How Does Organizational Culture Shape the Use of Humor in Corporate Training?

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ABSTRACT

This research brings contextual factors to the forefront of communication research by investigating how organizational culture impacts the use of humor in corporate training. Through in-depth interviews with corporate trainers, content analysis of company and training materials, and participant observation in training sessions and within the company emergent themes developed. These themes, and their respective sub-themes, are presented in a format that highlights participants' retrospective sense making about the effects of organizational culture on humor in training. The four themes that emerged were (a) employee focus, (b) perceptions of cultural uniqueness, (c) management modeling behaviors, and (d) trainer's relationship with organizational members. Discussion indicates the importance individual interpretations of organizational culture and humor usage based on interpretations of the symbolic meanings within organizational culture.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a process. In fact, Hamilton and Parker (2001) define communication as "the process of transferring thoughts and ideas from one person to another" (p. 3). This process is often explained through the use of a schematic showing the flow and direction of various aspects of the process. The nature of the diagram shows that communication really is an incessant, cyclical process.

The different aspects of the communication process can be applied to professional and personal relationships. In the field of training and development, the communication process is the crux of all that occurs. Therefore, managers and trainers are constantly trying to improve within the realms of the communication discipline.

The following paper presents a review of literature on organizational culture, training, and humor. In addition, this original line of research is explained through methods of data collection and analysis, results, and discussion in order to find a relationship between organizational culture and the use of humor in corporate training.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Culture

In today's competitive business world, companies are constantly striving to determine ways to set them above their competitors. Too often companies get caught in a rut where innovative products and creative marketing are not tailored to the right corporate and consumer audiences. Since a relationship between atmosphere and organizational development

exists, it only makes sense to take on a holistic approach and address the entire atmosphere in which corporate development occurs. By doing so, employees and employers can gain a better understanding of the communication process and the environment in which such communication occurs. This atmosphere is called organizational culture and is an area of study within the communication studies field. Organizational culture is defined as "a system of shared values and beliefs that interact with a company's people, organizational structure, and control systems to produce behavioral norms" (Andrews & Herschel, 1996, p. 50). Based on this definition it is virtually impossible for organizational culture to be self-reported. It is necessary for an objective perspective to be presented.

In addition to this definition, Eisenberg and Goodall (1997) present four strong views of organizational culture that may make it easier to analyze organizational culture in communication terms. First, the comparative management view considers culture as imported phenomena through employees' national and ethnic affiliations. Cultures are adapted to local ways of life. The second view is the corporate culture view in which culture is a tool manipulated to increase productivity of the company. The third view, organizational cognition, presents culture as a shared thinking, meaning, and values of organizational members. Finally, the organizational symbolism view allows culture to depend on the nonverbal messages and communication exchanges of the organization.

Beyond definitions and views of organizational culture, it is essential to realize various ways in which culture can be established and determined. Artifacts, shared values, and shared basic assumptions are the three most prominent (Young, 2000). Organizational culture as artifacts includes dress codes, arrival times for meetings, placement of office furniture, and others. Shared values are integrated into an organizational culture through goal or mission statements, code of ethics, or standards of practice. Artifacts and shared values are relatively simple to examine and practice but shared basic assumptions are not as easy to observe. Shared basic assumptions include use of space and time, problem solving techniques, extent of relationships at work, and so on (Young, 2000).

Organizational culture and shared values are communicated to employees in a number of ways. One of the most prominent displays of culture and values is through human resource policies. By merging values into policy, fundamental elements of vision, direction, and decision-making skills are enhanced within the culture (Begley & Boyd, 2000). In order for employees to adhere to and accept the proposed company values, such values need to be projected through succinct literature and training. Previous research has indicated that human resource policies indirectly suggested values but interpretation is left up to the employee. Recent evidence has shown that by providing employees with a clear and concise standard for the company, values are defined and observed (Begley & Boyd, 2000). Essential tools for clarifying cultural values include mission and vision statements along with corporate codes of conduct (Begley & Boyd, 2000). Such tools have been successful in numerous companies. Begley and Boyd (2000) site Texas Instruments as a company in which redefining human resource policies has been successful. Texas Instruments utilized thirty focus groups to surface consistent values of integrity, innovation, and commitment (Begley & Boyd, 2000). These values were then implemented into a company credo and helped to redefine training for the company. By focusing on the values that encompass the foundation of the company, training is based upon company ideals and individual positions rather than policies.

