

Service Amid Crisis: The Role of Supervisor Humor & Discretionary Organizational Support

“A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done.” ~ Dwight D. Eisenhower

“You can’t expect your employees to exceed the expectations of your customers if you don’t exceed the employees’ expectations of management.” ~ Howard Schultz

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic placed unprecedented demands on service employees (Kannan, 2021). Employers across industries reported a sharp decline in employee engagement (Chanana and Sangeeta, 2020) and, given the importance of perceived service quality for organizational survival, it is not surprising some of the biggest impacts of this engagement chasm occurred within the services industry (Harter, 2020). Crises bear unique stressors and great uncertainty for service employees, forcing them to find new ways to cope while still trying to meet work demands. Not only must they continue to perform their duties, but they must also do so with a smile on their face, projecting a positive, can-do attitude to customers. To facilitate such adaptability, organizations must find ways to help their employees cope with stressors and uncertainty.

In this study, we explore the potential of two proactive strategies for sustaining service employee engagement and effectiveness: (1) supervisor use of positive humor, and (2) the provision of discretionary organizational support. Supervisors’ use of positive humor is considered a socioemotional coping resource with the potential to promote work effectiveness as well as support employees’ capacity to benefit from other organizational resources (Tan *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, when organizations offer discretionary forms of support (e.g., helping employees with the emotional or financial aspects of a crisis), it sends the message that the organization values their employees’ well-being enough to ‘go out of their way’ to offer support

in their time of need. Drawing on insights proffered by job demands-resources (JD-R), broaden-and-build, and psychological contract theories as well as the psychological principle of reciprocity, we explore the interaction of supervisor humor (through its role in building coping resources and illuminating the availability of other forms of organizational support) and discretionary organizational support (through its role in exceeding psychological contract expectations and thus eliciting reciprocity in the form of greater engagement) in promoting service performance via three dimensions of work engagement.

Using cross-sequential survey-based data collected from service employees working full-time during the COVID-19 pandemic, we find (1) supervisor humor positively affects work engagement; (2) supervisor humor and discretionary organizational support can act as substitutes for one another in promoting work engagement, such that engagement is promoted/preserved so long as one of the two is high; and (3) the impact of supervisor humor for service performance via extra-role behavior, innovativeness, and pride is fully mediated through work engagement. From a theoretical perspective, these results contribute to theory on workplace humor by elaborating on the mechanisms by which humor and discretionary organizational support may promote service effectiveness. Further, these results proffer important considerations regarding conceptualizations of the work engagement construct for future research. Practically, our results illuminate the benefits of positive forms of humor during crises as well as the merits of organizations providing discretionary support commensurate with and geared toward employee needs. We elaborate on these theoretical and practical implications and discuss profitable directions for future research later in the paper.

Literature Review

Leading service researchers have encouraged the field to engage in more employee-related scholarship because of the crucial role service employees play in the customer experience (e.g., Subramony *et al.*, 2017). Similar to the interest garnered by customer engagement, there is growing interest in work engagement - a construct characterized by employee absorption (enjoyable engrossment in work), vigor (resilience or energy in work), and dedication (sense of significance in work) (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). Work engagement is thought to be a key mechanism by which service effectiveness can be fostered in the workplace (Barnes and Collier, 2013; Menguc *et al.*, 2013). Engaged service employees are known to generate more satisfactory customer experiences than are their less engaged counterparts (Bakker *et al.*, 2004).

Unfortunately, work engagement tends to deteriorate in stressful, uncertain, and turbulent conditions (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2015). JD-R (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) and broaden-and-build (Fredrickson, 2001) theories offer a useful lens to understand why this occurs as well as to explore ways organizations can support employee engagement. According to these theories, the conservation and renewal of employee resources is the key to preserving employee engagement and effectiveness. Resources constitute valuable personal, social, tangible, and energetic assets needed to derive stamina and resilience (Halbesleben, 2006), and are crucial to an employee's ability to initiate and maintain the drive necessary to excel at work (Fredrickson, 2001). Leaders' use of positive humor - particularly during turbulent times - renews and refreshes employee resources, which can then be productively reinvested in the work role (Tan *et al.*, 2020).

We extend this body of research by examining the interaction of supervisor humor and discretionary organizational support for improving work engagement and effectiveness during

crises. This research is timely for two key reasons. First, research on the role of supervisor use of positive humor in service employee engagement and performance is still in its infancy (Shellenbarger, 2017). Although humor scholars generally agree that ‘positive supervisor humor tends to be positive’, there seem to be boundary conditions on this effect (Robert and Wilbanks, 2012), probably because humor, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder (Dukerich *et al.*, 2002). Thus, the broader work environment plays a role in the interpretation and efficacy of humor. Since neither the service employees’ perception of their supervisor nor that of their organization operate in a vacuum, and since employees’ perception of their employer affects their relationship with their supervisor, an exploration of these interacting contextual influences is warranted. Second, since crises can emerge at any time and at any level of an organization, understanding how a service organization may proactively respond and the extent to which these responses are interdependent is timely.

Supervisor Use of Positive Humor

Emotional resource depletion is a key impetus for work disengagement and other negative employee outcomes (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Research suggests supervisors’ use of positive humor may replenish employee resources (Salanova *et al.*, 2010) by eliciting positive emotions through activating dopaminergic reward centers of the brain (Goel and Dolan, 2007), broadening cognitive functioning, and building resources (Salanova *et al.*, 2010). Decker and Rotondo (2001) argued positive humor favorably shapes the work environment by building trust and improving effectiveness. Supervisors who use positive forms of humor are seen by others as more intelligent, confident, and sensitive to their employees’ moods, tastes, and needs (Shellenbarger, 2017). Further, positive supervisor humor serves to reduce social and status distances, establish similarities, broaden avenues of communication, and develop a stronger

rapport with employees (Kim *et al.*, 2016), ultimately enhancing well-being and performance within the entire unit and establishing a rejuvenating and reciprocal cycle of positive affect (Robert and Wilbanks, 2012). In a service context, positive humor not only improves employees' service performance but also increases their willingness to proactively engage in service encounters (Wu *et al.*, 2020). It also serves a role-modeling function that ultimately enhances service employees' ability to creatively meet the differentiated needs of customers as well as increases their willingness to go above and beyond for their employer (Peng *et al.*, 2020).

The JD-R model asserts that when employee resources are high, challenging job demands are seen as more appealing (Bakker *et al.*, 2004); an idea consistent with Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory that suggests positive emotions can broaden one's thought-action repertoire, build lasting psychological resources, and improve well-being. Since leadership has a "special role in fostering work engagement" (Bakker *et al.*, 2011, p. 21), supervisors who make use of positive humor enhance the psychological well-being of others (Ünal, 2014). These positive emotions trigger initiative, persistence, and resilience (Hakanen *et al.*, 2008), and result in engaged employees who view work-related stressors as both opportunities and welcomed challenges rather than as frustrating or insurmountable obstacles (Salanova *et al.*, 2010). When used in response to stressful events, positive humor provides a coping mechanism that promotes relaxation, reduces tension, and helps employees respond effectively to differentiated customer needs (e.g., McGraw *et al.*, 2013).

Sparked by supervisor humor, positive affect spreads via social contagion and refuels resources throughout the work environment (Robert and Wilbanks, 2012). These resources can then be reinvested in work via increased enthusiasm, energy, and concentration (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). The more well-stocked an employee's resource pool, the more likely they are to

seek opportunities to invest those resources, prompting a reciprocal gain spiral with the investment of resources yielding exponential returns within indicators of engagement (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Hakanen *et al.*, 2008). In this way, supervisor humor can (a) promote employee absorption by eliciting enjoyment in the work and workplace, (b) foster vigor via the renewal of energetic resources which can be used to support resilience in the face of stress and uncertainty, and (c) reinforce dedication by reviving enthusiasm and perceived task significance.

