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ANALYZING HUMOR STYLES AND EMOTIONAL REACTIONS OF COMIC SCENE PARTICIPANTS IN TV SERIES

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Humor plays an important role in the everyday functioning of individuals, both in private and professional environments. The goal of this research is to investigate the role of humor in the business environment of a health clinic as depicted in a sitcom. The research is based on the method of content analysis applied to a video recording of the sitcom, which included both quantitative and qualitative analysis of a representative sample of episodes. The results show that comic scenes account for 15.31% of the total duration of the analyzed episodes. Humor most commonly manifests as witty comments, jokes, irony, and sarcasm. These scenes elicit various emotions and reactions from the participants in communication; the most common include confusion, indifference, association, and relaxation. The positive effects of humor are visible in the development of a supportive working atmosphere, improved interpersonal relationships, elevated mood, and reduced stress. The humor styles identified include affiliative, self-defeating, self-enhancing, and aggressive, with affiliative humor being the most prevalent. When used in a socially acceptable way that respects ethical norms and diversity, humor can contribute to reduced stress, stronger teams, and better communication in the healthcare business environment.

Key words: *humor; content analysis; business environment.*

1. Introduction

Humor is an integral part of human behavior and appears in everyday interpersonal relationships (Martin 2007). By its definition it is a form of communication which participants in communication consider funny (Martineau 1972). Humor theories can be divided into the relief theory, the incongruity theory and the superiority theory (Wilkins and Eisenbraun, 2013).

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The Relief Theory argues that humor is used to release tension and reduce the influence of stress. Witty and funny situations result in a feeling of relief which relieves anxiety and physical tension. Positive feelings released during laughter may significantly contribute to maintaining mental and physical health. The Incongruity Theory argues that humor occurs in situations in which expectations differ from actual experience. This theory emphasizes the importance of disproportion between a common experience of a situation and a different view of that same situation. The Superiority Theory explains situation in which people are caught in awkward situations.

If the importance of humor in business communication is to be analyzed, it is necessary to understand humor styles.

1.1. Literature overview

Martin et al. (2003) analyze humor within a framework of a two-dimensional model: the dimension of enhancing self-improvement and improvement of relationships with others and the dimension of vulnerable – benign. Within the framework of these two dimensions humor is divided into affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating.

According to Besser and Zeigler-Hill (2011) and Romero and Cruthirds (2006), affiliative humor is used by people who try to improve their communication and create good interpersonal relationships. The goal of using this humor style is to create a positive and friendly working atmosphere in which the employees feel good, relaxed and accepted. Self-enhancing humor is directed to the person using it. The goal of using this humor style is to create a positive self-image, a positive image of the person's abilities and to enhance self-respect (Martin et al., 2003). Aggressive humor is characterized by disrespect and manipulation, which show supremacy and a lower level of empathy. Aggressive humor causes negative feelings of shame and embarrassment of the interlocutor. Self-defeating humor is used by individuals who make others laugh by ridiculing themselves. Such persons often have low self-esteem and a poor image of themselves (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

The results obtained in the research conducted by Vaughana et al. (2014) confirm that self-esteem is associated with the humor style which a person uses; thus, people with higher self-esteem most commonly use affiliative humor and rarely aggressive or self-defeating. Exposure to humor can improve both short- and long-term mental and physical states of a person. Positive outcomes resulting from short-term exposure to humor include organ simulation, reduced stress level and tension mitigation (Gremigni, 2012). Long-term exposure can contribute to the strengthening of the immune system, pain relief and a better mood (Kramer & Litao, 2023). Exposure to humor and a reaction that includes laughter can alleviate anxiety, depression and stress (Martin et al., 1993). Research conducted by Marchezi et al. (2019) shows that a positive humor style, such as self-enhancing humor, improves interpersonal relationships and satisfaction of employees and negative humor styles, such as aggressive or self-defeating, results in dissatisfaction.

Humor is element of the business environment. When used in business communication, humor can positively affect productivity, reduce stress, enhance group cohesion, improve communication, encourage creativity, build organizational culture and strengthen leadership

(Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Humor can also increase employees' satisfaction, which is why they would give more attention to their respective jobs and try to improve their work performance (Kelly, 2019).