There are many indicators of organizational culture within the company. As previously mentioned, Texas Instruments utilized employee observations and individual core values as

indicators of the organization's culture. One specific study focused on the use of space as an indicator of organizational culture by classifying physical environment as a cultural artifact (Barclay & York, 2001). This study recognized that a system of classifying the functions of a physical setting was necessary in the workplace and identified the functions of physical setting as shelter and security, symbolic recognition, task instrumentality, contentment, and development (Barclay & York, 2001). The physical setting in a workplace is a symbol of abstract values within the organizational culture. Things such as room set-up, office furnishings, and office features such as windows, corner offices, and size serve as status symbols and are used to gain an edge.

Being aware of ways in which organizational culture is formed is an important step toward knowing how it can affect an organization. Sully De Luque (2000) presents a study that shows a connection between culture and feedback-seeking and feedback-giving behavior. Feedback is seen as a vital source of learning about job directives and performance and individuals intuitively seek such feedback in the professional setting (Sully De Luque, 2000). Feedback giving and seeking behaviors are integral and reciprocal activities.

Sully De Luque's (2000) study concluded that a hierarchy structure in a corporation results in individuals resisting supervisor's attempts to give feedback and often perceive such feedback as less trustworthy and reliable. A hierarchy structure can also impact employee's level of involvement. Shadur and Kienzle (1999) conducted research measuring employee demographic information, attitudes regarding the job and the company, and dimensions of bureaucracy, innovation, and support in terms of the organizational culture. Findings indicate that organizations that show support and commitment tend to increase variables of employee involvement within the organization's culture (Shadur & Kienzle, 1999).

Training

As economical competition increases, corporations are seeing the importance and value of training employees. Training and development is a unique aspect of communication studies and communication professionals are being specifically educated to conduct productive training sessions. Many studies have examined andragogy, the study of adult learning, and discovered that there are certain ways in which adults process and theorize information (Kaupins, 1997). Since the average attention span of American adults is decreasing every decade (Main, 1987), corporations are attempting to determine successful ways to increase long-term retention of information gained in training.

Training methods are constantly being analyzed to ensure that trainees are receiving and retaining required information. Kaupins' (1997) study required professional corporate trainers to evaluate a variety of training methods. Such training methods include self-study programs, internships, role-playing, and advanced technology (Kaupins, 1997). The study concluded that adults tend to prefer self-direction, learning from real-life events, and application of learned material, with specific results showing high regard for live cases and internships. Kaupins (1997) realizes that a large variety of training methods are used among corporations today. However, the study found lectures as having low ratings in relation to knowledge retention. In agreement with the conclusions of this study, Deming (2001) suggests that participative methods of training are most effective, as acting on information allows it to be stored in the long-term memory. Participative training includes asking for audience expectations and questions, reciting lessons, and giving feedback (Deming, 2001).

Humor

In Western society, the ideal of work is becoming increasingly integrated into everyday life. No longer is work a tangential phase within one's life. Work is now a fixated spot within the realms of one's social reality and physical being. With a growing trend of work becoming part of the life development process, work must take on certain characteristics of a wholesome lifestyle. One such characteristic is humor. Employees are to a point where they expect a work environment to foster a healthy sense of humor. Research has concentrated efforts on observing humor and its benefits. However, due to the natural design of humor, recording humor forces one to an unnatural degree of self-consciousness (Linstead, 1985). Since humor is a part of the life process, researchers have strived to overcome such an obstacle in order to determine the use of humor in workplace and beyond.

An important strain of research has studied the benefits of humor in the workplace. First of all, humor presents a framework for which meanings can be offered (Linstead, 1985). The definition of communication, as previously presented, is "the process of transferring thoughts and ideas from one person to another" (Hamilton & Parker, 2001, p. 3). Logically, humor can then increase the communication process within the workplace by transferring ideas and thoughts through helping create shared meaning. Next, Vartabedian and Vartabedian (1993) state that humor in a company also helps to define the personality of the company or, in some cases, gives the company personality. Finally, humor can be used to stimulate change and promote closure within a workplace environment (Linstead, 1985).

