

Managers Blind: Humor

Yöneticilerin Kördüğümü: Mizah

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SUMMARY

Humor is a common element of human interaction and therefore has an impact on work groups and organizations. Despite the belief that business is serious, humor can lighten the mood within organizational environments and make work life more enjoyable. Humor has been described as an important component of organizational culture by creating a positive environment in which knowledge and ideas are shared freely and interpersonal relationships can flourish. Despite this, managers often fail to take humor seriously or realize its numerous benefits. Indeed, the proper use of organizational humor can provide valuable benefits to organizations—and even more valuable tools to management for motivating staff, communicating effectively, and mitigating discord. Humor is more than just funny concepts; it represents a multifunctional management tool that can be used to achieve many objectives. Managers can select the appropriate humor style suitable for the desired organizational outcome, adjust for individual differences, and achieve positive organizational outcomes. This article describes how nurse managers can use humor to reduce stress and enhance leadership, group cohesiveness, communication, creativity, and organizational culture.

Keywords: Humour; manager; nurse.

ÖZET

Mizah insan etkileşiminde ortak bir unsurdur ve bu nedenle çalışanlar ve kuruluşlar üzerinde önemli etkisi vardır. Çalışma ortamının ciddi olduğu inancına rağmen, mizah örgütsel ortamlarda stresi hafifletmek ve iş yaşamını daha zevkli hale getirmek için kullanılabilir. Mizah bilgi ve fikirlerin serbestçe paylaşılabilirdiği ve kişilerarası ilişkilerin yeşerebileceği olumlu bir ortam yaratarak örgüt kültürünün önemli bir bileşeni olarak tarif edilmiştir. Buna rağmen, genellikle yöneticiler, mizahı ciddiye almak ya da onun faydalarını fark etmekte başarısızdırlar. Nitekim örgütsel mizahın doğru kullanımı personeli motive etme, etkin iletişim, uyumsuzlukları azaltma gibi örgütlere değerli faydalar sağlayabilir. Mizah sadece komik kavramlardan daha fazlasıdır; hedeflere ulaşmak için kullanılacak birçok yönetim aracını ifade eder. Yöneticiler, istenen örgütsel sonuç için, bireysel farklılıklara uyumlu ve olumlu örgütsel sonuçlar elde edebileceği uygun ideal mizah stili seçebilirler. Bu makalede yönetici hemşirelerin stresi azaltarak liderliği, grup bütünlüğünü, iletişimi, yaratıcılık ve örgüt kültürünü geliştirebilmek için mizahı kullanmalarının önemini açıklamak amaçlanmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Mizah; yönetici; hemşire.

Introduction

Personal distress or tension in daily life is relieved with a smile that appears on the faces because of a funny word, joke, event, picture, or comics. Humor, when it is used at a proper time and in a proper environment, decreases tension like a magic wand. In other words, at times of stress and emotional tension, humor can function as a tool reducing emotional burden in the environment.^[1]

The literature has shown humor and laughter to have many physiological, social, and psychological advantages. Physiologically, while laughing, through contraction and relaxation of muscles, the muscle strain reduces, circulation im-

proves, heart rate and blood pressure rise, respiratory rate and depth increase, and immune system improves by an increase in immunoglobulin A and pain tolerance.^[2-4] Socially, laughter helps people to establish new relations and strengthen their friendships functioning as a bridge between them, helps in analysis of conflicts, and provides satisfaction by increasing creativity and productivity.^[4-6] Moreover, psychologically it helps people to improve their self-esteem by developing positive emotions through relieving stress, tension, anxiety, and their negative effects.^[3,7,8] Although the importance of humor in bringing joy to people's social life and facilitating learning in education is well known and understood, the use of humor in management has not gained acceptance as expected. Today, competition and individual differences in the job environment create many difficulties and obstacles for managers. The first thing that comes to mind about managers is a traditional approach created by the management using authority and rules to instill fear in people with a threat of punishment. Therefore, managers having a sense of humor contradicts the nature of authority. Humor is perceived as a frailty for managers. Thus, the use of humor in the management causes worry that it may weaken the authority and diminish the seriousness of the manager. However, nowadays, when people need more of peace and trust, and the humane

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management demands have increased, humor can function as an important tool, defusing tension and giving the authority a humane identity.

