stand with your leader...do you usually know how satisfied your leader is with what you do?	.81
How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs? (How well do you understand?)	.83
How well does your leader recognize your potential? (How well do you recognize?)	.84
Regardless of how much formal authority he/she has built into his/her position, what are the chances that your leader would use his/her power to help you solve problems in your work? (What are the chances that you would?)	.80

(Continued)

Question	F1
Again, regardless of the amount of formal authority your leader has, what are the chances that he/she would "bail you out," at his/her expense? (What are the chances that you would?)	.78
I have enough confidence in my leader that I would defend and justify his/her decision if he/she were not present to do so. (Your member would)	.82
How would you characterize your working relationship with your leader? (Your member)	.90
Eigen values	4.8
% of variance explained	67.9

Note: **Bold** items meet loading requirements.

Leader-Member Exchange Multi-Dimensional Model

Liden and Maslyn (1998) created a multi-dimensional LMX scale that measures different factors involved in the leader-member dyad. The multi-dimensional scale (LMX-MDM) consists of a seven-point, twelve-item scale. The measure contains four sub-scales of three-items each and asks participants to evaluate the degree of (a) affect, (b) loyalty, (c) contribution, and (d) professional respect for their leader. Internal consistency coefficients of .90, .78, .60, and .92, for affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect, respectively, have been reported. Test-retest correlations of .83, .66, .56, and .79, have also been reported in the literature for this measure (Liden and Maslyn, 1998).

The LMX-MDM scale was subjected to a principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation (Table 3) in this study. In order for an item to load on a factor, it must record a primary loading of at least .50 and no secondary loading within .30

of the primary loading was required. Three factors accounting for 76.9 percent of the cumulative variance emerged.

The first factor, *relational respect*, accounted for 55.9 percent of the variance and was comprised of the affect, loyalty and professional respect components of the LMX-MDM scale. The second factor, *contribution*, accounted for the remaining 21.0 percent of the variance. The internal reliabilities for the two factors were .96 and .76, respectively (Cronbach's Alpha). Factor scores were then computed for each factor for subsequent analysis.

Table 3

Principal Components Factor Analysis of Leader-Member Exchange
Multi-Dimensional Model (LMX-MDM) with Varimax Rotation

Question	F1	F2
I like my leader very much.	.87	.29
My leader is the kind of person one would like to have as a friend.	.85	.25
My leader is a lot of fun to work with.	.84	.25
My leader defends my work actions to a superior, even without complete knowledge of the issue in question.	.75	.27
My leader would come to my defense if I were "attacked" by others.	.83	.29
My leader would defend me to others in the organization if I made an honest mistake.	.81	.31
I do work for my leader that goes beyond what is specified in my job description.	.10	.87
I am willing to apply extra efforts, beyond those normally required, to meet my leader's work goals.	.35	.84

(Continued)

Question	F1	F2
I do not mind working my hardest for my leader.	.56	.67
I am impressed with my leader's knowledge of his/her job.	.83	.20
I respect my leader's knowledge of and competence on the job.	.85	.22
I admire my leader's professional skills.	.86	.24
Eigen values	6.7	2.5
% of variance explained	55.9	21.0

Note: **Bold** items meet loading requirements

CHAPTER THREE

Results

In order to test the hypotheses, a Pearson, one-tailed correlation analysis (Table 4) was executed between leaders' humor styles and the quality of exchanges between leaders and members.

Each hypothesis proposed in this study was supported by the analysis. There were significant positive correlations between the *benevolent* dimension of the HSQ and the *relational respect* ($r = .79, p = .000$) and *contribution* ($r = .32, p = .000$) measures of the LMX-MDM. *Benevolent* humor was also strongly correlated with the LMX-7 scale ($r = .61, p = .000$). This supports Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2.

The *aggressive* component of the HSQ had a significant negative correlation with the *relational respect* ($r = -.32, p = .000$) and *contribution* ($r = -.18, p = .000$) component of the LMX-MDM, and with the LMX-7 scale ($r = -.39, p = .000$). These findings support Hypothesis 3.

