

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Applying Humor in Conflict Management with a Systematic Approach**

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Receive Date: 22/Jan/2026

Revise Date: 09/May/2026

Accept Date: 10/May/2026

How to cite

Bakhtiari, Z., Nargesian, A., Gholipor, A., Fouladi, A.R. (1405). Applying Humor in Conflict Management with a Systematic Approach, *Public Organizations Management*, 14(3), 63 -88.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT**Introduction**

Conflict is an inevitable interactive phenomenon in organizations, arising from differences in ideas, values, and emotions among individuals or groups. When unmanaged, conflict can lead to detrimental outcomes such as reduced morale, productivity, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee well-being. Therefore, conflict management is not merely about avoidance or termination, but rather about designing effective strategies to minimize destructive effects while enhancing the constructive functions of conflict for organizational learning and effectiveness. In this context, humor, as a key leadership characteristic and communication tool, plays a vital role in fostering a positive organizational culture, improving group cohesion, enhancing self-efficacy, and reducing stress, anxiety, and burnout. Given these multifaceted benefits, this study aims to systematically review the literature on the role of humor in managing and reducing organizational conflict.

Methodology

This study was conducted with the aim of systematically reviewing published literature on the application of humor in conflict management. To achieve this objective, a systematic review methodology was employed, and a comprehensive search was carried out in the reputable scientific databases Scopus and Web of Science. Ultimately, 40 articles that were fully aligned with the research objectives were selected and analyzed. The systematic review process followed standard stages, including:

Step 1: Formulation of the Research Problem

Research questions determine the overall direction of the review process and serve as a guide for subsequent stages. Like other types of research, review studies require clearly defined and well-formulated research questions.

Step 2: Article Search Protocol

Keyword searching is the most common method for identifying relevant literature. Accordingly, keywords must be carefully examined to ensure the selection of terms that generate relevant data. To identify synonyms related to the research keywords, the Thesaurus website was used. In addition, the Connected Papers platform was employed to identify networks of articles relevant to the research topic. Final refinements to the search terms were made based on expert opinions and reviewers' feedback.

Step 3: Search for Scientific Sources

The quality of a literature review is highly dependent on the quality of the sources collected—"garbage in, garbage out." A systematic review therefore requires a structured and comprehensive literature search.

In this study, the Web of Science and Scopus databases were used to collect relevant sources. The criteria for article selection included topical relevance, year of publication, and indexing in the aforementioned databases. The findings of this study were extracted exclusively from these sources.

Step 4: Selection and Screening of Sources

In this study, the search and selection process was conducted in several stages. Initially, 3,643 potentially relevant articles were retrieved from the databases. In the first screening stage, 97 records were identified as eligible based on title, abstract, and keywords. After full-text review, 51 articles were excluded due to lack of relevance to the topic of “the application of humor in conflict management,” and 6 articles were removed due to duplication. Ultimately, 40 articles that directly addressed the research questions and were closely aligned with the study’s focus were retained for final analysis.

Step 5: Quality Assessment of Final Articles (Concise Version)

To evaluate the quality of the selected studies, the standardized **CASP** checklist was used. This tool includes 10 key criteria, and each article was scored on a scale from 0 to 20. A score above 14 was considered the threshold for inclusion. The results indicated that all 40 final articles met the required quality standards and were deemed suitable for the study.

Step 6: Data Extraction

The information required to answer the research questions was collected during this stage. Data extraction was carried out using a structured data extraction form that included general characteristics of each article—such as title, objectives, methodology, and key findings. In addition, variables directly related to the research questions were carefully extracted from the selected studies.

Step 7: Data Analysis

Following initial coding and data compilation, higher-level analysis was conducted. During this phase, codes were examined and integrated to identify overarching themes. Some codes were excluded if they did not fit into any theme. Through iterative review and refinement, themes were developed to be sufficiently precise, distinct, non-overlapping, and comprehensive, enabling them to capture a broad range of ideas across the data. This process resulted in the reduction of data into a manageable set of core themes that represent the essence of the original texts. Finally, themes were grouped based on data content and, where appropriate, theoretical foundations.

