

Changes in Sense of Humour of Finnish Chief Police Officers

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Changes in sense of humour have been studied very little. In this study changes in sense of humour were not studied from moment to moment, nor over long intervals. Instead, a three-year interval was used in this study because it is long enough to monitor changes and short enough for participants to recall accurately. This study included 45 Finnish chief police officers. One basic reason for choosing police officers was that police work is basically serious work and perhaps humour can be seen more clearly in this profession.

1. The concept of sense of humour

In theoretical discussions concepts of laughter, joking, comic and humour have very different meanings. The "sense of humour" needs to be distinguished from "sense of fun", "sense of wit", "sense of ridicule", "sense of the comic" and others (Ruch 1996).

There is still no standard conception of sense of humour or theoretical framework upon which researchers generally agree. This situation is quite different from that of some other psychological constructs (e.g. extraversion, memory) where researchers generally have a common understanding of the phenomena they are investigating, even though they may use different measures or research approaches. The lack of common agreement in the field of humour is probably due to the fact that humour, like concepts such as creativity or love, is derived from a long tradition of folk psychology rather than being "invented" by psychologists (Martin 1998).

Although it is generally agreed that sense of humour is multidimensional, there is still no consensus as to what the relevant dimensions are. According to Thorson & Powell (1993), each individual's sense of humour is a complex network of traits and constructs. They see sense of humour as a grid of bipolar continua. People can be relatively high or low in different elements of sense of humour: creativity, appreciation, tolerance of ambiguity, *joie de vivre*, skills in using humour to achieve social goals, and uses of humour as an adaptive mechanism. Sense of humour may also be related to intelligence. It is compounded by social factors, including cultural restraints and tradition and the social acceptability of the uses of humour. In some instances it may be related to aggression and situation coping (Thorson & Powell 1993).

2. Development of Sense of Humour and its Changes

The use of humour in organisations is related to individual differences, i.e., sex, age, sense of humour, as well as interpersonal relationships and organizational culture (Duncan, et al., 1996). Changes in sense of humour among children at different ages have been well studied (Mc Ghee 1979). Thorson, et. al. (1997) found that humour is understood differently by the young and the old. The appreciation of humour is related to age (Bergen 1998). Generally speaking: as one ages, one's playfulness decreases.

In summary, there are no scientific studies about the changes in the sense of humour of adults, especially not in work environments. There have been only common sense intuitive deductions that perhaps changes in work and especially work-related difficulties will influence the sense of humour in adults. Many people report that over a short interval mood, stress and daily hassles will influence changes in their sense of humour. These changes are not thought to be constant. Nowadays there are also many books and courses on methods of developing one's sense of humour suggesting that there is a widely held view that sense of humour can be developed (Mc Ghee 1999).

3. Measurement and Assessment Methods of Sense of Humour

A researcher wishing to assess sense of humour quantitatively has several options. Some researchers have recorded the amount of time (in seconds) their participants spent smiling and laughing, respectively (Chapman & Chapman 1974; Falk & Hill 1992). However, the validity and reliability of such measures has

been questioned (Thorson 1990; Wilson 1979). Self-report measures have also been used. For example researchers have posed the question: "What makes you laugh?" (Heckel & Kvetensky 1972), or requested participants to explain the humour in stimulus material (Sheppard 1977). "Humour diaries", in which participants record all incidents of humour and laughter experienced over a period of time, have also been used (Mannell & McMahon, 1982; Morris 1987). One very popular method for measuring sense of humour is the use of some kind of questionnaire.

The questionnaire used in this research is called The Multidimensional Sense of Humour Scale, MSHS (Thorson & Powell 1993 a, 1993 b). MSHS contains 24 items in a 5-point Likert format (0 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree) investigating the "sense of humour" in its four components of humour generation or creativity, uses of humour as a coping mechanism, appreciation of humour and attitudes toward humour and humorous persons.