In addition to research on humor in the workplace, there are also reportings of personal and social benefits of humor. According to Decker and Rotondo (1999), employees use humor to alleviate boredom and to facilitate friendship. In addition, humor is a highly valuable strategy to increase attention and comprehension. A recent study on the impact of humor in advertising outlines the numerous goals and benefits of humor (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). The study suggests that humor attracts attention, does not hinder comprehension, persuasion, or source credibility, and improves fondness. Other benefits of humor include group cohesion, the ability to view others and self more objectively, the promotion of healthy living, mental flexibility, and creative thinking (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 1993). Above all, humor has overwhelmingly been proven as a winning stress reliever (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 1993). Essentially, an individual that benefits from these aspects of humor becomes a better person and ultimately, a better employee, thus impacting the workplace.

Although humor benefits the individual and the entire workplace, the use of humor is conditional. Humor consultants have long recognized that humor is situational and are currently investigating appropriate usage per situation (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 1993). Organizations consist of a mixture of communication settings and situations. It is still unclear where humor enhances or distorts a message. The key is to match the humor to the situation, know limitations and the audience, and avoid offensive humor (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 1993). Additionally, humor is conditional based upon the individual differences, interpersonal relationships, and organizational culture (Decker & Rotondo, 1999).

Additional conclusions of the study conducted by Weinberger and Gulas (1992) delineate three types of humor. The first type is intentional humor. Intentional humor is where the humor is related to message processing. The second type is semantic humor. This is the type of humor that focuses around product-related themes. The final type of humor defined in the study is structural humor. Structural humor is syntactical and refers to the integration of humor into product claims. Although these three types of humor were defined in terms of

advertising, they can be applied to humor in training by suggesting a relationship between the atmosphere and environment in which the humor occurs. Decker and Rotondo (1999) indicate that superiors and subordinates look to each other for signals of appropriate expression of humor.

Deming (2001) combines all the benefits and types of humor and links them to corporate training sessions. Deming (2001) concludes that humor tends to make participants more relaxed, more receptive to the information presented, and creates a bond between trainer and trainee as long as the humor is not directed toward an individual. Thus, humor in corporate training has been proven effective in information processing and retention.

A study conducted by Franzini and Haggerty (1994) asked participants where they would like to add humor in their lives and an overwhelming response was "work", the most frequent single category mentioned. The benefits of humor could assist in the overall effectiveness of corporate training. The correlation between humor and the organizational culture is presented in this passage:

> Humor has long been recognized as a cultural indicator because it reflects the values, beliefs, world views, and the overt and covert assumptions of the members of those cultures. Only recently, though, has the use of humor been examined and seriously recommended for use in the "corporate culture." (Franzini & Haggerty, 1994, p. 341)

All this being considered, this project explored if and how humor in training is manifested by organizational culture. The following research question, broad enough to allow for an exploratory understanding of organizational culture impact on humor in training, is presented:

How does organizational culture shape the use of humor in corporate training?

METHOD

Data Collection

In order to explore the impact of organizational culture on humor in training, qualitative research methods were used. A qualitative approach allowed flexibility during the investigation, yet provided needed structure. Furthermore, interpretive designs are uniquely suited for exploratory investigations in which specific variables are not easily identifiable (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The ideas researched in this study, humor, training, and organizational culture, are abstract ideas. Therefore, a qualitative method was more beneficial than a quantitative approach.

Three different qualitative research techniques were used within this project. First, interviews were conducted with trainers from seven different major, national organizations. The interviews were one-hour each and based on a set of questions pertaining to corporate culture, training techniques, humor usage in training, and interpretations or impressions of the influences of culture on humor and training. The interviews were based on a set field guide but were conducted predominately through an unstructured style to allow for flexibility in follow-up questions. The interviews were audio-taped and field notes were taken. An open protocol was used during the interviews.

