The Influence of Sense of Humor on Resilience and Psychological Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Cognitive Appraisal

Yazmin M. Faisal & Eugene Y. J. Tee
Department of Psychology, HELP University, Malaysia
Email: yazmin_2393@hotmail.com (Yazmin); teeyj@help.edu.my (Eugene)

Abstract

Humor, and the discrete positive emotion of amusement have been shown to be positive influences on a range of organizational outcomes. While studies have shown that a sense of humor is important for leaders and employees alike, fewer studies have focused on the underlying mechanisms by which a sense of humor leads to these positive outcomes. The current study hypothesizes a positive relationship between organizational employees’ resilience and psychological well-being. It is also hypothesized that cognitive appraisal mediates the sense of humor-resilience and psychological well-being link. A sense of humor is thus likely to encourage individuals to engage in positive coping demands or stressful situations, leading to enhanced resilience and psychological well-being. One hundred and eight (108) employees from various organizations in Malaysia provided responses to questionnaires assessing sense of humor, resilience, psychological well-being, and cognitive appraisal tendencies. The hypotheses were assessed via the PROCESS macro in SPSS, allowing for assessment of the main effects and hypothesized mediation effect. Results provided support for the hypotheses – sense of humor was significantly related to resilience and psychological well-being, and that cognitive appraisal mediated this link. The results are discussed in light of implications for humour theory and research in organizations, as well as how a sense of humor may serve a buffering effect towards workplace stress.

Method

A non-experimental correlational study was conducted amongst 108 employees from various organizations in Malaysia who were at least 23 years of age. Measures used:

- Sense of Humor: 24-items Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (Thornson & Powell, 1991)
- Resilience: 14-items Ego-Resiliency Scale (Block & Kremen, 1996).
- Psychological Well-Being: 7-items Measure of Psychological Well-Being (Chol, Dintotto, & Kim, 2012)
- Cognitive Appraisal: Cognitive Appraisal Scale (Skinner & Brewster, 2002)

Analytic Strategy

- We used Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS macro to test the mediation hypotheses – that the relationship between SOH and resilience and PWS will be mediated by challenge appraisal.
- The PROCESS macro enables the analysis of the indirect effect of SOH (on resilience Y) and on PWB (Y) through challenge appraisal (M). The macro assesses whether the effect of X and Y is significantly explained by another variable, M. The assessment was conducted twice, simultaneously, for the analyses of the mediating relationship on both outcome variables – resilience and PWB.
- In all of the PROCESS macro tests conducted, we used 1000 bootstrap samples and the confidence intervals (CI) set at 95%.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Sensation of Humor, Resilience and Psychological Well-Being

Sense of Humor: the tendency to laugh and to joke during stressful situations (Martin et al., 2003).

Research suggests that the use of humor is associated with numerous beneficial individual and organizational outcomes, such as greater frequency of experience of positive emotions (Geisler & Walter, 2003), more positive self-conceptualizations (Martin et al., 1990; Tracy et al., 2006), as well as elevated psychological well-being (PWB; Kuiper, 2014).

Humor and Amusement as Buffers of Stress: The Broader-and-Build Theory

- In accordance to the broaden-and-build theory, Fredrickson (2000) proposes that humor might function as a mechanism that promotes positive coping through an important mechanism – cognitive appraisal.
- These cognitive appraisals, described as an individual’s evaluation of constructing an occurrence that influences his/her course of action is central towards the SOH-resilience and PWB link (Skinner & Brewster, 2002; Martin et al. 1999).

Cognitive Appraisals as Mechanisms for Promoting Resiliency and Well-Being

The first mover of appraisal is challenge appraisal, in which the individual focuses on the positive aspects of the situation, and their competence in surmounting the challenge and meeting their goal. The second mover of appraisal is threat appraisal, in which the individual focuses on the negative aspects of the situation, along with their inability to cope with that stressful circumstance (Skinner & Brewster, 2002).

Kuiper (1999) argues that a sense of humor enables a more favourable appraisal of stressful situations, adding that individuals high on SOH are more likely to see such situations as less threatening.

Past research has focused extensively on the stress-buffering effects of SOH as a coping strategy (Ablad, 2012; Kuiper et al., 1999).

Further, there is evidence for the buffering effects of humor during adversity (Kuiper, 2012), and the links between SOH in influencing challenge appraisals of stressful situations (Geisler & Walter, 2010; Maisel & Kuiper, 2016).

Alen (2009) also investigated negative cognitive appraisal as the mediator of the relationship between sense of humor and resilience and psychological well-being.

H2a: There is a positive relationship between sense of humor and resilience.

H2b: There is a positive relationship between sense of humor and psychological well-being.

H3a: There is a positive relationship between sense of humor and challenge appraisal.

H3b: There is a positive relationship between sense of humor and threat appraisal.

H4a: There is a positive relationship between challenge appraisal and psychological well-being.

H4b: There is a positive relationship between threat appraisal and psychological well-being.

The relationship between sense of humor and resilience/psychological well-being will be mediated by cognitive appraisal.

Discussion

Hypotheses 1a, 2b, 3b, 3a, 3b, and 4 were supported

- Significant correlations between sense of humor and challenge appraisal, resilience, and psychological well-being.

- Results resembled past research that discovered that high sense of humor individuals adopt challenge appraisals when stressed, which builds resilience and enhances psychological well-being (Kuiper, 2012).

- In particular, the relationship between the coping humor factor and resilience is fully mediated by challenge appraisal.

Hypothesis 2b was not supported

- Sense of humor was not significantly correlated with threat appraisal.

- Inconsistent with past research (Kuiper et al., 1999; Maisel & Kuiper, 2016).

Alternative explanations: Individual differences in uses of humor

- Each individual engages in different humorous strategy (Kuiper, 2020), which results in one’s self-perception of having a sense of humor regardless of the humor style (adaptive or maladaptive) one adopts.

- Findings make contributions to the understanding of the underlying mechanisms employees with high sense of humor practises.

Results and Post-Hoc Analyses

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations between the Variables (n = 108)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>30.99</td>
<td>10.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Humor</td>
<td>66.39</td>
<td>12.06</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Humor Creativity and Social Uses</td>
<td>30.64</td>
<td>8.03</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Coping Humor</td>
<td>11.26</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-1.37</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – Appreciation of Humorous People</td>
<td>17.84</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – General Humor Attitudes</td>
<td>10.01</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>40.13</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Well-Being (PWB)</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Appraisal</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat Appraisal</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