4. Sense of Humour and Work Life

Morreall (1991) argues that humour at work has three benefits: 1. it promotes physical and mental health; 2. by responding to potentially stressful situations with humour, unlike negative emotions, it maintains a sense of control, as individuals can disengage themselves temporarily from the situation, thereby gaining some perspective; and 3. it fosters mental flexibility and acts as a social lubricant, allowing people to work more effectively. Whilst some types of humour, such as "gallows" humour, may appear insensitive to those outside of a particular occupation, they may operate to defuse negative emotions, such as anger, and sadness, arising as a consequence of the work, allowing staff to work more effectively, by diffusing situations and enhancing group camarade.

Decker et. al., (1999) found that subordinates' reported use of positive (unoffensive) humour was best predicted by scores on the Multidimensional Sense of Humour Scale, while reported use of negative (sexual and insult) humour was best predicted by their supervisors' use of negative humour.

5. Humour, Health and Well-Being

Gallowey & Cropley (1999) analyzed many studies concerning humour and sense of humour and concluded, that humour as a response (e.g. laughter) is associated with a reduction in some existing mental health problems, whereas hu-

mour as a psychological process (sense of humour) appears to moderate the perceived intensity of negative life events. The first one is called state humour and the latter one is called trait humour.

Carroll and Schmidt (1992) found that the use of humour to cope with anxiety-evoking events was significantly and negatively correlated with health problems. When a good sense of humour is combined with an external humorous event, the benefits of humour seem potent. The participants' anxiety level is reduced and a positive mood is enhanced, so that positive thoughts rather than negative thoughts are more likely to be available to help with the cognitive work associated with confronting stress. (Cann, Holt & Calhoun 1999).

Higher levels of sense of humour are related to a more positive self-concept and greater psychological well-being (Kuiper & Martin 1993; Kuiper, Mc Kenzie & Belanger 1995; Lefcourt & Martin 1986; Martin & Lefcourt 1983).

The MSHS has been shown to correlate positively with exhibition, dominance, warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, excitement seeking, creativity, intrinsic religiosity, arousability, positive emotions, extraversion and cheerfulness. It has been shown to correlate negatively with neuroticism, pessimism, avoidance, negative self-esteem, deference, order, anxiety, aggression, depression, death anxiety, seriousness, perception of daily hassles and bad mood (Thorson & Powell et al. 1997).

6. Humour in Police Work

Popular culture portrays policing as a dangerous, exciting, powerful and extremely active career, where the majority of an officer's time is spent pursuing and arresting criminals. This glamorous world of policing is not realistic in many ways. In reality the police work is also writing documents, waiting and many other not so exciting activities. Police officers are one of the occupational groups that have received considerable research attention into the causes and effects of occupational stress (Brown & Campbell 1994).

The police occupational culture offers devices for discharging emotion without loss of professional status, in using "gallows" or "sick" humour (Fielding 1988), which allows officers collectively to empathise with each other's feelings, without being perceived as being vulnerable.

Pogrebin and Poole (1988) identified four different types of humour used by US police: jocular aggression, audience degradation, diffusion of danger/tragedy and normative neutralization. Jocular aggression represents a humorous attack aimed at supervisory or management personnel. Audience degradation me-

ans that the police talk about the public using rather cynical humorous terms. In Finland, for example, the name *kirjastoauto* (book mobile) in police language means that there is a car full of gypsies (the word *gypsy* in Finnish being near the same as for novel). Diffusion of danger/tragedy means that joking relations concerning dangerous interactions provide a way for officers to express their emotions without damaging their professional image as confident and fearless. Normative neutralization means situations in which police officers perceive a suspect whom they feel deserves punishment is unlikely to be prosecuted or convicted (Pogrebin & Poole 1988).

Gilbert and Whiteside (1988) who studied characteristics of behaviour that are associated mainly with good performance in police work, based their study on the views of supervisors. The most important characteristics were "partnership with the boss" and "sense of humour." "Sense of humour" meant sharing humour with one's boss and with workmates.