The second form of qualitative research used was participant observation. Participant observation occurred through submersion into the organizational culture and training ses-

sions. During the company tours, employees were observed in their natural work environment. Personal and corporate artifacts, dress code, conversations, and other cues pertaining to organizational culture were also noted. Various observable activities, articles, and patterns were recorded. During observed training, the researcher was identified as a research participant and recorded activities, patterns, humor, reference to culture, and other aspects pertinent to the research topic were noted.

Finally, items were collected to conduct a content analysis. The selected trainers provided copies of mission statements, vision statements, training materials, internet sites, intranet sites, and more. These documents were read, analyzed and compared to the cultural interpretations expressed by the interviewer and interviewee.

Participants/Setting

Participants were corporate trainers at major, national organizations. A network sampling technique allowed seven participants. The participants were employed by a variety of companies. The companies were in a variety of industries including international agriculture, educational database, heating and cooling engineering, insurance, compensation and benefits, energy, and computer consulting. Companies were located in 1) Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2) Chicago, Illinois, 3) Minneapolis, Minnesota, 4) La Crosse, Wisconsin, 5) Madison, Wisconsin, and 6) the District of Columbia.

Data Analysis

The interviews were conducted on-site at the company of each participant. A variation of the Q-Sort data analysis method was used. The audio-tapes and notes were reviewed for analysis. The notes were copied, cut and placed into categories. Themes were identified within the categories. Materials provided by the organizations were also categorized into emerging themes.

Participant observation occurred during observed training sessions and/or company tours. Interactions, conversations, training style, and training environment were all observed during training sessions. Conversations, personal and corporate artifacts, and dress code were also examined during company tours.

RESULTS

Themes emerging from the data analysis are presented in a format that highlights participants' retrospective sense making about the effects of organizational culture on humor in training. The four themes that emerged were employee focus, perceptions of cultural uniqueness, management modeling behaviors, and trainer's relationship with organizational members.

Employee Focus

Each selected company participant made a conscious effort to call attention to the high-level quality of employees. Employees were the focus of much discussion and the training sessions that were the focus of this research were designed for employee development and growth. The analysis of data concluded that there are different areas in which employees are the focus of conclusive results.

Subcultures. First, it was a reiterated theme among participants that organizational cultures vary by departments within an organization. This is believed to be true based on the higher levels of personal interaction within the department. Personal interactions are present

in many relationships within organizations and benefit the company and individuals. When personal interactions occur, employees have the chance to greatly increase interpersonal relationships and therefore, comfort, closeness, and creativity are also heightened. Because of the teamwork atmosphere and strong working relationships that often develop between individuals within a department, humor usage increases. One participant stated this:

> *Humor is life. Everyone in our department has a screw loose somewhere! That is what allows us to laugh. Our core team started out together and has been together since the beginning. Our team really knows each other. We even know what screws are loose.*

Congruent with this passage, it was also stated that departments know people first and corporate management knows people second, an idea that is further explored in a later results section.

It is apparent that not only does departmental subcultures impact humor usage, but occupation does also. After discussion of occupational history, many of the participants hypothesized that organizational culture and humor usage varies by occupation. Certain occupations tend to attract people with particular character virtues that either help or hinder the ability to use humor in the workplace.

Overall, there is a difference between departmental and occupational cultures. But more importantly, there is a difference between the interpretations of organizational culture by each individual employee. Due to the differences in sense making and reality forming ideals among individuals, there is very little possibility that organizational culture can be solely defined. Each employee has a different interpretation and that is what makes organizational culture so unique and intriguing.

Enjoyment of Work. Next, many people in society believe that work should be enjoyable. There are many factors that can increase the enjoyment of a job. When one enjoys work, energy is stored internally and productivity is increased. In fact, there is a distinct pattern observed that links enjoyment of work to increased performance. As previously stated, each employee forms his/her own interpretations of the symbols sent regarding organizational culture to create individual reality and meaning. Through this process, individual employees develop a sense of identity within the organization and begin to feel connected. The individual embodies the excellence of the organization in order to assimilate into the new culture. Embodied excellence equals enjoyed work experiences because employees interpret messages sent by management about the culture in terms of their own life experiences forming a workplace reality.

