Supervisor Communicative Behaviors as Influence of Subordinate Burnout: The Mediating Effects of Perceived Immediacy and Burnout

Michael K. Cundall Jr.[1]
Stephanie Kelly[2]
Kenneth Rocker[3]
Ryan Goke[4]
Kyle Barrentine[5]
Ayanna Dawkins[6]

Abstract: Previous research examining the role of supervisor communication as an influence of subordinate's loyalty to a company has accounted for relatively little of the percentage of explained variance in loyalty. The current paper expanded on the body of knowledge by investigating the previously unexplored influence of supervisors' humor and the mediating role of subordinate burnout. The final model showed that supervisor humor, immediate behaviors, and solidarity behaviors influenced subordinate loyalty through the mediation of perceived immediacy; it further showed that supervisor immediate behaviors and solidarity influence subordinate loyalty through the mediation of subordinate burnout.

A 2018 survey conducted by Deloitte of over 10,000 Millennials found that 46% planned to leave their job within a year and only 26% planned to stay beyond five years (Bersin, 2017). Nearly a third of individuals who leave their job do so because of supervisor communication (Work Institute, 2019). This makes research into the influence of supervisor communication on subordinates a critical topic for the modern workforce. An abundance of research on supervisor subordinate communication was conducted long before Millennials entered the workforce (c.f.,

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[1] North Carolina A&T State University, USA; mcundall@ncat.edu
[2] North Carolina A&T State University, USA; sekelly@ncat.edu
[3] Massey University, USA; ktrocker@aggies.ncat.edu
[4] North Dakota State University, USA; ryan.goke.@ndsu.edu
[5] University of Virginia, USA; kjb4fv@virginia.edu
[6] American University, USA; ayanna.dawkins@outlook.com

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Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Jensen et al., 1997; Rice & Shook, 1990). While recent research has explored relationships between supervisor communicative behaviors and subordinate responses to those behaviors (e.g., Jia et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2018; Lybarger et al., 2017; MacDonald et al., 2019), there is yet more to be explored among the current workforce.

An under explored communication variable is supervisor humor. Humor is an undervalued and increasingly important part of a healthy and engaging work and social life (Butler, 2015; Cann et al., 2014; Gkorezis et al., 2011). It can have salutary effects on recall, perseverance, and the toleration of stress and pain (Abel, 2002; Baumeister et al., 2007; Berk et al., 2001; Mak et al., 2012). The present study seeks to explore the explanatory power of supervisor humor among previously recognized influences subordinate loyalty. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to combine and replicate the findings of prior work on supervisor communicative behaviors and subordinate loyalty (e.g., Jia et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2018; Kelly & MacDonald, 2019; Kelly & Westerman, 2014; MacDonald et al., 2019), additionally assessing the influence of supervisor humor.

Construal Level Theory

Construal level theory (CLT) explains how the perceived proximity of a referent (be it an object, event, or person) allows individuals to imagine their interaction with the referent varying degrees of abstraction such that greater proximity decreases abstraction (Liberman & Trope, 1998). In CLT, more levels of construal equate greater distance and fewer levels of construal equate less distance. Early work with CLT focused on temporal construal, demonstrating that the closer to an event someone comes, the more concretely they are able to think of detailed plans vs. abstractly thinking of how they will enjoy or not enjoy the event.

On a social level, CLT explains that the more socially distant you feel from someone, the less possible it is to imagine detailed interactions with them. For example, someone with high perceived psychological distance with a coworker will only easily be able to think abstractly about how an upcoming collaboration will go (e.g., whether it will be stressful or difficult). However, the same collaboration assignment with a coworker someone has low psychological distance with can easily be thought of in less abstract terms such as the channels through which collaboration will happen, the timeline for completing tasks, and the sequencing of collaborative steps. The level of detail in which people conceptualize future interactions changes with psychological closeness

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because their level of construal determines whether they use primary or secondary characteristics to evaluate the referent (Trope et al., 2007). So, for example, in imagining a project with a coworker with whom high psychological distance exists, imagining collaboration will be highly dependent upon whether you like their personality, whereas in imagining a project with a coworker with whom low psychological distance exists, their strengths, weaknesses, and workstyles can be assimilated into imagining the collaboration. In other words, individuals will focus on reason why they should feel a certain way about interactions when there is a high level or construal but focus on how to navigate the interaction when there is a low level of construal.

