Laughing in harmony: Humour and Confucian relationships in South Korean organizations

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy in Management, The University of Auckland, 2017.

ABSTRACT

Humour is commonly perceived as a phenomenon that brings happiness to people. However, such a singularly positive depiction of humour can be problematic in different cultural contexts, particularly those influenced by Confucianism. Yet, organizational studies have not fully examined how these different underlying cultural philosophies influence the way people communicate and behave.

Undertaken in South Korean organizations, this doctoral study contributes empirical data examining the relationship between humour and Confucianism in South Korean workplaces. In particular, it investigates the formality and hierarchical relationship structures which shape interpersonal relationships in South Korean organizations. The research was conducted in three South Korean companies from different industries. A qualitative-method approach was used, and included participant observation, interviews, and document collection. A period of one month of full immersion in each of the South Korean companies was undertaken.

The findings show that humour provides an insight into the changing values of individuals within South Korean workplaces, who appear to be in process of moving from the traditional Confucian values and relationships towards more Westernized, individualist ideals. The Confucian values of formality create an underlying assumption that humour is unsuitable in an organizational context. This assumption often leads to a negative impression of humour users being held, especially for those of lower hierarchical status. Therefore, the use of humour differs depending on the hierarchical position of the individual.

However, humour is still an important part of modern organizational life and often used to develop interpersonal relationships which transcend organizational hierarchy. This is more commonly instigated by individuals of higher hierarchical status. Humour also helps to maintain and support Confucian values of harmony by protecting the *chemyon* (face) of individuals, and performs a balancing role within the culturally changing workplace- where traditional Confucian values are being challenged by Western influences, particularly among younger employees. Organizational members perceive that humour used in Confucian based relationships therefore create further uncertainty and some emotional burden on those of lower hierarchical status. Examining the use of humour in South Korean workplaces helps to explain the emerging distortions of traditional Confucianism and the changing relationships of organizational members.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to show my gratitude to all the people that has given me support in completing this thesis. First, I thank my supervisors Dr. Barbara Plester and Associate Prof. Brigid Carroll for their help, with both their academic expertise and social support. I feel very privileged to have you both as my supervisors, and would not have finished this thesis without you.

I would also like to show my appreciation to Prof. HanWoo Kim, Prof. SienHo Han, Dr. JongCheol Kim and SNUAC for providing support during my research period in Korea.

Nevertheless, a huge thank you to Prof. Kerr Inkson for proofreading this thesis. Also, thank you Prof. Richard Philips for your Asian studies expertise, and Associate Prof. Chellie Spiller and Dr. Peter Smith for your advice on methodology.

I thank my family, DoHyun, JinKyung, MinJee, and Cherry for taking care of me, and putting up with my tantrums at home. Also, many thanks to Ms. JongHwa for looking out for me while I was in Korea, along with SunKyung, InSoo, SangWook, YoungHoon, and MiKyung.

My study-coffee mates, Lena, JungMin, Miriam, and Eli, I would not have survived without our semi academic coffee sessions.

Lastly, I thank God for all that has happened during this PhD experience.

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GLOSSARY

Gong-ja	Confucius
Hyung	Older brother, addressing older male by a younger male
Jang-nan	Horseplay
Mom-gag	Slapstick
Nim	Sir or madam. Most formal title used towards an individual of relationally higher status
Nong-dam	Verbal jokes
Nunchi	Wits, sense, reading the atmosphere
Obba	Older brother, addressing older male by a younger female
Seongrihak	Korean Neo-Confucianism
Ssi	Mr, Mrs, Miss, or Ms. A formal title used towards an individual of relationally lower or similar status
Sunbae	Senior. More formal title used towards an individual of relationally higher status, especially within educational institutions
Unni	Older sister, addressing older female by a younger female

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Chapter one will introduce this current research, by discussing the reasons behind investigating the topic of organizational humour and Confucianism. This current research will be justified by explaining why humour may be an important phenomenon to explore within workplaces, and then discussing the reasons behind conducting research in South Korean (hereinafter Korean) organizations. The research question will also be explained in detail, and the chapter concludes with an outline for structure of this thesis.

1.1 Justification for the study

1.1.1 Why organizational humour?

Workplaces are becoming more diversified, and people of different cultural backgrounds need to interact and work together more frequently. Many people are actively seeking jobs overseas, and migrating to different countries, for the purposes of education, career development, or for personal preferences. This trend has led to many people being multilingual and multicultural. While it may be possible to learn a language in a short period of time, learning a culture is more difficult and complex.

Organizations bring together groups of individuals from diverse backgrounds, and within the workplace different individuals are required to communicate and work together. Because relationships between individuals can develop more easily through fun communicative experiences (Ayres, 1983), having a sense of humour is considered to be a favourable personal trait. This means that humour is often (misleadingly) perceived as something nice that always brings happiness and joy to those involved. This expectation towards humour means that individuals frequently use humour for the purpose of creating a sense of togetherness and to increase group cohesion in the workplace (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Similarly, many organizational humour studies are based on the assumption that humour is perceived to be a positive process between organizational members (i.e. Francis, 1994; Vinton, 1989; Collinson, 2002; Romero & Pescosolido, 2008).

From a management perspective, the idea of humour can be considered as a way to control employee behaviour (Minsky, 1980), and achieve multiple benefits for their workers, such as relieving stress (Morreall, 1991), increasing group cohesion (Brown & Levinson, 1978), and facilitating creativity (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). However, humour is complex and may also cause aggression (Smith & Powell, 1988) or cynicism (Fleming, 2005). While such negative outcomes may be achieved intentionally, the contextual nature of humour means that it is also easy for communicators to experience unintended outcomes. This is because humour is a socially constructed process which is sensitive to the cultural values of the communicating individuals (Plester, 2007).

Humour is a universal phenomenon experienced in all cultures and organizations (Alden, Hoyer, & Lee, 1993). However, with exception of a few studies such as those of Collinson, (1988), Grugulis (2002), and Plester and Orams (2008), organizational studies do not examine in-depth the cultural aspects of humour processes in the workplace. Even in the above studies where organizational humour is investigated on its own, the context in which humour processes are examined tends to be limited to Western organizations. For example, Collinson's (1988) study was based on a factory in England, and Plester and Orams (2008) investigated four New Zealand companies. This means that there is a limited understanding of organizational humour within diverse cultural contexts, where the basic underlying assumptions about humour may be different as present studies are primarily in Western contexts.

The idea of humour is approached quite differently in Confucian-based cultures. Confucian philosophy demeans the value of humour (Yue, 2014), which is thought to harm the hierarchical and unequal relationships between individuals. The idea of maintaining harmony and interdependence is important in Confucian society (Chan, 2008), and humour is perceived to interfere with this objective. Although these societal values of Confucian traditions are an important part of relationships and communication between individuals, this does not mean that humour is excluded in Confucian-based cultures and organizations. For example, a study by Song, Hale and Rao (2005) shows that South Korean workers use humour in business negotiations. This means that organizations within Confucian-based societies do use humour, at least in business negotiations and meetings. However, it is unclear how such organizations perceive the use of humour, and what impact humour has between the organizational members. It seems that in organizational contexts the societal Confucian philosophy is expected to create different expectations towards the use of humour.

This contrasts with Western organizational contexts, and raises the question of how humour may or may not be used in Confucian-based workplaces.

The growth of Asian markets has increased the need to understand how organizations in non-Western contexts operate, especially how their organizational relationships differ from those in Western workplaces. Rowley (2013) highlights the need to understand the contextual influence on non-Western organizations such as Korean organizations. This is because many of these organizations adopt Western organizational systems and practices, yet the organizational culture and relationships maintain Confucian values and creates incongruence (Rowley, 2013). It is now insufficient to assume that Westernized organizational practices and processes work in the same manner in such different cultural contexts, thus it may be risky to use humour without fully understanding its cultural impacts (Alden et al., 1993). Therefore, this study aims to explore humour in Korean workplaces. Korea is an East Asian country which embeds Confucianism as a part of its wider societal values (Deuchler, 1992). The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between organizational humour and Confucianism in Korea, especially within the unequal relationships between organizational members.

1.1.2 Why South Korea?

The Korean economy has developed rapidly since its industrialization in the 1960s (Amsden, 1992). Many Korean organizations such as Samsung and LG operate on a global scale, and South Korea has also become an attractive market for foreign companies to enter and operate in. However, because Korea is a small country located between China and Japan, Korea and Korean organizations are often generalized as collectivistic, and therefore similar to other East Asian cultures (Cha, 1994). This generalization means that despite the increased rate of business operations of Korean organizations (with the rest of the world), Korea and its organizations are not fully explored in organizational studies. In 2010, McKinsey and Company selected Korea as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, yet it is the least understood. It is overshadowed by the big global players China, Japan, and Russia, which limits our understanding of the South Korean economy and its organizations ('South Korea: Finding its place on the world stage', 2010). Although Confucianism is not the only philosophy shaping the culture of Korea, rituals and language reinforce the strong influence of Confucianism on the Korean people (Stowell, 2003). In fact, of the East Asian countries

that have historically been influenced by Confucianism, Korean society most displays Confucian values (Deuchler, 1992).

Confucian influences are displayed in society-wide trends such as the strong desire for achievement in education (Lee, 2006). Korea has the highest rate of tertiary education for the age group of 25 to 34 years, with 67.7% of the population having tertiary education ('Education at a glance: OECD indicators', 2014). The strong influence of Confucian traditions spills into the organizational context: while Korean organizations adopt many modernized (mainly Western) systems and structures, traditional values - including those from Confucian backgrounds - still remain strong in Korean people and influence the way they interact and communicate (Rowley & Bae, 2003).

1.1.3 Why humour and Confucianism in South Korean workplaces?

Although there are some studies that examine the different perceptions towards humour in different cultural contexts, these do not fully explore the cultural impact of using humour in these diverse workplaces. For example, Yue, Jiang, Lu, and Hiranandani (2016) introduces the different cross cultural perspectives to humour in Western and Eastern cultures, but do not goes into discuss the depth of how these are different and what the implications may be for using humour. Studies such as Yue et al. (2016) suggest an expectation that Confucian cultures do not favour humour in social interactions in comparison to Western cultures. However, this does not meant that humour is excluded from all conversations of Confucian-influenced individuals. Therefore, it is important to explore how humour is used and impacts the communicators through observations, to capture the real-life situations in using humour.

Confucianism emphasizes the value of unequal relationships between people. The hierarchy resulting from these unequal relationships is believed to be the key to maintaining peace and harmony in society (Yao, 2000). This belief is reinforced in everyday communication such as the use of honorifics and body language that is in accord with the relational hierarchy between the communicating individuals (McBrian, 1978). Such formalities involved in the communication between individuals are considered to be important rituals that are necessary to maintain the status differences between the individuals (Shim, Kim, & Martin, 2008). In the organizational context this sense of hierarchy goes even further than it does in the wider society, and the formal structures of organizational positions provide another form of

hierarchy to organizational members. Thus, in Korean organizations the Confucian values such as harmony, unequal relationships, and formality are maintained.

According to Confucian values and assumptions, ideally humour should not be used in Korean organizations. However, humour still exists, and is believed to break the hierarchical boundaries imposed by Confucianism. Cooper (2008) states that laughing together through humour allows individuals to go temporarily beyond the status differences between individuals by enjoying the same moment, thus developing the quality of interpersonal relationships between organizational members. However, this idea of levelling, even temporarily, the relationship between those in different hierarchical positions (Cooper, 2008) conflicts with the underlying value of unequal relationship structures in Confucianism (Deuchler, 1992). This means that humour may be perceived as something which damages the harmony pursued by Confucianism, which can only be achieved by structuring individuals in a hierarchical relationship Yet harmony is one of the most significant values followed by Koreans of all age groups (Zhang, Lin, Nonaka, & Beom, 2005).

While these conflicting ideas are believed to exist in the interactions within Korean organizations (Song et al., 2005), it is unclear how such Confucian values influence the use of humour. Understanding the relationship between humour and Confucianism in Korean organizations is important in exploring the different and changing nature of organizational relationships in the workplace, and will help to provide insights into the complexities of organizational humour in different cultural contexts. As the globalizing business environment pushes the need to understand contextual influences on organizations, understanding Asian work contexts such as that of Korea is important for the future work of both professionals and researchers. Therefore, the contrasting ideas of humour and Confucianism guide the research questions that determine the overall direction of this thesis.

1.2 Research question

This is an exploratory study with the overarching research question: *What is the relationship between Confucianism and humour in organizations, and what might this relationship tell us about, not just South Korean organizations, but the role of organizational humour in a global world?*

The sub-questions for the study are:

1. What is the relationship between the Confucian value of harmony and organizational humour?

2. What is the relationship between the Confucian unequal relationship structures and organizational humour?

3. What is the relationship between the Confucian value of formality and organizational humour?

The research method was selected based on the exploratory nature of the research questions. A qualitative research method was selected, as each of these questions aim to investigate the complexities of organizational humour and Confucian values. The aim of providing different stories of how Confucian values influence humour in Korean organizations is achieved through an in-depth examination of the use of humour in three different Korean companies from different industries. These stories or data were collected through participant observation, interviews, and document collection. Using multiple methods to collect data helps to reflect the phenomena in a rich contextualized way (Lee, Collier, & Cullen, 2007).

1.3 Structure of thesis

The structure of this thesis is arranged into seven chapters. Chapter One introduces the purpose of this research and how the overall thesis is structured, by describing each chapter and its contents. Chapter Two provides the basis of this research through a review of literature from the relevant fields of organizational studies, humour, and Confucianism. This chapter is divided into three parts. By examining the existing studies on organizational humour, Confucianism in Korea, and humour in Confucian contexts, this chapter helps to construct the theoretical background to the phenomenon of interest- humour in Korean organizations. Chapter Three discusses the research methodology and clearly shows how this research was conducted. Three different methods were used to collect data across three Korean companies, and these are participant observation, interviews, and document collection, and each method is discussed in this chapter. The data was analysed using thematic analysis to create three themes. By justifying why and how this research was conducted, this chapter provides transparency in the research process and also philosophical support to the resulting research. Chapter Four illustrates the research context by discussing each of the participant companies in detail. This chapter contextualizes the data which helps

to understand how humour is used in each of the companies. It discusses how the nature of the relationship between the organizational members may influence such use of humour in the workplaces. Chapter Five presents the findings for this study, and discusses each of the themes identified using examples from interviews and observations. Chapter Six discusses the results from the previous chapter, and details how the findings extend or present new ideas in comparison to the existing literature. Chapter Seven concludes this thesis by summarizing the overall research, and outlining the contributions and implications, as well as indicating directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the existing literature in the two broad areas of humour and Confucianism. The chapter is divided into six sections to build towards, and support, the current study's research question about workplace humour and Confucianism in Korean organizations. The first section reviews the organizational humour literature, examining classic theories of humour and the different roles of humour in workplaces. The second section examines humour as a social process and how workplace humour affects organizations and their members. It further highlights the importance of context in humour processes and how this may affect the quality of interpersonal relationships in the organization. The third section reviews different approaches to the concept of culture, especially in cross-cultural research, and the fourth introduces and examines Confucianism as both a philosophy and an aspect of culture, outlining both the origins of Confucianism and its adaptation into the Korean society in order to explain how it is now manifested within Korean organizations. The fifth section examines the idea of humour in Confucian organizational contexts, thus highlighting a gap in the literature. The sixth section summarises the chapter.

