The Relationship between School Principals' Humor Styles and School Climate

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Abstract

Described as "smiling thought" by Einstein, humor has been related to a number of organizational processes and outcomes, one of which is organizational climate. Climate of an organization is the result of its members' everyday behaviors. Although there are studies on how humor influences organizational efficiency, there are few studies on the relationship between leaders' humor and organizational climate. Specifically, although numerous studies have been done on the effect of leader behaviors on climate, the management literature is short of the studies on the influence of leaders' humor behaviors on climate. In order to define the relationship between school principals' humor styles and school climate, this study was designed as a relational survey model. Study group consisted of 356 teachers working at public schools in Kayseri in 2014-2015 academic year. Data collected by Humor Styles Scale and School Climate Scale was analyzed on SPSS 21.0 package program and descriptive statistics, t-test, ANOVA, Tukey test and Pearson correlation methods were used. According to the results, it was observed that as school principals' humor style "Cynical Humor Style" was perceived most by the teachers and that their school climate perceptions were positive. Besides, significant positive correlations between positive humor styles scores and school climate scores, and significant negative correlations between negative humor styles and school climate scores were observed.

Key Words: Humor, humor styles, teachers, school principals, school climate

Introduction

One of the things that we, all are quite sensitive about is our sense of humor. Actually, we all, most probably, know people who easily admit that they don't like to read, have no interest in religion and politics, cannot sing in tune or play a single musical instrument, or that they waste too much time watching useless television programs. But there is not anyone who admits having no sense of humor (Hurren, 2006,373). With this provoking claim, Hurren draws our attention to the importance of humor in our lives and in our self-perceptions. According to Turkish Language Organization dictionary (2016) humor is defined as tinge of irony aiming to amuse, make people laugh and joke someone without hurting the feelings. It can also be defined as the art of making one think on the events, amuse or make people laugh (Yardımcı, 2010,2). Altınkurt and Yılmaz (2011,2) explains humor as all the situations mediate the behaviors of laughing and making people laugh. In a similar way, Southam (2001; as cited in Kılınç, Recepoğlu and Koşar, 2014,136) describes humor as an unexpected, sudden and surprising situation which results in laughing or smiling. Just like Hurren (2006), Yılmaz (2011,31) draws attention to the importance of humor in daily life by likening it to the oxygen of life.

Many can be said about the functions of humor in life. According to qualitative and quantitative works in the extant literature Berk (2010,323) argues that humor has 15 psychophysiological benefits. Humor lessens stress, depression and loneliness, increases self-respect, hope and energy, and creates a feeling of strength and control. Being such an important sense, humor basically might seem to be a subject of psychology. Yet, its effects on organizational settings are getting the attention of management and organization researchers more and more. According to Barsoux (1996,500) spontaneous humor is often considered to be an irregular behavior, or at best an unproductive intervention. It ranks alongside irresponsibility, irrationality and incompetence as a wrench in the works of business efficiency. However, management researches suggest otherwise. That is, far from sabotaging organizational purpose, humor proves instrumental in pursuing it. According to Decker and Rotondo (2001,450) effective managers possess leadership ability in order to affect change in followers, and one promising area of focus is the relationship between humor and leadership. In the same vein, Recepoğlu and Özdemir (2012,28) argue that findings about humor and leadership are clear and consistent; humor is an important component of effective leadership which is composed of solving managerial problems, managing the change, motivating the followers. Studying humor at school leadership, William and Clouse (1991,1) identifies humor as an important device for improving administrator-teacher relationships. Besides, the use of humor facilitates the informal school climate, increases social bonding (which contributes to increased productivity), conflict resolution, and commitment.