Affective distance is another dimension of construal that is closely related to social distance, but distinct (Fielder, 2007). Whereas social distance deals with the interconnectivity of people, affective distance pertains to the emotional connection, where high affective distance contains negative emotion (e.g., disliking) and low affective distance contains positive emotion (e.g., liking). For example, high job satisfaction would represent low levels of affective construal about one's job whereas low job satisfaction would represent high levels of affective construal. Like psychological construal, emotional construal can apply to a person or construct (Fielder, 2007). As such, both social and affective construal can play a part of the communication process.

Construal Level Theory and Subordinate Loyalty

A recent model published to explain subordinate loyalty to the company as an outcome of supervisor communication is well explained by CLT. Kelly et al.'s (2018) model of subordinate loyalty found that supervisor use of immediate behaviors and solidarity messages indirectly influence subordinate loyalty through the mediation of perceived immediacy. Solidarity messages are those evoked to establish rapport, emphasizing trust and synchronicity (MacDonald et al., 2019). Immediate behaviors are those communicative behaviors that induce a reduction in perceived psychological distance (Kelly & Westerman, 2014). Perceived immediacy is the perceived psychological distance between communicators, which is changed as a result of a message receiver perceiving immediate behaviors in addition to all other communicative behaviors displayed simultaneously by the message sender (Kelly, 2012). As such, perceived immediacy is psychological distance, a social level of construal. Loyalty is a classification of organizational citizenship behaviors that exhibit one's commitment to act in the best interest of the company (Van Dyne et al., 1994). This includes behaviors such as not leaving the company and upholding its

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public image. Taking this all together, Kelly et al.'s model found that social construal a subordinate has with their supervisor (i.e., perceived immediacy), is influenced by supervisor's immediate behaviors and solidarity messages, and that in turn perceived immediacy affects subordinates' loyalty. This aligns well with CLT, which would expect that supervisor communicative behaviors designed to reduce psychological distance (i.e., construal level) would allow subordinates to more clearly imagine themselves engaging in loyalty behaviors such as continuing to work with the supervisor vs. abstract feelings about staying with the company.

Although the Kelly et al. (2018) model aligns well with CLT, the authors did not use CLT to guide their study. The present study intends to apply CLT to the Kelly et al. (2018) model. In doing so, three hypotheses will be replicated:

H1: There is a positive relationship between supervisor solidarity and subordinates' perceived immediacy.

H2: There is a positive relationship between supervisor immediate behaviors and subordinates' perceived immediacy.

H3: There is a positive relationship between subordinates' perceived immediacy and loyalty.

Next, using the concepts of social and affective construal, the Kelly et al. (2018) model will be expanded to include the concepts of supervisor humor and employee burnout.

Humor

Humor has had a variety of definitions across time. Plato in his dialogue *Philebus* described humor mainly as pertaining to making fun of others (Morreall, 2020). O'Connell (1969), in partially keeping with Plato, proposed that humor can be delivered as *sarcastic*, *funny* or *hostile wit*. More recently, humor has been defined as a recognition of some sort of incongruity, which is characterized as something unexpected, absurd, ill-fitting, etc. (Morreall, 2020). Furthermore, successful humor is generally understood to require a shared understanding of the content so as to allow the perception of the humorous incongruity to be understood (Cohen, 2001).

Beyond the more conceptual research into humor, humor is understood to have a broadly instrumental role in a variety of areas of human action including a variety of business/workplace

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interactions (Barsoux, 1996). Over the past couple decades, the interest into the role that humor has in various workplace interactions has grown markedly, particularly humor as seen as someone's ability to be humorous. Researchers have focused on creating various measures of humor in the workplace (Cann et al., 2014). The present study utilizes Booth-Butterfield & Butterfield-Booth's (1991) operationalization of humor as the tendency a person has to produce humor (i.e., whether someone is perceived to be funny or not, regardless of the type of humor they use). That perception of being able to produce humor has been found to have a variety of positive effects in the workplace.

Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2012) in a meta-analysis found evidence that when humor was perceived to be present in the workplace, it improved workplace performance and health among employees. Smith & Khojasteh (2014) found that humor in an organization reduces stress and conflict as well as improved communications. Supervisor's effective use of humor has been found to have a variety of positive impacts on subordinates including performance, engagement, loyalty to the organization, willingness to follow organizational rules and procedures (Goswami et al., 2016), stress (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006), satisfaction (Campbell et al., 2001), and empowerment (Gkorezis et al., 2011).