2.1 Organizational humour

2.1.1 Defining humour

Despite humour's universal existence across all cultures and groups, it is an ambiguous concept to define (Alden et al., 1993). Numerous attempts by scholars from various disciplines have been made to define humour in a single framework, but no universal definition has been formulated (McGhee, 1979). Humour is a complex and inconsistent phenomenon which includes feeling of amusement, the evocation of laughter, and motivation to engage these processes, which conceptually allow humour to be viewed in multiple dimensions in the forms of a stimulus, response, or disposition (Plester, 2007). La Fave, Haddad, and Maesen (1976) suggest that in general, the essential ingredient of a humour theory may be a perceived incongruity that creates a momentary feeling of happiness. However, the positive terms used by La Fave et al. (1976) to describe humour are misleading

because they result in the concept being perceived as a purely 'good' phenomenon. It is important to note that humour also involves a dark side, which helps us to better understand humanity (Morreall, 1983). This current research adopts Plester's (2007) multi-dimensional definition of humour, where humour is a form of social interaction between individuals which may or may not be engaged with an intention to amuse and evoke laughter.

This broad definition of humour is important in this current research, as organizations consist of communities of people, each with its own distinct culture and environment (Morgan, 2006). A diverse group of individuals from various backgrounds gather and interact, crafting a wide range of experiences and emotions (Plester, 2007). The diverse backgrounds and perceptions of these organizational members mean that humour used between them may also take different forms, and be interpreted in multiple ways. While humour generally helps to relieve boredom (Roy, 1959) and stress (Morreall, 1991) for individuals, it may also create adverse effects for others in the workplace. In this current research, therefore, defining humour broadly is necessary in order to capture and investigate what is considered as humour (where it may not be humour to others) and its impacts in the studied workplaces.

2.1.2 Humour theories

Theories of humour date back to the philosophical ideas of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates (Billig, 2005). Although the underlying reasons why people experience humour cannot be explained by one theory, a broad literature has evolved from sociology, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology, that identifies theories of humour. The major theoretical perspectives on humour are built around the concepts of superiority, relief, and incongruity. Superiority and relief theories explain the motivation to express humour, while incongruity theory focuses on the nature of the objects of humour (Cooper, 2008). Humour is a complex process, and can only be explained through a combination of these ideas rather than a single theory.

2.1.2.1 Superiority theory

Superiority theory is the oldest stream of interpretation in humour, and originates from the works of Hobbes (1840). He suggested that when people see another person's misfortune,

stupidity, or clumsiness, they gain a momentary feeling of superiority, because they are not themselves going through that unfortunate experience. This provokes laughter at the victim. Similarly, Aristotle stated that we feel superior towards ugly or inferior individuals, and thus laugh because of the joy created in the process; and Socrates (reported by Plato) stated that the ridiculous was characterized by a display of self-ignorance (Billig, 2005). Raskin (2012) categorizes this theory of humour as socio-behavioural, as this group of theories uses forms of disparagement in evoking humour and laughter. Similarly, Bergson (1911) describes humour as a rigidity of body or character. In his works the social process between the joker and the victim is absent, but the laughter source is highlighted. An example of this is laughing at a man who tries to walk on ice but continuously fails and slips. Bergson states that the humour is not limited to the physical aspect of the scenario, but the focus is on the inappropriateness of laughing at someone in such situations. The actions are restricted and mechanical, as if following a prescribed programme, such as when the object of the humour walks off the ice, and into the water. The victim's failure to walk on the ice arouses the feeling of superiority, and creates incongruity to the viewer and evokes amusement (Buckley, 2005).

Most sexist or ethnic humour is derived from this perspective, where uncommon or minority groups are targeted for mockery, to enforce the social mainstream's norms (Fine, 1976). In this interpretation of humour, humour relies on making fun of a perceived weakness of the target, but within a play frame where people know that it is only a joke (Gruner, 2000). A definite boundary exists to divide something which is funny from other serious matters (Raskin, 2012), but the limits and tolerances are ambiguous. This is due to fact that this boundary is formed by the individual's perception, which is driven by their culture (Plester, 2009a). Since an individual's culture is unique, with multiple sources of background such as ethnic, religious, organizational, and other groups, it is difficult to assume the limits of one's boundary in identifying whether humour used is perceived to be funny or offensive.

Works by Hobbes (1840) and Freud (1960) state that laughter is a rebellious activity: these authors propose that humour may be used negatively to ridicule others, which contrasts with the common perception of humour as a form of positive enjoyment. However, this negative form of humour can also be used upon oneself as the object of laughter (Gruner, 1978). Although this disparaging form of humour is most frequently used towards others, sometimes jokers voluntarily display their own weaknesses to gain certain benefits. Alongside causing enjoyment to others, humour enhances the disparager to others, such as being represented as a

person with a sense of humour who can recognize their own shortcomings, and can seem more confident in themselves by doing so (Stocking & Zillmann, 1976). On the other hand, utilizing negative humour on the self can be used to avoid potential aggression. Employing aggressive humour against oneself or the group one belongs to sets up a joking atmosphere which avoids the engagement of other forms of negative communication. Since the aggression is directed towards the speaker and their own group, nobody else is victimized outside of the humour shared. Furthermore, degrading the self discourages others from doing so, thus protecting the joker from potentially humorous attacks by external forces (Boskin & Dorinson, 1985).

Humour based on superiority can often create discomfort for those subjected to it, as this theory allows humour to operate as a means of correcting social behaviours (Bergson, 1911; Butler, 2015). This form of discipline (through laughter) was illustrated by the royal fool throughout the ages as one of its functions (Duncan, 1962). People laughed at foolish antics which in fact represented the behaviours of beliefs which were unacceptable in society (Apte, 1985). By laughing, individuals publicly acknowledged that the behaviours and beliefs were socially unacceptable. This also caused them to feel superior or triumphant in contrast to the inferior (fool) and programmed them to believe that they would not be in the inferior individual's position by behaving the same way. Reinforcing unity among group members and increasing the feeling of belonging are also results of the feeling of superiority, as laughing at problematic behaviours in a group invokes a sense of togetherness (Duncan, 1982). However, the distinction between disparaging and non-disparaging humour is based upon knowledge of the victim (Gruner, 1978).

Disparagement theory explains the aggressive humour used by framing the joker as the 'hero' of the scenario (Wicker, Barron, & Willis, 1980). Rapp (1951) portrays the expression of humour as having its origins from the feeling of hostile glory gained from defeating an enemy or rival in a battle. This highlights a dark side of human nature, supported by the study of Cantor and Zillman (1973) that found that there was greater appreciation of humour when the joke was aimed at someone whom the listener disliked. Disparaging humour suggests that the key to creating a successful joke is careful target selection is, and that the joker must be careful when directing the joke within an unfamiliar set of individuals because it may signal dislike between the communicators, thus distorting interpersonal relationships or even causing aggression between the joker and the victim(Smith & Powell, 1988). Therefore, disparaging humour's humour function is only appropriately fulfilled when the

humour is used within a closely bonded in-group, or directed towards disliked out-group members.

2.1.2.2 Relief theory

Relief theory focuses on the feeling that a person experiences when engaging in humour. Derived from the psychoanalytical group of theories, the relief theory was mostly developed from the works of Freud (1960). Freud (1905) suggests that 'the human condition is marked by self-deception, and that we wish to conceal from ourselves knowledge about the dangerous psychological forces that guide our daily conduct' (Billig, 2005, p. 139). He argues that despite our effort to recognize a joke as simply what it is, it actually has hidden meanings and desires veiled behind its framework. These hidden meanings are created from the conflict between individual desire and social order, an interpretation that contrasts to Bergson's (1911) analysis of laughter. The relief theory suggests that humour reduces psychological tension, which is often caused by individuals' fears (Boeree, 1998). Nervous energy is released through laughter, where the suppressed desires (that individuals fear to express out in the open) are indirectly revealed to relieve the tension. Freud (1905) argues that these suppressed desires are embedded in all human beings, and that we inherit the instincts of sexuality and aggression that promise to afford us the most intense pleasures. However, because these instincts are fundamentally anti-social, they are dangerous. Therefore, in order to live socially, individuals fear to reveal these thoughts, and must learn to repress such desires. Freud (1905) based his theory on the person's unconscious conflict in the process of unfavoured desire repression, where laughter shows how unconscious motives might be at play.

Under this relief perspective of humour, the experience of humour and laughter is caused from the sensing of reduction in stress (Berlyne, 1972; John Morreall, 1983; Shurcliff, 1968). Inappropriate impulses related to sexuality and aggression are released using laughter as a disguise, in order to elude guilt, and laughter functions as a type of defence mechanism by a person to avoid acknowledging the real reason behind laughing at certain jokes, and to keep face (Freud, 1905). This unconscious desire is embedded in the works of relief theorists, including Douglas (2002) who states that whereas people usually control their actions according to social expectations, freedom can be achieved by using humour as a method of unleashing some parts of our unconscious. The satisfaction gained through such actions can

be related back to superiority theory, and humour cannot be explored under a single stream of theoretical perspectives. For example, racial humour may provide the feeling of superiority to the joker, and at the same time the person's aggression towards a certain ethnic group may be released in a safe manner, whereas expressing such racial discrimination in any other way would be socially inappropriate. However, where this form of racial discrimination may avoid an immediate clash between the associated groups, it is still politically incorrect and may become a source of future conflict.

2.1.2.3 Incongruity theory

Incongruity theory focuses on what brings humour out, where absurdity is created between an object or perception, and reality (Alden et al., 1993). This cognitive-perceptual theory of humour relates to the concept of incongruity in humour (Bergson, 1911). Raskin (1985) argues that when cognitive or structural contrasts between expected and unexpected situations are included in a joke, then enjoyment can be felt by the recipients. However, if the violation is too distant from the commonly accepted norm of the recipient, it can be threatening to that person (McGhee, 1979). When the incongruity is resolved, humour is achieved as a result, but this also means that when the problem is not solved, confusion replaces the intended humorous situation (Suls, 1983). The incongruity-resolution theory suggests that a humorous response depends on a quick understanding of the joke, where the joking atmosphere created would show the intention of the joke and facilitate a suitable mood for the listener (Suls, 1983). Under this perspective, achieving humour between individuals with cultural differences may be difficult, as the variation between people in values and norms distort the conditions needed for the incongruence to be understood. This means that a joker must have knowledge of the participant's cultural background in order to match the incongruous point of laughter (Alden et al., 1993). Researchers such as Suls (1972) and Shultz (1976) emphasize the importance of incongruity and resolution for humour, while Nerhardt (1977) believes that just having an incongruity is sufficient. A study by Suls (1983) displays both sides of this debate, where some participants found mere perception of an incongruity humorous, but for others it caused confusion and frustration. However, incongruity followed by resolution was viewed as funnier than incongruity alone in more instances. Therefore, both incongruity and resolution should be considered in humour

research, as different studies show various methods through which the humour process 'works' between the communicators.

2.1.2.4 Comprehension-Elaboration theory

Comprehension-elaboration theory is a more recent theory of humour which involves how people evaluate whether humour is amusing or not (Cooper, 2008). Under this theory, individuals will only find humour amusing if certain conditions are fulfilled. Firstly, the level of comprehension difficulty of the humour is considered, then the cognitive elaboration the recipient displays after understanding the humour (Wyer, 2003) . This means that the reason why people find some humour amusing and some not, takes context into account. Therefore, depending on the social appropriateness of the humour and the potential scale of offensiveness to related groups, the level of amusement will differ (Cooper, 2008).

The comprehension-elaboration model provides a way to understand how contextual cues influence the appreciation of humour quite independently of the structural properties of humour (such as incongruity and resolution). Nevertheless, this approach provides insights into the observation that the processing of humour appears to be automatic and spontaneous (Suls, 1983). Leventhal (1980) proposed that the linkage between expressive cues (facial expression) and evaluative reactions is normally automatic, but is disrupted if the person deliberately focuses attention on the on-going response. Thus, it follows that humour should be lost by self-consciousness, and indeed experimental data show that deliberate attention to one's laughter diminishes enjoyment of the experience (Cupchik & Leventhal, 1974). For humour to result under these circumstances, the comprehension of joke material must be a spontaneous, almost automatic process. Furthermore, it follows that explaining a joke will never be as funny as processing it naturally. This means that humour shared in a homogenous group, compared to that shared in a culturally heterogeneous group, will have a higher chance of success, as the conditions of comprehensions become more complex in such contexts.

2.1.3 Humour styles

Different styles of humour can be used in different situations, as humour is highly influenced by the context. Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray and Weir (2003) first developed a measure of four humour styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive humour. Affiliative humour involves a slightly self-defeating, affirming, and non-threatening style of humour communication, while self-enhancing humour is more focused on the individual. Humour in this sense acts as a stress reduction method to perceive life positively, and creates positive self-esteem and favourable emotions. On the other hand, self-defeating humour involves ridiculing oneself excessively to amuse other people, and often leads to depression, hostility, anxiety, and other negative emotions. Aggressive humour belittles, ridicules, and excessively teases others. This particular style of humour is believed to improve self-perception at someone else's expense, which relates back to the superiority theory of humour. Romero and Cruthirds (2006) later developed a fifth category, the mild-aggressive style of humour, which is a more passive form of aggressive humour style that provides a mid-point in the humour style list between self-defeating and aggressive humour.