In the extant literature, humor hasn't been studied in a common way. In scales developed by different researchers, it can be seen that humor has been claimed to have different dimensions. For instance, Cemaloğlu, Recepoğlu, Şahin, Daşçı and Köktürk (2012) argue that humor behaviors can be examined with a scale which has five dimensions. The first dimension is "Cynical Humor Style". Cynical humor style is used to insult and hurt other people. The second dimension is "Productive Social Humor", which is used to develop relationships with other people. The third dimension is "Affirmatory Humor", explained as having a positive attitude towards humor. The fourth dimension is "Negatory Humor" meaning rejecting humor, humorous attitude, sayings and behaviors. The fifth and the last dimension is "Nonhumorous Style". People with a nonhumorous style include humor in their lives just a little bit or not at all. The relationship between the sense of humor and various organizational processes and outcomes have been the focus of different studies. In the extant literature, there are studies on the relationship between humor and group cohesion (Duncan, 1984), organizational culture (Clouse and Spurgeon, 1995), and the effect of humor on leader-follower relationships (Avelio, Howell and Sosik, 1999). In educational organizations, while the researchers have focused on the use of humor in classroom setting (e.g. Oruç, 2010), there are just a few studies on the humor behaviors of school principals (Ziegler, Boardman and Thomas, 1985; William and Clouse, 1991; William, 1994; Hurren, 2006; Recepoğlu, 2011; Recepoğlu and Özdemir, 2012; Yılmaz, 2011).

Long before humor did, climate had attracted the organizational researchers. Although there is not a standard definition of this construct, Ashforth (1985) argues that climate is shared perceptions of behavior (as cited in Hoy, Tarter, and Bliss, 1990,261). Hoy and Miskel (1987) suggests that organizational climate is a broad term that refers to members' shared perceptions of the work environment of the organization. As for school climate, it is the subjective and objective feelings and perceptions of teachers about the school (Ellis, 1988; cited in Nur, 2012,43). As a complex and vague concept, climate and school climate, has been studied in various methods. For example Loukas (2007,1) argues that although it is not easy to come up with a standard definition, researchers agree that school climate is consisted of physical, social and academic dimensions. Hoy and Tarter (1991; as cited in Çağlayan, 2014,97) suggests that the first component of school climate is about the quality of the relationship between principal and teachers. The second component is the quality of the relationship among teachers. Çağlayan (2014, 97-103) found out that school climate is composed of three dimensions. The first dimension is leadership and participation, the second dimension is instructional environment and the third is cooperation. It is clear that in organizational and school climate studies leadership has always been treated as a separate dimension. As Balcı (2002,112) argues school principal has a great influence on the characteristic of school. He or she is the one who has a critical importance on improving school's academic and social climate. As a result of this critical importance, the question "What is the influence of schools principals' humor styles on school climate?" needs to be answered.

In educational management literature, school climate has been related to various organizational processes and outcomes. Researches indicate that school climate and school effectiveness, teacher

commitment and students' success are correlated (Tsui and Cheng, 1999); school climate creates a difference in instructional environment and student success (Bossert, 1988). However, apart from just a couple of studies (Ziegler and Boardman, 1986; Williams and Clouse, 1991, Williams, 1994), there are not enough studies on the relationships between school principals' humor styles and school climate. Specifically, in Turkish literature the relationship between two concepts has never been studied before. As it is agreed that school principals has an utmost importance on school climate, it is crucial to understand how their humor behaviors influence school climate.

This study has been planned from this point of view. That is to say, studying the relationships between school principals' humor style and school climate will provide valuable implications for educational management. In this study, which basically aims to enlighten the relationship between school principals humor styles and school climate, it is also aimed to measure the perceptions of teachers about their principals' humor styles and school climate and analyze these perceptions according to some personal variables.