In sum, humorous supervisors have been found to be more effective, and more liked than their non-humorous counterparts (Rizzo et al., 1999). When someone recognizes another person as being humorous, the shared or common background necessary to understand the humor of another reveals important similarities about the individuals sharing the humor (Cohen, 2001). Indeed, this sharing can often lead to perception of comradery and closeness with the humor sharer (Foresman, 2021). Therefore, in alignment with CLT, it is predicted that when a subordinate recognizes a supervisor as being humorous, they have greater perceived closeness with that supervisor. Therefore, a fourth hypothesis is proposed:

H4: There is a positive relationship between supervisor humor and subordinates' perceived immediacy.

Burnout

To this point, the article has focused on variables related to social construal (i.e., perceived immediacy). Now the topic will transition to affective construal, where negative emotions are

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conceptualized as higher levels of construal and positive emotions are conceptualized as lower levels of construal (c.f., Fielder, 2007). Specifically, affective construal through burnout is considered.

Maslach (1993) defined burnout as "a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among professionals who work with other people in some capacity" (p. 20). It manifests as a combination of fatigue and lack of motivation (Bianchi, 2018). Employees who experience burnout may also exhibit poor job performance and health problems over time (Bakker & Costa, 2014).

Role ambiguity, role conflict, role stress, stressful events, workload, and work pressure are among the most important job demands that cause burnout (Alarcon, 2011). Misfit between personality and job demands may also induce burnout (Bakker & Costa, 2014). Individuals need support both inside and outside of work to avoid burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). If workers experience burnout, then insufficient opportunities to rest and regenerate depleted energy aggravate the exhausting impact, dictating whether one can recover from a state of burnout or whether it worsens (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Working for an authoritarian supervisor who enforces policies and rules upon employees without soliciting feedback or understanding their jobs is likely to result in burnout (Kelly & MacDonald, 2019).

Employees who experience burnout are more likely to leave their organization (Rahim & Cosby, 2016). MacDonald et al. (2019) explains that employees who begin feeling unsatisfied with their job eventually begin to feel burnout, which is why they will eventually seek to leave. Ultimately, burnout leads to disengagement and dissatisfaction with one's place of employment (MacDonald et al., 2019; Rahim & Cosby, 2016). This means that employees with low burnout are more likely to feel satisfied with their job.

According to CLT, affective construal works such that positive emotions result in lower levels of construal and negative emotions, like burnout, result in higher levels of construal (Fielder, 2007). Further, types of construal are positively related in the same context so, for example, in situations where individuals have higher emotional construal, they should also have higher social construal (Trope et al., 2007). Therefore, supervisor behaviors of solidarity, immediate behaviors, and humor, which should be negatively related to social construal variables, should also be negatively related to positive affective construal variables. This means that a negative affective construal variable like burnout, would be negatively related to social construal. Therefore, the

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following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: There is a negative relationship between supervisor humor and subordinates' burnout.

H6: There is a negative relationship between supervisor solidarity and subordinates' burnout.

H7: There is a negative relationship between supervisor immediate behaviors and subordinates' burnout.

According to CLT, not only does lower construal mean that a referent seems closer, it also means that interaction with that referent seem more probable (Trope et al., 2007). So, for example, lower construal with a supervisor should make future interactions with them seem more probable. Therefore, a final hypothesis is proposed:

H8: There is a negative relationship between subordinates' burnout and loyalty.

Expanded Model Proposal

CLT explains that higher levels of construal (social, affective, or other) leave future interactions with a referent seeming less probable while lower levels of construal make future interactions more probable. In alignment with CLT, Kelly et al.'s (2018) study found that supervisor immediate behaviors and solidarity lower construal with subordinates, and result in subordinates' higher intention to loyalty to their workplace such that social construal (i.e., perceived immediacy) mediated supervisor communication and subordinate loyalty. This paper argues that supervisor humor, because of the similarity observed that allows humor to be shared, should also lower social construal that a subordinate perceives with their supervisor (i.e., supervisor humor should increase perceived immediacy). This paper further argues that burnout, an affective construal, should also mediate supervisors' communicative behaviors and subordinate loyalty. As such, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

H9: Perceived immediacy will mediate the relationships between supervisor behaviors (i.e., immediate behaviors, humor, and solidarity) and subordinate loyalty.

H10: Perceived immediacy will mediate the relationships between supervisor behaviors

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(i.e., immediate behaviors, humor, and solidarity) and subordinate loyalty.