While different styles of humour can determine how the audience reacts to the joke, the purpose of the humour can be another important factor in how the joke is accepted (or rejected). Freud's (1905) observations suggest a broader categorization of humour, which states that the jokes are made with either innocent or specific purposes. Innocent humour constitutes of the joke being a joke in itself and serving no particular aim. In contrast, *tendentious* humour serves an aim, and tends to be expressed in a more hostile way. Tendentious jokes produce much greater laughter than do innocent ones, due to the hostile content and the manner which the joke is delivered. This is linked to the classic theory of superiority, where humour serves the purpose of making the joker feel superior over the victim, and often 'jokingly attacks' the target in a socially inappropriate way. For example, sexual or racist jokes can evoke extreme ends to the reactions by the recipient, depending on the context and the position of the target (Billig, 2005). Similarly, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) describe humour as either 'pure' or 'applied'. Pure humour is equivalent to the concept of innocent humour, made with the intention of entertaining, while applied humour is used to express a message. The fact that there is an embedded aim to the humour used is similar to the concept of tendentious humour, but Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) exclude hostility from their conceptualization of applied humour. Therefore, the intention behind

which style of humour is used and the method of delivery determines the functions in which it may serve between communicators.

2.1.4 Functions of humour

Humour often acts as a communication medium between individuals, where differing perspectives are shared through laughter, and this works as a disclosing behaviour to help parties become more familiar with one another. The psychological gap between the individuals may be reduced as humour blurs the layers within a social construct, such as organizational hierarchy (Cooper, 2008). Brown and Levinson (1978) identify this function of humour in relation to the positive face strategy, where the exchange of humour eases the process of communication and individuals may express solidarity towards others. Furthermore, a positive self-image can be created by sharing a joke for the purpose of establishing common ground amongst a group of people. However, humour can have negative functions. Within an organizational context, humour can function to challenge management (Critchley, 2007), or to gain power within the group. Hay (2000) suggests that when a person initiates a joke in order to share a common idea with others, this process can place the joker in a more powerful status position within the group.

In general, the benefits of using humour are known to include the physical benefits of laughter which cause the same impact as exercising, leading to health benefits, while psychologically the use of humour can vent anger and frustration that might otherwise be destructive (Baron, 1978). In a social context, Martineau (1972) discusses the three very broad functions of consensus, conflict, and control. Humour can assist a group to reach consensus in a smoother manner than when they address an issue directly. The problem is communicated within a joking atmosphere and individuals become more open to new ideas. This relates back to the relief theory where the release of tension created by the differing ideas prevents potential aggression and increases openness. Burawoy's (1979) study showed that when 'black and white' workers were required to co-operate regardless of the racial prejudice present between the two groups, humour diluted the aggression and assisted in minimizing the racial hostility. In order to maintain social order, agreement between the groups could be reached by releasing the social frustration and expressing conflict in a humorous way. However, joking does not always provide a shortcut to consensus and the achievement of harmony.

Another function of conflict is conveyed in 'aimed' humour (Freud, 1905), where the type of humour used is usually aggressive and has an underlying meaning. The jokes made in this context challenge the current undesirable situation, without engaging in an all-out-war. This is commonly observed in organizational contexts, where employees may use humour to challenge management (Plester & Orams, 2008). Using humour in the appropriate context, allows the communicator to manipulate the perspectives of another without a high risk of engaging open conflict. If the situation is taken too seriously, conflict can be avoided by claiming it was a joke (Powell, 1988). Therefore, a form of 'resistance' may be created through humour, in order to express disagreements or different perspectives between the communicators (Butler, 2015).

Humour also may help to manage resistance and achieve control within the group. In Collinson's (1988) study of shop floor workers, men were grouped into different work divisions which exchanged veiled insults, in the form of ambiguous 'piss-takes' or 'ribbing'. These actions were in fact a part of the workers' strategy to mutually control and discipline the other group. The brutal jokes acted as a social control over peculiar individuals who refused to bend in the power game. However, humour is a complex process, and the communicators may not achieve consensus, conflict, or control as a result of the humour used. Therefore, while humour may be an effective communication medium, it may also create unintentional outcomes, especially within organizational contexts where individuals are artificially grouped together for work purposes.

2.1.5 Role of organizational humour

From an organizational perspective, humour can be viewed as a useful skill for managers to use to successfully interrupt unproductive thinking patterns (Minsky, 1980). New perspectives (suggested by the management) may be quickly adopted through the use of humour, which promotes innovation and creativity, resulting in better problem solving techniques (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki 1987). However, humour may be interpreted differently by each individual, and may cause offence regardless of the intentions of the humour initiator. This means that the use of humour within the increasingly diversified workplace (Quinn, 2000) may be particularly difficult for managers. For example, Kalliny, Cruthirds, and Minor's (2006) study of different managerial humour styles used in American, Egyptian, and Lebanese cultures shows the differentiated humour used and accepted in these

contexts. These differences imply that managers must be careful in using humour, as humour that is effective in one cultural context may not work in another context, and may heighten ambiguity and confusion.

From the employees' perspective, the role of humour within the workplace includes challenging management, boundary alteration, culture development, and relief provision (Plester & Orams, 2008). Organizational members may use humour to challenge the management and formal principles of the organization (Mulkay, 1988). Joking messages allow organizational members to challenge management, but the joker is protected by the frameworks of humour (De Vries, 1990). At the same time, the employee who initiated the joke may become a hero amongst their colleagues, and gain peer support and popularity as they were able to contest the authority of an issue which all workers wanted to address (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999).

Humour also helps to blur the boundaries within the workplace. Humour creates an informal world outside the strictures of managerial control (Douglas, 2002; Linstead, 1985) and allows organizational members to touch upon sensitive issues which may not be discussed using other forms of communication (De Vries, 1990). Therefore, the informal nature of humour allows organizational members to challenge and change the formal structure (Strömberg & Karlsson, 2009) by blurring the boundaries of formality within the workplace.

The function of culture development may be accomplished by using humour to share and confirm the mutual assumptions in the organizational group (Plester & Orams, 2008). The boundary between what is and is not appropriate as a source of humour is set by the joker, who may 'push the boundaries' and define the social behaviours of a workgroup (Wenger, 1998). Through this process, the joking individual is able to establish a high status within the group (Boland & Hoffman, 1983), and help enhance the social bonds between members (Plester & Orams, 2008).

Lastly, the function of relief involves the joker releasing the anti-social urges for the self and the group (Happe, 1996). The stress may have been derived from institutionalized practices or from the leader, and humour can decrease the anxiety gained from these sources. All four functions of humour as outlined by Plester and Orams (2008) assist the members of the organizational group to establish a bond between them, which leads to further workplace socialization and the development of interpersonal relationships within the workplace.

2.2 Workplace relationships and humour

Humour can act as a catalyst in developing workplace relationships, and organizational humour can help individuals to develop relationships at both the vertical and horizontal levels (Cooper, 2008), regardless of the formality of the setting. 'Formal' settings are arranged events which are often clearly structured and controlled, whereas 'informal' settings are rather spontaneous and without any specific objectives (Mak, Liu, & Deneen, 2012). Humour can be utilized in both settings, where relationship development processes can be enhanced and individuals may socialize through humour interactions. This may assist new employees to integrate into the organizational setting, and learn the culture of the workplace group (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006).

Mak et al. (2012) suggest that because humour creates a sense of mutual understanding between organizational members, it is an important part of worker integration (Wenger, 1998). Utilizing humour as a communicative medium may help individuals to merge into workplace groups and may also strengthen the interpersonal relationships within the group by signaling an in-group culture for solidarity (Zijderveld, 1983). However, humour may also isolate individuals and distort interpersonal relationships. For example, Plester and Sayer's (2007) study of Information Technology (IT) companies showed how banter facilitated the socialization of work group members. The humour used by participants was abusive, and deflated the target's ego. Members of the group enjoyed and accepted the banter exchanged, signaling that their relationships are close enough to take such abusive jokes as 'only a joke'. Banter occurred most frequently with the involvement of popular colleagues, who were already well settled into the organization's culture, as they were the most accustomed and safest members to enjoy the humorous exchange. Overall, it was clear that playful banter was utilized to facilitate the functioning of the cultural systems of the organization. However, the less-socialized members perceived the banter to be exclusionary, painful and insulting, and thus, for some individuals, damaging to workplace relationships. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the impact of humour on communicating organizational members, as it may either develop or damage organizational relationships.

2.2.1 Cooper's (2008) relational process model

Cooper's (2008) relational process model shows that in the use of organizational humour, social processes function in conjunction with individual-level mechanisms. She proposes that interpersonal humour operates through four related processes: affect-reinforcement, similarity-attraction, self-disclosure, and hierarchical salience. While the classic humour theories describe the motivations to express humour and determinants of humour enjoyment at an individual-level analysis, this model illustrates humour as a social process within organizational contexts.

Affect-reinforcement describes how the feeling of attraction is established through association with a positive experience. Humour is one form of social communication which reinforces or punishes through the event (Baron, 1984). Using humour can arouse positive emotions in people, who enjoy the interactions with the joker and thus like the person more.

Perceived similarity is the level of belief of an individual that s/he is similar to a target individual. The shared attitudes and beliefs create attraction between the individuals (Byrne, 1971), and imply that people who find the same event to be humorous will be attracted to each other. Individuals from the same cultural background experience this process more often than those from a foreign culture. Holmes and Hay's (1997) study showed that Maori (indigenous ethnic group in New Zealand) used humour to distance themselves from the dominant ethnic groups, which also reinforced their group norms and emphasized commonality. Likewise, humour can signal similarity or dissimilarity in organizations through individuals' expression or attitude towards certain topics, where the responding attitudes of others determine their membership to the group.

Expressing humour in the workplace can be a method of self-disclosure, as it reveals a degree of information about the joking individual (i.e. humour preferences). Humour is not a requirement in fulfilling the job description at work, but by voluntarily displaying humour, the communicators may feel closer to one another (Collins & Miller, 1994). However, the listeners may evaluate this deeper level of information given by the joker negatively, especially if the humour violates the beliefs and norms of the listener (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). For example, high risks are associated with sexual or racial jokes, but these can be accepted when the group has made them a norm (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006).

Hierarchical salience is the only factor in this model which is relevant in power differential settings. Using humour can enhance the relationship between individuals, or in reverse, detract from those at a different level of hierarchy. For example, a manager using humour to control the behaviour of employees (Martineau, 1972) will increase the authoritative distinction between the parties. Conversely, using humour can also break down the interpersonal barriers created by the formal hierarchy of the organization (Vinton, 1989). Subordinates can exploit this kind of humour to express disagreements or even challenge management (Plester & Orams, 2008).

Analyzing humour as a social process helps to understand the contextual factors more, and links the classic humour theories of humour with the processes involved in achieving the specific functions of humour. These social processes are especially contextual, as for example, the hierarchical salience process depends on cultural expectations such as power distance (Hofstede, 1984). Different cultural backgrounds and ethnocentrism (Drever, 1952) cause the degree of change in the quality of interpersonal relationships to be either magnified or diminished. For example, a person with a perception of high power distance may feel that the humour used by a superior with the intention of diminishing their status differences is discomforting. This means that although humour is understood and seems to be enjoyed by both parties, in fact it is not achieving the user's original intention because the cultures of the communicating parties provide different sets of beliefs. However, if there is a strong organizational culture that establishes a common belief in these social processes, because the organization is an important part of constructing self-identity it may be enough to overcome an individual's authentic cultural expectations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Overall, Cooper's (2008) model suggests that these four social processes of humour affect the quality of the interpersonal relationship between the communicators. This model helps to show how the broad functions of humour (e.g. Plester & Orams, 2008) actually impact the individuals and the relationships between work colleagues (including subordinates and superiors): the model was therefore used as a guide in observing humour instances and collecting data within this current research.

2.2.2 Humour and status

Because individuals in organizations are positioned under a hierarchy through work roles or titles, organizational relationships are complex. Therefore, communicating and socializing in

the workplace may be difficult, as organizational members must learn to communicate well with both their colleagues, and the 'boss'. However, in comparison with relationships between same-level work colleagues, the hierarchical differences between a superior (boss) and the subordinate create differences in the communication process to develop interpersonal relationships. As hierarchy and status differences are important in this current research, the term 'superior' is used instead of other titles such as 'leader' or 'manager' in order to show the relational hierarchical differences between the organizational members (i.e., there may be multiple organizational members with the job title 'manager' but positioned at different hierarchical levels).

Workplace humour involving a superior usually has a different impact on the work group than humour used between same-level colleagues (Drath & Palus, 1994). At an individual level, different types of relationships can be observed between the superior and subordinate, which contain a variety of emotions and affections (Oglensky, 1995). Humour can be an effective mechanism to smooth the communication process between organizational members (Plester, 2007), helping individuals to express these emotional aspects within organizational relationships. A similar social process is applied between the superior and subordinate when humour is used to develop interpersonal relationships, but as recognized in Cooper's relational process model (2008), humour can enhance or detract the quality of relationship between the individuals by either emphasizing or minimizing the hierarchical differences. Therefore, the intentional use of humour to blur or highlight the power differences may be possible, but the model also suggests that if the purpose of the humour is interpreted incorrectly these effects may occur unintentionally, and the situation must be approached more carefully than in co-worker situation.

Generally, a superior's use of humour employs more control-related meanings. For example, gently interrupting unproductive thinking patterns is believed to improve productivity (Minsky, 1980), and the lighter atmosphere promotes creativity and innovation for the workers (Isen et al., 1987). The authoritative power held by superiors causes their actions to be more influential in the workplace than those of other workers. When humour is used correctly the status differences amplify stress reduction processes (but can also impose stress on the employees in reverse), help enhance communication between management and employees, and motivate subordinates (Davis & Kleiner, 1989). Using humour in this manner will help to create a constructive workplace environment, and also improve the perception that the subordinates have of their superior. For example, Priest and Swain's

(2002) study of cadets in United States Military Academy showed how humour influenced subordinates' perception of the quality of a superior. In general, superiors who were deemed 'good' in the eyes of their followers had a significantly higher overall humour rating than those who were deemed 'bad'.

Commonly, a humorous superior is favoured by subordinates, but this depends on the type of humour used. Goodchilds (1959) suggested that the group members' responses were based primarily of the type of humour used by the superior. Two opposing styles of humour users were proposed, which were 'clowning wit' and 'sarcastic wit'. Although the clowning wit was liked by the members, the level of influence was low, while the sarcastic wit was not liked, but was more influential. On the other hand, O'Connell's (1969) study found that funny wit was popular, influential, and associated with high task-achievement oriented supervisors. In contrast, sarcastic wit was less influential, more hostile, and less oriented toward task achievement.