The *self-defeating* component of the HSQ had significant correlations with each of the measures used in the study. Therefore Hypothesis 4 was supported due to *self-defeating* humor's correlations with *relational respect* ($r = .20, p = .000$), the LMX-7 scale ($r = .11, p = .000$), and *contribution* ($r = -.10, p = .35$).

Table 4

Correlation Matrix of LMX and Humor Styles

Item Name	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Benevolent Humor	—					
2. Aggressive Humor	-.11*	—				
3. Self-defeating Humor	.38*	.25*	—			
4. Relational Respect Component	.79*	-.32*	.20*	—		
5. Contribution Component	.32*	-.18*	-.10	.48*	—	
6. LMX	.61*	-.39*	.11*	.83*	.44*	—

* Correlation is significant at the .000 level (1-tailed).

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion

This study investigated the role of specific humor styles on the relationship between leaders and members. According to Leader-Member Exchange theory, leaders are most effective when leaders and members develop mature relationships (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1995). LMX delineates that leaders create in-group and out-group relationships with members. In-group relationships are characterized by trust and respect while out-group relationships remain more task-oriented (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1995). Research shows that creating in-group relationships have organizational benefits such as performance and job satisfaction (Graen et al., 1982), but it fails to explain what conversational moves a leader can implement to create in-group relationships. This study introduced humor as a possible conversational move that leaders could use to create in-group relationships in the leader-making process in LMX.

A survey methodology was employed to test the relationships of the variables under investigation in this study. Humor styles were measured via Humor Styles Questionnaire which identifies how often an individual uses a particular humor style (Martin et al., 2003). Martin et al. (2003) developed the humor styles by proposing that humor is either directed toward one's self or others, and that humor is either positive or negative. The analysis resulted in the creation of four humor styles: *affiliative*, *self-enhancing*, *aggressive*, and *self-defeating*.

Two measures were used to operationalize the relationship between leaders and members, the LMX-7 and the LMX-MDM (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). The LMX-MDM contained new dimensions in the relationship between leaders and members and allowed the researcher to test whether these new dimensions are influenced by different humor styles. LMX-7 is a widely used and reliable measure of the quality of exchanges between leaders and members. Using two LMX measures provided the theoretic opportunity to compare Liden's and Maslyn's multi-dimensional re-conceptualization and the LMX-7 in the context of leadership and humor.

The measures were compiled and released in a survey through a website. Data were collected through an expansive snowball sample. A significant number of completed surveys were returned quickly to the researcher. After the data were collected, a component factor analysis was conducted on the three measures. All of the measures reported sound internal reliability. A correlation analysis was then executed between the humor styles and LMX components that loaded properly.

The hypotheses for this study were based on the intersection of leadership and humor. The positive humor styles (*affiliative* and *self-enhancing*) were hypothesized to be positively associated with the quality of exchanges according to the LMX scales. Conversely, the negative humor styles (*aggressive* and *self-defeating*) were expected to be negatively associated with the quality of exchanges in the leader-member dyad.

The correlation analysis confirmed all of the hypotheses proposed in this study. Each of the four hypotheses reported significant correlations. The factor analysis of the two LMX scales indicated that there is not a significant difference

between the two scales. LMX-MDM loaded two different factors and provided additional insight into the specific characteristics of the relationship that was associated with humor in this study.

Implications

A leader's use of different humor styles influences the relationship between the quality of exchanges between leaders and members. The findings of this study offer several contributions to the study of discursive leadership. The study extends the literature on LMX theory, advances the research on humor and its functions in organizational life, and offers insight into differing LMX measures and their effectiveness.

The implications of these findings are very significant both in terms of advancing the theoretical richness of LMX and the practical world of successfully leading and managing in organizations. LMX now has increased explanatory and predictive capability by identifying the capabilities of humor in the leader-member dyad. Although this study only correlated humor and LMX, it is evident that humor affects the formation of in-groups and out-groups. From a practical standpoint, leaders are now able to see how positive (or benevolent) humor can strengthen the quality of exchanges they have with their members.