In Kerkkänen's (1997) study concerning Finnish chief police officers no statistically significant relationships were found between sense of humour, work satisfaction, work capacity and health. It is clear that many other factors influence health and well-being more than humour and sense of humour. Such things are, for example, nutrition, physical exercise, social status, relations to superiors etc.

Kerkkänen (1997) found five main categories of the use of humour and sense of humour in the work of Finnish chief police officers: 1. Opening situations, 2. Lightening or relieving tension in critical situations, 3. Debriefing situations and anticipating critical situations, 4. Normal daily routine and coffee breaks and 5. Avoiding the use of humour. The police officers mentioned, in particular, that the last one is especially important in many cases when policemen behave diplomatically. Abstaining from use of humour is an important part of the professional skills of senior police officers. In work situations when the use of humour is not appropriate are, for example, death situations, severe injuries and violent situations where police must use physical force.

Jennifer Grover (1999) found that higher MSHS scores of British police officers were positively related to higher educational qualifications, being married/cohabiting and having difficulties with spouse or partner. Relationship problems may arise as a consequence of one partner consistently using humour to avoid relevant relationship issues, rather than addressing them directly.

7. Changes in Police Work During 1993-1998 in Northern Karelia, Finland

In 1993-1998 there were some major general changes in police work and in police organisation in Finland. The most important things were: 1. the reform of the jurisdictional district 2. the reform of the county administrative board and 3. the experimental Emergency Center. There were also some specific local changes during that period: 1. the change in organization of chief police officers in Joensuu Police Department. 2. the so-called Media tumult at Joensuu Police Department which consisted of two parts: a) the skinhead problem and b) suspicion and rumors of possible misconduct of policemen.

8. Research Questions

The research questions arose from questions people have often presented about humour in general and about the humour of policemen in particular.

The research questions were formulated as follows:

1. How stable are the different assessment methods of sense of humour?
2. What changes can be found in sense of humour of police officers during three year-period?
3. What factors are related to the changes in the sense of humour?
4. Is it possible to find different groups according to type and amount of change in sense of humour?
5. What are the relationships between sense of humour and some variables describing the health and well-being of police officers?

Participants and Methods

This study included 45 chief police officers. They came from different levels of police officers' work: 17 rural police chiefs, 14 police inspectors, 4 individuals from the police office of the provincial government and 10 investigators from the Central Department of Criminal Investigation.

The time of this research from autumn 1995 to winter 1998 was especially serious and difficult for police in North Karelia. There were many major and specific organizational changes in police work: police worked under pressure and often figured prominently in the press and in the public eye. The articles in press and programmes on television were both positive and negative.

The most important part of the research material consisted of the Multidimensional Sense of Humour Scale (MSHS), interviews and health and well-being

measurements. This data was collected twice: in 1995 and in 1998. Between these years there were no interviews or measurements. In the year 1998 42 responses were received of the original 45 police officers. One had died, one had retired and one did not answer.

The data obtained was analysed using qualitative analysis of interviews and open-ended questions in questionnaires, comparative statistical analysis, varimax-rotated factor analysis and Q-factorial analysis of MSHS, multiple regression analysis and log-linear analysis and correlation analysis of sense of humour, demographic, health and well-being variables.

Results

1. How stable were the different assessment methods of sense of humour?

In this study the change in sense of humour was estimated in three ways: 1. the difference in the total points on the Multidimensional Sense of Humour Scale, 2. the difference in one's own schoolgrade estimations of sense of humour, 3. the difference in other's schoolgrade estimations of one's sense of humour.

The correlations between different measures of sense of humour during 1995-1998 revealed that MSHS (cor .68, $p = .000$) and others' estimation of sense of humour (cor .78, $p = .000$) were stable assessment methods of sense of humour but the measurement of sense of humour based on one's own estimation of own sense of humour according to the Finnish-grading system was not stable during the three-year period.