Because, as Smith and Powell (1988) argued, in the use of disparaging humour the target's relationship to the respondent must be considered, superiors must be cautious about how humour is delivered. Superiors who used self-disparaging humour were perceived to have high willingness to share opinions, encourage member participation, and relieve tension. On the other hand, those who used superior-targeted humour (aimed at higher members of the hierarchy) were perceived to be less willing to share opinions and to be ineffective in group communication. Subordinate-targeted humour usage was not perceived as a good method of relieving tension or showing members' input, and was rated low on social attractiveness. However, it seems that the group's expectation and the context influence these results, as in some instances, not using humour resulted in more positive evaluation of the group's superior. This study indicates that superiors may use disparaging humour as an effective tool in conducting organizational tasks, particularly if they direct the joke at themselves. However, directing disparaging humour towards others may be dangerous as the nature of the humour is aggressive, and communicators must establish a common ground of understanding in order to make the humour work (Gruner, 1978). Because each potential victim's perception will differ according to their cultural background, this may be a difficult task (Kalliny et al., 2006).

From the employer's perspective, supervisors with a sense of humour were perceived to be more effective in their positions and well liked. This is supported by Napier and Gershenfeld's (1973) study, which showed that 98 percent of the chief executives studied

favoured hiring more humour-oriented candidates, especially for managerial positions. Humour may promote productivity by reducing the psychological distance between the superior and subordinate, by facilitating workers to 'like' their superiors and by motivating them to work harder. This relates back to Cooper's (2008) relationship process model, where the affect-reinforcement process applies to subordinates who relate the pleasurable experience of shared humour to the superior. New organizational members in particular may benefit from this effect and integrate more easily to the workplace (Vinton, 1989). The globalized workplace recommends workers to explore effective and cost-efficient skills such as humour, regardless of their position in the organization. However, because humour is a contextual phenomenon, this is a difficult task regardless of the sense of humour a person may have.

2.2.3 Contextual humour

Humour is a highly contextual phenomenon. While humour can act as a catalyst to diminish cultural differences between individuals and smooth communication in workplaces, certain cultural environments can limit the use of humour. These contextual aspects include the difference between individuals, but also organizational culture. For example, Plester's (2008) study of New Zealand organizations showed that although one of the researched companies presented itself as a fun company, this was not true. The organizational culture of this particular company did not accommodate fun between organizational members, although the management misrepresented it to be fun and humorous. Similarly, humour may not be well accommodated in certain contexts. It is true that humour is a universal phenomenon enjoyed by people of all cultures, but certain cultures may perceive humour differently (rather than the general perception of humour always being a funny and positive interaction) (Alden et al., 1993). This issue includes Confucian cultures, where Confucianism is a philosophy which is embedded in various East Asian cultures such as China, Japan, Vietnam, and Korea. However, most organizational humour studies are based on Western workplace contexts (e.g. Collinson, 1988; Plester, 2007). This means that findings from these studies focus on Western cultural assumptions, which may not be consistent across different cultural contexts. Therefore, in order to further explore the cross-cultural issues in workplaces, it is important to investigate organizational humour from different cultural perspectives.

2.2.4 Issues in cross-cultural management

'Cross-cultural management is the study of the behavior of people in organizations located in cultures and nations around the world. It focuses on the description of organizational behavior within countries and cultures, on the comparison of organizational behavior across countries and cultures, and, perhaps most importantly, on the interaction of peoples from different countries working within the same organization or within the same work environment' (Adler, 1983, p. 226). The globalized structure of the workplace has expanded management's role of understanding employees, across borders. A person's attitude towards acts such as communication, conflict management, accepting authority, and cooperation depends on the person's culture (Chevrier, 2003): approximately 25 to 50% of the variance in this attitude can be explained by the national culture (Gannon & Pillai, 2010). Despite the lowered language barrier in most cross-cultural and multicultural situations, it is still difficult to manage such differences within organizations.

The difficulties associated with cross-cultural management include the problem of cultural dominance or ethnocentrism. Adler's study (1983) stated that this problem was derived from the dominant group's assumptions and their use of a single culture's perspective in managing the entire organization. Furthermore, there were difficulties in integrating workers from different cultures. However, the benefits of utilizing a multicultural workforce seemed to outweigh such difficulties, and the same study showed that 60% of the panel surveyed saw major benefits in multiculturalism. The most significant advantages were increased creativeness and innovativeness and better sensitivity towards dealing with foreign clients. Although the globalized workplace has increased the need for organizations to deal with cross-cultural management issues, the level of ethnic diversity within the society seems to determine the degree of emphasis on this issue. In comparison to multicultural societies such as New Zealand, for example, only in recent years has the relatively homogeneous ethnic lineage of Korean society and its workforce caused cross-cultural issues to arise (Han, 2007). Nevertheless, it is difficult to limit these cross-cultural issues to ethnicity, as globalization and advancement in technology encourage the merging of diverse cultural ideas regardless of the ethnic origins of people.

Cross-cultural management in work organizations can be a difficult task to accomplish, as there are a multiple sources of culture which must be considered prior to making it 'work'. There are many layers of culture (subcultures) which makes the generalization of culture

styles seem nearly impossible. This is one of the main criticisms which Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions had from other cross-cultural scholars. In order to target this issue, different approaches to analyzing cross-cultural issues have been constructed, such as the GLOBE study, and the studies of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2004) which aimed to understand the cross-cultural issues further. Yet culture is still over-simplified, with too much emphasis being placed on formulating generalizable categories. Regardless of the context, communication is a crucial aspect of managing cross-cultural issues. 'Culture is communication, and communication is culture' (Hall, 1959, p. 186), as without proper communication an individual's unique perceptions which construct their behavior cannot be understood by another.

In order to address the cross-cultural issues within organizations (i.e. working with a multicultural team), humour can function as a catalyst in the socialization process, which as a result can increase cohesion within the group and diminish conflicts raised from cultural misunderstandings. In contrast, as a result of humour, problems may occur where cultural misunderstandings are further highlighted, which could become a serious issue when organizations interact with external groups (e.g. conducting negotiations with foreign companies). This problem is likely to occur if organizational members use humour with the naïve expectation that humour is always good and recommended for use within the workplace. Although the role humour may play in diminishing cultural gaps and developing relationships between organizational members is undeniable, whether this assumption is applicable across all cultural contexts is questionable.

2.2.5 Humour across cultures

Humour is observed in all cultures, and is a rather common phenomenon (Berger, 1987). The universal features of humour involving the basic cognitive structure of humour appreciation create a commonality across all people around the globe (Alden et al., 1993). The function of humour is important in all contexts, as humour performs important cultural roles such as enforcing social norms and defining cultural identity (Bricker, 1980; Duncan, 1985). For example, Holmes and Hay (1997) found in their study of native New Zealand ethnic groups, that humour is used to maintain group boundaries by highlighting similarities between the members of the group. Similar patterns of humour usage are found in other minority groups. A classic example is outlined by Burma (1946), in African-American society. Burma (1946)

states that racial humour was frequently used and even publicized in one of the largest African-American magazines in America, which mocked the mainstream ethnic groups for the purpose of highlighting racial competition and conflict, along with the social and cultural patterns which have arisen from these racial conflicts. Highlighting similarities within the group and differences between groups creates a mental boundary, where understanding and laughing along with a joke assures the individuals of their shared social norms and group membership.

Humour is one of the most effective communication mechanisms an individual may utilize. However, the different cultural perceptions can diminish or damage the purpose for which the humour was used. When used correctly, humour will allow individuals to integrate themselves easily into unfamiliar territory. On the other hand, when the cultural implication of using humour is not fully understood, the joker may in fact be confusing or offending others (McGhee, 1979). This relates back to the incongruity theory, where insisting on the joker's own cultural assumptions (and completing the joke) will not resolve the incongruity to the listeners (Raskin, 1985), therefore detracting from the initial intention of friendly integration. Globalization has blurred cultural boundaries, and high mobility amongst the younger generation has increased the need for individuals to understand the different cultural expectations of others. Although media and other types of indirect experiences provide a degree of cultural differences in humour, these are often stereotypical representations, which may be misleading (Apte, 1987). Understanding the different cultural perspectives to humour will enhance the quality of humour interactions within the workplace, help to use humour effectively, and reduce the psychological gaps between the individuals (Cooper, 2008).

2.3 Culture and context

2.3.1 Defining culture

Culture can be broadly defined as people's way of life (Ronen, 1986). Culture is a complex term which relates to a group's behaviour and its origins (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). Matsumoto and Juang (2012) define culture as a collective configuration of attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviours shared by a group of people, which are communicated down from a generation to the next, but are treated differently by each individual. As researchers are also influenced by their own culture (Zander, 1997), the meanings embedded in the term 'culture'

are more contextual rather than universal. Nevertheless, the term itself is transformational rather than solid, where 'culture is one of those terms that defy a single all-purpose definition and there are almost as many meanings of culture as people using the term' (Ajiferuke & Boddewyn, 1970, p. 154). However, one of the most frequently used and simple definitions of culture in comparative management studies states culture as a group's collective understanding or mental programming (Hofstede, 1984).   Individuals are grouped with those with similar cultural understandings as themselves, which may be of national culture (or ethnicity), organizational culture (if they belong to a certain organization), or any other subcultural groups within a larger community.

The most common categorization of people with similar identities is of national culture, where theorists such as Hofstede (1984) have extensively developed a set of concepts in an attempt to define cultural boundaries. In anthropology, different value systems are reflected as 'culture' (Kroeber, 1963). According to the theory of attitude, values and beliefs are distinguished from one another because values are relatively resistant to change whereas beliefs can change as new information is absorbed to change the related attitudes towards an object (Fishbein, 1963). This means that an individual maintains their own set of values which were established in the course of their upbringing (cultural background), but that the exposure to external influences will alter the belief system to allow contextual adaptation in how people behave. In the past, this adaptability towards different cultures was not emphasised in the literature. However, increased mobility and a globalized workforce have enforced the need for such flexibility in people, and many countries are now heterogeneous in their population composition (Stalker, 2000). By learning new information and adapting into a different culture, norms (standard behaviour in a given context) can be followed to minimize conflict and maximize cohesion within the community involved. This is crucial when an individual is entering into a foreign location, including artificial groupings such as the organization (Cox Jr, 1991). Unfortunately, understanding and adjusting into a different culture is very difficult. Some of the cultural characteristics may be visually represented, but most are embedded in the subconscious, so that the understanding of a culture differs for each individual.

2.3.2 Measuring culture?

One of the most significant cross-cultural value analyses and organizational dynamics pieces of research is the study by Hofstede (1984) that identified the cultural dimensions. This work allowed national cultures to be clustered into groups, where similarities and differences between societies could be identified, and assisted in generalizing whether certain behaviours may or may not be acceptable across a group of nations. The original set of dimensions of Hofstede (1984) included individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity. However, a revised set of dimensions was introduced which included long term and short term orientation (Hofstede, 2001). Furthermore, in his 2010 edition he added a sixth dimension, indulgence versus self-restraint.

The dimension of individualism versus collectivism relates to the integration of individuals' primary groups. Individualistic societies emphasise personal achievements and individual rights. The ties between individuals are loose and only the self and their immediate family are expected to be taken care of. On the other hand, collectivistic societies are bonded together as members of the cohesive group or organization. Within the group, which includes extended families, loyalty is expected to be exchanged as a form of protection against outsiders (Hofstede, 2001). However, categorizing an entire culture into these distinct characteristics seems like a sweeping generalization. There may be extreme variations of individualistic and collectivistic characteristics within a culture, depending on factors such as ethnic composition of a country, geographic location (cities), and age group.

Power distance is defined as 'the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally' (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 1991, p. 28). This dimension indicates the level of dependence or reliance that subordinates have on their superiors (managers) within hierarchical relationships. For example, low power distance means that subordinates have limited dependence on their superiors, and they are more comfortable with demanding the right to contribute, and to critique those in power. However, in high power distance countries individuals accept the hierarchical differences and autocratic and paternalistic power relations.

Uncertainty avoidance is defined as 'the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain and unknown situations' (Hofstede et al., 1991). This dimension captures the need of individuals for clarity and security for individuals, such as that provided by rules,

policies, and detailed supervision. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance have a higher preference for working to a set schedule, where work is guided by the company rather than the self. This characteristic is portrayed by the length of the worker's involvement with one organization, for example, Japanese workers who are classified as having a high uncertainty avoidance culture, often have a life-time job, spending most of their career in one company (Brannen & Wilen, 1998).

Masculinity versus femininity relates to the distribution of emotional roles between genders. Masculine cultural values centre around competitiveness, assertiveness, materialism, ambition and power, whereas feminine cultures focus on relationships and quality of life. This dimension does not involve a comparison between male and female, but its characteristics influence individuals' values with regards to careers, social recognition, and competition. As a result, these values also impact the individual's meanings and interpretations to work, and motivations towards work (Hofstede, 1984).

The fifth cultural dimension later identified by Hofstede and Bond (1988), long-term versus short-term orientation describes values which are characterised as either more future-oriented and dynamic, or static and directed towards the present or past. The long-term orientation of 'Confucian dynamism' was to influence entrepreneurial activity in society (Hofstede, 2001). The characteristics include persistence, sensitivity to status, ordering relationships by status, prudence, and having a sense of shame. The short-term orientation discourages flexibility, risk-taking and initiative. Such short-term orientation were presented through the characteristics of stability, respect for tradition, protecting one's face, and the sharing of greetings, gifts, and favours (Hofstede, 2001).

A criticism was raised by Fang (2003), as this dimension was solely intended to move away from the Western way of thinking rather than to conceptualize a 'universal' dimension to culture. The original idea of Confucian dynamism was suggested by the Chinese Culture Connection (1987), which led to the argument that the target focus of this dimension was to introduce an oriental concept into Hofstede's (1984) set of measurements (Fang, 2003). Nevertheless, the philosophical flaws with regards to the unbalanced nature of Confucian dynamism's two ends caused confusion to both Western and Chinese readers. The Chinese traditions consider natural balance to be an important factor in life, known as the 'yin and yang'. All things in life must be in balance, such as light and dark, which must be at opposite ends of the spectrum. However, Hofstede's fifth dimension is rather continuous. The long-

term and short-term orientations are not contrasting values for the Chinese, but closely interrelated subjects, so that a culture cannot hold a distinct long-term cultural orientation, but a combination of both long and short-term. For example, Chinese national culture was classified as long-term oriented, but studies have showed that Chinese culture is in general past-oriented, and this is expressed by strong family traditions and ancestor worship practices, which are not the characteristics of long-term orientated culture (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). However, in the business context, short-term orientation has been a prominent Chinese trait (Chen, 2002).