As mentioned earlier in this study, high-quality exchanges and in-group relationships lead to many different benefits in a team or organization (Graen et al., 1982). In-group relationships in the partnership phase of the leader-making process exhibit high levels of trust, mutual respect and the sharing of ideas (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1995). Turnover (Graen & Ginsburgh, 1977), performance (Graen et al.,

1982), organizational commitment (Nystrom, 1990) and other organizational phenomena can be improved through more in-group relationships in the workplace. The research found in this study illustrates how leaders can use humor in the leader-making process to create more in-group relationships and ultimately improve the effectiveness of the department or organization.

Secondly, this study advances the literature on humor by adding an additional function of humor in organizational life. Humor has been found to have many benefits to an organization (Decker & Rotondo, 2001; Vaill, 1989; Meyer, 1997; Brotherton, 1996) and this research provides strong empirical support that humor can function to improve the dyadic relationship between leaders and members. The findings not only suggest that humor has an impact on the relationship between leaders and members, but that particular types of humor have specific influences on the leader-member dyad.

The *benevolent* humor styles, affiliative and self-enhancing, were found to have an impact on the leader-member relationship. The use of the LMX-MDM reveals that the strongest correlations occurred with member's perceived loyalty, affect and professional respect. This finding is intuitive and confirms the predictions from Martin et al. (2003) that benevolent humor styles have a positive effect. The analysis provides support on how positive humor styles influence particular aspects in the leader-member relationship.

The analysis also revealed interesting data regarding the use of negative humor. The *aggressive* humor style correlated as expected with a negative relationship with different aspects of LMX. Martin et al. (2003) hypothesized that

the aggressive humor style would be negatively associated with qualities such “relationship satisfaction, agreeableness, and conscientiousness” (54). The results of this study align with the hypothesis given by Martin et al. (2003) by indicating the negative impact aggressive humor has within the leader-member dyad. The analysis suggests that a leader who uses aggressive humor will debilitate or hurt the relationship between the leader and member.

The most interesting component of the humor styles is the self-defeating humor. The analysis found no significance between the humor style and the dimensions of LMX-7 and LMX-MDM. The result of this aspect of the study is not surprising according to the nature of the study. Fabrizio and Pollio (1987) acknowledge that individuals who exhibit self-defeating humor could have a low self-esteem and show emotional neediness. Leaders in organizations are often known for self-confidence and high self-esteem and rarely neediness. Since we did not have strong correlations with this humor style, it can be inferred that leaders do not use self-defeating humor or that individuals who use self-defeating humor are not promoted into leadership positions.

Lastly, the findings of this study provide new knowledge to the leadership making process by using both the LMX-7 and the LMX-MDM scales. When Liden and Maslyn (1998) created the LMX-MDM scale, they criticized the uni-dimensionality of LMX-7. In this study, two of their four original components, relational respect and contribution, achieved appropriate reliability levels, but still accounted for more variance than the original LMX-7. Thus, heuristic insights were generated

concerning both the psychometric properties of LMX-MDM and the multi-dimensional flavor of leader-member relationships.

Future Research Considerations

The present study identifies the relationship between humor styles and leadership, but it leaves plenty of room for future research. One area that needs to be addressed in future studies is the role of biological sex and the use of humor in leader-member dyads. There are two provocative areas of interest concerning biological sex and humor in the leader-member dyad. One of these harbingers for future research concerns the impact that the biological sex of the leader has on humor use, and how this intersection affects leader-member relations. A second harbinger of future research concerns the dyadic composition of the leader-member relationships, and whether humor affects same-sex versus mixed-sex leader-member relationships differently.