In addition to the formation of personal reality, employees also enjoy work when they are awarded for personal performance. Incentive and recognition programs were put into practice by various companies interviewed and will be discussed later in the results section.

Job satisfaction was also classified and qualified by organizational fit. As one participant simply stated, "Conservative cultures and companies attract conservative people." Matching an individual's personality with an organization's personality, commonly known as organizational culture, is extremely important in comfort, ease, and overall enjoyment of the work situation. Some participants expressed characteristics of the organizational culture that fit with their own personality. One example is a company that is family friendly and embraces an environment where family comes first in the lives of the employees. Another personality trait expressed as making an effective match was personable employees. Individuals that

thrive on personal interaction should work in an environment where employees are people oriented.

In addition to all of these characteristics that encourage work enjoyment, participants noted special employee "perks" that also increased enjoyment of work. Such "perks" include excellent benefit packages and offering professional growth opportunities to all employees.

Geographic Location. Finally, it was evident by the discussion with participants that employee focus was impacted by geographic location. Each participant had individual interpretations of work ethic in geographic locations across the United States.

Participants in this study shared experiences and thoughts on characteristics of businesses per region. Several participants were employed in various regions of the Unites States and banked on personal experience to draw conclusions about regionalism. It was shared that the employees and environment in the Northern parts of the Unites States are nurturing and caring for individuals within the organization, present an aura that makes the employee feel as if he/she matters and is an important asset to the company, possess a high respect for authority, and tend to be fast-paced. The employees and environment from the Southern parts of the United States are set on adding value and efficiency to the business and organizational culture and thrive in a slow-paced, non-stressful environment. It was believed that characteristics such as strong work ethic, sharing, helping, and reservation present in the Midwest because of the regional farm mentality of sharing and helping others and oneself in order to be successful. Further expression on the Midwest implies that customers from the area are not cutting edge or creative and the culture of a company should reflect those served. It was never implied that one regional personality was superior to other, but just possessing different organizational qualities and managerial approaches.

One participant shared her experiences of what occurred at her company just a few short months before the interview. The company is located nationwide with the predominate areas being focused in Northern and Southern parts of the United States. This particular company underwent reorganization and a CEO was hired. The CEO was from a Southern philosophy and placed to work in a Northern mentality. This transition was difficult for the employees in Northern facilities since the CEO was from a different organizational culture where awards and recognition were non-existent. The Human Resources department at this company did not standardize policies and procedures for all branches therefore different cultures blossomed based on regional location. The company is slowly starting to define and standardize expected behaviors and business philosophies that combine ideals of the Northern and Southern company counterparts.

The example provided by the participant not only supports the impact of management on company philosophy, but also the importance of regionalism on organizational culture. These ideas are congruent with the proposal that employee focus is dependant on the regionalism of the company. The expressed energy of organizational culture is different by state and region.

Perceptions of Cultural Uniqueness
Prior to giving participants a textbook definition of organizational culture, participants were asked to asked to define culture in his or her own words. Responses included:

> *A shared belief system or idea on how work should be conducted or how an individual should conduct him/herself in a work environment.*

> *The way we behave. The norms, values, and unwritten rules within an organiza-*
> *tion.*
>
> *Attitudes and behaviors that reflect the values of the company and it's employees.*
>
> *Agreed upon set of values that organizations use to operate off of.*
>
> *The nebulous qualities about a company determined by the individual employee.*
> *Culture is flowing, not static.*

After discussing the overall ideals of organizational culture, discussions led to topics on individual companies cultures and eventually the points of such a culture that are claimed as unique. Interestingly, ideas of uniqueness expressed by one participant were stated by other participants as expected and existing characteristics of individual organizational cultures.