The predicted path model constructed from these last two hypotheses is depicted in Figure 1. Of the eight paths predicted in Figure 1, only three are replications that were predicted in the original Kelly et al. (2018) model.
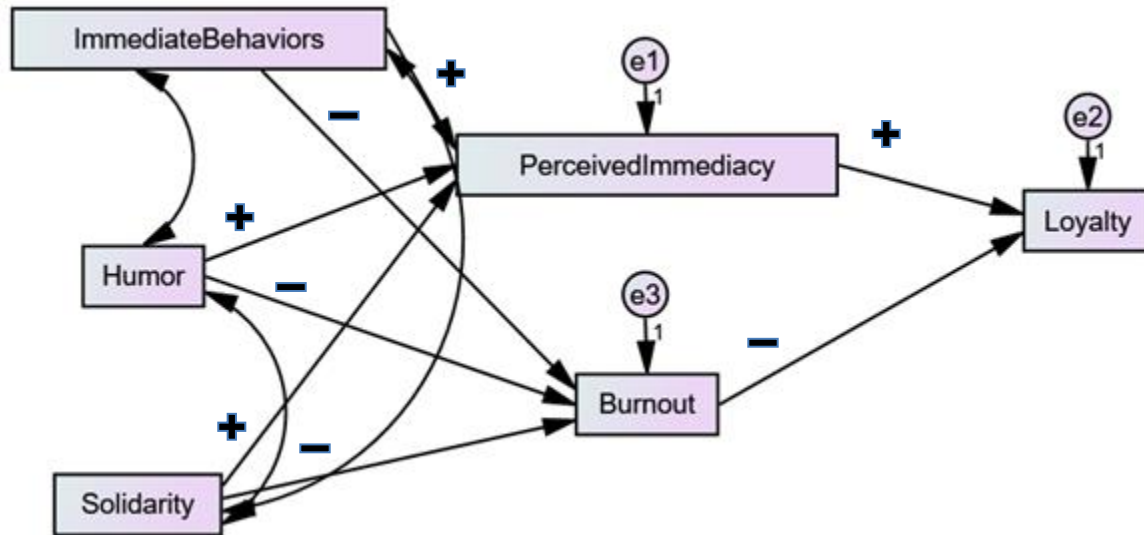

Figure 1: *Proposed Model*

Method

The following sections describe the methods, procedures, and instruments utilized to collect data to test these hypotheses and proposed model.

Participants

A total of 216 respondents participated in this study. Each was currently employed and had a direct supervisor. On average, participants had worked for the supervisor they referred to throughout the questionnaire for 3.3 ($SD = 5.50$) years. The average age of participants was 31.7 ($SD = 13.5$) years old. Among participants, 90 identified as male, 124 identified as female, and two chose not to identify biological sex. Occupations broke down as follows: 16.7% sales, 15.7% managerial, 15.7% skilled labor, 12.0% education, 8.3% clerical, 4.6% healthcare, 4.2% food services, 2.8% transportation, 2.3% military, .5% non-farm labor, 11.6% other, and .9 unidentified.

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Procedure

Data was collected through an online questionnaire. A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants. Researchers used personal email contacts and social media to share the link to their online questionnaire. The study was described as an attempt to better understand workplace communication. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were given the opportunity to leave their phone number to enter a drawing for a $25 gift card. On average, participants needed 7 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Instrumentation

Solidarity

Solidarity was measured through MacDonald et al.'s (2019) measure. This measure was a condensed version of Wheeless' (1976) measure. It was comprised of 12 items with a 7-point Likert-type response scale that ranged from *Disagree Strongly* to *Agree Strongly*. MacDonald et al. (2019) indicated that the modified measure yielded evidence of content validity.

Immediate Behaviors

Immediate behaviors were measured with an adapted version of McCroskey et al.'s (1995) measure. This measure was originally designed to be used in reference to an instructor. Therefore, the measure was adapted to change references from "my instructor" to "my supervisor." The measure consists of nine Likert-type items with a 7-point response scale ranging from *Disagree Strongly* to *Agree Strongly*. McCroskey et al. (1995) indicated that the measure showed evidence of convergent validity.

Humor

Humor, operationalized as how funny a person is perceived to be, was assessed through Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield's (1991) humor orientation scale. This assessment consists of 17 Likert-type items with 7-point response scales ranging from *Disagree Strongly* to *Agree Strongly*. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) showed evidence of convergent validity for the measure.

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Perceived Immediacy

Perceived immediacy was assessed through Kelly et al.'s (2015) assessment. This measure is composed of nine semantic differential items. Kelly et al. (2015) reported evidence of convergent and content validity for the measure.

Burnout

Burnout was assessed through Kelly and Westerman's (2014) assessment. This assessment consists of seven Likert-type items with 7-point response scales ranging from *Disagree Strongly* to *Agree Strongly*. Kelly and Westerman (2014) found evidence of content validity for the measure.