Method

Trying to find out the relationship between school principals' humor styles and school climate, the relational survey method was applied. Selected according to purposive and stratified sampling methods, the study group was consisted of 356 voluntary teachers working in Kayseri, in 2014-2015 academic year. The characteristics of the study group can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. *Frequency and percentage distribution of the study group*

Variables	Categories	N	%
Gender	Female	181	50,8
	Male	175	49,2
Marital Status	Married	306	86,0
	Single	50	14,0
Work Experience	Less than 10 years	132	37,1
	Between 11-20 years	166	46,6
	More than 21 years	58	16,3

As seen in Table 1, the study group included 181 female and 175 male teachers, most of whom were married and who had work experience varying between less than 10 years and more than 21 years. In order to collect data two measures were used, a personal data form developed by the researchers was used, as well. One of the measures was Humor Behaviors Scale (HBS), which was developed by Cemaloğlu, et al., (2012), and the other measure was School Climate Scale (SCS) developed by Çağlayan (2014). Found to be reliable and valid by Cemaloğlu, et.al. (2012) HBS is a 32-item, five-point Likert scale. In HBS there are five dimensions, which are cynical, productive-social, affirmatory, negatory humor styles and nonhumorous style. Proved to be reliable and valid by Çağlayan (2014) SCS is a 47-item, five-point Likert scale. In SCS there are three dimensions, which are leadership and participation, instructional environment and cooperation. The data collected for the study were coded to SPSS 21.0 statistical program (the importance level was .05). For both scales, higher points imply higher levels of teachers' perceptions about the school principals' humor styles and school climate. In the analysis, descriptive statistics, means, standard deviations, t-test, ANOVA, Tukey multiple comparison test, Pearson's correlation coefficients were used.

Findings

In this part first of all findings about school principals' humor styles, then findings about school climate and lastly the relationships between the two are given. Findings about school principals' humor styles according to teachers' perceptions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Means and standard deviations for school principals' humor styles scores*

Humor Styles Dimensions	N	$\overline{X}$	Sd
Nonhumorous Style	356	3,5234	1,11852
Negatory Humor Style	356	4,0534	1,00173
Affirmatory Humor Style	356	3,2360	0,92041
Productive-Social Humor Style	356	2,7444	0,94492

Cynical Humor Style	356	4,3525	0,87126

Data in Table 2 shows that according to teachers' perceptions, school principals exhibited "cynical humor style" most and "productive-social humor style" least. Further analyses were done to find if teachers' perceptions about school principals' humor styles differed according to the teachers' gender, marital status and teaching experience. T-test results showed that teachers' perceptions didn't differ significantly according to their gender (Nonhumorous Style =1,004, negatory humor style =1,499, affirmatory humor style =0,678, productive-social humor style =-1,092, cynical humor style =0,312 and p >0,05 for all the dimensions). As for gender, t-test analysis showed that teachers' perceptions didn't differ significantly in nonhumorous (t=1,485, p >0,05), productive-social humor style (t=0,609, >0,05) and cynical humor style (t=1,293, p>0,05). Yet, in negatory (t=2,301, p<0,05) and affirmatory humor style dimensions (t=2,098, p<0,05), there were significant differences between the groups. In both dimensions the means of the married teachers' scores (negatory humor style $\overline{x}$=4,1085, affirmatory humor style $\overline{x}$=3,2771) were higher than the single teachers (negatory humor style $\overline{x}$=3,7160, affirmatory humor style $\overline{x}$=2,9840). When one-way ANOVA was conducted to analyze the differences according to their teaching experience, it was observed that teachers' perceptions about school principals' humor styles didn't differ significantly in affirmatory (F=1,415, p>0,05) and productive-social (F=0,310, p>0,05) humor style dimensions. Yet, in nonhumorous style (F=4,602, p<0,05), negatory style (F=11,771, p<0,05) and cynical style dimensions (F=6,706, p<0,05) meaningful differences were observed. When TUKEY test was conducted to find the source of these meaningful differences, it was observed that in nonhumorous style, negatory humor style and cynical humor style dimensions, the perceptions of teachers with more than 21 years teaching experience were lower than those of the teachers with 10 years and less teaching experience (mean difference for nonhumorous style= -,49547, p<0,05; for negatory humor style= -,74305, p<0,05, for cynical humor style= -,49412, p<0,05) and teachers with 11-20 years of teaching experience (mean differences for nonhumorous style= -,46967, p<0,05; for negatory humor style= -,49975, p<0,05; for cynical humor style= -,32613, p<0,05). After the analysis about humor styles, analysis for school climate was conducted. Findings about school climate are given in Table 3.