Laughter provides relief from tension and negative emotions caused by stress, and it can contribute to better concentration and focus when solving tasks and problems. When employees joke about a stressful situation, it can create a sense of dominance and control over the situation (Smith & Khojasteh, 2014). Humor can also strengthen group cohesion and foster a sense of community and connection by creating positive relationships within and between groups (Crowe et al., 2016). It facilitates the release of tension and enables conversation about awkward or sensitive topics. Moreover, it helps to create a relaxed and positive work environment that encourages employee creativity (Lyttle, 2007). Humor positively influences the development of a favorable organizational culture—an environment where ideas are respected and efforts are made to build better interpersonal relationships (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Managers can use humor to enhance leadership by reducing communication barriers and building trust among employees (Wijewardena et al., 2024). Organizations that promote an entertaining organizational culture can motivate optimistic and witty individuals who contribute to a positive working atmosphere (Milaković, 2021). In healthcare institutions, humor introduced by Clown Doctors helps alleviate the negative effects of hospitalization and positively impacts children, their parents, family members, and medical staff (Boričević Maršanić et al., 2016). Abbas (2019) confirmed that participants in a TV show used humor to avoid embarrassing questions by adapting to the host's style and the content of the interview.

Gender differences in using humor in business environment have also been identified. Men most commonly use humor at their work place to evaluate the behavior, attitudes and solutions of their superiors, especially emphasizing competitive humor. On the other hand, women use humor to get the sense of association and belonging to the community and to strengthen their position within (Sinkeviciute, 2019). The meta-analysis of research on the use of humor in business organizations conducted on a sample of 49 studies confirmed that employees' humor produces positive effects on health and coping with stress. Furthermore, humor positively correlates with work performance and work group cohesion. Humor used by the management positively affects the employees' satisfaction, work group cohesion, positive perception of the management's behavior by the employees and general satisfaction with the management (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2015). According to the results of the research conducted by Cann et al. (2014), humor has not yet been sufficiently recognized as an element of organizational climate, despite its significant contribution to the satisfaction and increased productivity of employees.

Humor is frequently used in sitcoms and television shows. The translation of comic scenes in TV series such as "Friends" must take into account cultural differences (Korostenskienė & Pakrosnytė, 2017). Comic elements in series like "I Love Lucy" and "Modern Family" often rely on stereotypes and unexpected plot twists (Korostenskienė & Lieponytė, 2018).

Humor can cause different emotions and reactions. Emotions are defined as short, subjective, physiological and functional expressive phenomena which harmonize our adjusting response to significant events in our lives (Reeve, 2010). Emotions are divided into primary and secondary ones. Primary emotions include happiness, sorrow, fear, anger, disgust and

surprise, and represent a direct spontaneous reaction to a stimulus (Ekman, 1992). Secondary emotions are more complex and are associated with social norms, experience, upbringing, beliefs and a personal interpretation of a situation. They are more conscious, reflect intention and include guilt, shame, jealousy, anger and pride. Using ECG imaging, Selveraj et al. (2013) analyzed emotions and with them associated reactions based on dimensions like high and low level of excitement and positive or negative sign of emotional states. The results showed that negative emotions with high level of excitement were anger and to it associated feeling of misery, dread and upset. Positive emotions and reactions with high level of excitement were happiness and to it associated excited anticipation. Negative emotions with low level of excitement were sorrow and to it associated disgust and whining. Positive emotions with low level of excitement were the feeling of satisfaction and to it associated relaxation and pleasure.

The business environment can be portrayed in a humorous way in a TV series. This paper analyses the humorous elements found in a Croatian TV series. The analysis is based on the above mentioned theories and research results.

1.2. Research Goals and Research

The general goal of this research is to determine the significance of humor in business communication and its effect on communication participants. The specific goals are to determine the frequency of occurrence and duration of certain humor styles in the selected series, recognize the reactions and feelings of colleagues, which occur when humor is used, determine the frequency of humor that is used for particular purposes and determine what humor style is the most prevalent one among the series' main characters. The reason for conducting this research is the positive impact of humor in the working environment and the TV series, which was explained in the introduction and literature review. Additionally, the literature review showed that humor is an important factor in creating a positive working environment and using humor at the workplace has the following benefits: relaxed social relations, reduced stress, better inter-personal bonding, a sense of belonging, positive perceived leader performance, group cohesion, mental health improvement, closer relationships, less inhibitions and better conflict resolution (Magnus et al., 2012). The sitcom clinic is chosen as the example of the business environment.