Loyalty

Loyalty was assessed through Van Dyne et al.'s (1994) assessment. This measure consists of 12 Likert-type items with 7-point response scales ranging from *Disagree Strongly* to *Agree Strongly*. Van Dyne et al. (1994) provided evidence of convergent validity for the measure.

Results

Before hypotheses are tested, instruments should be examined to identify whether they have retained their hypothesized factor structure (Kelly & Westerman, 2020). Each of the measures utilized for this study are hypothesized to be first-order unidimensional by the measure creators (c.f., Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1990; Kelly et al. 2015; Kelly & Westerman, 2014; MacDonald et al., 2019; McCroskey et al., 1995; Van Dyne et al., 1994). As such, the first phase of analysis is to examine the proposed unidimensionality of the individual measurement models, which is a test of content validity (Kelly & Westerman, 2020).

Unidimensional Measurement Model Tests

Content validity of each unidimensional measurement model was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). All measures have a hypothesized factor structure that should be examined before testing hypotheses unique to a paper; doing this allows items causing residual error to be identified and provides a foundation for measurement improvement in future research (Kelly & Westerman, 2020). Bryne (2016) set the following standards of mediocre to acceptable fit:

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Goodness of Fit (GFI) ≥ .90, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) ≥ .90, Standard Root Mean Residual (SRMR) ≤ .08, and Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA) ≤ .10.

The solidarity and perceived immediacy measures fell within this range. The immediate behaviors measure had low GFI, low CFI, high SRMR, and high RMSEA. Consistent with Kelly et al. (2018), three of the items in this measure caused statistically significant residual error (items about paralinguistics and the item referencing having a relaxed body posture). Humor also had unacceptable fit indices across all four metrics. Consistent with the findings of Violanti et al. (2018) who suspected a potential second false-factor in the measure, these problematic items were primarily those that were designed to be reverse coded. Once these items were removed, the fit indices were strong. The loyalty measure also yielded poor fit across all four indices. This measure had five items causing a statistically significant amount of residual error with no discernable pattern across problematic items (*represents organization favorably, would accept a job at a competing organization, keeps informed, does not work beyond, volunteers for overtime*). Once removed, the fit statistics were strong. The burnout measure had a slightly elevated RMSEA. No items were identified causing residual error, so the residual error persists. RMSEA is sensitive to even minor misfit, leading some scholars to question whether a universal cutoff such as suggested by Bryne (2016) is even feasible for RMSEA (Chen et al., 2008), so a slightly elevated RMSEA for one measure is not of great concern for the overall study. Fit statistics for original and respecified measures are displayed in Table 1 and the descriptive statistics are found in Table 2.

Table 1

Fit Statistics

	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	χ^2
Solidarity	.88	.94	.09	.04	$\chi^2(54, N = 216) = 157.12, p < .001$
Immediate Behaviors Original	.79	.68	.21	.11	$\chi^2(27, N = 216) =, p < .001$
Immediate Behaviors Modified	.96	.96	.09	.05	$\chi^2(9, N = 216) = 25.30, p = .003$

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Humor	.59	.69	.17	.15	$\chi^2(119, N = 216) = 866.87, p < .001$
Humor Modified	.91	.95	.10	.04	$\chi^2(35, N = 216) = 106.32, p < .001$
Perceived Immediacy	.94	.97	.09	.03	$\chi^2(20, N = 216) = 52.07, p < .001$
Burnout	.92	.95	.13	.05	$\chi^2(14, N = 216) = 65.59, p < .001$
Loyalty	.79	.69	.14	.10	$\chi^2(54, N = 216) = 292.31, p < .001$
Loyalty Modified	.98	.98	.04	.04	$\chi^2(14, N = 216) = 19.63, p = .14$

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	*SD*	Min-Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
Solidarity	3.85	1.25	1.00-7.00	.17	-.42	.90
Immediate Behaviors	5.23	1.05	1.83-7.00	-.54	.07	.77
Perceived Immediacy	5.12	1.30	1.00-7.00	-.58	-.17	.91
Burnout	2.63	1.44	1.00-7.00	.58	-.55	.91
Humor	4.36	1.26	1.11-7.00	-.14	-.29	.91
Loyalty	4.94	1.11	1.71-7.00	.03	-.34	.78

Non-Directional Hypothesis Testing

Next, individual hypotheses were tested. Each of the hypotheses were supported, which included predictions of (H1) a positive relationship between supervisor solidarity and subordinates' perceived immediacy ($r = .48, p < .05$), (H2) a positive relationship between supervisor immediate behaviors and subordinates' perceived immediacy ($r = .47, p < .05$), (H3) a positive relationship between subordinates' perceived immediacy and loyalty ($r = .29, p < .05$), (H4) a positive