Another criticism with regard to long-term and short-term orientation relates to the concept of 'saving face', which is a characteristic of the short-term cultural orientation. According to Hofstede and Bond (1988), Western countries consider 'saving face' or having a sense of shame (related to concepts of reputation, integrity, and behaviours in building relationships with others) to be more important than China does. In reality, Chinese society values 'face' as one of the most important elements to guide behaviour, as they are deeply conscious of how their behaviour will impact on how others view their family and clan's reputation (Fang, 2003). However, it is important to consider that this contradiction between theory and reality may be caused by subcultural variations existing within a national culture, rather than by philosophical flaws in the conceptualisation of this cultural dimension.

The most recent dimension of indulgence versus self-restraint was constructed to measure happiness through life control and importance of leisure (Minkov, 2009). This concept was very different to the original cultural dimensions model, as it was derived from Ronald Inglehart's work on survival versus self-expression values (Inglehart & Baker, 2000) which conceptually combined Hofstede's (1984) individualism dimension and the idea of happiness.

Although these cultural dimensions seem generic and can be measured in a similar manner across all cultures, the level of accuracy of such generalized notions of culture provides is questionable. Cultures are very unique, and numerous issues such as diversity or translation in language create barriers in 'measuring' culture (Ji, Zhang, & Nisbett 2004). Yet many cultural studies focus on generalizing different cultures into a small number of groups, and impose a categorization which supposedly summarizes a whole culture, such as Project GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness) where 61 nations were analysed and identified into ten clusters. The clusters included Sub-Saharan Africa, Confucian Asian, Southern Asia, Latin America, Anglo, Eastern Europe, Latin Europe,

among others. This means that countries such as Korea, which is included in the Confucian Asian cluster, are categorized as culturally no different from other countries within the cluster, such as China and Japan. These findings can be very misleading, as culture is fluid and is interpreted differently for each individual.

2.3.3 Fluid culture

Both Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions and the GLOBE study suggest a generalized view of culture, at the national level. However, the idea of quantifying culture and grouping similar-patterned cultures together can be dangerous, when culture is considered as a living organism. Minkov and Hofstede (2012) state that Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions were constructed only at a national level, the focus being on underpinning variables which correlate across nations, rather than for organizations or individuals. Despite this justification, the cultural dimensions were still targeted for criticism due to the significance of subcultures within the national cultures, as these fragmented characteristics of national culture can limit the scope of generalizability. Similar issues were outlined for the GLOBE study, where the diversity within and between national cultures were not considered. Graen (2006) argues that the GLOBE study's strong focus on finding average national norms for leadership culture created misleading results, as the variations within the countries are too large to be ignored. For example, elements such as generational, social, educational, ethnic, and gender differences were not considered in average national norms, thus creating organizational practices based on these standardised characteristics of culture that could be misleading (Graen, 2006).

In this current research, culture is not generalized as specific characteristics which shape the behaviours of individuals. This is because culture is complex and fluid. Past studies such as Hofstede et al. (1991) and Trompenaars (1994) describe Korea as one of the most collectivist countries in the world, as its people scored higher on this dimension than in Japan's corporate culture. However, this Western-based interpretation has been challenged, as Chang and Chang (1994) indicated that Japanese scholars such as Watanabe and Hasegawa have argued that Korean organizations are more individualistic and competitive than Japanese (Cho & Yoon, 2001). Cho and Yoon (2001) propose that such individualistic and competitive behaviour is a part of 'dynamic collectivism', where in-groups and out-groups are distinguished by applying strong collectivistic norms to the in-group, while individualistic

norms are attributed to out-groups. This creates intensification of competition between the groups, thus showing contrasting results in identifying the cultural characteristics of Korea.

Another significant term which determines the behaviour of corporate members is hierarchy. The Korean notion of hierarchy is based on Confucianism. Confucianism is the common cultural root of East Asian nations, and its philosophy outlines that depending on the hierarchical relationship, people are mutually interdependent, due to the feeling of being indebted to others (Chen & Chung, 1994). Social status created from this hierarchical structure defines most interpersonal relationships, and is based on characteristics including age, gender, and position in society. The distinction is reflected in the language, as the terms used in addressing those in different positions on the hierarchy change relative to one another. For example, an older person is addressed according to their organizational position, along with the term 'nim' which is the equivalent to 'sir' or 'ma'am', and their first name would not be used by an individual of lower status. Social etiquette is also distinctive, especially when it comes to interactions between individuals of unequal social status, such as greeting with a bow rather than offering to shake hands. These distinctions suggest that individuals of different social status or positions on the hierarchy are likely to be identified as outsiders, and must maintain distance from the communicating individuals (Hur & Hur, 1988). Depending on how an individual classifies another person as hierarchically similar or different to the self, groups may be divided, along with the attitude towards the associated group members. Therefore, this current research adopts Confucianism as one of the underlying philosophy to analyse the data collected in the studied Korean organizations. This is because, in comparison to other cross-cultural frameworks such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Confucian values are more context-specific to the researched organizations, and allow an in-depth investigation of humour interactions between organizational members.

2.4 Confucianism and Korean organizations

2.4.1 Background

Korea is a country which has experienced one of the fastest developments during the 20th century. While Korea was considered as a developing country in the past, it is now active in the global business market, with many global companies collaborating with local Korean businesses. However, the culture of Korean organizations is often generalized to be similar

to that of its neighbours, Japan and China. Although global cultural studies (such as that of Hofstede, 1984) do suggest that Korea portrays similar cultural characteristics to other East Asian countries, this can be misleading, especially when examining the nature of interpersonal communication and relationships in organizations.

Korea has a long history which is traced back as far as 2333 BC, where the first kingdom of Korean culture, *Gochosun* appeared in Korean myth (Kookhakwon, n.d.). Different kingdoms were established and demolished in history, while Korean culture continued to change with time. External forces also influenced the ancient Korean culture, where the close relationship with China maintained a consistent cultural input to Koreans. One such cultural input is the concept of Confucianism. The idea of Confucianism emerged and was submerged throughout Korean history but is still strongly embedded in modern Korean society (Deuchler, 1992). Other external cultures (other than traditional Korean and some Chinese culture) were exposed to Korea from the late 19th century, when Korea adopted an open-door policy to the outside world. The Japanese annexation in 1910 forced further cultural changes to the Korean way of life. Korea began to change rapidly, followed by the industrialization era from the 1960s, and a financial crisis in 1997 (Hoare & Pares, 1999), to become the more Westernized Korea of today.

The introduction of Western ideas from the 1890s slowly changed Korea through the years. However, Korean culture still displays many Confucian values in everyday life and organizational practices (Shim, as cited in Shim et al., 2008). Although Confucianism originated in China, contemporary Korean society embeds more Confucian traditions than other neighbouring East Asian countries (Choi, 2010). This section will discuss the idea of Confucianism as a part of the culture in Korea, and its influence on the people in organizations.

2.4.2 Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism

Confucianism is a philosophy of relationships which constructs the social system, to teach moral values emphasizing harmony and interdependence. Confucianism originated from the ideas of the Chinese scholar Confucius (called Gong-Ja in the Korean language). However, Confucianism has constantly developed through time, with the Chinese scholar Chu Hsi (1130-1200AD) making the most significant contribution to moderating Confucianism by

infusing it with ideas from Taoism and Buddhism, resulting in what is now known as Neo-Confucianism (Deuchler, 1992).

The main teachings of Confucianism build around the Chinese concepts of 'jen', 'i', 'li', 'chih' and 'xin'(Wang, Wang, Ruona, & Rojewski, 2005). 'Jen' translates into the word humanism, the natural human feeling for others, where these feelings are evaluated according to one's relation to them (McNaughton, 1974). These feelings include love, harmony, kindness, and benevolence, which also relates to filial piety, awareness of right and caring about virtues, and thus 'jen' is the most important value under the Confucian philosophy. 'I' is about being righteous and performing justice in one's actions towards the common good rather than self. It is almost like an obligation towards interpersonal relationships (Yum, 1988). 'Li' means propriety, where one must be considerate of others, which relates closely to the concept of Jen (Yum, 1988). 'Chih' concerns the importance of wisdom and that passion towards liberal education that one must value as a human being. Lastly, 'xin' means trustworthiness, and being faithful and loyal (Wang et al., 2005). These concepts craft as a philosophy, culture, and religion, which are still crucial in many East Asian cultures.

Confucianism is a system of ethics, where the Confucian way of life is intended to structure everyday activities for the objective of becoming a good human being (Yao, 2000). However, the multiple interpretations of Confucianism developed throughout history and across different regions create confusion as to how this is achieved. Thus, the concept of Confucianism is rather broad (De Bary, 1995). However, the general idea of Confucianism creates a perspective of civilization through behaviour, where the people structure relationships and behaviour into a hierarchy through rites and rituals (Deuchler, 1992). Under Confucian philosophy, these rites are intended to correct human nature in the belief that people are fundamentally good, and that teaching and guidance can improve them (Shim et al., 2008). Therefore, Confucianism is 'essentially a system of ethics' (Needham, 1970, p. 25) which values both the internal motive and the external results (or actions) to evaluate a person's conduct in terms of morality (Yao, 2000).

Based on the idea of Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism was developed through various reinterpretations and modifications to these traditional ideas. Developments from the original works of Confucius distinguish it from traditional Confucianism by being termed Neo-Confucianism or new Confucianism. Neo-Confucianism was first developed during the Song Dynasty and the Tang Dynasty, by the Confucian scholars Han Yu and Li Ao (Deuchler,

1992). However, the boundaries between Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism are blurred, due to the concurrent developments of the philosophy by different scholars. For example, the works of Chu Hsi are considered to include some of the most important ideas in Neo-Confucianism, despite being a significant part of the original Confucianism. Therefore, rather than Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism being specified as two distinct philosophies, they are interrelated philosophies where Neo-Confucianism is a branched-out idea from Confucianism, and both emphasize the idea of humanism.

The greatest distinction between Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism is that Neo-Confucianism denies Taoist and Buddhist ideas. Superstitious and mystical elements in the Confucian philosophy are rejected. Under Neo-Confucianism, where family and community are valued, public-spiritedness and togetherness are stressed. Perhaps this is similar to the traditional values of Confucianism, but with a greater emphasis on an understanding that life in this world is intertwined with human relations, traditions, personal commitment and social responsibilities. Such values replace the religious or superstitious aspect of Buddhism, by illustrating worship of Buddha as a corrupt and unrealistic behaviour (Yao, 2000).

Neo-Confucianism influenced the general ideology of China, Japan, Korean, and Vietnam until the 19th century, but was once again modified to accommodate the different contextual factors in each of the cultures. For example, Neo-Confucianism in Korea emphasized its religious aspects when introduced to Korean people, to counter Buddhist and shamanist beliefs amongst the people, replacing these with ancestor-worshipping rituals (Deuchler, 1992). Korean Neo-Confucianism developed further to construct a philosophy that guides the everyday lives of the people in a systematic manner. Rather than being a purely religious term, Neo-Confucianism was also accepted as a philosophy of knowledge and education. In Korea this was termed 'Seongrihak' (Park, 2002), where an academy was constructed for the first time to further the study of (Neo) Confucianism. Therefore, the idea of Neo-Confucianism differs in each culture, depending on the trail of interpretation and development implemented by the scholars of the local culture.

2.4.3 Korean Confucianism

2.4.3.1 Adopting Confucian ideas in Korea

The tradition of Confucianism permeates all aspects of Korean society, business, and management (Rowley & Bae 2003). Korea was the first country outside China to experience a nation-wide influence of Confucianism on its people, along with having the longest and richest history of practicing Confucian philosophy (Yao, 2000). However, despite the well-documented records of Korean history, it is hard to track down the development of a certain culture, as culture is a fluid process that changes over time. Confucianism is one of the many foreign influences that was intentionally implemented in Korea and integrated into the authentic culture of the Korean people.

Koreans believed the Confucian world cultivated a sense of civilization, and thus Confucianism was adopted as a culture, resulting in a society-wide transition from Buddhist-based habits to Confucianism. Confucianism consists of numerous rites and rituals that 'correct' the actions and change the inner dispositions of the person from bad to good (Deuchler, 1992). Many of these rites and rituals centre on structuring the society to portray a relationship of inequality. Under Confucianism the ideas of natural inequality, hierarchy, and authority are expected to exist throughout society (Clark, 2000). People need to know their place in society and the nature of their relationships with others, and to avoid violence. With respect to creating social order, superiors lead by moral example and others follow (Clark, 2000). These structured relationships are based on the assumption that rather than living alone, people live together as a community where everyone plays a role in relation to one another. Therefore, compared to people from cultures that are identified strongly with individualist ideals, such as Americans, Koreans accommodate their behaviour according to the context rather than following their individual desires (Triandis, 1995). This idea of interdependent relationships remains as the central concept of Confucianism (traditional Confucianism), Neo-Confucianism (new Confucianism), and Korean Confucianism (Korean interpretation of Neo-Confucianism). Therefore, for the purpose of this current research, this idea of relationship structure will be referred to as the Confucian ideal rather than Neo-Confucian ideal.