First off, longevity of employment was indicated by several participants as a unique component. Many companies prided themselves on their ability to retain employees and hire from within for upper management positions making the company more effective and efficient. Employees are treated as if they are important, valued assets to the company. One participant commented:

> *Our company strives to hire the best employee's possible. We want to keep our*
> *employees because we know and believe they are the best. We foster an environ-*
> *ment for our employees to grow and develop and what a better way to do that than*
> *internal promotions?*

Next, due to the job duties and responsibilities of participants, several respondents commented on the definitions and unique perceptions of organizational culture as portrayed through training concepts. Another repeated idea of uniqueness was that of creativity with training techniques. Many participants commented on the importance of being employed within a culture that allows freedom and personal expression. Employees that are allowed to try what he/she thinks will take more pride in the product. This was observed in one company that allowed each trainee the opportunity to develop a schematic drawing symbolizing the desired lessons to be learned within training. Another company allowed the trainer the ability to implement creative approaches to training including themes, games, off-site interactions, and more. One participant even stated that his company did not want policy to limit creativity. Finally, in addition to creativity, the idea of learning through participation was indicated as a unique aspect of the culture and training of several companies. Companies that appreciate such educational principles valued failure as a learning force. Failure was seen by these companies as an intense opportunity to learn and grow in an applicable situation. Engaging the audience increases retention and comfort with presented materials, especially when all five senses are involved. Furthermore, individuals employed by companies that value hands-on learning also indicate an increased assimilation into the organization and a greater feeling of importance, acceptance, and trust. Two different participants offered supporting comments:

> *I absolutely love what I do because the company supports me and my creative*
> *training efforts.*
>
> *This company allows me to fail and learn. They release me to the adventure, give*
> *me the tools to succeed, and say, "Go do it!"*

Another company proposes a Chinese proverb as their primary learning philosophy. Upon entering the training facility, the following philosophy is posted:

> Tell me and I will forget; show me and I may remember; let me and I will understand.

Although more than one company values a philosophical, modern learning approach, one company claimed to value traditional pedagogy. This company found a balance between creativity and constraint with employee relations and training.

Besides the aforementioned expressed areas of uniqueness, there were three expressions of company uniqueness that were truly original in respect to the formation and execution of organizational culture.

Value-set. One of the original characteristics of organizational culture expressed was the possession of an extensive set of guiding ethics and values for the company. It was explained that such ethics are the guiding force behind all opportunities and successes of the organization. The participant actually stated the following:

> *We pride ourselves on our ethical standards. We will turn away business if there is a contradiction with our guiding ethics. Additionally, we have a value set to do good work in order to feed the world. This is our noble endeavor.*

This passage only reiterates the utmost importance of ethical decision making within the company. Employees and management alike will be honest in their ethical approach and walk away from business if it means compromising set ethical principles. All levels of employees are informed of the high ethical standards prior to employment and are shown a video about ethics at the company upon employment.

Decision-making. Another form of cultural uniqueness is the ability for employees to be integrated with management for decision-making purposes. One company allows decision making to occur among all employees. In this company, upper management meets with all other employees on a quarterly basis to define the organizational culture and discuss corporate occurrences. Another company is in the process of dissolving a traditional management approach in order for employees to have a greater say in the occurrences and standards within the company.

The two companies that identified decision-making as a unique aspect of the organizational culture also identified feedback as an important part of the entire decision-making process. In companies where management was responsive and open to comments, employees identified the working environment as comfortable and open. One of the companies observed had feedback forms on their intranet sites where employees could offer suggestions to management. Both also had emails and phone numbers of managers available to all employees. One company implemented a human resources policy that provides a safe listening environment where employees can share an organizational perspective and implement an action plan. A participant commented:

> *Our company is employee powered and there is no multilevel approval process. The values of the employees shape the values of our company. Decisions are made by a committee and are not dictated to us.*

Clubs within the organization. Another very unique aspect to organizational culture presented was that of clubs for special interest groups within the organization. Clubs were formed for groups such as African Americans, Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transsexual and Ally, Asians, and women and more. The groups were funded and supported by the company and ultimately, management. Each organization had its' own email listserve and were able to use company property and services for meetings. The clubs plan social and educational events in which all employees are invited. All organizational members had the opportunity to participate in any of the special interest groups or attend any of the events planned by the groups.

Management Modeling Behaviors

Communication. The role of management is not easily defined within any organization. However, there are some communication efforts made by management of the companies observed that deserve credit for encouraging an open organizational culture.