H1: Supervisor humor is positively related to (a) absorption, (b) vigor, and (c) dedication.

Discretionary Organizational Support as a Moderator of the Supervisor Humor–Work Engagement Relationship

As research suggests employee reactions to supervisor humor are context-dependent (Robert and Wilbanks, 2012), the work climate can also affect whether employees perceive supervisor communication as humorous or not. The provision of organizational support, especially that which is discretionary, affects employee perceptions of the work environment such that the presence of support is associated with more positive work climates whereas the absence of support is associated with more negative work climates (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). We formally define discretionary organizational support as the extent to which employees perceive their employer has provided tangible and intangible coping resources beyond those typically expected

Psychological contract theory (Conway and Briner, 2009) would suggest that the employment relationship carries an implicit assumption of organizationally sponsored support, particularly when that support is seen as crucial to sustaining effective employee performance. Thus, some level of organizational support is expected, particularly during times of crisis.

Meeting this obligation is unlikely to result in significant changes to the perceived work climate; however, when an organization is seen as going ‘above and beyond’ by providing discretionary forms of support, the requirements of the psychological contract are surpassed and the employee is both reassured and feels less ‘alone’ in the chaos (Chen and Feeley, 2014), buffering emotional exhaustion, renewing resilience, and creating a strong positive work climate (Chong *et al.*, 2020).

Discretionary organizational support can (1) allay employees’ concerns that would otherwise tie up valuable resources (Halbesleben, 2006); (2) evoke positive emotions - such as joy - that are then mirrored during service encounters with customers; and (3) generate additional resources that can be reinvested in the work/workplace (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). Research conducted during the pandemic supports these effects showing, for example, that organizationally sponsored ‘safety net’ benefits for employees (e.g., unemployment compensation and paid-time-off) decreased the deleterious effects of a scarcity mindset and thus increased employee emotional health (Probst *et al.*, 2020).

We argue that in the context of a positive, supportive work climate, the role of supervisor humor in service employees’ work engagement is magnified (such that the humor-engagement relationship is stronger) when discretionary support is high. In this way, supervisor humor and perceived emotional support interact to enhance (a) employee enjoyment in work and the workplace (boosting absorption), (b) resilience via resource renewal (enhancing vigor), and (c) enthusiasm and perceived task significance (renewing dedication).

H2: The positive role of supervisor humor on (a) absorption, (b) vigor, and (c) dedication is moderated by the provision of discretionary organizational support such that the

effects of humor on engagement are stronger when discretionary organizational support is higher.

How Work Engagement Drives Service Employee Effectiveness

The COVID-19 pandemic forced service organizations to rethink services and service-related scripts in fundamental ways in order to survive (Rosenbaum and Russell-Bennett, 2020). Successful business leaders rapidly innovated amid the chaos, managing to employ workers who mirrored their drive, creativity, and pride in their work, and were willing to devote their own emotional, physical, and social resources to their work units (e.g., by being good citizens and engaging in extra-role behaviors) and the organization (e.g., by reflecting their pride for their employer in their interactions with coworkers, customers, and other stakeholders) as well as within their service work (e.g., by being willing to implement innovative ideas and proactively recognizing and meeting customer needs).

From the perspectives of JD-R and broaden-and-build theories, work engagement is a state of excess resources available to invest in the workplace via creative solutions to challenges (Hakanen *et al.*, 2008), support for struggling coworkers (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008), proactive service behaviors (Jang *et al.*, 2020), and enhance commitment to and pride in organizational service values (e.g., Hakanen *et al.*, 2008). Compared to their less engaged counterparts, engaged service employees tend to be more enthusiastic and energetic, experience better mental/physical well-being, and be more confident in their ability to adapt. Engaged employees also tend to be more adaptable (Harter *et al.*, 2002), better performers (Barnes and Collier, 2013), eager to take on challenging tasks (Tims *et al.*, 2016), more willing to help coworkers (Bakker *et al.*, 2004), and less likely to experience burnout (Crawford *et al.*, 2010). They are also more likely to ‘job-craft’ by mobilizing resources to optimize how they work

(Tims *et al.*, 2016). These attitudes improve service climate and translate to positive and proactive service encounters (Salanova *et al.*, 2010).

The three dimensions of work engagement (absorption, vigor, and dedication) should promote service employee effectiveness in the form of extra-role behavior, innovativeness, and organizational pride. That is, service employees who find enjoyment in and become engrossed in their work (absorption), who are energetic and resilient (vigor), and who are enthusiastic about their work, embracing the importance of doing a good job (dedication) are naturally more inclined to engage in behaviors that benefit customers, coworkers, and their organization. Such employees are also likely to spend time and energy in finding innovative solutions to differentiated customer needs to ensure the continued success of their employer. Not surprisingly, we would also expect service employees who enjoy their work, deriving energy from what they do and embracing the significance of their role to others, to be proud of their employers' product and service values. As such, we expect:

H3: Absorption is positively associated with (a) extra-role behavior, (b) innovativeness, and (c) organizational pride.

H4: Vigor is positively associated with (a) extra-role behavior, (b) innovativeness, and (c) organizational pride.

H5: Dedication is positively associated with (a) extra-role behavior, (b) innovativeness, and (c) organizational pride.

The study's conceptual model is provided in Figure 1.

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Method

Data were collected at two time periods (April and September 2020), using a sample of service employees obtained through the Prolific platform. All respondents resided in the United

States, spoke fluent English, and worked at least 30 hours a week in a service-oriented role. At Time 1, responses from 387 individuals were collected, though 69 were removed due to missing data, leaving 318 responses for an effective response rate of 82%. At Time 2, all 318 respondents were sent a second survey measuring organizationally important attitudes and outcomes. Of those, 172 completed the survey, resulting in a 54% response rate. Tests of non-response bias revealed no significant differences in age ($F = 3.68, p = .06$), sex ($F = 1.74, p = .19$), race ($F = 3.80, p = .74$), or compensation ($F = .42, p = .50$) between those that completed the second survey and those that did not.

Because of the variety of service employees utilized in our sample, we also examined the sample according to the service taxonomy developed by Bowen (1990). We chose this taxonomy over other typologies for two reasons: (1) the empirical nature of the taxonomy, which was developed based on cluster analysis, and (2) because of its repetitive use within the service field to evaluate samples similar to the current research (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998). The basis of Bowen's taxonomy is that services can be divided into three groupings: Group 1 consists of services directed at people and characterized by high customer contact and customization of services (e.g., healthcare, educational, financial services, consulting); Group 2 consists of services directed towards property with low customer contact and moderate customization (e.g., logistics, product technical support, product repair); and finally, Group 3, which is characterized as services directed at people with moderate customer contact and moderate customization (e.g., retail, entertainment). After dividing the sample, there were 70 (41%) incidents for Group 1, 48 (28%) for Group 2, and 54 (31%) for Group 3 (see Table 1 for more information on the sample). To assess if differences were present across the three service categories, an analysis of variance was run to see if the constructs in the model were significantly different by cluster. Significant

differences were not found for any of the variables in the model across the three groups and thus the sample was combined for the remaining analyses.

In sum, the sample was 52% female, and the average age of the respondents was 37 years. Approximately half (51%) of the sample was paid hourly versus 49% who were salaried. With regards to ethnicity 74% of the sample was Caucasian, 10% African American, 8% Asian, 6% Hispanic, and 2% other.

