

Book review

Scheel, Tabea & Gockel, Christine (2017) *Humour at Work in Teams, Leadership, Negotiations, Learning and Health*. Cham: Springer.

Humour is universal and present in every aspect of our lives. Researchers have focused their interest on this subject and much has been written about the semantics of jokes on humour, health, and romantic relationships (Ruch 2010). One field in which less has been written is humour at work, and the aim of Tabea Scheel and Christine Gockel when writing this book was to bridge this gap. They have realised an intriguing project, presenting eight chapters that cover several areas of the potential of using humour at work. The first chapter introduces the reader to the relevance of studying humour in work and organisational psychology, outlining both positive and negative effects and giving an overview of the book (Morreall 1991).

Chapter 2 is written by Scheel. This chapter focuses on the concepts and definitions of humour, and here the most prominent theories are introduced. Scheel states that humour is a very complex phenomenon and although each theory may be correct, it may also acknowledge only part of the phenomenon, and there is no fully satisfactory, comprehensive definition of humour. The three main theoretical approaches (incongruity theory, superiority theory, and relief/release/arousal theory) are well presented and explained, and evidence for each theory is laid out (Martin & Ford 2018). Moreover, some additional theoretical approaches that can be useful for explaining the role of humour at work, such as social identity theory and Instructional Humour Processing Theory, are introduced to the reader. Then, Scheel discusses the intrapersonal and interpersonal functions that humour may serve at work, and the last paragraph is dedicated to questionnaires that might be relevant for the assessment of workplace humour, presented in the Appendix.

Chapter 3, prepared by Gockel, is dedicated to explaining the role of humour in teams. In this chapter, a description of the duality of humour in teams, as well as its capacity to unite and to divide are presented, reporting on both qualitative and quantitative studies. Positive forms of humour have been found to increase cohesion, to clarify issues, and to enforce social norms (Robert 2016). The dark side of humour in teams is represented by the use of humour to contrast one's view with an opponent's, or to differentiate one's group from another group. This chapter presents four processes that explain how humour may produce benefits and positive outcomes in teams. Later, two paragraphs are dedicated to explaining the evolution of laughter and how it helps to create cohesiveness in groups, especially via emotional contagion, while the last paragraphs highlight the opportunity to conduct new research in this field.

Chapter 4, written by Christine Gockel and Laura Vetter, focuses on humour in leadership. Humour may be a useful tool for leaders when used appropriately, as it helps in creating cohesion, strengthening solidarity, and emphasising collegiality, and inspires subordinates to find creative and innovative solutions to complex problems (Lynch 2009). The authors present an interesting overview of the functions of leader humour, especially focusing on the relationship between the leader and subordinate. Finally, a difference between the use of and the effects produced by humour by males and females is explored.

Chapter 5, written by Gockel, presents the role of humour in negotiations, explaining how it can simultaneously be used both competitively and cooperatively. After an initial description of the general functions, the outcomes are explained, showing some mediators of these effects. In this regard, some faults in the literature, such as the lack of empirical research, are well presented.

Chapter 6, produced by Scheel, focuses on humour in learning, specifically referring to academic settings, showing once again how humour is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it may enhance teachers' immediacy and presenters' likability; on the other, it may reduce the perceived credibility of the presenter and may not necessarily improve effectiveness or performance. Two theoretical approaches are presented, namely (1) the Instructional Humour Processing Theory, which combines incongruity-resolution theory, disposition theory, and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of persuasion; and (2) the Perceived Humour Hypothesis, which is based on the assumption that the positive effect of humour on memory is based on the perception of humour rather than semantic elaboration or incongruity resolution. Next, the cognitive, social, and psychological benefits of humour are presented. The final paragraph explores the differences between the ways of presentation of humorous stimuli (e.g., online vs textbooks).

Chapter 7 is written by Scheel and summarises research on the benefits of humour on mental and physical health, first in general contexts and then at work. Several studies are discussed, showing the correlation between humour and well-being, anxiety, and depression. A specific section is dedicated to explaining how employee humour is positively related to employee's mental health, as well as work-related outcomes (Martin & Ford 2018). Humour has been shown to positively influence performance, work engagement, job satisfaction, and to negatively affect withdrawal. Findings on the relationship between humour and burnout are presented. In this regard, two mechanisms are discussed: humour as a moderator between stressors and mental health through affect and coping, and humour as an antecedent of several mediators of mental health.

In the concluding chapter, Scheel and Gockel introduce two new avenues for future research topics with regard to humour: diversity and virtuality. Culture, gender, and age diversity in the use and appreciation of humour is presented in the first part of the chapter, showing how these topics have become even more salient due to globalisation. Virtuality refers to the state of the art of the use of humour through computers, smartphones, and tablets for several purposes, such as virtual teamwork.

Finally, a selection of useful scales for assessing humour at work is provided. This compilation encompasses scales with a focus on coping, personality, and humour types, as well as scales especially for communication and work contexts.

On the whole, this book represents a major contribution to the fields of humour studies and work. The book is well structured, each aspect is logically and persuasively argued, and references are updated. It is recommended both for scholars of humour interested in deepening their knowledge in this field, and for managers and leaders who are interested in using and improving humour as a soft skill. In this regard, the book helps the reader, as each chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings, an outline of research gaps for future studies, and implications for practice in order to facilitate the process of learning and employing humour.

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