According to these goals, the research questions were set as follows:

1. What humor types occur in the sitcom episodes' analyzed sample and what is their repetitive frequency and duration?
2. How does using humor at work place affects emotions and reactions of colleagues, what emotions and reactions appear and what is the frequency of their appearance?
3. What is the purpose of using different humor styles in the analyzed episodes?
4. Which humor style prevails in the analyzed comic situations?

2. Methodology

The used methodology was the one of content analysis of publicly available recordings of sitcoms. The Content Analysis methodology is defined as a qualitative method whose goal is to determine manifested and latent content of communication in audio-visual recordings (Huber & Froehlich, 2020, p 37).

The content analysis sample is as follows: The research involved a content analysis of video recordings from the Croatian sitcom "Naša mala klinika" ("Our Little Clinic"). The series consists of 112 episodes across four seasons, with each episode lasting approximately 45 minutes. All episodes are available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/@NMK>).

The sample used for the analysis comprised one episode from each of the four seasons, resulting in a total of four episodes. The total duration of all four episodes was 169 minutes and 49 seconds (i.e., 2 hours, 49 minutes, and 49 seconds):

- Season 1 – Episode: "Body shop" (The Body Shop), Duration: 40 minutes, 55 seconds;
- Season 2 – Episode: "Sestrina sestra" (Nurse's Sister), Duration: 39 minutes, 28 seconds;
- Season 3 – Episode: "Danilciji kod" (Danilci's Code), Duration: 45 minutes, 52 seconds;
- Season 4 – Episode: "U laži su kratke noge" (Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire), Duration: 43 minutes, 34 seconds.

The analysis focused on the communication among the main characters, who are as follows: Ante Guzina, Toni Grgeč, Franjo Slaviček, and Lili Štriga (doctors), Veljko Kunić (surgeon), Bogo Moljka (psychiatrist), Florijan Gavran (physiotherapist), Ivo Zadro (patient), Helga (nurse), Milan Car (ambulance driver) and Šemsudin Dino Poplava (doorman). The analyzed parts of communication included elements of humor.

For the purposes of both quantitative and qualitative analyses, data collection forms were developed to record the number and duration of comic scenes. The data collection approach was based on the methodology used by Juckel et al. (2016), in which the authors analyze the frequency and duration of comic scenes in sitcoms and classify them according to humor techniques. In this study, the categories of analysis were defined based on established humor types and styles. The duration of each individual comic scene was measured in seconds.

The comic scenes were categorized according to the type of humor they displayed. The categories include: teasing, quips, irony and sarcasm, self-deprecating jokes, riddles, anecdotes, puns, and jokes. This classification is partially adapted from the humor categories analyzed by Dynel (2009).

The analysis of emotional and behavioral responses of characters in comic scenes was based on the following categories: joy, surprise, relaxation, connection, confusion, embarrassment, self-confidence, anger/fury. These categories were partially adapted from Ekman's (1992) model of primary and secondary emotions. Additional categories were developed based on the actual sample used in this research to more accurately capture the emotional nuances observed in the sitcom.

To identify the purpose of humor in the sitcom, comic scenes were classified according to the situations in which they occurred. The categories used include: creating a positive work atmosphere, enhancing interpersonal relationships, increasing productivity, reducing stress levels, encouraging creativity, boosting morale, overcoming obstacles, and strengthening leadership. These categories align with those identified in the meta-analysis on the purposes of humor by Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2015).

The quantitative content analysis involved counting the number of occurrences of each specific humor style and calculating their percentages relative to the total number of humor instances. The qualitative analysis consisted of classifying the content into categories based on the four humor types defined by Besser and Zeigler-Hill (2011):

- Affiliative humor is characterized by the use of jokes and pranks to uplift coworkers, foster a positive work atmosphere, and strengthen interpersonal relationships among peers.
- Self-enhancing humor reflects an optimistic outlook on life; it helps mitigate stress, overcome obstacles, promote a positive self-image, and boost self-confidence.
- Aggressive humor involves sarcasm, teasing, or making fun of others, often demonstrating superiority, showing a lack of empathy, and creating a negative work environment.
- Self-defeating humor consists of self-deprecating jokes and involves willingly risking ridicule from others.