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relationship between supervisor humor and subordinates' perceived immediacy ($r = .47, p < .05$), (H5) a negative relationship between supervisor humor and subordinates' burnout ($r = -.28, p < .05$), (H6) a negative relationship between supervisor solidarity and subordinates' burnout ($r = -.22, p < .05$), (H7) a negative relationship between supervisor immediate behaviors and subordinates' burnout ($r = -.28, p < .05$), and finally (H8) a negative relationship between subordinates' burnout and loyalty ($r = -.37, p < .05$). This confirms the direct paths represented by one-way arrows in Figure 1, but not the indirect paths that create the model. Indirect path fit will be tested in the overall model test.

Model Testing

Hypotheses 9 and 10 predicted a mediated model and which the construal variables of perceived immediacy and burnout mediated supervisor communicative behaviors and subordinate burnout. The model was tested through structural equation modeling (SEM) using the AMOS maximum likelihood parameter estimation algorithm using the respecified and confirmed measures. The fit statistics were as follows: GFI = .97, CFI = .95, SRMR = .05, and RMSEA = .13. This indicates acceptable fit statistics for all global fit indices except RMSEA, which is slightly elevated.

Indirect effects were tested using bootstrapping with subsamples of 200 participants and a 95% confidence interval. The confidence intervals for the indirect paths through perceived immediacy were as follows: solidarity ($.03 < \rho < .13$), immediate behaviors ($.03 < \rho < .16$), and humor ($.03 < \rho < .13$). Thus, all indirect paths through perceived immediacy were supported. The confidence intervals for the indirect paths through burnout were as follows: solidarity ($.01 < \rho < .04$), immediate behaviors ($.04 < \rho < .19$), and humor ($-.1 < \rho < .03$). Therefore, the indirect paths from solidarity and immediate behaviors to loyalty were supported, but not the indirect path from humor to loyalty. This means that fit for the indirect path from humor to loyalty through burnout may be a result of the effect being within sampling error of zero after it is corrected for attenuation due to measurement error by the AMOS algorithm. As such, the path must be removed and the model retested to avoid Type 1 Error. The supported model which removed the hypothesized path from humor to burnout is depicted in Figure 2. Global fit statistics for the supported model were as follows: GFI = .97, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .11, and SRMR = .05. Again, the RMSEA is slightly elevated, but the other global fit statistics were well within the bounds of good fit. Therefore, given that RMSEA is the weakest predictor of model fit given its sensitivity (Chen et al., 2008), the data

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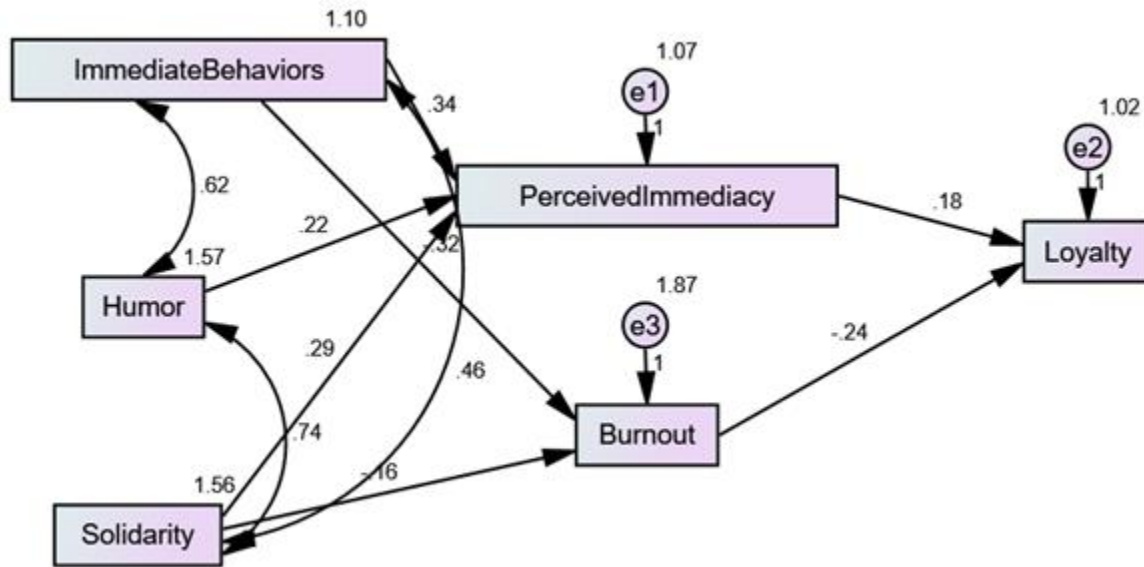overall support the proposed model through global fit statistics.