Theoretical Framework of Humor

Mizah (humor) has originated from the Arabic word “müzah” giving place to gülmece. It is defined as a joke (latife) and entertainment in the Ottoman Turkish Encyclopedic Dictionary.^[9] The word gülmece is used in the Turkish dictionary as the definition of humor, and humor is defined as “an entertaining, laughing, and ironical act aiming to play a joke on someone’s behavior without hurting; a form of literature presenting laughter-inducing parts of the truth.”^[10]

People attempting to explain laugh and humor first tried to seek an answer to the question “Why do people laugh?”; the answers they gave to this question have led to the development of the first theories on humor and laughter.^[6,11] However, it is stated in the literature that providing a standard definition for the sense of humor is difficult.^[12-15] According to Martin (2004), the main reason for this situation is related to the fact that humor is complex in terms of cognitive, affective, behavioral, physical, and social aspects.^[13]

Humor is an ability to see entertaining sides of events and situations rather than always being serious.^[16] It is a wisecrack telling opinion and cultural values using jokes.^[4] In other words, the sense of humor is an ability to see, perceive, and tell something ridiculous.^[6,13] According to Plato, humor is “telling the truth under the cover of joke.”

Humor is classified into four types on the basis of whether humor is compatible or incompatible and interpersonal or inside of a person expressing individual differences in daily life using humor.^[13]

Affiliative Humor

Affiliative humor is a humor type including the ability to use humor (playing a joke, telling jokes, saying funny things, making a wisecrack, and so forth) to relieve and entertain others.^[17] Basically, this type does not contain hostility and is used as a tolerance tool to improve interpersonal relations. The affiliative humor has a positive relationship with moods dominated by cheerfulness, self-esteem, intimacy, satisfactory relationship, and positive emotions.^[18]

Self-enhancing Humor

This type of humor is a dimension that looks at life with a humorous point of view, is created in minds of people, and includes an ability to look at things with a funny perspective despite distress and stressful moments.^[17] People having this type of humor tend to use humor as a tool to overcome difficulties, stress, and disputes in life.

Aggressive Humor

This type of humor involves inappropriate insults, hostility, kidding, teasing, and stinging derision among people.^[17] Aggressive humor focuses on characters and attitudes of others.^[19] The intended purpose of people having this type of humor is to criticize or suppress people by mocking, teasing, insulting, or in a sexual or racist manner.^[18]

4-Self-defeating Humor

This type of humor includes telling and doing funny things at the expense of being insulted to be accepted and remain close to others, making an exhibition of oneself, and laughing with others when one is insulted or made fun of by them. This is a self-directed type of humor.^[17]

Modern psychological studies conducted on humor have determined that the sense of humor is a positive and demandable personality trait improving psychological health and well-being.^[20,21] This trait arises as a defense to avoid being under the influence of negative feelings in difficult or frightening situations. Herzog and Streny (2008) reported that people having a good sense of humor also have some positive characteristics such as optimism, self-acceptance, self-confidence, and autonomy at higher levels.^[21]

While using humor, it is necessary to consider timing, perception, and content. Otherwise, humor can cause anger and rage in people by creating a totally opposite effect. It is important to use humor at an appropriate time. If a person using humor does not pay attention to this, the environment can become more tense and the communication can be negatively affected. While using humor, people should guess how the other person will perceive it. The content of humor is also important. People should especially avoid making jokes that are sarcastic, insulting, or about sexuality and ethnic background.^[4]

Managers and Humor

Nowadays, competition and individual differences in the job environment create many difficulties and obstacles for managers. Therefore, efficient executive leaders are needed both now and in the future. The characteristics of efficient executive leaders include creating a vision and explaining it to the group, getting ready for risk, being able to cope with problems and conflicts, being open to change, being determined, being able to establish effective communication, keeping a level head, being aware of the feelings and behaviors of others, looking after others’ requirements and targets, and being able to present their humor abilities in stressful moments.^[22]

Melendez (2002) described a leader as a person who has a vision and good sense of humor, benefits from others, knows him/herself and his/her employees well, and is a passionate, kind, honest, open to change, and a good coach.^[23]

On the contrary, Depree stated honesty, valuing others, being sympathetic, knowing the spirit of people, being courageous in relationships, having good sense of humor, wonder and energy, being consistent, being available at any moment, understanding the past, and respecting the future by looking at today as the basic characteristics expected in leaders.^[24]

Hence, managers and leaders should be a person who has a good sense of humor. If managers use humor skills in management, it can increase productivity and efficiency in service.

Humor increases self-confidence in people. If managers are not self-confident, they always tend to point out mistakes in others while hiding their own mistakes. This situation weakens the confidence in the manager and decreases productivity. A good sense of humor can provide a conducive environment to easily work out the solutions by reducing the tension caused by mistakes through funniness. Therefore, humor can be used in a working environment to identify problems. In working environments, problems of the organization can be clarified using funny events. This kind of humor can be used to directly examine current situations and face conflicts.^[4]

Humor is advantageous for employees in coping with burnout, which is experienced by employees. It can help people to perceive their stressful experiences differently and assess the situation more positively. Hence, it prevents emotional burden and its damages on people and provides them a sense of relief.^[6,12] Humor is one of the effective and healthy methods that provides a different perspective to cope with tough experiences of life.^[4]