-----insert Table 1 here-----

Measures

Table 2 reports the multi-item scales used to measure relevant constructs. Scale reliabilities (i.e., Cronbach's alpha) are reported on the diagonal of the correlation matrix in Table 4. All scales used a 7-point response (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) unless otherwise specified. *Supervisor positive humor* was assessed using five items from Decker and Rotondo's (2001) positive humor scale wherein participants were asked to consider their supervisor's use of positive humor during the pandemic. Composite reliability (CR) for this measure is .95. *Discretionary organizational support* was measured with the question, "My employer went out of the way to provide resources that would help employees deal with the emotional aspects of COVID-19". To assess reliability, we sorted the data for this item and then randomly divided the sample in half and ran the correlation between them ($r = 0.97$). *Work engagement* was measured using the 10-item, three-dimensional scale designed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004)($CR_{\text{absorption}} = .92$; $CR_{\text{vigor}} = .95$; $CR_{\text{dedication}} = .96$). *Extra-role behavior* was assessed on a 7-point always (1) to never (7) scale using six items from Lee and Allen (2002) ($CR = .88$). *Innovativeness*¹ was assessed using Weiss *et al.*'s (2002) 6-item scale with the question stem adapted to the COVID-19 context (i.e., To what extent do you feel as though your

employer's response to the pandemic has...; CR = .94). *Organizational pride* was assessed using a 4-item scale by Gouthier and Rhein (2011) similarly adapted to fit the COVID-19 context (CR = .96). In all analyses, we controlled for respondent age, role ambiguity, and general life stress since each may be related to one or more of the dependent variables². For *role ambiguity*, we used five items from Rizzo *et al.* (1970) (CR = .91), and for *life stress*, we used a 4-item scale adapted for relevance (Bakker *et al.*, 2011) (CR = .90).

-----insert Table 2 here-----

Analyses

Before testing the hypotheses, confirmatory factor analysis using SmartPLS 3 (Ringle *et al.*, 2015) was used to establish the reliability and validity of the multi-item measures. Factor loadings are reported in Table 3. All items loaded by construct as expected. The average variance extracted (AVE) values are reported in Table 4 and all AVEs were above the .50 threshold (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

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Discriminant validity was evaluated in two ways. The first test used the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion wherein the square root of the AVE for each construct is compared with the correlations of all other latent constructs. As shown in Table 4, the AVEs exceed the correlations for every pair of latent variables (Hair *et al.*, 2017). The second test was based on the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (Henseler *et al.*, 2015), which uses a bootstrapping procedure. As shown in Table 4, all values fell below the suggested 0.90 critical value (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). Both tests, therefore, corroborate the existence of discriminant validity. Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 5.

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Results

We tested hypotheses using the procedures developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004) using SPSS OLS regression with the PROCESS macro. As reported in Table 6 Model 2, humor was marginally related to absorption ($B = .0119; p < .10$). As reported in Table 7 Model 2, humor was significantly related to vigor ($B = .226, p < .01$) and, as shown in Table 8 Model 2, humor was also significantly related to dedication ($B = .148, p < .01$). Consequently, H1a-c were supported, with H1a marginally so in this sample.

-----insert Tables 6, 7, and 8 here-----

As reported in Table 6 Model 3, the interaction between supervisor humor and discretionary organizational support on absorption was marginally significant in this sample ($B = -.068, p < .10$), but unexpectedly, with the coefficient being negative rather than positive. The nature of this relationship is presented in Figure 2. Consistent with the figure, and shown at the bottom of Table 6, conditional effects and the Johnson-Neyman region of significance reveal discretionary organizational support assisted in increasing employees' absorption at lower levels of humor. At moderate to higher levels of humor, there are no statistically meaningful gains to be had on absorption by providing increasingly higher levels of discretionary organizational support. As shown in Table 7 Model 3, the interaction predicting vigor was significant ($B = -.123, p < .01$) but unexpectedly negative. The nature of this relationship is presented in Figure 3. Correspondingly, the conditional effects and the Johnson-Neyman region of significance shown at the bottom of Table 7 reveal discretionary organizational support helped to increase employees' vigor at lower to moderate levels of humor. At higher levels of humor, discretionary organizational support does not have a statistically meaningful impact on the relationship with vigor. As shown in Table 8 Model 3 and Figure 4, the interaction also predicted dedication ($B =$

-.078, $p < .05$). Conditional effects and the Johnson-Neyman region of significance indicate that discretionary organizational support strengthens employees' dedication at lower levels of supervisor humor. At moderate to higher levels of humor, there are no significant gains to be had on dedication by increasing discretionary organizational support to a high degree. Thus, while each moderation was significant, H2a-c were not supported. Interestingly, these results suggest supervisor humor and discretionary organizational support can substitute for one another in promoting work engagement.

-----insert Figure 2, 3, and 4 here-----

As shown in Table 9 and supporting H3a-c, absorption at time 1 was significantly associated with extra-role behaviors ($B = .247, p < .01$, Model 1), innovativeness ($B = .342, p < .01$, Model 2), and organizational pride ($B = .348, p < .01$, Model 3) at time 2. As seen in Table 10 and supporting H4a-c, vigor at time 1 was significantly associated with extra-role behaviors ($B = .215, p < .01$, Model 1), innovativeness ($B = .202, p < .05$, Model 2), and pride ($B = .244, p < .01$, Model 3) at time 2. As shown in Table 11 and supporting H5a-c, dedication at time 1 was related to extra-role behavior ($B = .227, p < .01$, Model 1), innovativeness ($B = .310, p < .01$, Model 2) and pride ($B = .462, p < .01$, Model 3) at time 2.

-----insert Tables 9, 10, and 11 here-----

A table summarizing the results of the test for each hypothesis considered in the study is found in Table 12. Although not explicitly hypothesized, when the variables in the aforementioned hypotheses are combined there is an implied prediction of full, cross-sequential moderated mediation (see Figure 1). The data bears this out for the mediators of vigor and dedication, but not with that of absorption. Table 13 contains the direct and indirect effects as

well as the indices of moderated mediation and conditional indirect effects that support this supplementary analysis.

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Discussion

Using a cross-sequential survey-based design, we collected data from service employees at two points during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to explore the role of supervisor use of positive humor as a mechanism for enhancing service employee engagement and effectiveness, and the moderating influence of discretionary organizational support in this relationship. Our results suggest (1) supervisor use of positive humor promotes extra-role behavior, innovativeness, and pride among service employees through its role in enhancing work engagement, and (2) discretionary organizational support can act as a substitute for supervisor humor, such that the provision of either form of ‘emotional resource builder’ can benefit employees’ work engagement, and ultimately important work outcomes. These results suggest implications for theory and practice as well as profitable directions for future research.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the literature on workplace humor by providing a framework for understanding how positive humor can help employees renew and revitalize resources during times of crisis. That is, supervisor humor can facilitate work engagement and associated outcomes through emotional resource renewal (Tan *et al.*, 2020) and employees' socioemotional need fulfillment (Cooper *et al.*, 2018). Thus, humor is a powerful management skill that can promote work engagement during times of crisis, with particular promise in the services industry. Theoretically explained by the tenets of JD-R and broaden-and-build theories, supervisor humor can serve as a proactive, stress-relieving, coping mechanism (Mesmer-Magnus

et al., 2012) that contributes valuable resources to the employee reservoir, which can then be reinvested in customer service innovations and quality. Moreover, these resources act as a catalyst for the employee via the broaden-and-build process as outlined by Fredrickson (2001) wherein the employee experiences higher levels of work engagement. In turn, work engagement leads to increases in extra-role behavior, innovativeness, and pride.

Recognizing employee perceptions of their supervisor and discretionary organizational support do not occur in a vacuum, we explored how discretionary organizational support moderates the relationship between supervisor humor and work engagement. A priori we expected the relationship to be positively moderated. However, the results painted a more interesting picture. Given the negative coefficient and the specific region where the conditional effect occurred, the relationship between supervisor humor and work engagement is strengthened by discretionary organizational support primarily when humor is at low levels. This is significant as not every supervisor is capable of injecting high levels of levity. In essence, the organization has multiple levers they can pull in times of crisis that interact to improve work engagement. Moreover, when an organization is proactive in providing discretionary forms of support to help their employees cope with crises, this support can amplify lower to moderate levels of supervisor humor.