Figure 2: *Supported Model*

Discussion

The results of this study expanded the model proposed by Kelly et al. (2018), giving a more nuanced look at how supervisor communicative behaviors influence subordinate behavior. Hypotheses 1, 2, and 4 predicted that there would be positive correlations between subordinates' perceived immediacy with their supervisor and supervisors' immediate behaviors, solidarity, and humor. The data were consistent with these hypotheses. Hypothesis 3 further predicted that subordinates' perceived immediacy would be positively correlated with their loyalty. Again, the data were consistent with this hypothesis. The overall model test gave further insight into these relationships, indicating that perceived immediacy acts as a mediator between these exogenous variables and subordinates' loyalty. This means that the data indicate that supervisors' communicative behaviors of solidarity, immediate behaviors, and humor induce their subordinates' perceived immediacy which in turn induces subordinates' loyalty.

Hypotheses 5, 6, and 7 predicted negative correlations between subordinates' burnout and supervisor's humor, solidarity, and immediate behaviors. The data were consistent with these hypotheses. Hypothesis 8, in addition, predicted that subordinate burnout would be negatively correlated with loyalty. The data supported this hypothesis as well. The overall model test found that burnout acts as a mediating variable between the exogenous variables of supervisor solidarity

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and immediate behaviors to subordinate loyalty. Burnout, however, did not mediate the relationship between supervisor humor and subordinate loyalty. Thus, while supervisor humor is correlated with subordinates' burnout, the present data do not present evidence that it influences their burnout like solidarity and immediate behaviors.

It is notable that perceived immediacy and burnout were confirmed as the direct inputs of loyalty. The implication is that subordinates' loyalty is a response to what they think and/or feel about the supervisors' behaviors rather than simply the behaviors themselves. So, while behaviors like immediate behaviors, humor, and solidarity are positive tools that supervisors can use in their communication with employees, they are subject to perceptual filters, and may not always be interpreted as intended. Therefore, while they are a series of communicative tools that supervisors who wish to inspire subordinate loyalty can and should use, they should not be treated as an infallible checklist (Kelly et al., 2020). It is critical for supervisors to follow up with subordinates if they ever respond to immediate, solidarity, or humorous behaviors in an unexpected way to ensure that they were not perceived in an unintended way. For example, the immediate behavior of eye contact would not have its intended effect if it was perceived as staring (Kelly et al., 2015).

Although previous research has found that perceived immediacy acted as a mediator between supervisor solidarity and immediate behaviors and subordinate loyalty (Kelly et al., 2018), the roles of humor and burnout were previously untested. Humor is known to have several benefits in areas directly related to the workplace (Baumeister et al., 2017; Mak et al., 2012). Humor allows individuals to tolerate stress more readily, and thus makes stressful work seem less so (Abel, 2002). Thus, it was surprising that burnout did not mediate the relationship between supervisor humor and subordinate loyalty like perceived immediacy. This shows that while humor plays an important role in supervisor-subordinate dynamics, there is much still to be discovered. Yet, burnout did mediate the relationships between supervisor solidarity and immediate behaviors with subordinate loyalty, demonstrating that emotional wellbeing and perception filter subordinates' responses to supervisor communication.

Implications for Research

These findings have two major implications for future research in this area. To reiterate, the definition of perceived immediacy is perceived psychological distance in response to a sender's communicative behaviors (Kelly et al., 2015). Seminal work on immediate behaviors (Mehrabian,

1981) limited immediate behaviors to a specific set of non-verbal behaviors, (e.g., leaning forward, smiling, paralinguistics). More contemporary research has begun to show that the original set of immediate behaviors was too sparse. Kelly et al. (2018) showed that solidarity communication was also an immediate behavior. The present study indicates that effective humor is an immediate behavior as well, thus increasing the scope of the class of immediate behaviors.

The present research also responds to the recent calls of many communication scholars (e.g., Croucher & Kelly, 2019; Kelly & Westerman, 2020; McEwan et al., 2018; Violanti et al., 2018) to replicate the findings. The field of communication has been reticent to publish previously reported findings which has made it difficult for researchers to complete meta-analyses, thus stunting the growth of knowledge in the field in terms of both measurement development and moderator identification. The replication of solidarity, immediate behaviors, perceived immediacy, and loyalty results in addition to the novel findings on humor and burnout primes researchers for a future dataset looking into measurement error and moderation among these variables through meta-analysis.