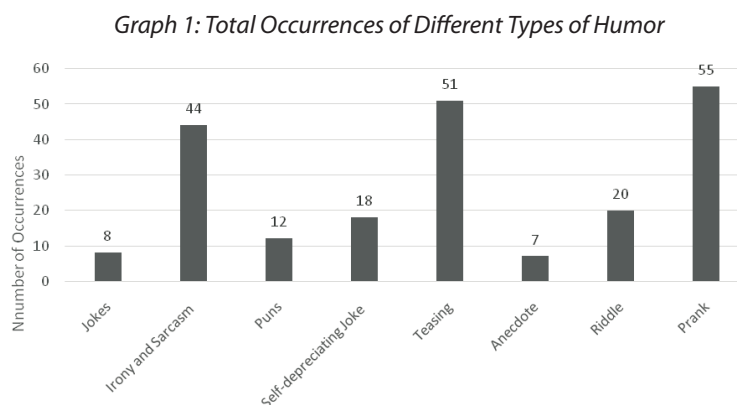
3. Results and discussion

The results of the qualitative and quantitative content analyses, conducted on a randomly chosen sample of sitcom episodes, are presented in the diagrams and tables below.

3.1. Frequency of Occurrence and Duration of Different Types of Humor

The analysis of the selected episodes identified a total of 215 occurrences of various types of humor. To address the research question — What types of humor occur in the analyzed sitcom episodes, and what are their frequency and duration? — the classification framework proposed by Dynel (2009) was applied. This includes categories such as jokes, quips, teasing, sarcasm, self-deprecating jokes, and anecdotes. Additionally, other humor types observed in the sample, such as puns and riddles, were included.

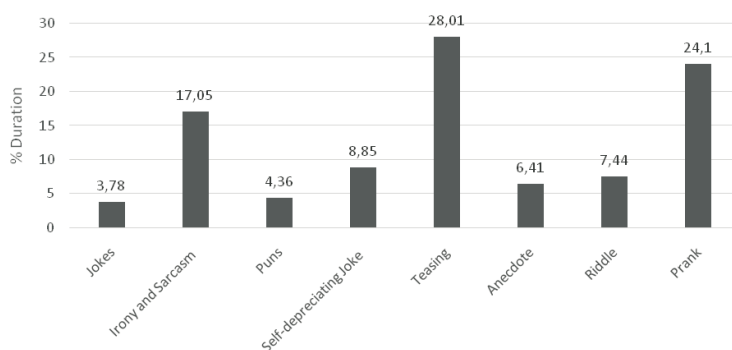
Graph 1 presents the overall number of occurrences, expressed as the frequency of each humor type.



Source: Research results

The analysis of the total registered types of humor (Graph No. 1) showed that the most common occurrences in the studied episodes were pranks, appearing 55 times out of 215 (25.58%), followed by teasing with 51 occurrences (23.72%), and irony and sarcasm with 44 occurrences (20.47%). Next were riddles, appearing 20 times (9.30%), self-deprecating jokes 18 times (8.37%), and puns 12 times (5.58%). The lowest frequencies were recorded for jokes, with 8 occurrences (3.72%), and anecdotes, with 7 occurrences (3.26%). The total duration of the four-episode sample was 169 minutes and 49 seconds (2 hours, 49 minutes, and 49 seconds). The analysis revealed that all types of humor combined accounted for a total duration of 1,560 seconds, or 26 minutes, within the 4 episodes (which total 10,189 seconds). Thus, comic scenes comprised 15.31% of the total episode duration. In other words, 26 minutes of the analyzed episodes were occupied by humor types classified as pranks, teasing, irony, sarcasm, self-deprecating jokes, puns, riddles, and anecdotes.

Graph 2: Total Percentage of Duration of Scenes Containing Different Types of Humor



Source: Research results

Graph 2 shows the percentages of time spent on each type of humor in the studied episodes. According to the results, the highest proportions of the total comic scene duration (100%) were occupied by teasing (28.01%), pranks (24.10%), and irony and sarcasm (17.05%). Following these were self-deprecating jokes (8.85%), riddles (7.44%), and anecdotes (6.41%). The least time was devoted to puns (4.36%) and jokes (3.78%). The percentages reflecting the duration of individual humor types correspond closely to the percentages of their respective frequencies.