One participant recapped a situation in which management was located within the same building as employees. The participant then compared that situation to the present situation in which management is located in an entirely different building. The participant reflected on how important it is to be in the presence of management in order to grasp some form of similarity. The distance was noted to make management more of a distant, surreal figure that dictated policies, procedures, and business judgments.

In contrast to the distance of this participant's management, all other participants commented on the presence of management and how influential their roles were within the organization. Management was seen as the company "role model." The organizational culture and leadership within the company came from the top down yet there was very little acknowledgement of titles or an organizational hierarchy. Employees are included in decision making about the company. This creates a visibly realistic image of management because management is able to admit they do not know everything. Such approaches to management allow employees to view management as part of the organization's team and add a personal touch, despite technological advancements.

Moreover, effective management presents an open organizational culture by initiating consistent policies and procedures. These policies and procedures do not have to be formal guidelines but rather things that are modeled by management. Examples from participants included an open door policy, speaking to all people on a first name basis, mentoring programs, little or no reference to job title, and more.

Recognition and Motivation. In addition to the ways management effectively communicates, management among participant's companies effectively model such powerful leadership tactics as recognition and motivation. As previously stated, when employees feel appreciated through recognition, they are more motivated to produce for the benefit of the company.

Companies researched within this study implemented various programs to recognize accomplishments of employees and keep them motivated to be prolific employees. One particular company made excessive strides to recognize and motivate employees. First, the company has a President's Council in which the president of the company selects employees to sit on a committee that is responsible for making decisions and giving feedback about the company. In addition, there are also "Employee of the Month" and "Employee of the Quarter" programs in which peers nominate and vote on the recipient. Finally, there are also programs implemented by management in which new employees get acclimated into the organizational culture. There is a tradition that the entire team takes a new employee to lunch

on their first day of work. There is also a new employee database in which new employee photos and brief biographies are listed and accessible to all employees within the organization. All these motivational and recognition tactics allow employees to feel successful in their accomplishments and increase the positive portrayal of this organization's culture.

Trainer's Relationship with Organizational Members

Know your audience. Humor was a topic of discussion with each participant. A great deal of the discussions started as general conversation about humor but eventually turned to conversations about why and how humor can be used depending on the situation and audience.

The participants concurred on various benefits of humor. Humor is used by the participants for purposes consistent with those contained by the literature review. Participants most frequently identified humor as an essential way to relieve tension and increase retention and attention.

Participants also agreed that humor is situational. Every situation required the development of a new formula for which humor usage could be calculated. The equation never really has a definite solution. Because there is no sure solution to humor usage, participants agreed that the easiest way to come close to perfection is by knowing individual audience members. When audience members are known in advance, there is an expected behavior. A pre-existing relationship between audience member and trainer allows for comfortable bantering and matching personalities. In addition, these benefits are also present when there is a pre-existing relationship among audience members. On the other hand, when there is no previous interaction or relationship between the trainer and the audience, the trainer must be a careful observer. During observation, the trainer listens, plays, and simplifies interactions between audience members in order to learn which actions, words, and messages the entire audience deems appropriate.

No matter how comfortable a trainer is with an audience, there are still certain guidelines to be followed when using humor in any professional setting. One participant stated the following:

> *Even though I greatly enjoy using humor and making people laugh during my training sessions, I also know that training is my profession. That means there is a professional line that I must not cross. My ethics tell me where that line is and I will never cross it. If I ever have to think twice about the joke I am going to crack, I won't crack it. If I think the joke may be slightly insensitive, I will not say it. If I cross the line, I have violated my rights as a corporate trainer. Instead of chancing it, I make fun of myself. That way no one can get mad at me but me!*

Trainer's role. The job responsibilities of a corporate trainer are not easily defined. The job of a corporate trainer may consist of being no one, being everyone, or anything in between. The participating trainers listed the primary roles fulfilled on the job. These roles include, but are obviously not limited to, facilitator, guide, educator, teacher, enabler, and developer. One role that was negated was that of stand-up comedian. Trainers are not hired to perform a comedy act. Humor was defined as an integral part of each participant's training but not an exclusive part.