Implications for the Workforce

While immediate behaviors, solidarity, and humor demonstrated by a supervisor are not a panacea for burnout and perceived immediacy, they are best practices. Reiterating the recommendations of MacDonald et al. (2019) and Kelly and MacDonald (2019), supervisors who wish to develop solidarity with their subordinates should engage in interpersonal conversations with subordinates in order to foster rapport. Benign conversations such as weekend plans or weather are good places to start. Also echoing the recommendations of Kelly and Westerman (2014) and Kelly et al. (2018), supervisors who wish to practice more immediate behaviors with their subordinates can utilize the list of behaviors commonly perceived as immediate (i.e., smiling, eye contact, relaxed body posture, using vocal inflection).

For supervisors who wish to increase their humor, recommendations are a bit more complex. Supervisors who wish to use humor must do so while maintaining professionalism and avoid teasing humor that may be perceived as bullying (Keltner et al., 2001). As Cundall (2019b) argues, one of the main mistakes people make with humor in the workplace is wrongfully assuming the goal of humor. The goal of humor at work is not to actually achieve laugh out loud status, or, rather, this is rarely the goal. What is desirable, what is an appropriate response for humor in the

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workplace, is what more often happens when individuals type 'lol' into their device. What typically happens is a soft chuckle, or pronounced exhalation, or a half smile. The workplace is not a comedy club. It is work. But individuals, employees, and supervisors alike need to know that the space is amenable to laughter and levity (Cundall, 2019a). Here are three places a supervisor who wishes to be more humorous may start:

Visual Humor: One of the first ways a supervisor can begin incorporating humor is through the use of cartoons, memes, or funny, non-serious images (Cundall, 2019b). If an employee were to see a non-suggestive, humorous picture, prominently displayed in the company break-room, or better still, a supervisor's office, that employee will begin to understand that laughter and humor are not anathema, at least in the eyes of the person who made the display prominent.

Humorous Artifacts: Next, supervisors who wish to increase their humor can encourage a modicum of playfulness in outfits (Warren & McGraw, 2016). For men, this typically means a colorful or playful tie, pocket square, or socks. For women, this may mean a playful scarf or jewelry. Perhaps a day on a recurring basis, weekly or monthly, that encourages creativity in attire could be developed. Of course, the local human resources folks may need to be involved, but invite them to play along as well and not simply act as "workplace correctness" monitors--a seriously unfun job.

Teasing Safely: Although teasing may be among the riskiest of supervisory behaviors, it can be done safely through the aid of immediate behaviors, specifically paralinguistics. The differentiating factor between bullying teasers and prosocial ones is the delivery. According to Keltner et al. (2001), teasing when accompanied by extreme changes in paralinguistics, is almost always recognized as attempted humor rather than bullying.

Humor at the workplace involves some level of risk--almost any behavior does (Lytle, 2007). The primary concern for supervisors is to avoid mixing humor and aggression. Humor that is high in aggression, prone to ridicule, etc., is less helpful in creating good work environments and most likely to be misinterpreted (Martin et al., 2003). Ultimately, supervisors must be cognizant of their audience. As the results of this study indicate, subordinates will not be responding directly to an article of humor used by their supervisor, but rather their perception of that humor.

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Limitations

This study was limited in its reliance on survey data to determine sequencing of variables. Although the patterns in data relationships are consistent with causality, causality cannot be determined without true behavioral data. Future behavioral research with these variables would expand the current body of knowledge. This study was also limited in the minor misfit displayed in the measures, particularly the burnout measure, which could not conservatively be respecified to remove the misfit.

Conclusions

The data reported support a number of conclusions. Firstly, this research supports the inclusion of effective humor in the collection of immediate behaviors. However, the data also reinforce previous findings that show that the immediate and solidarity behaviors are not directly related to outcomes like loyalty, rather they are mediated variables: variables mediated by perceived immediacy and burnout. This indicates that the relationships involved among factors like immediate behaviors and resultant loyalty are more complex, more nuanced. This higher level of complexity, and the ways in which certain immediate behaviors might not guarantee a particular salutary outcome (e.g., a supervisor telling a good joke and then creating higher levels of employee loyalty) indicates that the use of any immediate behavior should be cautioned with the warning that the relationship between the cause and the desired effect is not as direct as the earlier literature may have implied. Thus, supervisors who wish to increase subordinates' loyalty may do so through the fine-tuning of their immediate, solidarity, and humorous behaviors, but must be cognizant of the perceptual filters that may change the meaning in intended and received messages.

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