Table 3. *Means and standard deviations for school climate scores*

Dimensions	N	$\overline{\text{X}}$	Sd
Leadership and Participation	356	3,3105	0,91758
Instructional Environment	356	3,4095	0,72712
Cooperation	356	3,5864	0,79231
School Climate Scale Total Score	356	3,4188	0,74767

In Table 3 mean and standard deviation for SCS total score and means and standard deviations for the factors are presented. SCS total score mean was 3,4188 and standard deviation was 0,74767. This showed that teachers' perceptions for their schools' climate was around "agree" level. In addition, the highest mean was that of cooperation factor ($\overline{\text{X}}$ = 3,5864, Ss=0,79231), which meant that teachers perceived the cooperation factor most in their school atmosphere. T-test was conducted to find out if teacher perceptions of school climate and school climate factors changed according to their gender and marital status. According to t-test analysis between the genders significant differences for school climate total score was observed (t=2,877, p<0,004), there weren't significant differences in the factors, though (leadership and participation t=0,130; p>0,05, instructional environment t=0,000; p>0,05 and collaboration t=0,001; p>0,05). In SCS total score female teachers' score mean ($\overline{\text{X}}$ =3,5298, Ss.,69606) was meaningfully higher than male teachers ($\overline{\text{X}}$ =3,3041, Ss.,78310). According to teachers' marital status, no significant difference was observed between married and single teachers either in total SCS total score (t=-,424; p>0,05) or factors (leadership and participation t=-,842; p>0,05, instructional environment t=-,087; p>0,05 and collaboration t=-,067; p>0,05). One-way ANOVA was applied to find out the differences in SCS total score and dimensions according to teachers' experience. Although no significant difference was observed in SCS total score, in collaboration factor significant differences between the groups were observed (F=3,524, p<0,05). In order to find out the source of the difference TUKEY test was used. According to the test results, the significant difference was between the teachers with 10 years and less teaching experience and the teachers with 21 years and more; specifically, teachers with 10 years and less teaching experience had a higher score in collaboration factor than the teachers with 21 years and more experience (mean

difference= 0,32807, p<0,05). The correlational analysis about the relationship between teachers' perceptions of school principals' humor styles and school climate factors is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *The relationship between school principals' humor styles and school climate factors*

		Leadership and Participation	Instructional Environment	Collaboration
Cynical Humor Style	r	-,371	-,272	-,299
	p	,000	,000	,000
Productive-social Humor Style	r	,476	,380	,357
	p	,000	,000	,000
Affirmatory Humor Style	r	,501	,363	,364
	p	,000	,000	,000
Negatory Humor Style	r	-,535	-,374	-,430
	p	,000	,000	,000
Nonhumorous Style	r	-,449	-,367	-,346
	p	,000	,000	,000