2.4.3.2 Relationships, family, and age

Under the Confucian philosophy, the concept of 'jen' (humanism- appropriate inter-human behaviour) primarily guides how an individual should develop relationships with others and behave accordingly, with the objective of achieving love and harmony amongst them (Hwang, 1991). The original works of Confucius outline these relationships into five categories comprising: 1) King and subject; 2) father and son; 3) husband and wife; 4) elder brother and younger brother; and 5) between friends (Tu, 1998). All these categories except one (friends) represent the hierarchical relationships that are expected between individuals while emphasizing the concept of togetherness or a sense of 'we' (Kalton, 1979). Individuals determine their appropriate position in a relationship according to age, gender, and social position (such as job title) (Rowley & Bae 2003). Therefore, an individual's behaviour is shaped according to the relational position they are placed.
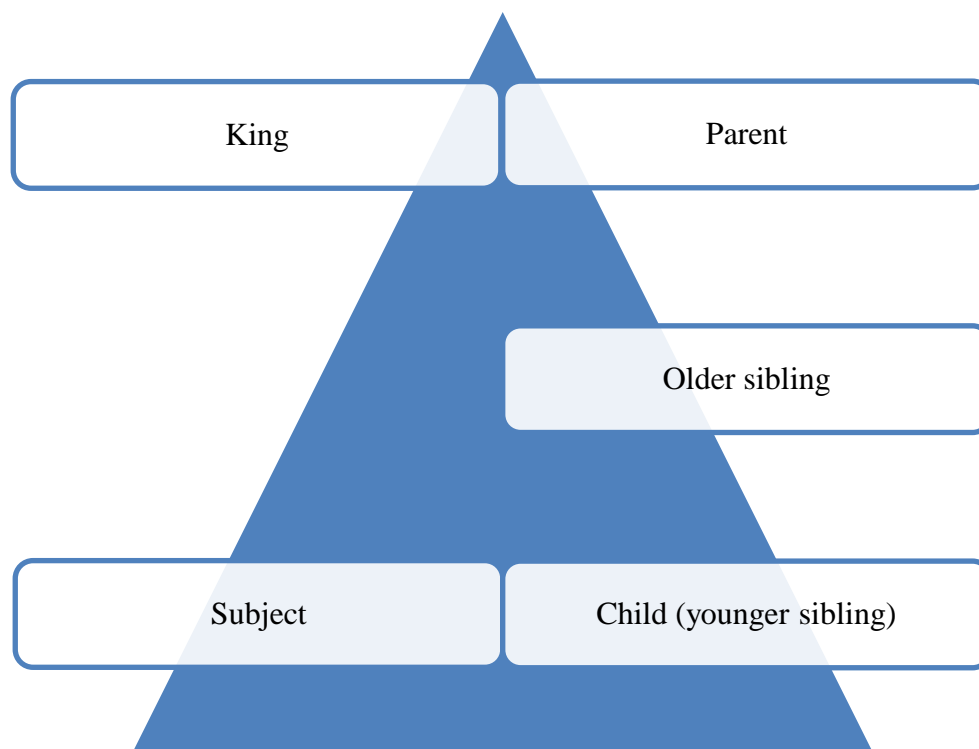
Figure 1. Confucian family relationships and hierarchy

Family is an important concept in Confucianism, with three of the Five Relations outlined above involving family-based relationships. Family is one of the most influential aspects of Confucianism, which was adopted into the Korean culture, leading to Ancestor worship. Figure 1 illustrates, within the Five Relations of Confucius, the hierarchical relationship

structure within the family, in conjunction with the King-subject relationship. The parent (especially the father) is considered in line with the King, suggesting the power held by the parent within the family. Therefore, Ancestor worship was considered to be a fundamental affair of the family (particularly of males), based on the Confucian teachings of filial piety (Kang, 1995). The practice of Ancestor worship was not a part of the original teachings by Confucius but as an extension of filial piety to the dead (Park, 2002). While Ancestor worshipping does incorporate a religious aspect into the Korean culture, more focus is given towards executing ceremonies that build around the family. The importance of family orientation is reinforced in the everyday lives of the Korean people through such rituals (Shim et al., 2008).

Family-oriented rituals and ceremonies are proposed to increase the family's sense of belonging (Kang, 1995). However, although modern Korea still acknowledges the importance of these ceremonies, it tends to conduct these ceremonies on a much smaller scale, or with simpler methods. Furthermore, while the structures of the rituals are maintained, many people do not understand the spirit of the Confucian rules of propriety (which these ceremonies and rituals were traditionally built around) and may even perform in a distorted manner.

Ageism is another aspect of the structuring of Confucian hierarchical relationships. Seniority is respected and is placed at the higher end of the hierarchy within society, so that in the course of communication age is the first consideration to take account of (Park, 1979). Age is considered to correspond with wisdom, and growing old is a sign of grace, piety, and respect. For example, Koreans grandly celebrate the sixty-first birthday to honour a person's lifetime. This custom is associated with their children's acknowledgement of the indebtedness they have towards the parent. Furthermore, respect towards elders is not limited to family circumstances. Attitudes towards age represent perhaps the most significant difference between Confucianism and Western cultures (Park, 1979).

2.4.3.3 Gendered Korea

Traditional Korean society emphasized the equality between men and women. During the Koryo dynasty (918- 1392) women enjoyed a strong social status and freedom, where even divorce did not cause significant social or economic negativity to women. However, the

development of (rather extreme) Confucianism during the Choson dynasty altered this social standing for women. The values in the patrilineal social paradigm restructured the social status of women. Through law, women lost their inheritance rights, while the position of the 'first wife' of a man became the best social status women could acquire (Deuchler, 2003). This change diminished women's position in the wider society, and limited women's position to within households. In the Confucian role of women the notion of loyalty to the husband is still emphasized, to the extreme point where committing suicide after being widowed was considered honourable (Shim et al., 2008). The relationship between husband and wife was parallel to that of a king and his subject, where a hierarchical relationship was emphasized to demand complete obedience from women (Park, 1979). This traditional idea of gender and hierarchical relationships remains in the modern Korean society.

Korea is inevitably a gendered society, being ranked 116th out of 144 countries in the gender gap index, 2016. This rating is lower than those of Korea's neighbouring countries, where Japan ranked 111th and China 99th (World Economic Forum, 2016). In conjunction with the Confucian ideals of hierarchical relationships, military culture also plays a part in constructing such a male-centred environment. All men are obligated to serve in the military for 21 to 24 months depending on their allocated military position (Republic of Korea Army, 2015). Exposure to military life impacts the culture and identity of Korean men extensively, where their experience aligns with the Confucian values of in-group harmony and hierarchy (Cho & Yoon 2001). Therefore, these gender-oriented values also become apparent in interpersonal communication.

2.4.3.4 Communicating Confucianism

While it is unclear whether Confucianism is the sole basis of Korean people's values, many indigenous Korean values and communication concepts reflect the Confucian ideals. These include family interdependence, status-consciousness, hierarchy, conformity (a sense of belonging), and in-group and out-group distinctions. Relationships are developed, and communication is structured, to represent these values and assumptions. Shim et al. (2008) argue that these social relations can only be developed harmoniously through the processes of facework. Facework (Korean term *chemyon*) is the effort to maintain a certain social identity or public self-image towards the self, in order to regulate an individual's position within relationships and the wider society (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Therefore, facework has the

objective of keeping harmony amongst people, and developing a friendly atmosphere through the appropriate establishment of individuals' social identities in relation to one another.

Facework or saving face is an important part of maintaining the Confucian societal structure. The process of saving face is complex, and involves more people than just the communicating individuals. The concept of face does not just affect one person but also relates to mutual face that represents the whole family or in-group (Oak & Martin 2000). Therefore, if face is not maintained, guilt is derived because the individual is letting down the wider group that the person belongs to, bringing shame to the whole group or family (Lee, 1998). Face must be protected to maintain unity amongst people, and damaging face will also damage multiple relationships. These include the relationships between communicating individuals who are directly involved in the process of damaging the face. The relationship between the individual who caused the damage and the in-group associates of the victim (due to mutual face) are also affected through this process. Nevertheless, the relationship between the victim and their own in-group is potentially damaged (Shim et al., 2008).

Facework is performed and maintained through everyday practices, language and other means of communication. For example, greetings reflect the hierarchical relationships between individuals as they physically communicate using bows, shaking hands, or waving hands (Cho & Yoon, 2001). Bowing signals that the individual acknowledges that they are situated at a lower hierarchical position than the other. However, such rituals are so deeply embedded in the daily lives of the Korean people that they are performed without the performers being fully aware of the Confucian meanings behind the practices, and sometimes even performed in a manner that is distorted from the traditional meanings (Kang, 1995).

Language also supports and portrays the Confucian values of family interdependence, status-consciousness, and hierarchy in everyday life. Honorifics signal the relational social position of an individual to another, reinforcing their status within conversations (McBrian, 1978). Furthermore, people are addressed using words that represent the social relationships between the individuals (Hwang, 1991). For example, a young male may address an older male differently according to the context. In a relatively personal relationship, the older male is addressed as 'hyung' (directly translated as older brother), but in a formal context, the word 'nim' (meaning sir or madam) is used after the full name of the person. When the relationship relates to any formal or educational institution, then 'sunbae', meaning senior, is used instead. Therefore, a hierarchical relationship is maintained through honorifics, which

are traditionally structured to preserve harmony between people, and to reinforce social positions.

While performing certain actions (rituals) and language assists the maintenance of Confucian relationships, silence is also an important part of this process. Speech is devalued as an influence on hierarchical relationships, and even silence is perceived as a good style of communication (Lim, 1999). This phenomenon is perhaps a perception crafted by integrating traditional Confucianism with Buddhist and Daoist ideals in communication, where verbal language is distrusted in its ability to deliver a correct message, and is considered a constraint which diminishes true meanings (Kim, 2004). Traditional Confucianism suggests that language should be carefully constructed to align one's words and behaviour, and communication should be an act shared with (and for the benefit of) the wider community rather than for the individual. Silence is preferred if this cannot be achieved (Kim, 2004). In particular, silence is a safe method of communication for individuals in a relationally lower hierarchical position, as the Confucian value of hierarchy suggest that individuals should follow the decisions of those higher up in the hierarchy rather than providing their opinion about a matter (Song & Meek, 1998). For example, students tend to stay silent as an audience, in order to listen to their teachers. This is a way of showing respect to the superior (teacher) and following their instructions rather than questioning them (Yuan, 2015). Therefore, individuals in a relationally lower hierarchical position sacrifice their voice (and thus do not raise their own opinion) for the sake of group harmony (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990), while non-verbal methods of communication such as *nunchi* are preferred instead of speech. Communication is expected to accommodate the appropriate context, while the emotional (non-verbal) exchange is also valued for its contribution to constructing an integrated communication practice (Kim, 2004).

Nunchi is another concept that helps to maintain group harmony and face. *Nunchi* is defined as mind-reading (Kim, 2003) or discovering another person's hidden agenda in communication by 'reading between the lines' (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2014). '*Nunchi* is a kind of *sense*, but it cannot simply be explained as *sense*. *Nunchi* is an interpretation of others' facial expressions or of what they say plus a mysterious 'alpha' hidden in their inner hearts. *Nunchi* is usually an interpretation by the lower social class of the feelings of the higher social class, necessary in an unreasonable society in which logic and inflexible rules have no place' (Kim, 1975, p. 7). Although this seems rather vague, *nunchi* is a skill that helps to develop and maintain relationships through effective non-verbal

communication, where behaviour is driven by the desire to maintain appropriate relationships (Kim, 2003). Socially acceptable boundaries are identified through this process, and there are complex limits that an individual must maintain within Confucian relationships.

The basic idea of *nunchi* is common across all societies, but it is particularly important in the Korean context. In Confucian-based relationships, *nunchi* is more than simply being polite or having an awareness of the situation. Using *nunchi* grasps the situation in a holistic manner, where a successful *nunchi* incorporates complex processes of executing and deciphering nonverbal messages from one party to another (Samovar et al., 2014). Usually the role that an individual takes in the process of *nunchi* depends on their social status. The individual positioned at the higher end of the relationship often executes a nonverbal message towards the individual positioned at the lower level, and this often creates responses of 'words which differ from the meaning the Korean wishes to convey' (Oak, 2000, p. 33). For example, a 'superior' may yawn or sigh with a tired expression to signal that s/he wants coffee. A 'subordinate' using *nunchi,* would decipher this message quickly to provide coffee to the 'superior', although no verbal communication was exchanged between the individuals. This process would enable individuals to maintain a positive Confucian relationship by saving the face, or reputation, of the 'superior' (Samovar et al., 2014) and would reinforce hierarchical differences. However, *nunchi* does not simply focus on accommodating the needs of the 'superior' by the 'subordinate'. Rather, its function of contextualising one's behaviour helps to balance the different cultural expectations between communicators.

2.4.3.5 Modern Korean Confucianism

Globalization introduced alternative values into Korea, such as those of Western cultures (Zhang & Harwood, 2004). In particular, due to economic and political restructuring in modern Korean society, traditional values changed to integrate Western individualism. This change was inevitable as it was a means to enter, and to succeed and grow in, the global marketplace where Western cultural norms were most dominant (Lee & McNulty, 2003). For example, Korea was able to recover from its 1997-1998 monetary crisis (IMF) by promoting individualistic ideas such as monetary incentives for companies' performance (Lee & McNulty, 2003). However, Ward (2002) argues that there is evidence of Korea reacting against Western cultures, causing a relatively slow movement towards cultural globalization in Korea. This is supported by Mitu's (2015) study of young Koreans aged between 20 and

30 years, where 53% of the respondents stated that that they believed contemporary Korean society is dominantly influenced by Confucianism.

Family orientation is still strong, and collectivism is still valued. Parents are to 'teach' their children, and in return loyalty and belongingness are expected towards family, where individuals' decision-making processes are influenced by parents even in adulthood (Shim et al., 2008). Gender is still perceived unequally, but where the traditional Confucian philosophy defined gender roles as men having a higher status than women (Pek & Leong 2003), contemporary studies define it from a different perspective. For example, Ueno (1987) and Iwao (1998) showed that Asian women were no longer displayed as oppressed suffers of a male-dominated society, but as the possessors of power in the domestic sphere. This means that Confucian gender roles are still expected, but with different interpretations derived from Western cultural influences. Similarly, Hoffman's (1995) study showed that Korean women could only blend into male-dominated workplaces by developing close interpersonal relationships. This means that power between the genders is not simply unequal, but depends on the context, providing a different interpretation to the traditional Confucian ideas about gender roles.

Shim et al. (2008) suggest that modern Korean Confucianism has been moderated through the influences of capitalism, to centre around the values of family, prestige-consciousness, self-reliance, conformity (hierarchy, nationalism, and communal spirit), and in-group and out-group distinction. This signals that people value interdependence and hierarchy less and the self more. However, this does not mean that Koreans have become individualists like their counterparts in Western contexts. Hierarchy is still acknowledged, and efforts towards harmonious relationships are still maintained, along with a recognition of the need for self-control. This is illustrated in the dilemma of young Koreans, of being against traditional vertical relationships, but unable to ignore the hierarchy in relationships (Yoon & Choi, 1994). This behavioural pattern has been labelled as dynamic collectivism, and replaces the traditional top-down hierarchies of Korea (Cho & Yoon, 2001).

Changing perceptions of traditional hierarchical relationships create confusion, especially for the younger Koreans in the workplace, as the more Westernized perceptions clash with the generic organizational culture, which supports hierarchical relationships. This is because according to the individualistic perspective conformity is considered negatively, as something submissive (Markus & Kitayama, 1994); yet, from Confucian traditions, it is a positive

practice that creates social stability and unity. Shim et al. (2008) suggest that the meaning of conformity has also changed, and that it now conveys the meaning of hierarchy, nationalism, and communal spirit. Rather than focussing solely on a sense of belonging or togetherness, conformity is identified strongly with the fear of social isolation, which drives the desire to fit within the group. According to Pye (1985), Koreans fear social isolation the most, in comparison to other Confucian-based cultures. Therefore, individuals attempt to fulfil the emotional aspects of connectedness (from conformity) through rituals practiced regularly with their group members in the form of fun activities such as Internet games or *noraebang* (karaoke) (Shim et al., 2008). This is also supported by research conducted by Zhang et al. (2005), who found that the younger generation in East Asia (China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan) still valued the traditional Confucian ideas, and, in particular, endorsed interpersonal harmony the most. This supports the claim that the modern Korea is not simply rejecting the Confucian ways of past, but still values the traditional norms of harmony, now protected by modernized methods.