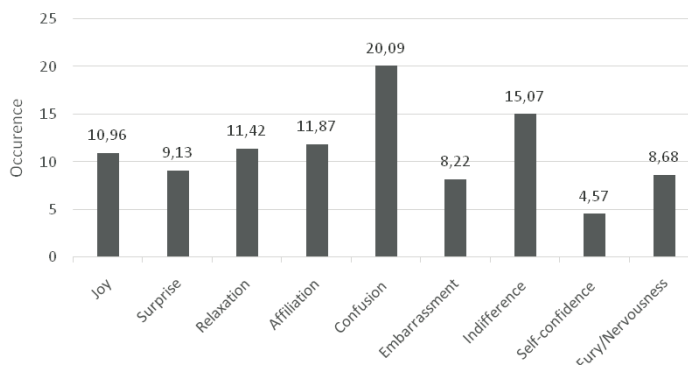
3.2. Frequency of Occurrence of Emotions and Reactions

To address the second research question — How does using humor in the workplace affect the emotions and reactions of colleagues? What emotions and reactions appear, and how frequently do they occur? — the following data on different emotions are presented.

Graph 3 provides an overview of the emotions and reactions that the main characters elicit in their peers. The results indicate the overall percentage of each emotion or reaction occurrence. Emotions were inferred from both verbal and non-verbal communication among

the main characters. Analysis of the selected episodes revealed that the most prevalent emotions were confusion (20.09%) and indifference (15.07%), followed by affiliation (11.87%), relaxation (11.42%), joy (10.96%), surprise (9.13%), fury (escalation of anger) (8.68%), embarrassment (8.22%), and self-confidence (4.57%). Primary emotions were classified according to the model proposed by Ekman (1992).

Graph 3: Overall Occurrence Percentage of Emotions and Reactions to Comic Scenes

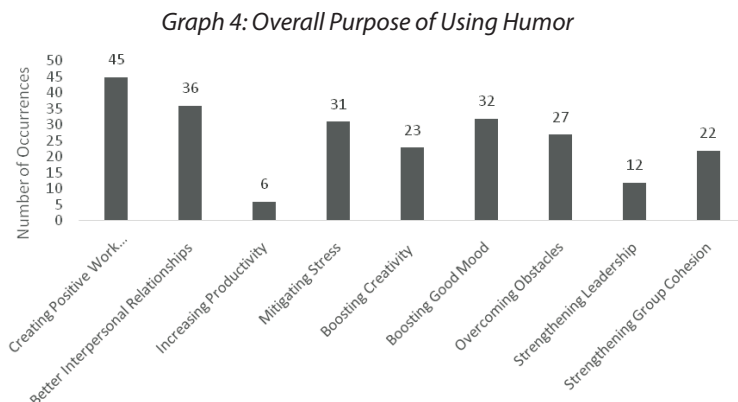


Source: Research results

The classification model of emotional states based on the dimensions of high/low arousal and positive/negative valence, studied by Selvaraj et al. (2013) using ECG wave imaging, demonstrated that the reactions and emotions of communication participants were evenly distributed across both positive emotions (such as joy and affiliation) and negative emotions (such as embarrassment and anger/fury). Furthermore, the results indicate a balance between high-arousal emotions (e.g., joy, surprise) and low-arousal states (e.g., relaxation, indifference). This balanced distribution of positive and negative emotions, spanning different levels of arousal, characterizes the comic situations in the humorous clinical business environment examined. In addition to primary emotions like joy, surprise, and anger/fury (as classified by Ekman, 1992), more complex reactions such as confusion and indifference were also observed.

3.3. The Purpose of Using Different Types of Humor

To address the third research question — What is the purpose of using different humor styles in the analyzed episodes? — content analysis was employed. This method was applied to the video recordings to assess the purposes behind the use of various types of humor within the clinic's business environment portrayed in the sitcom.



Source: Research results

Graph 4 presents the overall number of situations in which different purposes of humor were identified. A total of 239 situations were analyzed. In the studied episodes, the most common purpose of humor was to create a positive work atmosphere, occurring 45 times (18.83%), followed by strengthening interpersonal relationships 36 times (15.06%), boosting good mood 32 times (13.39%), mitigating stress 31 times (12.97%), and both overcoming obstacles and fostering group cohesion among employees, each with 27 occurrences (11.30%). Humor was least frequently used to strengthen leadership, 12 times (5.02%), and to increase productivity, 6 times (2.51%).