Step 8: Reporting the Findings

In this final stage, the findings derived from the systematic review of the selected articles are presented. First, descriptive results of the literature review are reported, followed by a coherent presentation of the findings obtained through thematic analysis.

Findings

The findings indicate that the application of humor in conflict management is influenced by a set of contextual factors, including individual characteristics of actors, organizational structure and culture, and the nature of the conflict situation. Moreover, different types of humor (constructive and destructive), speaker–listener positioning, and intervention mechanisms such as discursive and behavioral techniques as well as face management play a decisive role in shaping the organizational outcomes of this strategy, which are discussed below.

1. Context and Background Factors

Characteristics of the actors: Age, work experience, gender, and racial similarity or employees’ backgrounds influence the perception and effectiveness of humor. Individual differences can lead to divergent interpretations of humor in conflict management.

Organizational structure and culture: Organizational climate, leadership style, culture, power distance, workplace norms, repetition of jokes in inappropriate situations, initiating humor with powerful individuals, power relations, social power dynamics, humor as a tool for challenging authority, Confucian values of harmony and hierarchy, and leader–member exchange quality all determine how humor is received, interpreted, and how it affects conflict management.

Characteristics of the conflict situation: The intensity and seriousness of the conflict play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of humor in conflict management.

2. Anatomy of Humorous Behavior

Constructive forms of humor: These include affiliative, tension-relieving, self-enhancing, and self-deprecating humor. Such forms of humor can manage conflicts constructively by reducing tension, improving the quality of work relationships, increasing cooperation and team cohesion, creating a democratic communicative climate, strengthening positive interactions, and reducing employee silence.

Destructive forms of humor: These include aggressive, controlling, and biased humor, which can escalate conflict and create feelings of superiority.

3. Speaker–Listener Situational Awareness

The speaker's intention and the listener's response determine how humor is perceived and interpreted. The speaker's intent, the listener's reaction and interpretation, attention to hierarchy, and sensitivity to face needs in interpersonal encounters can turn humor into a tool for reducing tension and fostering positive relationships.

4. Mechanisms of Intervention and Transformation

Discursive techniques: The use and imitation of pre-scripted conversational patterns, as well as parody and inversion of dialogues, can contribute to conflict management.

Behavioral techniques: The ambivalence–shift model and the interaction between body language and verbal language enhance humorous expression and coping laughter.

Face management: Coping laughter reduces face threat, conceals face loss, renders serious situations less serious, facilitates topic shifts, and helps reduce conflict.

5. Organizational Outcomes

Positive functions: These include preventing and reducing conflict, improving interpersonal relationships, reducing tension, facilitating learning and interaction, increasing team cohesion, effectively managing stress and pressure, and improving job satisfaction and human communication. Humor can also enhance employees' autonomy and spontaneous creativity, regulate emotions, and create a greater sense of calm and flexibility

Negative functions: These include silencing minority voices, failure to challenge gender norms, escalation of conflict, employee resistance to organizational tasks, suppressing discussions of exclusion and harassment, and the perpetuation of racial stereotypes.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicate that humor, when applied consciously, ethically, and in alignment with the conflict context, can serve as an effective tool for managing interpersonal and organizational conflicts. The effectiveness of humor is significantly influenced by individual, cultural, and power-related differences, as well as by its content, context, and mode of delivery. Evidence suggests that constructive humor reduces face-threatening situations, regulates negative emotions, facilitates communication, strengthens double-loop learning, and creates shared meaning, thereby preventing conflict escalation and enhancing relationship quality, collaboration, and team cohesion. Conversely, inappropriate or destructive use of humor may lead to misinterpretation, weakened professional relationships, and intensified conflict. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for systematic attention by managers and human resource professionals to communication skills training and the purposeful use of humor as a complementary strategy in effective organizational conflict management.

KEY WORDS

Humor, Conflict, Conflict Management, Systematic Review.