Interestingly, at relatively moderate to higher levels of humor, the conditional effect of discretionary support was not present, suggesting that when employees perceive their supervisors as quite humorous it is sufficient to promote work engagement regardless of the level of discretionary support. The negligible impact of support is likely because humor has already reduced the employees' emotion-laden stress and anxiety to the level that is needed to positively impact their work engagement. Thus, it appears that supervisor humor and discretionary

organizational support can act as substitutes for each other. Regardless, from a humor perspective, it is noteworthy that humor maximizes resource renewal such that additional resources are less crucial to navigating the crisis.

This research also contributes to the work engagement literature. Results suggest the combination of humor and discretionary support can play a crucial role in maintaining two of the three dimensions of engagement (vigor and dedication, but not necessarily absorption) during times of organizational crisis and widespread stress. More importantly, as previously discussed, humor and support can work together such that they can act as substitutes.

Although not hypothesized a priori, the results of our operationalization of work engagement along three dimensions (versus a global measure) makes an important contribution to ongoing scholarly discussion regarding the conceptualization and operationalization of the work engagement construct in certain contexts. Although some scholars advocate for a unidimensional construct (e.g., de Bruin and Henn, 2013), others insist engagement is inherently multidimensional (e.g., Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). In the current study, including the supplemental analyses, we employed a three-dimensional operationalization of engagement and found absorption's role (although marginally significant, see Table 6) was somewhat different in comparison to that of vigor and dedication. It is possible that absorption becomes less relevant in crisis-like situations where employees may find it more difficult to become immersed or engrossed in their work. In fact, situational factors such as working from home, utilizing technology with higher frequency, and other realities of working amidst a crisis may have more adverse effects on absorption than in less 'charged' scenarios. This finding is particularly interesting in light of the fact that a post-hoc exploratory analysis using a unidimensional rather than a multi-dimensional conceptualization of engagement provided full support for our model.

Thus, we provide evidence that the use of a global factor potentially blurs the possibility that absorptive work engagement is less relevant during times of stress.

Practical Implications

Effectively operating as one of the most widespread organizational crises of modern times, COVID-19 forced us to re-evaluate and re-imagine fundamental ideas related to service delivery and customer satisfaction (Rosenbaum and Russell-Bennett, 2020). Service employees were thrust into ambiguous work dynamics in the midst of dealing with the stress and turbulence associated with the pandemic on both personal and professional levels. Yet, the dynamics characteristic of a pandemic-ravaged service industry created an opportunity to study how organizational practices may mitigate the degradation of service employee work engagement. Engagement is particularly important in times of crisis when service organizations need engaged employees who can adapt ‘on the fly’ and persevere despite roadblocks and uncertainty.

Our results provide compelling support for the role of humor as a vital management tool during crises. Recent practitioner books and ‘Ted Talks’ have highlighted the power of humor in the business context, arguing that shared laughter has both tangible and intangible goal-related benefits for both work and life roles and that these benefits are compounded during times of stress and uncertainty (Aaker and Bagdonas, 2021). Sadly, especially in those times where the infusion of levity promises the greatest potential for mitigating stressors, humor tends to be in the scarcest supply.

So, what should an organization do? Humor is more than having an arsenal of jokes at the ready. Rather, it can be as simple as supervisors adopting a communication style infused with a positive, can-do, ‘we’re all in this together’ attitude that instead of ignoring or sugarcoating negatives, reorients others toward constructive and effective workarounds that may even result in

unanticipated benefits/improvements. Such communication strategies can be developed, even within supervisors not typically oriented toward humor. Indeed, research would suggest this is a skill that can be learned through modeling/observation as well as professional development and coaching (Decker and Rotondo, 2001). Corporate-level internal marketing campaigns leveraging levity and emphasizing well-being may also promote a cultural shift throughout lower levels of the organization (McGraw *et al.*, 2013).

Crises may ‘up the ante’ in terms of what employees expect their supervisor and organization will do to help them cope and succeed. Simply meeting the psychological contractual obligations is not sufficient. Rather, to inspire significant enhancements to service performance, the organization must be seen as caring about their employees enough to provide discretionary rather than obligated forms of support. Importantly, discretionary support is only valuable to the extent it is perceived as helpful/beneficial to the employees receiving it. If the support provided does not address their most pressing needs, it will not benefit employees in the renewal of resources needed to remain engaged in their service work and inclined toward service excellence. Therefore, service organizations must track the pulse of their employees’ needs and provide support designed to tackle the issues that unnecessarily tie up their finite resources. Generic support will not suffice. Research suggests that in times of crisis, organizations should identify stressors associated with eudaimonic rather than hedonic needs and develop tools specifically to address them (Barnes *et al.*, 2021). In practice, organizations have done this with support such as providing hazard pay, equipment to work from home, frequent check-ins, flexibility with changing or altering working hours, and acknowledging the importance of the employee via public praise. Further, the organization has the opportunity to show how valued employees are by supporting non-work roles that employees are juggling during the crisis, such

as through added healthcare or extra time-off. Most importantly, organizations need to understand that there is not a one size fits all solution to support (Mihalache, 2021).

Finally, a significant finding from this study is how humor and discretionary organizational support can work in combination. That is, organizations can combine supervisor humor and discretionary organizational support to increase work engagement that is then realized in increased extra-role behaviors, innovativeness, and pride. In situations where a supervisor might not possess a natural predisposition toward utilizing humor in the workplace and/or are too preoccupied with their own set of stressors to focus on infusing humor in their interactions with employees, discretionary organizational support can foster the motivation important for work engagement. Alternatively, at higher levels, the organization might be able to reallocate resources from discretionary support to more needy areas.

Limitations & Future Research

Study limitations are unavoidable, though recognizing how future research may be used to confirm and/or triangulate results and conclusions is valuable. Inherent limitations within this study's methodology include mono-method and single-source bias, the use of online subject pools, extraneous influences affecting participant responses that may have occurred between survey administrations, and potential power issues which may explain why the three dimensions of work engagement did not behave uniformly in our sample. Mono-method and single-source biases are common in such survey designs, but since supervisor humor and discretionary organizational support were measured only from the perspective of the service employee, they may not represent the intentions of the supervisor/organization. Although it can be argued that employee perceptions are their reality and thus negate the relevance of the intent, future research is needed to confirm our results using multi-source, multi-method designs. Such designs would

also permit exploration regarding when/how supervisor humor intentions and employee perceptions of humor align as well as the development of training interventions that may promote effective uses of supervisor humor. To contribute to the ongoing research regarding the interpretations of humor as well as discretionary support we have provided examples from our study in Table 14.

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Next, since we collected data over time, it is possible respondents changed in some way between the initiation and the termination of our data collection (e.g., in terms of dedication, competence, and the like). Given the diversity of our sample, it is unlikely any common factor systematically affected the data, though future research might consider such contextual issues. Finally, we used a single-item measure of service employees' perceptions of this construct. Some have argued single-item measures have inherent limitations, though fortunately, substantial research has documented the reliability and validity of such measures (Wanous *et al.*, 1997). Either way, future research is needed to further validate the one-item scale used herein.

Other profitable directions for future research may include, for example, investigating the combined effect of humor with other leadership strategies as well as the extent to which our model applies to other crisis scenarios that may be less widespread or politically charged. Future research might also explore how crises/turbulence affect employee expectations for organizational support.

Conclusion

The pandemic led to an abrupt redefinition of customers' service expectations. Service providers unexpectedly found themselves in the position of needing to rapidly navigate an entirely new reality of customer service while also desperately seeking ways to maintain

employee investment in service excellence. Unfortunately, crises are an all-too-common occurrence, and how service providers navigate them will make or break their ultimate viability. Disengagement from the workplace and stressors associated with its turbulence threaten employee engagement and effectiveness. Encouraging supervisors to leverage effective humorous communication and going above and beyond to provide support relevant to diverse employee needs during times of crisis are two pathways to maintaining work engagement and protecting service quality.