These results partially align with meta-analytic findings on the positive effects of humor in the workplace, which highlight humor's role in reducing stress, strengthening group cohesion, enhancing leadership, and improving productivity (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2015). Additionally, the observed effects of humor in boosting good mood and mitigating stress can be interpreted within the framework of humor theory (Wilkins and Eisenbraun, 2013), which emphasizes humor's contribution to relief and a relaxed atmosphere. These findings also support Gremigni's (2012) assertion that humor helps reduce stress and alleviate tension.

3.4. The Proportion of Different Humor Styles Occurrence

Humor styles used by the sitcom characters were analyzed according to the Model of Affiliative, Self-enhancing, Aggressive, and Self-defeating Humor Styles (Besser and Zeigler-Hill, 2011). To address the fourth research question — Which humor style prevails in the analyzed comic situations? — the following data were collected and are presented below.

Table 1: Humor Styles in Analyzed Episodes

Humor Style	Main Characters - % of Comic Scene Occurrence				
	Veljko Kunić	Toni Grgeč	Sanja Grospić	Šemsudin Dino Poplava	Franjo Slaviček
Affiliative (61.11%)	37.68	61.11	20.00	58.25	56.00
Self-enhancing (13.89%)	23.19	13.89	24.00	31.07	18.00
Aggressive (2.78%)	39.13	2.78	56.00	5.83	22.00
Self-defeating (22.22%)	0.00	22.22	0.00	4.85	4.00
100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Research results

Table 1 presents the results of humor styles used by the main characters. The data show that the most frequent humor style is the positive affiliative humor, accounting for 61.11% of occurrences. This style likely contributes to employee satisfaction and motivation, which is reflected in the overall atmosphere throughout the series. These findings align with those of Romero and Cruthirds (2006), who found that affiliative and self-enhancing humor are the most commonly used types in business environments.

4. Conclusion

The presented content analysis of a TV sitcom depicting the business environment of a healthcare clinic has shown that humor can have various effects on employees. Using an adequate sample of four episodes, it was found that comic scenes accounted for 15.31% of the total duration of the studied episodes. Despite this relatively modest percentage, the sitcom is considered humorous due to the emotions and reactions it evokes in viewers.

These results should be interpreted within the limitations of the methodology, namely that only one specific sitcom, which associates humor with a healthcare business environment, was analyzed and that the sample included only four episodes. This methodology could be expanded in future research to include additional episodes of the studied sitcom, as well as other TV series that portray business environments humorously.

The content analysis revealed that humor most frequently appears in the form of pranks, teasing, irony, and sarcasm, followed by riddles, anecdotes, puns, and jokes.

Humor in the business environment provokes a range of emotions and reactions from participants. The emotions identified in the studied episodes span primary emotions such as joy, surprise, anger, and fury, as well as more complex feelings like confusion and indifference. Some emotions, such as joy and surprise, involve a high level of excitement, whereas others, like relaxation and indifference, reflect lower levels of excitement.

Humor also produces positive effects in the business setting. In the analyzed episodes, humor is used to create a positive work atmosphere, strengthen interpersonal relationships, boost morale, and reduce stress. The main characters predominantly use affiliative humor, which fosters a positive, friendly, and relaxed work environment.

The common humor types (pranks, teasing, irony, riddles, self-deprecating jokes, puns, jokes, anecdotes) and humor styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating) as well as the emotional reactions humor can trigger in the workplace were identified. These findings may serve as a methodological framework for similar research in real business environments and provide recommendations on acceptable humor types and styles for various business contexts. Future research could extend to other business sectors beyond healthcare and apply this methodology to analyze humorous TV series depicting everyday business situations outside of clinical settings.

Additional limitations include the relatively small and randomly chosen video sample. Further analysis involving a larger number of episodes is necessary.

In conclusion, humor in a TV sitcom that humorously portrays a healthcare clinic business environment—while respecting diversity and ethical norms—may positively influence organizational climate and enhance group cohesion. Proper and moderate use of humor can contribute to relaxed communication and a more pleasant work atmosphere. Based on the results from the analyzed episodes, the authors cautiously suggest that humor may have similar positive effects in real business situations, though further research is needed to confirm this.

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