

Chapter 11: Communication

OB in focus

Humour in the workplace

Recent research has illustrated that successful organizational humour can improve group processes and outcomes that contribute to overall group effectiveness. Group productivity is enhanced because humour can have a positive effect on group cohesiveness, communication, creativity and stress reduction. Anecdotal evidence from the popular press indicates that today's workers expect work to be enjoyable. Younger workers (aged 18–25) in particular want to have fun at work and are more likely to leave firms when work is boring. A positive use of humour can facilitate long-term group effectiveness by having an impact on individual learning and development within the group, and team viability, or on the degree to which members of the group are able to continue working together in the future.

Communication plays a critical role in both group productivity and overall group effectiveness. Humour makes people more receptive to the receiver and message, it can be used to build morale and maintain relationships, and it can encourage communication between group members by reducing social distance and facilitating the expression of emotion and values. Furthermore, engaging in more effective communication processes leads to group members being more informed about processes, requirements and externalities that might influence group effectiveness, which should in turn lead to a more informed collective goal-setting process.

Using humour to create stronger cohesion between group members promotes higher levels of psychological safety and reduces stress levels, both of which are strongly influenced by the development of trust, open communication and personal rapport at the individual level. Groups that develop an atmosphere of psychological safety are able to solve problems based on honest reflection, openness and mutual influence, which results in learning. The use of humour within groups leads to positive group emotions that influence the development of group cohesion, commonly defined as 'attraction to the group'. The group is therefore a more attractive (for example, fun) place to be for group members. Consequently, this has implications for group viability and will aid in reducing employee turnover.

Source: Adapted from Eric Romero and Anthony Pescosolido (2008) 'Humor and group effectiveness', *Human Relations*, 61(3), pp. 395–418.