In Table 4 it could be seen that meaningful correlations between all dimensions of HBS and all the factors of SCS were observed. According to the correlation analysis, it was observed that there were significant and moderate negative correlation between cynical humor style and leadership and participation factor (r=-,371) and low negative correlation between cynical humor style and instructional environment (r=-,272) and collaboration (r=-,299). Between productive-social humor style and leadership and participation (r=,476), instructional environment (r=,380), collaboration (r=,357), significant and moderate positive correlations were observed. Likewise, significant and moderate positive correlations between affirmatory humor style and leadership and participation (r=,501), and instructional environment (r=,363), and collaboration (r=,364) factors were observed. Between negatory humor style and leadership and participation (r=-,535), and instructional environment (r=-,374), collaboration (r=-,430) factors, significant moderate negative correlations were observed. Significant moderate negative correlations between, the last dimension of HBS, nonhumorous style, and leadership and participation (r=-,449), instructional environment (r=-,367), and collaboration (r=-,346) factors were observed, as well.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this pioneer work for Turkish educational administration literature, valuable findings about school principals' humor styles and school climate were put forward and the relationships between the two were introduced. According to participant teachers of this study, school principals exhibited cynical humor style most, while they exhibited productive-social humor style least. This finding is inconsistent with almost all the previous studies about school principals' humor styles (Yılmaz, 2011; Recepoğlu and Özdemir; 2012; Recepoğlu, 2015; Williams, 1994). In the previous studies, it is seen that school principals were perceived to exhibit the humor styles that could be called positive styles in general. For instance, Yılmaz (2011,36) found out that school principals' self-enhancing humor style was perceived most by the teachers. Similarly, Recepoğlu and Özdemir (2012,32) observed that according to teachers' perceptions, the highest score for school principals' humor style was that of affirmatory humor style. In a later study by Recepoğlu (2015,35), that affirmatory humor style was perceived most by the teachers was validated again. Williams (1994,67), conducting his study in the USA, came up with similar results. In his study with teachers, it was observed that school principals' had the highest score in productive humor style. Kara (2014,719) who conducted her study with the managers in different sectors, found out that the managers scored themselves as having the self-enhancing and affiliative humor styles most. It is striking that although almost all the previous studies about school principals' humor behaviors found that school principals' humor styles were perceived positive most, in this study it was observed that schools principals' humor styles was scored the highest in negative humor styles. Strikingly, in this study it was observed that the second highest score was that of negatory humor style- a negative humor style, too. This different findings may simply derive from the fact that samples of the studies have got different perceptions. Besides, that the conditions for becoming a public school principal changed a lot in the recent times may have changed the perceptions of the teachers about the principals in a negative way. That is to say, because of unwanted changes about school principals' appointment regulations, teachers may have a total negative perception about the principals, not just about their humor styles. These inconsistent findings imply that more studies are needed to be done on this subject.

In this study, it was observed that the teachers' perceptions about the school climate was quite positive. The highest score was that of collaboration factor. This finding is similar to Bayram and Aypay's (2012,56) study, which found out that teachers had quite positive perceptions about their school climate and the highest score was that of collaboration factor. However, Çağlayan (2014,115) found out that teachers' perceptions about their school climate was not very high, but at "partially agree-moderate" levels. This might show that teachers in Çağlayan's study had relatively lower and negative perceptions about their schools' climate. One parallel finding of Çağlayan's study with this one is that the highest scores were observed in collaboration factor in both studies. Gültekin (2012,83) also reached the finding that in school climate dimensions, teachers scored the collegial support factor higher than all the other school climate factors.

When the relationships between school principals' humor style and school climate were analyzed, significant correlations between all the humor styles and all the school climate factors were found out. In general, while positive correlations between positive humor styles, such as confirmatory and productive-social humor styles, and school climate factors were observed, negative correlations were observed between negative humor styles, such as nonhumorous, negatory and cynical humor styles, and school climate factors. These findings show that if school principals use positive humor styles, s/he might be able to raise the positive perceptions about their school climate. And likewise, not using humor or having the negative styles might have detrimental effects on school climate. This finding is parallel with Ziegler and Boardman's (1985,347) findings. According to Ziegler and Boardman's study there were significant positive correlations between positive humor styles and school climate, and significant negative correlations between negative humor styles and school climate. In their qualitative study Williams and Clouse (1991) concluded that school principals' use of humor influenced the school climate in a positive way and it was perceived as an important communication device between the principals and the teachers. In accordance, Williams (1994,69) confirmed that when school principals exhibited and supported positive humor behaviors, there was generally positive school climate. Nonhumorous principals were generally the leaders of the schools with inefficient school climate. All the studies about school principals' use of humor and school climate in the extant literature showed that school principals' use of positive humor influenced school climate in a positive way. It is clear that studying the relationship between school climate, one of the determiners of student success, and school leadership behaviors one need to take the effects of use of humor into consideration in leadership. From this point, more studies with different research designs are needed to be done in order to clarify the importance and effects of humor in educational management. Moreover, the policy makers should improve and conduct activities and programs that can raise the awareness on how much beneficial humor might be as a managerial device in educational institutions.

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