It is possible to teach an unpleasant topic in education by making it pleasant using humor. Similarly, it is possible to make an unpleasant job entertaining by using a little humor. It is a situation that is completely related to the humor skills of a manager. Humor plays an important role in making people love their jobs.^[1] Moreover, using humor such as caricatures, stories, and jokes about the topic in in-service trainings is an effective method to attract listeners' attention. Staying focused on work for a long time causes concentration problems, which adversely affects a person's learning and productivity. Humor facilitates the learning process and recollection by enabling people to remain focused. It is stated that the learning skills of people increase in an environment where humor is used and they learn faster and recall quicker.^[4,25,26]

The sense of humor is an element that facilitates communication. A person who can laugh and make a wisecrack is open to communication. Being open to communication enables managers to not only intervene in problems before they become serious, but give opportunity to people for self-

expression. Since people have the space and environment to easily express their negative thoughts and feelings, jobs can be accomplished more smoothly.^[1] If people think that telling few things may directly hurt other people and they cannot use other communication methods to express their negative emotions and thoughts, they can prefer to use humor.^[4]

The mismatch between expectations and what has actually been achieved in life causes tension in the inner worlds. Managers who have no sense of humor tend to be short tempered. They dissipate their neural energy by shouting, reprimanding, and spilling out their hatred. This situation creates fear in people who are governed because such managers are more likely to frighten and punish. When they come to a deadlock, they act losing their temper rather than resolving the problem using wit. According to Moran (1996), many theories explaining humor have emphasized its two main features as the basis. First, humor exerts an effect that relieves tension and pressure. Second, humor enables a person to interpret a situation or event again with a different perspective.^[6,13]

As being a leader is a difficult job requiring seriousness, strict authority, and many solid rules, managers lead an extremely stressful working life. Defense mechanisms such as completely enjoying the life, being able to laugh at oneself, and having a good sense of humor help to cope with stress by increasing the self-esteem of people.^[1,2,4,5,27] Hence, humor replaces stress with more terminal and pleasant emotions.^[4] It creates a strong and good-humored management by building an alliance between seriousness and friendliness.

Humor in Nursing Service Management

Knowing and using humor skills is important for nursing service managers who constitutes a large part of employees working in organizations operating in vital areas such as health care. Humor is curative by increasing motivation among nurses who are exposed to adverse working conditions including busy schedule, working in shifts, low wages, physical inability, mobbing, and violence, thereby improving organizational climate and communication.

Today, competition and individual differences in the job environment increase conflicts among employees. It has been reported that the use of humor is beneficial in preventing and decreasing corporate conflicts.^[28] Adverse situations may arise any time in health institutions. Therefore, the efforts of nurse managers are always directed at ensuring that work is not hampered. Even attempting to be cautious taking opportunities into account is a source of stress. In such an environment, the managers' ability to reduce stress in the environment using humor serves as a remedy for others. When nurse managers share humor with their employees, they fulfill the

requirements such as belonging, having the power to express their desires or criticisms against the management, conveying their thoughts without hurting someone, and speaking freely.^[4]

Thornton and White conducted a study (1999) and nurses emphasized that humor is essential in forming a health care staff and working together. Humor increases the productivity of nurses by boosting their energy and decreases tension and panic by preventing burnout and disappointment.^[29] In fact, it allows people to present their experiences in a comfortable environment. This ensures an interaction between the manager and employees within an appropriate organizational climate.

Nurse managers can use humor to change their point of views and prevent negative interpretation and identification of a stressful situation or event. A study found that people having a good sense of humor used positive evaluation and problem-solving, coping strategies more compared with those who had a bad sense of humor.^[30]

Working areas of nurses include life events such as death and disease. The results directly affect the health of people. Hence, nurses do not have a chance to make mistakes. They are expected to take right and prompt decisions, use effective communication skills, and have information and experience about the subject in focus. Therefore, generally nurses suffer from high levels of stress. In the event that nurses are not able to overcome stress, they often experience burnout, psychosomatic disorders, and depression problems. This situation adversely reflects on the care provided, negatively affects the satisfaction level, increases employee turnover rates, and causes economic losses. In such a situation, nurses are advised to use a humorous approach, which is one of the best methods to overcome stress. In studies on humor, nurses have confirmed that humor is very effective in coping with stress and positively influencing the work climate.^[16,31]

In conclusion, humor is an individual tendency but a skill that can be improved. People in management positions encounter stressful events throughout their working lives. Also, nurse managers have high levels of stress because they lead a group engaged in health services. If they can effectively overcome stress, their quality of lives will become better for themselves and their employees. Nurse managers who have advanced humor skills can easily find solutions by looking at the problems from a different perspective and motivating their personnel in a cheerful manner. Nurse managers should know a humorous approach not only to help themselves but also to teach the group working with them. This can be acquired through vocational education and be improved by attending in management courses, and in-service trainings.

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