2. What changes were found in sense of humour

In quantitative measures there were changes in both directions; some had received better values than previously and others had received worse values than earlier. Chief police officers have estimated each other's sense of humour to be significantly (Wicoxon Matched Pairs -test, 2-tailed, $p = .0005$) worse in 1998 than in 1995. This estimation was made by using the well-known Finnish school-grading system from 4 to 10.

In verbal estimations, 40 per cent of the chief police officers mentioned that their sense of humour had not changed. The sense of humour had diminished or changed to worse direction in 31 per cent of chief police officers. The worse direction referred to the cynical or sarcastic dimension of sense of humour. Almost the same proportion, 29 per cent, mentioned that their sense of humour had increased or changed for the better. The better direction referred to the warm and kind dimension of sense of humour.

The astonishing result was that the changes in sense of humour measured by different methods (quantitative and verbal) did not correlate significantly. There are two main explanations for this: The measurements made in this research measured the different aspects of changes in sense of humour and the number of persons was so small that it was difficult to obtain statistically significant differences.

3. What factors are related to changes in sense of humour?

Two thirds (66,7 %) of those whose work has changed estimated verbally that their sense of humour had changed for the worse during 1995-1998. This change is almost statistically significant (Pearson sig. $p = .08$, Fisher Exact Test, $p = .08$) . Very many (75 %) of those who experienced the reform of the jurisdictional district negatively estimated verbally that their sense of humour had become worse during 1995-1998. This change is almost statistically significant (2-tailed Fisher Exact Test, $p = .07$) Most of those who experienced the reform of the jurisdictional district negatively were former rural police chiefs.

The factors influencing the changes in sense of humour was estimated by logistic regression analysis. Age and the level of schooling were the only marginally statistically significant factors which influenced the amount of change in the sense of humour estimated by Multidimensional Sense of Humour Scale; getting older evidently makes people have less sense of humour and having a higher level of schooling gives people more sense of humour. The level of significance for the influence of age was not high but is still worth mentioning: $.08$. The level of significance for the influence of education level was also not high but is also worth mentioning: $.09$.

The health and well-being factors did not have any statistically significant influences on the amount or direction of the change in sense of humour estimated by quantitative measures. The explanation for this is that the changes in sense of humour at group level had gone in both directions at the same time.

The chief police officers were asked to explain verbally which were the factors influencing the changes in sense of humour. The results obtained in this way tell that the factors influencing the changes in sense of humour are partly the same ones in both directions. The most often mentioned factors were 1. getting older, 2. having tough times at work, 3. being in a superior position at work, 4. change of job and 5. change in general work climate. It seems that many of the above- mentioned factors first influence sense of humour so that they diminish it for some time, and after people have become familiar with a new situation, the influence on the sense of humour becomes positive, i.e. first tension then re-

laxation. As stated earlier, 40 per cent of the chief police officers mentioned that their sense of humour had not changed during the three-year interval. The most frequently mentioned reasons for this were: 1. work conditions had been the same, 2. close relationships like family relations had been the same, 3. work friends and boss had been the same, 4. their own mental and physical fitness had been the same, 5. personality had not changed.

4. Is it possible to find different groups according to type and amount of change in sense of humour?

The search for different groups of persons according to type and amount of change in sense of humour was made by the so-called Q-factor analysis of different quantitative measurements in sense of humour. In Q-factor analysis individuals and variables have changed their places so that each individual is computed as a variable. This analysis revealed that one bigger group and several minor groups can be found there. The largest group consisted of persons who were realistic, so called "ordinary" people, whose sense of humour is neither high or very low. Grouping persons by their individual change curves in sense of humour during 1995-1998 produced same kind of result. There was one bigger group (about 50 percent) which consisted of persons whose sense of humour had changed to both directions when estimated by different measures.