One of the most common assumptions regarding biological sex and humor is that men use humor more than women (McGhee, 1979). Crawford (1995) found that men viewed their own humor more positively than women. She also discovered that both men and women selected men when asked to write about someone who has a good sense of humor (Crawford, 1995). Decker and Rotondo (2001) investigated biological sex and its role in the particular humor style used and appreciated by individuals. The research posits that males will use positive and negative humor more and appreciate both types of humor as well. Decker and Rotondo (2001) refer to females as being “disadvantaged” if “humor is related to perceived leader behavior and effectiveness” (p. 453). The study found that women

were penalized when using offensive humor at work, but women had higher effectiveness ratings when using positive humor (Decker & Rotondo, 2001, p. 460).

The results of these studies have significant implications for LMX. If a female manager uses positive humor with members, she may have more of an impact than a male who uses humor. Future research should address the styles of humor used by male and female leaders in organizations.

Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) argue that men would be more likely to joke more in mixed-sex conversations if the humor is status or power related according to the hierarchy-building perspective (LaFave, 1972). According to these findings, the use of humor in the leader-member dyad is influenced by biological sex. Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) found in their research that all male groups joked less than all female groups. The researchers suggest that this result comes from the need for females to use humor to build hierarchies in their groups. In the same study, Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) found that in task discussions, men told more jokes in mixed groups, but women joked more in all-female groups. The study claims that the primary use of joking in task discussions is to build hierarchies and status, not cohesion.

These findings suggest that the combination of biological sex, status, and gender-composition of leader-member relationships affect the use of humor in organizations. Future research should investigate the role of the biological sex of the leader and members in the leader-member relationships in order to discover if certain humor styles used by males and females with their male and female

members have a different impact on the quality of exchanges in the leadership making process.

Limitations

Some of the main limitations of this study and research pertain to the specific methods and measures used in the study. The survey (Appendix) used self-report measures that often report information that does not appropriately reflect actual phenomena.

The measures used were slightly adapted for the use in this particular study. The HSQ was created for leaders to assess their own personal humor style. The survey items were changed from first-person to third-person and this could have altered its effectiveness to measure the humor styles. Some of the items measured details about leaders that only really close members would be able to know.

The LMX-7 scale is intended to be taken by leaders and members and then the results are supposed to be compared. Since we only used data from random leaders and members, the scale may not have been utilized to its greatest capacity. Even with these limitations, the scales showed strong internal reliability and multiple components emerged and were able to be used effectively for the purpose of this study.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Humor Styles and LMX Surveys

Humor and Leader-Member Exchange: How Can a Leader Use Different Types of Humor to Create In-Groups and Out-Groups?

This study looks at the relationship between managers and employees. The first set of questions will require you to think of a current or former leader or manager. Answer the questions to the best of your knowledge concerning the leader you have in mind. The term “leader” will be use to represent this individual who could be a manager, supervisor or administrator.

Once you have completed the online survey, you are finished with the study. The information you provide in this survey will help communication scholars understand the correlations between humor and leadership. Understanding communicative aspects of the manager-employee relationship can help improve organizational effectiveness. Thank you for your participation in this study.

I. The first section of the survey asks a few demographic questions about yourself and your role in your company or organization. The information will be grouped and combined with the results of the other participants. Nothing you respond to in this section will be used to identify you.

1. Please indicate your sex:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

2. Please indicate the sex of your leader:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

3. How long have you known the leader? (years)

4. What is your current age?

5. Please indicate your race/ethnic background (select all that apply):

- a. American Indian or Alaska Native
- b. Asian
- c. Black or African American
- d. Caucasian
- e. Hispanic or Latino
- f. Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander
- e. Other (please write in):

6. What is your highest level of education completed:

- a. High School/GED
- b. Associates Degree
- c. Bachelor Degree
- d. Master's Degree
- e. Professional Degree
- f. Other (please write in):

II. The following statements address a leader's use of humor. Consider a former or current leader (manager or supervisor) and respond to the statements with him or her in mind.