Endnotes

¹ This measure has also been called synergy; however, as the scale developers noted, synergy occurs when parties to a relationship combine their perspectives, knowledge, and skills such that they, among other things, think in new and better ways about how to achieve goals. Consequently, when synergy occurs, something new and valuable is created (Weiss et al., 2002, p. 684). It is for this reason that we use the more commonly understood term, innovativeness.

² Other controls such as sex, ethnicity, tenure with supervisor, and organizational tenure were not significant and thus, were removed from the analyses. All control variables were measured at time 1.

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Figure 1: Conceptual Model

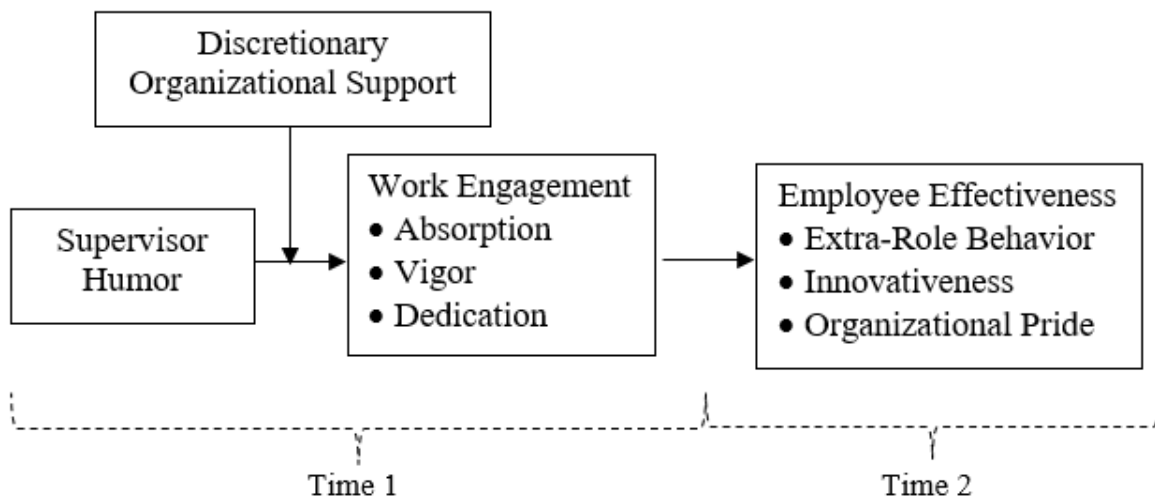


Table 1: Breakdown of Sample According to Bowen’s Taxonomy of Services

Bowen Taxonomy Grouping	#	%
Group 1: services directed at people and characterized by high customer contact and customization of services		
Healthcare	34	41.5
Banking / finance / legal services	22	26.8
Educational	22	26.8
Other	4	4.9
	82	100.0
Group 2: services characterized directed towards property with low customer contact and moderate customization		
Information Technology	17	32.1
Manufacturing	8	15.1
Technical support	8	15.1
Property related/inspection	7	13.2
Logistics	7	13.2
Other	6	11.3
	53	100
Group 3: services directed at people with moderate customer contact and moderate customization		
Retail	16	43.2
Hospitality	12	32.4
Administrative	5	13.5
Other	4	10.8
	37	100.0

Table 2: Multi-Item Measures

<p><i>Supervisor Humor (Decker & Rotondo, 2001)</i> My supervisor uses humor to communicate information My supervisor doesn't have a hard time making other people laugh My supervisor is a naturally humorous person My supervisor usually has something witty to say My supervisor uses humor which is non-offensive at work</p> <p><i>Work Engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004)</i> Time flies when I am working (Absorption) I feel happy when I am working intensely (Absorption) I am immersed in my work (Absorption) At work, I feel full of energy (Vigor) In my job, I feel strong and vigorous (Vigor) When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work (Vigor) I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose (Dedication) I am enthusiastic about my job (Dedication) My job inspires me (Dedication) I am proud of the work I do (Dedication)</p> <p><i>Extra-Role Behavior (Lee & Allen, 2002)</i> Help others who have been absent from work Show genuine concern and courtesy toward coworkers, even under the most trying business or personal situations Attend functions that are not required, but that help the organizational image Assist others with their duties Show pride when representing the organization in public Take action to protect the organization from potential problems</p> <p><i>Innovativeness (Weiss et al., 2002)</i> Led to new and better ways of thinking about how my colleagues and I can help achieve organizational goals Led to the involvement of new resources, programs, and services that better facilitate work Led to our work unit being more successful in carrying out our work Made me more optimistic about being able to continue work Increased my self-efficacy to accomplish my work Made me more open to finding new ways to accomplish my work</p> <p><i>Organizational Pride (Gouthier & Rhein, 2011)</i> Happy to be a member of my organization A feeling of joy to be part of this company Proud of what the company was achieving The company was doing something meaningful</p> <p><i>Role Ambiguity^a (Rizzo et al., 1970)</i> I know exactly what is expected of me in my role at work The explanation is clear of what has to be done in my role at work I feel certain about how much authority I have in my role at work I know what my responsibilities are in my role at work Clear, planned goals and objectives exist for my role</p> <p><i>Life Stress^a (Bakker et al., 2011)</i> I am overwhelmed by current events I am indifferent to current events I find the current events to be anxiety provoking I am stressed by current events</p>
<p>^a Control variable</p>

Table 3: Factor Loadings

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8	Factor 9
Humor 1	0.862								
Humor 2	0.917								
Humor 3	0.927								
Humor 4	0.908								
Humor 5	0.822								
Absorption 1		0.852							
Absorption 2		0.882							
Absorption 3		0.925							
Dedication 1			0.950						
Dedication 2			0.946						
Dedication 3			0.923						
Dedication 4			0.855						
Vigor 1				0.955					
Vigor 2				0.939					
Vigor 3				0.908					
Extra Role 1					0.736				
Extra Role 2					0.752				
Extra Role 3					0.646				
Extra Role 4					0.732				
Extra Role 5					0.769				
Extra Role 6					0.762				
Innovativeness 1						0.900			
Innovativeness 2						0.855			
Innovativeness 3						0.822			
Innovativeness 4						0.835			
Innovativeness 5						0.806			
Innovativeness 6						0.862			
Pride 1							0.940		
Pride 2							0.919		
Pride 3							0.925		
Pride 4							0.893		
Life Stress 1								0.745	
Life Stress 2								0.717	
Life Stress 3								0.932	
Life Stress 4								0.900	
Role Ambiguity 1									0.881
Role Ambiguity 2									0.615
Role Ambiguity 3									0.979
Role Ambiguity 4									0.734
Role Ambiguity 5									0.876

Table 4: Reliability and Validity

	Composite Reliability	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Humor	0.95	0.79	0.89	0.29	0.38	0.35	0.24	0.17	0.10	0.20	0.23
2. Absorption	0.92	0.79	0.26	0.89	0.87	0.88	0.29	0.30	0.27	0.07	0.43
3. Vigor	0.95	0.87	0.36	0.77	0.93	0.85	0.30	0.23	0.22	0.08	0.45
4. Dedication	0.96	0.85	0.33	0.79	0.80	0.92	0.29	0.29	0.37	0.09	0.44
5. Extra Role	0.88	0.54	0.21	0.26	0.27	0.26	0.73	0.60	0.52	0.16	0.06
6. Innovativeness	0.94	0.72	0.16	0.27	0.21	0.28	0.54	0.85	0.68	0.24	0.06
7. Pride	0.96	0.85	0.10	0.25	0.21	0.35	0.48	0.64	0.92	0.08	0.06
8. Life Stress	0.90	0.69	0.19	-0.03	-0.07	-0.07	0.13	0.22	0.06	0.83	0.11
9. Role Ambiguity	0.91	0.68	0.19	0.39	0.42	0.41	0.05	0.09	0.07	-0.08	0.83