Analysing the interviews of chief police officers produced four types of change-profiles of sense of humour: 1. No changes in sense of humour, 2. The sense of humour had changed to the more cynical direction, 3. The sense of humour had changed up and down 4. The sense of humour had changed to more positive direction during 1995 – 1998. The following examples are built up by putting together the answers of many persons.

1. No changes in sense of humour.

"My sense of humour has not changed. I am the same person as earlier. My work has not changed and my relations with my boss and my fellow workers are as good as earlier. I have been healthy and so have been also my wife and my children. I have been at work for such a long time that small changes and stresses at work does not matter."

2. The sense of humour has changed to the cynical direction.

"I think that my sense of humour has changed more to the cynical direction. The working climate is not good. Disagreements inside the personnel and the negative news about the chief police officers in media have depressed me a lot. People do not have confidence in police any more as much as earlier. Our working organization changed and my work is narrower than earlier and I do not like that. I do not have so much influence at my work as earlier. My back pain has also changed for worse so that I cannot laugh any more as much as earlier. I have been too long at work. I am not a useful worker any more".

3. The sense of humour has changed up and down.

"Basically my sense of humour is good but two years ago my sense of humour went temporarily down. When I think backwards I think that I had some kind of middle-age crisis. I lost my interest in my work and also in sex. I was really down. I thought that everything is useless. At the same time we had very hard times at work. We had too few men at work and at the same time we were negatively in public when newspapers wrote about police and skinhead problem. I felt myself really sick and I did not have any energy to work and take care of myself. I think that I had some kind of small burnout syndrome also. But then when I had a long vacation and discussed it with my wife and friends I began little by little feel happy and energetic again. Now I feel I have got my sense of humour back".

4. The sense of humour has developed in the positive direction.

"My work has changed so that it is now very suitable for me. I have many challenges and I like it. I have to manage with many difficulties with clients and personnel but I think that just these factors have changed my sense of humour to more broader and warmer direction. I am not so uncertain as earlier. I think that getting older and having enough challenges and stress at work have developed my sense of humour in positive direction. Now I can laugh more and also make my friends laugh. Life and especially working life is not so serious thing any more. I have good relations with my personnel, my boss and especially also with my wife and children. I have also been healthy and have had time for my hobbies and friends".

5. Connections between health and sense of humour during the 3-year interval.

Investigating the correlational relationships between sense of humour and well-being at work produced no statistically significant ($p=0.01$) results. Very few and only slightly significant correlations were found: one's own estimation of one's own sense of humour correlated negatively with diastolic blood pressure (cor. -0.31 , $p=.004$). This means that when people estimate their sense of humour as high, their diastolic blood pressure is most often low. Many significant correlations were found between different well-being factors and, of course, between different measures of sense of humour but not between sense of humour and well-being.

Discussion

Multidimensional Sense of Humour Scale and others' estimation of sense of humour were stable assessment methods of sense of humour but the measurement of sense of humour based on one's own estimation of own sense of humour was not stable during the three-year period. There was a statistically significant change to less sense of humour of the chief police officers in three years when

the estimation was made by Finnish school-grading system and when chief police officers estimated each others' sense of humour. About 40 percent of participants reported no changes in their sense of humour. Age and level of schooling were related to the amount of sense of humour; older age was associated with lower scores on MSHS, more education was associated with higher scores on MSHS. Change of job influenced changes in the sense of humour of chief police officers. The change was to the lower direction when they verbally estimated the change of sense of humour. The chief police officers reported changes in sense of humour in both directions; better and worse and the reasons for both changes are the same: getting older and having difficulties at work. It seems that if close relationships (such as family relations and relationship with the boss) are good, the changes are in a positive direction. One bigger group (about 40 – 50 % of persons) and several minor groups were found when grouping of police officers was made according to the type and amount of changes in sense of humour. The largest group consisted of persons whose sense of humour was neither high or low and whose sense of humour has changed slightly but not very much up and down during three years.