Respond to the statements using the following scale:

- 1 – Totally Disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Somewhat Disagree
- 4 – Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 5 – Somewhat Agree
- 6 – Agree
- 7 – Totally Agree

1. My leader usually doesn't laugh or joke around much with other people.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. If my leader is feeling depressed, he/she usually cheers himself/herself up with humor.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. If someone makes a mistake, my leader will often tease them about it.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. My leader lets people laugh at him/her or make fun at his/her expense more than he/she should.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. My leader doesn't have to work very hard at making other people laugh—My leader seems to be a naturally humorous person.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. Even when my leader is by himself/herself, he/she is often amused by the absurdities of life.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. People are never offended or hurt by my leader's sense of humor.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. My leader will often get carried away in putting himself/herself down if it makes his/her family or friends laugh.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. My leader rarely makes other people laugh by telling funny stories about himself/herself.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. If my leader is feeling upset or unhappy, he/she usually tries to think of something funny about the situation to make himself/herself feel better.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. When telling jokes or saying funny things, my leader is usually not very concerned about how other people are taking it.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. My leader often tries to make people like or accept him/her more by saying something funny about his/her own weaknesses, blunders, or faults.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. My leader laughs and jokes a lot with his/her closest friends.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. My leader's humorous outlook on life keeps him/her from getting overly upset or depressed about things.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. My leader doesn't like it when people use humor as a way of criticizing or putting someone down.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. My leader doesn't often say funny things to put himself/herself down.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. My leader usually doesn't like to tell jokes or amuse people.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. If my leader is by himself/herself and he/she is feeling unhappy, my leader makes an effort to think of something funny to cheer himself/herself up.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. Sometimes my leader thinks of something that is so funny that he/she can't stop himself/herself from saying it, even if it is not appropriate for the situation.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. My leader often goes overboard in putting himself/herself down when he/she is making jokes or trying to be funny.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. My leader enjoys making people laugh.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. If my leader is feeling sad or upset, he/she usually loses his/her sense of humor.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. My leader never participates in laughing at others even if all his/her friends are doing it.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. When my leader is with friends or family, he/she often seems to be the one that other people make fun of or joke about.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. My leader doesn't often joke around with his/her friends.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. It is my leader's experience that thinking about some amusing aspect of a situation is often a very effective way of coping with problems.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27. If my leader doesn't like someone, he/she often uses humor or teasing to put them down.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28. If my leader is having problems or feeling unhappy, he/she often covers it up by joking around, so that even his/her closest friends don't know how the leader really feels.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

29. My leader usually can't think of witty things to say when he/she is with other people.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

30. My leader doesn't need to be with other people to feel amused – He/She can usually find things to laugh about even when he/she is alone.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

31. Even if something is really funny to my leader, he/she will not laugh or joke about it if someone will be offended.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

32. Letting others laugh at him/her is my leader's way of keeping his/her friends and family in good spirits.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

III. The following seven statements seek to understand the quality of exchanges you have with your manager (or with your employees). Think about the same manager you had in mind for the previous statements and respond.

1. Do you know where you stand with your leader...do you usually know how satisfied your leader is with what you do?

Rarely Occasionally Sometimes Fairly Often Very Often

2. How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs? (How well do you understand?)

Not a bit A Little A Fair Amount Quite a Bit A Great Deal

3. How well does your leader recognize your potential? (How well do you recognize?)

Not at All A Little Moderately Mostly Fully

4. Regardless of how much formal authority he/she has built into his/her position, what are the chances that your leader would use his/her power to help you solve problems in your work? (What are the chances that you would?)

None Small Moderate High Very High

11. My leader defends my work actions to a superior even without complete knowledge of the issue in question.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. My leader would come to my defense if I were “attacked” by others.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I do work for my leader that goes beyond what is specified in my job description.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I am willing to apply extra efforts, beyond those normally required, to meet my leader’s work goals.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. I do not mind working my hardest for my leader.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. I am impressed with my leader’s knowledge of his/her job.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. I respect my leader's knowledge of and competence on the job.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. I admire my leader's professional skills.

Totally Disagree

Totally Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

You have successfully completed the survey. Thank you for your time.

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