N = 172
Square root of the AVE for multi-item measures along the diagonal
Heterotrait-monotrait ratio above the diagonal
Fornell-Larcker criterion below the diagonal

Table 5: Descriptives

	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Humor	4.67	1.37	0.93									
2. Discretionary Support	3.93	1.78	0.37**	~								
3. Absorption	5.03	1.27	0.27**	0.30**	0.87							
4. Vigor	4.39	1.57	0.36**	0.37**	0.78**	0.93						
5. Dedication	4.98	1.46	0.33**	0.44**	0.79**	0.80**	0.94					
6. Extra Role	4.67	1.28	0.20**	0.19*	0.24**	0.26**	0.25**	0.83				
7. Innovativeness	4.47	1.45	0.16*	0.26**	0.26**	0.21**	0.27**	0.53**	0.92			
8. Pride	4.86	1.60	0.09	0.27**	0.24**	0.21**	0.35**	0.48**	0.64**	0.94		
9. Life Stress	5.13	1.49	0.14	0.10	-0.05	-0.06	-0.09	0.09	0.18*	0.02	0.85	
10. Role Ambiguity	2.26	1.03	-0.21**	-0.12	-0.42**	-0.44**	-0.44**	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	0.12	0.93
11. Age ^a	2.71	1.16	-0.01	-0.04	0.19*	0.07	0.06	0.03	-0.05	-0.01	0.08	-0.18*

N = 172
Cronbach's alpha along the diagonal
^a *Categorical variable*

Table 6: Moderating Effect of Discretionary Organizational Support on the Humor – Absorption Relationship

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	5.834**	0.414	4.625**	0.510	6.012**	0.408
Age	0.129 [†]	0.078	0.157*	0.075	0.169*	0.074
Life Stress	-0.011	0.060	-0.054	0.058	-0.083	0.060
Role Ambiguity	-0.486**	0.087	-0.408**	0.086	-0.424**	0.086
Humor			0.119 [†]	0.068	0.084	0.070
Discretionary Support			0.157**	0.051	0.168**	0.051
Humor ^a x Support					-0.068 [†]	0.035
F						
F	13.086**		12.261**		11.021**	
R²						
R ²	0.189		0.270		0.286	
ΔR²						
ΔR ²			0.080		0.016	
FΔ						
FΔ			9.13**		3.787 [†]	
Conditional Effects						
Conditional Effects	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI		
-1SD	0.205	0.081	0.046	0.364		
SD	0.084	0.070	-0.053	0.222		
+1SD	-0.037	0.105	-0.244	0.170		
Johnson-Neyman significance region	Value	% Below	% Above			
	-0.729	38.372	61.628			

N = 172

[†] $p < .10$ * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

^a Data was mean centered prior to calculating the interaction variable

Figure 2: Absorption Moderation

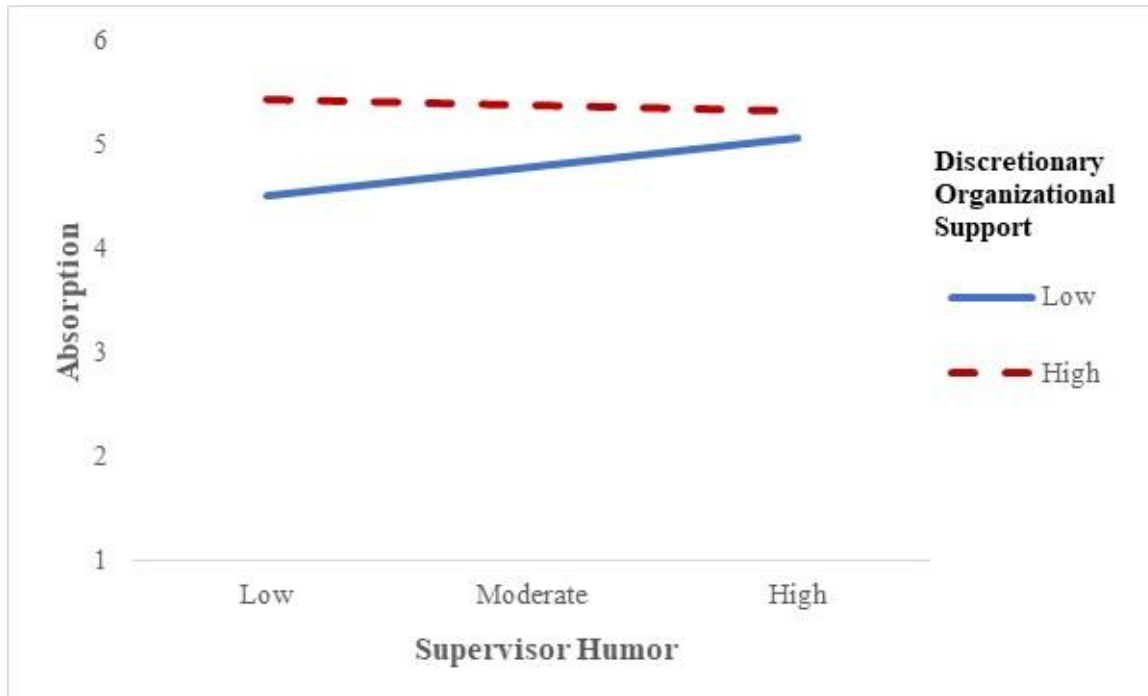


Table 7: Moderating Effect of Discretionary Organizational Support on the Humor – Vigor Relationship

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3			
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
Intercept	5.971**	0.511	3.938**	0.604	6.295**	0.475		
Age	-0.007	0.096	0.038	0.096	0.060	0.087		
Life Stress	-0.013	0.074	-0.083	0.074	-0.135†	0.069		
Role Ambiguity	-0.663**	0.108	-0.531**	0.102	-0.560**	0.100		
Humor			0.226**	0.080	0.164*	0.081		
Discretionary Support			0.233**	0.060	0.252**	0.059		
Humor ^a x Support					-0.123**	0.041		
Model Summary								
F	13.316**		16.302**		15.754**			
R ²	0.192		0.329		0.364			
ΔR ²			0.137		0.035			
FΔ			16.980**		9.059**			
Conditional Effects								
Conditional Effects					Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1SD					0.382	0.094	0.196	0.567
SD					0.164	0.081	0.003	0.324
+1SD					-0.055	0.122	-0.296	0.186
Johnson-Neyman significance region					Value	% Below	% Above	
					0.022	44.767	55.233	