مقاله پژوهشی

کاربست شوخ‌طبعی در مدیریت تعارض با رویکردی سیستماتیک

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چکیده

پژوهش حاضر با هدف طراحی الگوی کاربردی شوخ‌طبعی در مدیریت تعارض انجام گردید. در این پژوهش، تلاش شد تا با بهره‌گیری از رویکردی عمیق و تحلیلی، نقش شوخ‌طبعی به‌عنوان یک راهبرد ارتباطی و رفتاری در مواجهه با موقعیت‌های تعارض مورد واکاوی قرار گیرد. این مطالعه با بهره‌گیری از روش‌شناسی کیفی و با اتکا به رویکردهای مرور سیستماتیک و تحلیل مضمون انجام شد تا ابعاد کلیدی این پدیده‌شناسی و تبیین گردد. در این راستا، پس از غربالگری مطالعات و انتخاب ۴۰ مقاله نهایی مرتبط با موضوع پژوهش، متون منتخب به‌طور عمیق مورد بررسی قرار گرفت و فرایند کدگذاری بر اساس اصول تحلیل مضمون آغاز گردید. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد که شوخ‌طبعی می‌تواند در مدیریت و کاهش تعارض نقش مؤثری ایفا کند. این پژوهش با ارائه بینش‌هایی در خصوص این نقش، به بررسی بستر و عوامل زمینه‌ای (ویژگی‌های کنشگران، ساختار و فرهنگ سازمانی، ویژگی‌های موقعیت تعارض)، کالبدشناسی رفتار شوخ طبعانه (گونه‌شناسی شوخ‌طبعی سازنده، گونه‌شناسی شوخ‌طبعی مخرب، موقعیت سنجی گوینده و شنونده) مکانیسم‌های مداخله و تحول (تکنیک‌های گفت‌وگویی، تکنیک‌های رفتاری و مدیریت وجهه) و به پیامدها و خروجی‌های سازمانی (کارکردهای مثبت و کارکردهای منفی) کاربردی شوخ‌طبعی در مدیریت تعارض می‌پردازد. نتایج نشان می‌دهد که شوخ‌طبعی، در صورت به‌کارگیری آگاهانه، اخلاق‌مداری و متناسب با بافت تعارض، می‌تواند به‌عنوان ابزاری مؤثر در مدیریت تعارض‌های بین‌فردی و سازمانی عمل کند. اثربخشی شوخ‌طبعی به‌طور معناداری تحت تأثیر تفاوت‌های فردی، فرهنگی و جایگاهی، همچنین محتوای زمینه و شیوه بیان آن قرار دارد. شواهد حاکی از آن است که شوخ‌طبعی سازنده با کاهش تهدید وجهه، تعدیل هیجانات منفی، تسهیل ارتباطات، تقویت یادگیری دوحلقه‌ای و ایجاد زمینه‌های مشترک، به پیشگیری از تشدید تعارض، بهبود کیفیت روابط کاری و افزایش همکاری و انسجام تیمی کمک می‌کند. در مقابل، استفاده نابجا یا ناسازگار از شوخ‌طبعی می‌تواند موجب سوءبرداشت، تضعیف روابط حرفه‌ای و تشدید تعارض شود. در مجموع، نتایج این مرور بر ضرورت توجه نظام‌مند بخش منابع انسانی و مدیران به آموزش و توسعه مهارت‌های ارتباطی و استفاده هدفمند از شوخ‌طبعی، به‌عنوان راهبردی مکمل در مدیریت اثربخش تعارض‌های سازمانی تأکید دارد.

واژه‌های کلیدی

شوخ‌طبعی، تعارض، مدیریت تعارض، مرور نظام‌مند.

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تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۴/۱۱/۰۲

تاریخ بازنگری: ۱۴۰۵/۰۲/۱۹

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۵/۰۲/۲۰

استناد به این مقاله:

بختیاری، زینب؛ نرگسیان، عباس؛ قلی‌پور، آرین و فولادی؛ علیرضا (۱۴۰۵). کاربردی شوخ‌طبعی در مدیریت تعارض با رویکرد مرور سیستماتیک، مدیریت سازمان‌های دولتی، ۱۴ (۳)، ۶۳-۸۸.

حق انتشار این مستند، متعلق به نویسندگان آن است. © ۱۴۰۵ ناشر این مقاله، دانشگاه پیام نور است.



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