Dependant upon the role being fulfilled during a training session, the type of humor used changes. For example, one trainer expressed that when he is playing the role of an educator

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and lecturing to the audience, he uses more standardized humor in the form of stories of personal experiences to relay the information in an entertaining and memorable fashion. However, when he is playing the role of a facilitator and guiding audience members through self-paced learning, he uses more situational humor by feeding off of statements made and actions performed by audience members. This form of bantering humor usually develops into an open and safe environment for sharing, learning, and growing.

Above all other roles, the trainer must be a superb adaptor. Another trainer interviewed commented on the importance of observing what seems to be appropriate actions and humor and eventually adapting to the collective or middle version of the observed acceptable acts. When this occurs, the personality of the trainer changes to adapt to the audience. By observing the appropriateness of humor, individuals are rarely taken out of their social comfort zone and rapport is built between the trainer and audience members.

DISCUSSION

Beginning this research, anticipated results included a direct relationship between the organizational culture and the type of humor used within training. Through the course of the research and analysis, this anticipated finding was proven to possess much more depth than ever predicted. The results do in fact indicate how organizational culture can shape the use of humor in training but they indicate much more.

Each emerging theme amongst the results draws a new idea for discussion. First of all, it is believed that cultures providing an employee focus have a greater retention rate and an open organizational culture. The heart of employee-focused companies is within the subcultures. Each subculture possesses strong cultural attributes primarily because of personal interaction. Interpersonal relationships are conclusive elements in the strength of the organizational culture including increased job enjoyment. Subcultures tend to possess their own organizational culture. The subculture's organizational culture is combined with personality of employees and interpretations of anticipated organizational ideals presented through management and other means. This combination forms to satisfy a traditional managerial fantasy of corporate perfection in which the organizational culture is ideal to all employees. Other conclusions lead to the belief that geographic location plays an integral part in the formation of organization culture due to regionalism. However, regionalism is only as powerful as individuals believe and practice it to be. Regardless of geographic location, every company had perceived ideas of cultural uniqueness. Surprisingly, an area of uniqueness to one was an expected area to another. Without exposure to other cultures, organizations can become blinded to the driving and intense standards within their particular organization. Additionally, management plays a crucial part in the modeling of behaviors, values, and norms within an organization. Management impacts the stance of a company. Leadership ideals are filtered down and interactions with management not only model the appropriateness of humor usage but also of cultural attributes. Management must be conscious in their effort to communicate with employees regarding organizational issues. Besides management, trainers also perform a critical role in the presentation and formation of language allowing employees to sense-make the organizational culture in which they joined. When trainers have a previous and established relationship with trainees, humor usage increases and organizational culture is portrayed with ease.

In essence, the ideals discovered in this paper indirectly answered the proposed research

question. When pieced together, the results of this research present several powerful messages and ideals. Due to the individual interpretations of organizational culture and such cultural impact on the individual, humor usage within training is based primarily on the individual's freedom of expression interpreted through the symbolic meanings of organizational culture. It is evident that humor is necessary as a means of effective training and the type of humor used is dependant on the type of culture the humor is used within. Organizational culture dictates the level of humor. Yet, training humor is not scripted but impacted by the personality of the trainer, personality of training participants, the situation, and the training theme.

Overall, the results of this project are in line with the literature review and anticipated outcome. The depth of the results is substantial. However, further research could assist in offering additional suggestions and theories on the connection of organizational culture on humor usage in training. Throughout the data collection process, many other things were presented that with further study may offer added clarification to this subject. First, every employee has a different interpretation of a company's culture. Therefore, discussion of a connection between culture and humor is determinant on the individual employee. Further research may consider comparing different employee's perspectives. Second, additional research can explore if humor is impacted by a trainers prior interaction with trainees. Next, an interesting study may be a comparison of regional cultures and their impact on humor usage in training. Also, research may want to find character virtues of trainers that influence humor usage.

LIMITATIONS

Even though this research provided in-depth results, there were some limitations.

There was a limited amount of time for travel and research. Also, because it is costly to travel, finances were a limitation. The biggest limitation, completely out of anyone's control, was the state of the economy at the time this research was conducted. Because many companies were experiencing hiring freezes and market lows, training was not always occurring and companies were not as apt to expose their culture to a researcher.

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