N = 172

† < .10 * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

^a Data was mean centered prior to calculating the interaction variable

Figure 3: Vigor Moderation

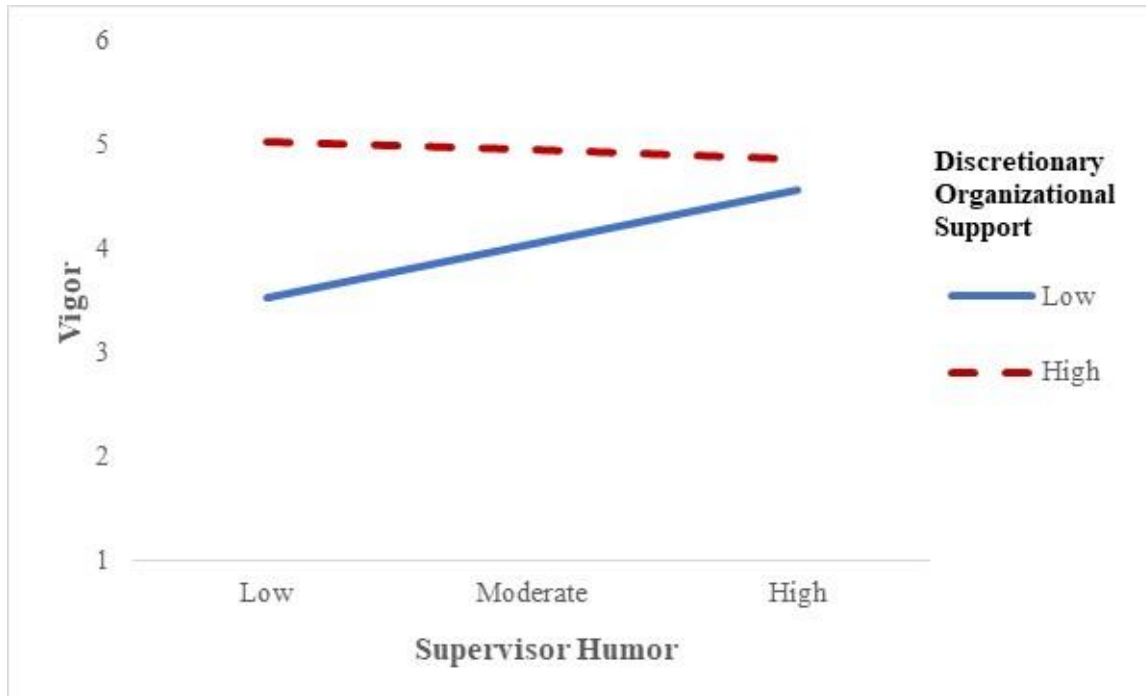


Table 8: Moderating Effect of Discretionary Organizational Support on the Humor – Dedication Relationship

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	6.604**	0.467	4.691**	0.568	6.792**	0.436
Age	-0.018	0.089	0.029	0.080	0.059	0.079
Life Stress	-0.032	0.069	-0.099	0.062	-0.120	0.063
Role Ambiguity	-0.622**	0.101	-0.499**	0.092	-0.439**	0.092
Humor			0.148*	0.073	0.108	0.075
Discretionary Support			0.296**	0.055	0.309**	0.055
Humor ^a x Support					-0.078*	0.037
F						
F	13.617**		19.526**		17.336**	
R ²	0.196		0.370		0.387	
ΔR ²			0.175		0.016	
FΔ			23.033**		4.388*	
Conditional Effects						
			Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1SD			0.247	0.086	0.077	0.417
SD			0.108	0.075	-0.039	0.255
+1SD			-0.031	0.112	-0.252	0.190
Johnson-Neyman significance region			Value	% Below	% Above	
			-.438	38.372	61.628	

N = 172

† < .10 * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

^a Data was mean centered prior to calculating the interaction variable

Figure 4: Dedication Moderation

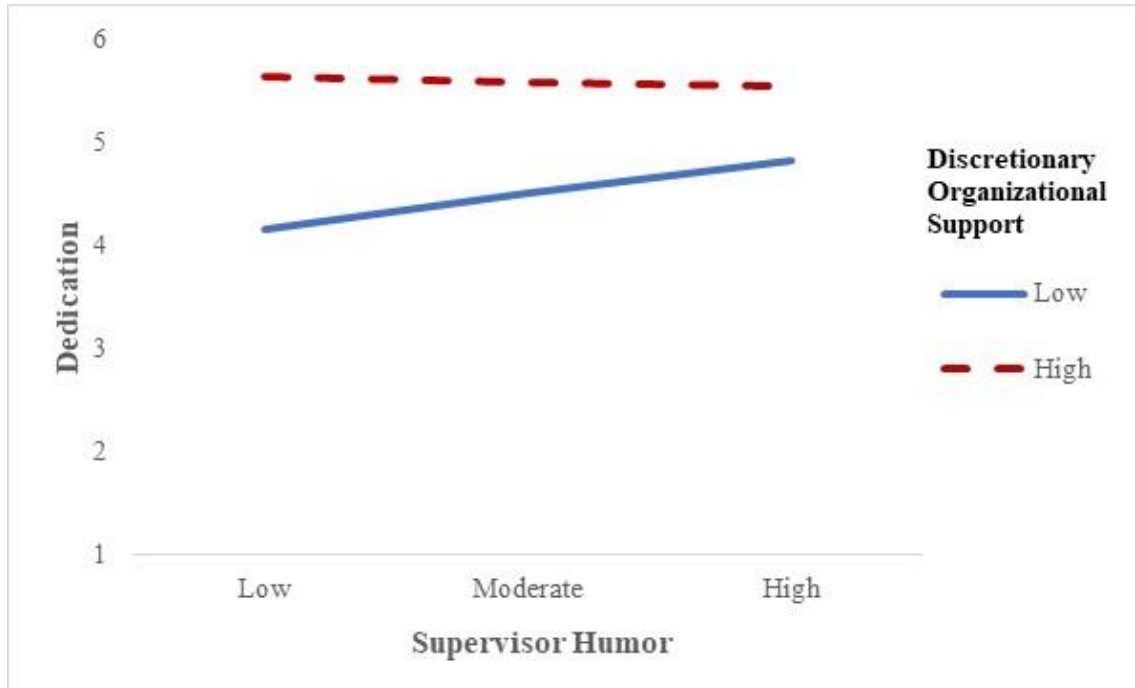


Table 9: Absorption's Effect on Organizational Behaviors and Attitudes

	Model 1 Extra Role		Model 2 Innovativeness		Model 3 Pride	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	2.234**	0.699	1.709*	0.780	2.689**	0.889
Age	-0.002	0.084	-0.140	0.094	-0.062	0.107
Life Stress	0.057	0.065	0.185*	0.073	0.026	0.083
Role Ambiguity	0.118	0.103	0.078	0.115	0.125	0.131
Absorption	0.247**	0.085	0.342**	0.094	0.348**	0.108
F	3.350**		4.760**		2.409*	
R ²	0.092		0.125		0.068	

N = 172

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Note: Bootstrap confidence intervals are used and reported for the indirect effect, conditional indirect effects, and tests of moderated mediation.

Table 10: Vigor's Effect on Organizational Behaviors and Attitudes

	Model 1 Extra Role		Model 2 Innovativeness		Model 3 Pride	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	2.512**	0.639	2.509**	0.728	3.333**	0.822
Age	0.029	0.083	-0.094	0.095	-0.017	0.107
Life Stress	0.060	0.065	0.184*	0.074	0.028	0.084
Role Ambiguity	0.132	0.104	0.044	0.118	0.113	0.134
Vigor	0.215**	0.070	0.202*	0.080	0.244**	0.107
F	3.515**		3.325*		1.854†	
R ²	0.096		0.091		0.064	

N = 172

† $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Note: Bootstrap confidence intervals are used and reported for the indirect effect, conditional indirect effects, and tests of moderated mediation.

Table 11: Dedication’s Effect on Organizational Behaviors and Attitudes

	Model 1 Extra Role		Model 2 Innovativeness		Model 3 Pride	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	2.261**	0.684	1.762**	0.763	1.975*	0.836
Age	0.033	0.083	-0.092	0.093	-0.014	0.102
Life Stress	0.064	0.065	0.195**	0.073	0.047	0.080
Role Ambiguity	0.133	0.104	0.097	0.116	0.223	0.127
Dedication	0.227**	0.075	0.310**	0.083	0.462**	0.091
F	3.489**		4.923**		5.452**	
R ²	0.095		0.129		0.141	

N = 172

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Note: Bootstrap confidence intervals are used and reported for the indirect effect, conditional indirect effects, and tests of moderated mediation.