2.4.4 Confucianism in organizations

2.4.4.1 Korean organizations and culture

Korean organizations are changing to promote a more Westernized culture. First, the organizational structures have changed to encourage a cultural shift. For example, the traditional systems of incentives, based on tenure or age, began to change in some organizations in the late 1990s (Lee & McNulty, 2003). Second, Confucian codes such as lifetime employment, seniority systems, paternalistic management, and relation-based management are being replaced by performance-based employment (Lee, 1998). However, individuals cannot ignore the Confucian values of loyalty to superiors, harmonious relations, respect for the elderly, and filial piety, that strongly impact work cultures and interpersonal relationships (Kee, 2008). In the wider Korean society these are still dominant values, which spill into the organizational lives. Therefore, Confucian ethics provide the ideological rationale for labour harmony and subordination to authority (Kim & Park, 2003), forming the basis of organizational relationships.

Confucian-based rituals in organizational contexts are also performed to maintain group (organization as a whole) solidarity and harmony, and to emphasize the notion of 'we'. Rites

and rituals represent the cultural belief and values (Trice & Beyer, 1984) of being 'Korean' and publicly demonstrate group identity (Islam & Zyphur, 2009). For Example, *gosa* is a rite asking a house-protecting god for blessings. Some Korean organizations perform *gosa* when starting something new, such as starting off a business or shifting to a new building. Often a pig's head is placed on the table of offering, along with notes (money) in the pig's mouth as a symbol for financial success (National Academy of the Korean Language, 2002). Rituals such as *gosa* performed by organizations display the Confucian idea of togetherness, and become a part of the organizational culture, rather than having the meaning of a religious activity. The objective lies in performing the ritual together, to create group solidarity and to help to mediate between individuals' beliefs and the organization (Nugent & Abolafia, 2006). These rites and rituals assist in cultivating an organizational culture which affirms the collective identity of its members, who are oriented towards creating 'organizations like families as well as armies' (Cho & Yoon, 2001, p. 79)

2.4.4.2 Organizational culture and rituals

Organizational culture is manifested in different forms, where rites, rituals, ceremonies, artefacts, stories, language, symbols, gestures, myths, legends, folktales, and physical settings are frequently noted (Trice & Beyer, 1984). From this long list of cultural forms, the most commonly discussed types are organizational rituals, rites, artefacts and other symbolic processes (Hofstede, 1977). Figure 2 provides a succinct version of the different levels of manifestation of culture which range from symbols to the core values. As suggested by Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, and Sanders (1990), this diagram is portrayed similarly to the successive skins of an onion, with rituals, heroes, and symbols being incorporated under the term 'practices'. This is because the 'practices' underlying meanings are constructed from the perceptions of insiders, but can also be visible to any observer. At one of the deeper levels, rituals employ important social activities to maintain or develop a culture, but technically this may not be necessary.
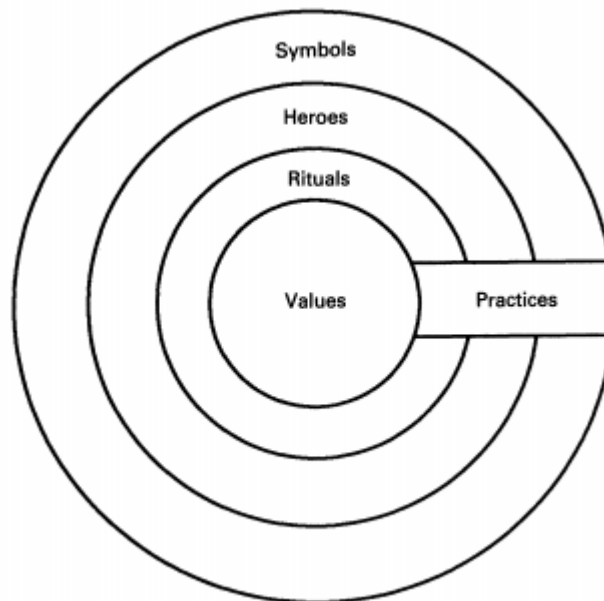
Figure 2. Manifestations of culture: From shallow to deep (Hofstede et al., 1990).

Trice and Beyer (1984) describe rites and rituals as a distinct representation of cultural beliefs and values which have a beginning and an end. This means that through studying rituals, some parts of the multifaceted organizational culture can be derived. Rituals in organizations enable a fast examination of culturally rich phenomena. Although it does not constitute the organizational culture as a whole, ritual action 'is a form of social action in which a group's values and identity are publicly demonstrated or enacted in a stylized manner, within the context of a specific occasion or event' (Islam & Zyphur, 2009, p. 116). The public demonstration establishes public interpretations for interpersonal behaviour, which safely mediates between an individual's own beliefs and the social norms (Nugent & Abolafia, 2006). Therefore, participating in rituals can be seen as a fast method for individuals to use to absorb the culture of the organization to which they belong.

The functional aspects of rituals in the organizational structure are viewed from two standpoints. Firstly, dominant social values are reinforced and maintained through the symbolic manipulations of managers, with individuals being socialized into prescribed roles (Forde, Fortes, Gluckman, & Turner, 1962). As a result, support for managerial actions and policies can be acquired (Pfeffer, 1981). However, authors such as Conrad (1983) and Turner (1969) regard rituals as a route towards open communication whereby dissatisfaction can be formally addressed, in order to resolve tensions and drive social change. These two

functions may occur simultaneously (Islam & Zyphur, 2009). Flores-Pereira, Davel, and Cavedon (2008) reviewed rituals from an embodied perspective, suggesting that rituals do not represent the culture, but rather are the experience of the culture. Their study involved analysing after-work drinking rituals, such as sharing beer, which was a relatively normal after-work ritual. The interactions and behaviours shown in this study showed that work rituals were more than a rational representation of the organizational culture, and also a perceptual-embodied experience.

The content of the rituals differ according to the organizations which enacts them. However, the structural basis of rites are universal, meaning that there is a certain uniformity across different cultures. Derived from the works of Durkheim (1961) (original work published in 1915), Van Gennep (1960) suggested that rites and rituals, rather than being simple acts of consensus maintenance of a group, assist individuals in shifting between different social roles. Moore and Myerhoff (1977) emphasized the formal properties than context features of rituals. Therefore, all rituals should: be repetitive; be planned events; be out of the ordinary in terms of members' behaviour; be highly organized and somewhat controlled; draw attention by using suggestive presentations; and be held for the benefit of the collective group. When these components are present, organizational ritual is established (Nugent & Abolafia, 2006).

Organizational members may integrate and bond deeply by performing rituals (Trice & Beyer, 1984). This means that performing rituals collectively not only promotes certain cultural aspects (such as hierarchical relationships in Confucianism), but also helps to foster positive relationships between workers and positively influences work outcomes, especially in collaborative work situations (Schweitzer & Kerr, 2000). For example, for the purpose of developing workplace relationships and group solidarity, many Korean workplaces organize after-hours drinking rituals for all members of a team or department to join (compulsory) and to have 'fun' in (Lee, Park, Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2006).

2.4.4.3 Organizational relationships and the self

Confucianism is embedded in all areas of Korean society, including at both organizational and personal levels. Relationships within organizations are extremely hierarchical, so that organizational members are coordinated into roles which mimic the structure of a family (Kim & Rowley, 2009). Superiors have the role of the parent, colleagues who are older or

have longer work tenure are considered as older siblings, colleagues at the same age or work tenure are considered as siblings, and the subordinate has the role of a child. Figure 3 illustrates the parallel hierarchical relationship structure between family and organizational members under Confucian ideals. This relationship structure within organizations reinforces organizational hierarchy and status differences between individuals. Therefore, the Confucian values of hierarchical relationships are emphasized at two levels for the workers: first from the family and wider society, and secondly, from the organizational structure that divides individuals into different vertical levels. The use of honorifics and organizational positions to address each other constantly reinforces the hierarchical position and creates a boundary in the development of interpersonal relationships (Yum, 1988).

Superior	Parent
Older/ experienced colleague	Older sibling
Subordinate	Child (younger sibling)
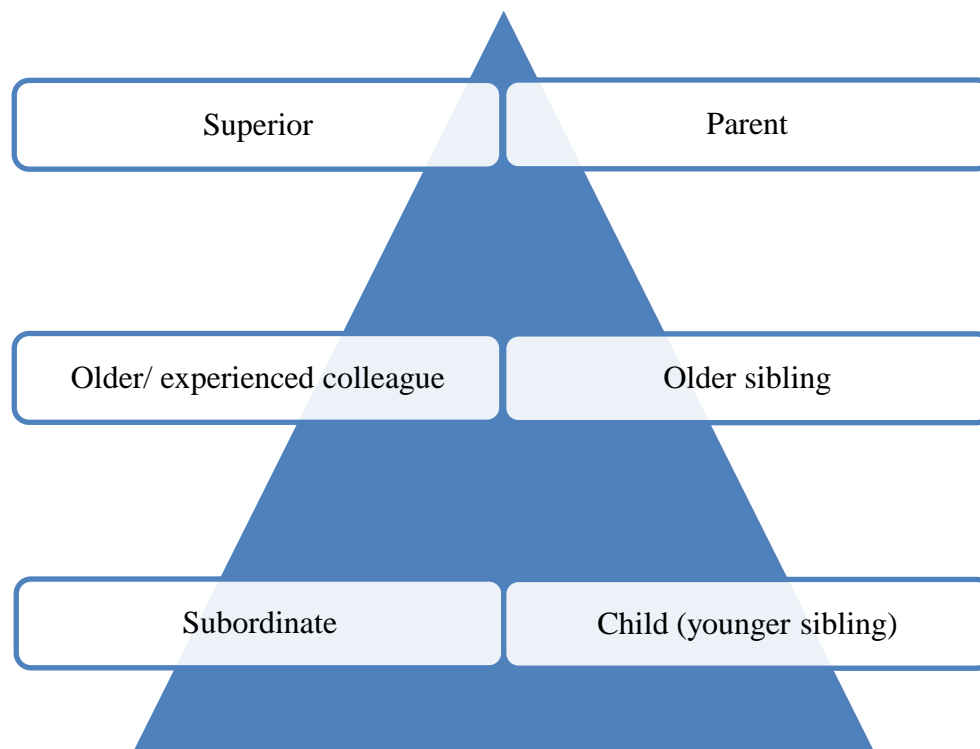
Figure 3. Confucian family- organizational relationships (refer to Chen, 1991)

Organizational relationships like this create paternalistic leadership within the organization, where employees are protected by their employer but are under that employer's control (Kee, 2008). In addition, such a family-like relationship structure also creates a more family-like environment. Interpersonal bonds that are more personal than those represented in the Western definition of work colleague, while family events are often shared with organizational members (Cho & Yoon, 2001). Therefore, organizational members frequently

attend another member's wedding, family funeral, and other family-related events, as a part of organizational culture. Unfortunately, authoritarianism and paternalism under Confucianism may be used negatively to bring about strict obedience to rules and loyalty to the company, thereby neglecting meeting the needs of company workers.

Although globalization is changing the perception that Korean workers have of such Confucian ideals of collectivistic, hierarchical relationships, this does not mean that they workers are becoming 'individualistic' as defined by Hofstede (1983). But whereas in the past the collective identity preceded the individual's own sense of personal identity, individual workers are now gaining identities separate from their organizational identities (Cho, 1994). For example, Cho's (1994) research showed that Korean workers saw themselves as valuing competitiveness, self-reliance, and internal locus of control to show work initiative, thus showing individualistic characteristics. However, within the same research, individuals also defined themselves as collectivistic people, whereas they saw other members as being more individualistic than themselves. This shows that while Korean workers are still conscious of contributing to the collectivistic group, they are noticing that individualistic behaviours are an important part of work.

Korean workplaces are influenced by Western ideals such as individualism, but core values in (collectivistic) Confucian practices remain (Song & Meek, 1998). In particular, the younger generation experiences greater confusion due to the conflicting views of Western and Confucian cultural ideals. Ingelhart's (1997) study of 43 industrialized countries showed that Korea has one of the greatest generation gap in understanding cultural values. The older generation tends to retain traditional values while the younger generation adopts more postmodern or individualistic values (Na & Duckitt, 2003). This means that the younger generations becomes more pluralistic in the social values they pursue (Kim & Rowley, 2009). Because it is difficult to generalize culture, this is a complex issue. Belonging to the same national culture does not mean that all those people will have the same cultural expectations (Griffin, 2006). For example, Shim et al. (2008) showed how a young female who was ethnically Korean but was educated in the USA for an extended period, felt that she was an individualistic person within Korea, but more collectivistic when she was in the USA. Therefore, Shim et al. (2008) argue that exposure to multiple cultural contexts creates confusion for the exposed individuals. Modern electronic media create an increasingly interconnected world and blur the cultural isolation bound to a particular place. 'The definition of situations and of behaviours is no longer determined by physical location… The

evolution of media has begun to cloud the differences between stranger and friend and to weaken the distinction between people who are 'here' and people who are 'somewhere else" (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 117). This means that media are blurring cultural boundaries, even for individuals who are considered as native to a particular geographic culture, creating more confusion within societies in defining their own cultural expectations.

Regardless of the various perspectives on culture, work relationships are still structured similarly to parent-child or teacher-student relations, which follow a hierarchical system where the eldest or authoritative figure is respected and governs others (Shim et al., 2008). The vertical organizational positions impose a sense of social order based on the traditional values of harmony similar to those of families. This sense of order is transformed into self-cultivated ideas of company loyalty and diligence to work hard for the organization. Individuals identify themselves with the company strongly, inspiring them to work over 12 hours a day (Kim & Park, 2003). Loyalty in the workplace is emphasized to a point where workers feel obligated to stay in the office until their boss goes home. However, it is interesting to consider how this behaviour intrudes on another Confucian value, that of family. Organizational members are constantly attached to other organizational members to a point that they cannot spend time with their families. Workers are expected to stay connected with the boss and to work after hours to fulfil their roles as members of the organization (Reynolds & Jeong, as cited in Shim et al., 2008).