In some contexts the Multidimensional Sense of Humour Scale is a reliable and good method of measuring sense of humour. It is especially good when we want to estimate how well people use sense of humour to achieve social goals and to cope with difficult situations. However it does not measure the sense of humour sufficiently when we want to measure sense of humour as the inner state and life attitude of a person, nor does it measure the negative uses of sense of humour. It may be that the MSHS tends to exclude other aspects of humour that are more relevant for police officers, such as "gallows" humour (Young 1995a). The MSHS omits items related to humour as a disposition for teasing and laughing at others, nor does it include a dimension for less valued humour, such as scatological humour, sarcasm, mocking, ridicule, satire or irony (Ruch 1996)

In this research no statistically significant correlations were found between measures of sense of humour and measures of well being and health. It may be truth that the sense of humour concept is so broad that it cannot be measured by simple questions and scales. In real life, sense of humour consists of partly contradictory things: humour is used for both positive and negative purposes. Another reason is that health is also a concept that cannot be measured by simple indicators. In addition, in this topic we must take into account the time factor. It is very obvious that in the daily routine and in stress situations the ability to use humour in many ways is good and perhaps is a generally healthy thing. In future studies, instruments measuring short time stress and moods would be useful.

Laughing and joking daily is good for health, but in the long term, during times of stress it may not be enough. Obviously at such times we need humour as an attitude to life and as an inner state of mind. Measuring the latter situation is surely much more difficult and requires research methods different from those used in this study. Although no statistically significant correlations were found between measures of sense of humour and indicators of well-being and health, the opinion of almost every senior police officer was that policemen gain considerable advantage in their work by having and using a sense of humour.

This discussion is not ready yet. Many more discussions are still needed. I think that especially discussions about the multiple meanings of humour in changing life contexts are wellcome.

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Zmiany w poczuciu humoru fińskich oficerów policji

Celem przedstawionych badań była analiza zmian poczucia humoru fińskich oficerów policji. W artykule postawiono następujące pytania: 1) Na ile zbieżne są oceny poczucia humoru mierzone trzema różnymi metodami? 2) Jakie rodzaje zmian można zaobserwować w poczuciu humoru na przestrzeni czasu? 3) Jakie czynniki wpływają na poczucie humoru? 4) Czy możliwy jest podział ludzi na grupy w zależności od typu i ilości zmian poczucia humoru, jakie w nich zaszły? 5) Czy podawane przez badanych powody zmiany w poczuciu humoru różnią oficerów policji od szeregowych policjantów? 6) W jaki sposób zmiany poczucia humoru związane są z sytuacją zdrowotną i bytową oficerów policji?

Badaniami objęto 42 oficerów policji. Z każdym z oficerów dwukrotnie przeprowadzono wywiad (w 1995 i 1998 r.) i każdego z nich przetestowano, używając wielowymiarowej skali poczucia humoru (Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale). Wzięto pod uwagę również informacje o badaniach lekarskich. Dla porównania wykorzystano dane dotyczące 48 szeregowych policjantów.

Wielowymiarowa skala poczucia humoru (MSHS) i inne oceny poczucia humoru, z wyjątkiem oceny własnej badanych, wykazały dużą zbieżność wyników. W ocenie innych oficerów poczucie humoru oficerów policji było w roku 1998 mniejsze niż w 1995, natomiast nie uległo większej zmianie według opinii samych badanych. Nie zaobserwowano także istotnych zmian, gdy mierzono je za pomocą MSHS. Znaczne zmiany w obu kierunkach, na lepsze i na gorsze, wystąpiły na poziomie indywidualnym. Tylko około 40% oficerów policji uznało swoje poczucie humoru za niezmienione. Utrata pracy prowadziła do osłabienia poczucia humoru – zmniejszała się częstość występowania humoru, a dowcip stawał się bardziej sarkastyczny.

Największa grupa badanych (około 50%) składa się z realistów i osób pozytywnie nastawionych do życia. Nie są oni – za bardzo dowcipni, ale też nie brak im przyczyny poczucia humoru.