Table 12: Summary of Hypotheses

Hypotheses		Result
H1	Supervisor humor → (+)	
	(a) absorption	Marginally Supported
	(b) vigor	Supported
	(c) dedication	Supported
H2	Discretionary organizational support moderates the relationship between humor and:	
	(a) absorption	Not Supported*
	(b) vigor	Not Supported*
	(c) dedication	Not Supported*
H3	Absorption → (+)	
	(a) extra-role behavior	Supported
	(b) innovativeness	Supported
	(c) organizational pride	Supported
H4	Vigor → (+)	
	(a) extra-role behavior	Supported
	(b) innovativeness	Supported
	(c) organizational pride	Supported
H5	Dedication → (+) *	
	(a) extra-role behavior	Supported
	(b) innovativeness	Supported
	(c) organizational pride	Supported

* Significant in the opposite direction predicted

Table 13: Supplemental Analyses of Full Mediation and Moderated Mediation

		Model 1 Extra Role			Model 2 Innovativeness			Model 3 Pride		
Absorption	Direct Effect	Effect	LLCI	ULCI	Effect	LLCI	ULCI	Effect	LLCI	ULCI
	From Humor	0.136	-0.009	0.281	0.063	-0.098	0.225	0.037	-0.147	0.221
	Indirect Effect									
	Through Absorption	0.047	-0.002	0.109	0.065	0.002	0.129	0.066	0.005	0.136
		Index	LLCI	ULCI	Index	LLCI	ULCI	Index	LLCI	ULCI
	Index of Moderated Mediation	-0.017	-0.044	0.008	-0.023	-0.059	0.009	-0.024	-0.054	0.010
Vigor	Direct Effect	Effect	LLCI	ULCI	Effect	LLCI	ULCI	Effect	LLCI	ULCI
	From Humor	0.112	-0.036	0.261	0.061	-0.108	0.230	0.022	-0.168	0.213
	Indirect Effect									
	Through Vigor	0.071	0.014	0.137	0.067	0.012	0.140	0.081	0.014	0.166
	Conditional Indirect Effects									
	Low	0.082	0.017	0.154	0.077	0.011	0.159	0.093	0.018	0.181
	Moderate	0.035	0.003	0.090	0.033	-0.004	0.087	0.040	-0.005	0.107
	High	-0.012	-0.074	0.054	-0.011	-0.070	0.045	-0.013	-0.086	0.063
		Index	LLCI	ULCI	Index	LLCI	ULCI	Index	LLCI	ULCI
	Index of Moderated Mediation	-0.026	-0.053	-0.004	-0.025	-0.053	-0.002	-0.030	-0.060	-0.003
Dedication	Direct Effect	Index	LLCI	ULCI	Index	LLCI	ULCI	Index	LLCI	ULCI
	From Humor	0.120	-0.028	0.267	0.041	-0.123	0.205	-0.027	-0.207	0.153
	Indirect Effect									
	Through Dedication	0.064	0.010	0.130	0.087	0.025	0.162	0.130	0.045	0.226
	Conditional Indirect Effects									
	Low	0.056	0.004	0.119	0.077	0.008	0.155	0.114	0.019	0.209
	Moderate	0.025	-0.014	0.077	0.034	-0.020	0.096	0.050	-0.028	0.139
	High	-0.007	-0.064	0.055	-0.009	-0.091	0.072	-0.015	-0.122	0.115
		Index	LLCI	ULCI	Index	LLCI	ULCI	Index	LLCI	ULCI
	Index of Moderated Mediation	-0.018	-0.039	-0.002	-0.029	-0.055	-0.001	-0.036	-0.071	-0.004

N = 172

Note: Bootstrap confidence intervals are used and reported for the indirect effect, conditional indirect effects, and tests of moderated mediation.

Table 14: Exemplars of Supervisor of Discretionary Organizational Support

<p>“One situation where I felt feelings such as cheer, elation, excitement, or delight as an employee because of something my employer did during the COVID-19 pandemic was when they catered us all lunch at the office. Catering lunch at the office was a small thing for my employer to do, but it took me and <u>all</u> of the other workers by surprise. It made us feel valued and proud to be part of the team we work on. It also made us feel appreciated for the work that we do.”</p>
<p>“Our company did quite well over the past year. As a result, last week they sent out an email stating that every employee, part-time and full-time, would receive \$50 to spend in the company store, a bonus holiday and \$1000 in our next paycheck.”</p>
<p>“First the company provided an extra monitor and a laptop so I could fully function at home with no issues, almost as if I was still in the office. The second thing has been that they have re-opened the office slightly but allowing employees to still work from home if they are uncomfortable, which is a great option. If we do go in, they are providing lunch each day which is a nice surprise and makes it a little easier for me to go in the office.”</p>
<p>“My boss decided to "order" an ice cream truck in the middle of July to stay in our parking lot for a few hours. It wasn't your run-of-the-mill ice cream -- it was a local small business with specialty ice cream, and we got to have the ice cream for free. I remember being really grateful for something as simple as frozen dessert, and my coworkers and I enjoyed taking a break from work to sit outside without our masks and eat enormous cups of ice cream.”</p>
<p>“My employer organized a virtual happy hour for her employees to raise our spirits for the next quarter of the year. She went through the trouble of surprising all 12 of us by personally dropping off a 6-pack of beer (and wine for non-beer drinkers) at our doorsteps in our individual homes. Funny part is most of us didn't see her drop them off, as she was socially distancing, and the beer came with wipes and sanitizers so that we could sanitize the beer before touching it! We were all very much pleasantly surprised by her act, and it ended up being one of our most bonding experiences, although the happy hour was via zoom.”</p>
<p>“I felt excited when I opened my mail one morning and found my employer had surprised me with a gift card to a local restaurant. along with a handwritten letter of appreciation from a manager. It was a small <u>gift</u> but it made me feel very appreciated and cared for. It was also a pleasant surprise that put me in a positive mood.”</p>
<p>“My work provided everyone with 12 weeks off for childcare issues due to school closures. This was a huge help to me and my family and has allowed me to not worry for a few months about where my kids are going during the day and who is going to help them with schoolwork.”</p>
<p>“I was especially pleased to note that our office dedicated an Administrative Time Off application procedure for any employee who contracted (or had a family member) contract COVID. Additionally, at the outset of the stay-at-home orders, we also were granted 80 hours of paid leave to use for caring for children or other family members if applicable. Finally, I am constantly impressed by how open, honest, and transparent my employer has been <u>with regard to</u> prompt notification of potential exposure in each office. I consider myself very, very lucky to work where I do!”</p>

Table 14 (cont.): Exemplars of Supervisor Humor

“My supervisor was trying to lighten everyone up by making light of the ever-increasing requirements for stepping up cleaning, distancing, and covid protocols. She made a comment in jest that we should not forget to sanitize the sanitizer bottle and to change our gloves before and after we sanitize the sanitizer bottle. It was silly enough to crack everyone up without making light of the serious necessity of the protocols we were actually expected and required to do.”

“My supervisor used humor in a very effective way last month. We had missed our targeted third-quarter goals and instead of expressing disappointment she made a joke along the lines of, "If only we had some reasonable excuse for our poor performance..." Everyone immediately laughed and felt much more at ease. We all went into the meeting very anxious because we knew the goals had not been met and we feared layoffs. Having my supervisor open the discussion with humor was a great way to release the tension and break the ice.”

“Our local baseball team is not very good. Since they couldn’t play this year due to COVID, they put out and sold a shirt that said “2020 undefeated season.” My boss bought one of these shirts and wore it to work. We all laughed about it.”

“My supervisor used our zoom meetings to bring lighthearted topics and humorous anecdotes and jokes when it was clear that our team was experiencing high levels of stress. She would joke with us to help us manage negative emotions and break up points of tension.”

“My supervisor has made zoom meetings fun. Last week he had a Halloween skeleton with a mask on in the background for our meeting. It lightens the mood and makes us all laugh”

“My supervisor has quite the sense of humor. He took all of my desk items and glued them to the ceiling. He basically inverted the entire desk contents and put it exactly where it was, but upside down. I found it hilarious! It did though take me a while to get it all down from the taped position that he had used haha!”