Although the social status of women in modern Korean society has improved, workplaces are still relatively gendered. In 2015, Korea out of all the OECD countries was found to have the greatest organizational 'glass ceiling' for females (The Economist, 2015). Although now there are more women in Korean workplaces than in the past, the majority of these workers are young, unmarried, and childless (Cha & Thébaud 2009). However, women in Korea are now highly educated, ranking Korea first out of the OECD countries in 2012 in the proportion of women in the 25-34 years old age group holding a tertiary qualification ('Education at a glance: OECD indicators', 2014). This means that despite the improved quality of the female workforce, organizations are not accommodating this societal change. The change of values amongst Korean women suggests that they are more serious about their work life and careers than about the traditional gender role of being good homemakers (Kim, 1993). Unfortunately, traditional Confucian values and male dominance at work restrain women from reaching high managerial positions (Kang & Rowley, 2005). It is still considered conventional for women to exit companies upon marriage or childbirth (Kim &

Rowley, 2009), despite the society-wide trend of diminished birth rates countering this belief. Therefore, women remain restricted in certain types of occupations and low-ranking managerial positions (Kim, 2001), thereby supporting an unequal relationship between male and female workers. This suggests that cultural expectations towards the gender role remain strong within organizations, so that, regardless of the changing cultural perceptions of (especially younger) workers, women cannot hold the 'superior' position in the relational hierarchy. Therefore, Korean organizations embed strong Confucian values that support inequality (in both gender and age) in organizational relationships. This conflicts with the change experienced within the wider Korean society, creating confusion and conflict amongst organizational members.

2.5 Humour and Confucian organizations

2.5.1 Humour in Korean organizations

Humour is a universal phenomenon enjoyed by all cultures and societies, including within organizations. Humour is a part of the communication process between individuals, and humour helps us to understand the internal ideology of the communicating individual or group (Won, 2002). From a management perspective, humour may be an effective way to control workers (Minsky, 1980), while also promoting innovation and creativity (Isen et al., 1987). However, humour is a highly complex and contextual phenomenon, making it difficult to consider or use as a tool in organizations. This is because different cultural understandings create multiple variations in the sharing and interpretation of humour (Kalliny et al., 2006)

In a Confucian society sharing humour is rather complicated, as humour can influence the quality of interpersonal relationships (Cooper, 2008). Humour processes allow organizational members to develop relationships both vertically and horizontally (see Cooper, 2008) through laughter, which conflicts with various values within Confucianism. Confucianism is a philosophy of rites and rituals to create a sense of formality (Yao, 2000). Thus, organizational communication tends to be formally structured, with silence being a preferred form of communication for subordinates (Lim, 1999). Speech is devalued especially in 'superior' and 'subordinate' communication, as the Confucian value of hierarchy suggests that 'subordinates' should follow the decisions of the 'superiors' rather

than providing their opinion about a matter (Song & Meek, 1998). Individuals in relationally lower hierarchical positions tend to withhold their opinions to maintain group harmony (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990), and this restrain by subordinates includes a sense of humour. Thus, humour may be seen as an informal and unnecessary verbal communication, while non-verbal communication skills such as *nunchi* are favoured to create good organizational relationships.

The ambiguous nature of humour means that individuals may interpret the shared humour differently to the intentions of the communicator. Within Confucian organizational relationships, the consequences of failed humour may be greater than simply having an awkward moment, and may extend to directly damaging the hierarchical relationship structure between individuals. However, this does not mean that humour does not exist in Korean organizations. For example, studies such those of as Jung (2014) and Kim and Lee (2009) suggest that there are some forms of humour that are shared within Korean workplaces. However, it is unclear how this happens, and what impact Confucianism has on humour interactions. Nevertheless, most of the organizational humour research is based on Western organizational contexts (e.g. Collinson, 1988; Plester, 2007). Therefore, the impact of humour within non-Western contexts such as Korea is questionable, and lacks research. However, Korean organizations are changing, and external influences such as those of Western culture are affecting the cultural values of individuals within Korean organizations and society (Zhang et al., 2005).

2.5.2 Expanding Confucian boundaries

Globalization is changing the traditional values of Confucian-based cultures (Zhang & Harwood 2004). In particular, the younger generation is influenced by Western culture, which can promote different social values and create conflict and confusion in organizations. Research by Ingelhart (1997) suggests that in understanding cultural values, Korea has a significant 'generation gap'. However, hierarchical relationships and interdependence (a sense of 'we' or collectivity) are still predominant amongst the younger generation (Zhang et al., 2005). Similarly, within organizational contexts, work culture and interpersonal relationships are still greatly influenced by Confucian values (Kee, 2008). This suggests that while Confucianism in Korean organizations is relatively stagnant, individual workers' values are changing to potentially create a conflict between the different perspectives.

The changing cultural values in Korea may be portrayed through the use of humour in the workplace. The traditional Confucian organizations do not welcome the use of humour between workers. Due to the formality stressed in Confucian principles, humour is considered as an inferior form of communication in workplace settings. Therefore, a humorous individual is considered not to take work seriously (Yue, 2014). However, Western organizational influences are changing values in Korean organizations (especially those of the younger generation). This means that, regardless of the Confucian values reinforced within the workplaces, younger members may enjoy humour in the workplace, creating a divide between organizational members through humour. Therefore, humour may signal a change of cultural values within Korean organizations which clashes with traditional Confucianism.

2.6 Chapter summary

Humour is a universal phenomenon that can be observed in all societies, and can be an important part of organizational life through its influence on the quality of interpersonal relationships between organizational members (Cooper, 2008). While the study of humour in organizational settings has been gaining interest, the literature is still limited in its understanding of organizational humour in different cultural contexts. This is because organizations are artificial entities comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds (Morgan, 2006), which thus create a context with complex social interactions. Organizational members have different perceptions on which to base their construction of organizational relationships and communication. Although participating in rites and rituals within the organization can help individuals to experience group culture and learn the boundaries of acceptable behavior (Trice & Beyer, 1984), this is only a part of their understanding of the cultural values within the organizational context.

Organizational humour is an ambiguous process which can provide benefit to the workplace (i.e. Collinson, 1988; Plester, 2009b; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Romero & Pescosolido, 2008). Humour may also help organizational members to develop interpersonal relationships regardless of the hierarchical position (Cooper, 2008). However, existing humour studies do not fully explore the impact of humour in non-Western organizational contexts, where hierarchical relationships are more crucial in defining interpersonal relationships between

organizational members.   This means that in Confucian-based contexts such as Korea, the impact of humour on the quality of interpersonal relationships between organizational members may be more complicated, as the Confucian values embedded in the daily lives of the Korean people conflict with some of the Western forms of workplace humour.

The Confucian value of hierarchy defines organizational relationships vertically, and is supported by the use of honorifics in language, and the identification of each individual according to their organizational position, based on the family-like hierarchical system which structures the group (McBrian, 1978; Shim et al., 2008). Humour used in this Confucian organizational setting can be dangerous, as Confucianism is a culture of rituals, where formality is emphasized, and behaviour is restricted according to the individual's social (Deuchler, 1992) and organizational position (Yang et al., 2015). Therefore, workplace humour may be a relatively unfamiliar concept in Korean organizational life, where it is often considered inappropriate in a professional organizational setting (Song et al., 2005). However, globalization and Western influences are changing the perceptions of Korean organizational members, creating a wide generational gap in cultural values (Ingelhart, 1997) and potential conflicts within traditional Confucian relationships.

Unlike Western contexts, Korean organizational contexts embodying Confucian principles emphasize inequality, suggesting that those in a 'subordinate' position do not have the liberty of instigating humour with a 'superior'. That is, humour is not used to mitigate hierarchical differences and create extended collegiality. Using humour in organizational contexts goes beyond the formality expected in highly hierarchical Confucian relationships. However, Korean organizations are becoming more subject to Western organizational influences and modes of communication. Although humour may be attempted in conjunction with the communication skill of *nunchi* (Kim, 2003), enabling the communicating parties to save face in the process, it is uncertain whether humour can successfully blur the hierarchical boundaries in Confucian relationships. Thus, humour usage such as that shared between Western colleagues may clash dramatically with the current Korean ethos. This is an emerging aspect of workplace humour, and that predicates the call for further cross-cultural humour research. Therefore, this current research investigates this relationship between workplace humour and Confucianism in Korean organizations, and the next chapter will discuss how this question will be explored.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Chapter three will discuss how this research was constructed, conducted, and captured. First, the goals of the research and the research questions will be explained. Then the philosophical backgrounds and theoretical frameworks to the research will be explained, along with the reasons for taking a multi-voiced interpretivist approach. The research design, involving qualitative examination of three companies, and the data collection methods used - participant observation, interviews and document collection - will be discussed. The cultural challenges and language-related issues faced in conducting research in Korea will also be discussed. Analytic techniques (thematic analysis) used to understand the data collected will be explained in detail, using examples to illustrate the process. Lastly, the ethical issues involved in conducting this research will be discussed, and the chapter will conclude with a summary.

3.1 Research goals and research questions

The goal of this research is to investigate the relationship between Confucianism and humour in Korean organizations. This is an important topic to explore because humour is considered an important part of work life and organizational relationships (Collinson, 2002; Cooper, 2008; Duncan, Smeltzer, & Leap, 1990). However, under the Confucian perspective, humour is considered to damage the formality and respect expected in such a hierarchical relationship (Yue, 2014), and it is not favoured, especially in superior-subordinate relationships. Because it is unclear how these conflicting ideas may impact the workplace, it is important to understand workplace humour in Confucian-based contexts.

The overall research question guiding the research is: *what is the relationship between Confucianism and humour in organizations, and what might this relationship tell us about, not just South Korean organizations, but the role of organizational humour in a global world?* The following three sub-questions support the main research question by breaking down the topic into smaller parts, and enable investigation of the relationship between Confucianism and humour in depth:

1. What is the relationship between the Confucian value of harmony and organizational humour?

2. What is the relationship between the Confucian unequal relationship structures and organizational humour?

3. What is the relationship between the Confucian value of formality and organizational humour?

Sub question 1. What is the relationship between the Confucian value of harmony and organizational humour?

This question focuses on the Confucian value of harmony, and whether this value influences how organizational members use humour in Korean workplaces, and vice versa. The idea of harmony is derived from the Confucian concepts of 'jen' and 'i', where the harmony of the group is valued by all its members (Yum, 1988). This question is investigated because past research shows that humour helps to increase group cohesion (Fine & Soucey, 2005; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Terrion & Ashforth, 2002) and to resolve conflict in the workplace (Collinson, 1988; Smith, Harrington, & Neck, 2000), and thus leads to harmonious work groups. However, past studies have mostly been conducted in Western organizational contexts, and do not fully explore how harmony is achieved under Confucian assumptions. This is important to consider, because harmony is achieved differently in different cultural contexts, and humour may even have adverse effects in the workplace.

Sub question 2. What is the relationship between the Confucian unequal relationship structures and organizational humour?

This question aims to understand the complex relationship structure within Korean workplaces, and how these unequal relationship structures influence the use of humour and vice versa. While studies such as that of Kondo (2009) provide an in-depth, contextual discussion of the importance of hierarchical roles in Confucian societies, it is unclear whether the use of humour affects and is also affected by this relationship structure. Within organizational contexts, differences in power between organizational members influence how humour is used (Holmes, 2000), yet this is mainly investigated in relation to the power

differences created through organizational hierarchy. Furthermore, humour influences the quality of interpersonal relationships between organizational members, and helps to temporarily level hierarchical relationships within organizations (Cooper 2008). This means that the unequal relationship structure prescribed under Confucianism may be impacted through humour. Therefore, this question also aims to extend Cooper's relational process model (2008), where it suggests that humour influences the quality of interpersonal relationships through interrelated processes of affect-reinforcement, similarity-attraction, self-disclosure, and hierarchical salience. Although only a few studies have used Cooper's (2008) model to explore the impact of humour on organizational relationships, the four sub-processes provide a good basis to investigate how organizational members in Confucian contexts may be influenced through humour processes. This will help to explore how the hierarchical relationships developed from both organizational positions and Confucian norms (based on age) affect and are affected by the use of humour in Korean workplaces.

Sub question 3. What is the relationship between the Confucian value of formality and organizational humour?

This question is included because past studies suggest that in Confucian cultures humour is devalued due to the idea of formality (i.e. Jiang, Yue, & Lu, 2011; Yue, 2014); yet these studies do not fully investigate how this Confucian value impacts the use of humour in workplaces. The idea of formality is linked to the Confucian concept of 'li', where being formal is associated with showing respect and consideration towards others (Yum, 1988). While it is expected that this idea concerning formality and humour is related to the hierarchical roles and professionalism expected in organizational relationships, this question attempts to further explore this relationship within Korean workplace contexts.

3.2 Research approach

The research has been designed and structured on the basis of the specific ontological and epistemological views of the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It is important to recognize this factor, as the nature of any scientific investigation is based on a paradigm which prescribes a series of assumptions to be shared across a particular discipline. Ontology specifies the nature of reality, which describes the existence of, and relationships between,

entities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemology is about knowledge, where philosophical arguments verify the scope and nature of knowledge in order to identify its legitimacy (Collis & Hussey, 2013). Therefore, methodology is defined by these philosophical systems which determine the set of techniques to be employed for analysis (Smith & Heshusius, 1986). This research uses a qualitative approach, which is based on an interpretive paradigm (Creswell, 2013). Because humour is a phenomenon that gains different meanings by interpreting social interactions, a multi-voiced interpretivism will be used as the underlying theoretical framework.

3.2.1 Interpretivism

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, an interpretivist approach is adopted. The interpretivist paradigm focuses on understanding social actions through grasping their meanings in a particular context (Fay, 1996). This approach suggests that human actions can only be understood this way, thus a social action can be interpreted to have multiple meanings depending on the situation, and thus multiple realities may be created. This differs from the study of natural sciences or positivism. Interpretivists seek to understand the meaning of social phenomena by conceptualising several realities rather than just one.

> Subjectivist assumptions view reality as imagined in and therefore a product of the human mind; believe humans are autonomous, give meanings to their surroundings, and are creative; that knowledge is personal and experiential; and therefore research methods need to explore individual understandings and subjective experiences of the world (Cunliffe, 2010, p. 649).

Therefore, social realities and knowledge can be captured through research only partially, as research accounts do not illustrate all of the stories which play out in an organization at any one time (Boje, 1995).

Capturing one of these realities involves the active interpretation of the phenomenon of interest by the researcher. Interpretation is considered as a natural part of human beings rather than a procedure or a technique to conduct in human sciences (Grondin, 1994). Therefore, because traditions shape perceptions and the ability to make judgements in a given situation, it is impossible to achieve a clear objective understanding of a phenomenon

(Gadamer, 1975). This means that a person's perception is structured through their past experiences and their knowledge resulting from these experiences. These experiences can also be considered as 'a living force that enters into all understanding' (Gallagher, 1992, p. 87) for the person. Since past experiences shape an individual's interpretations of the world, natural biases are created in this process. Thus, it is important to recognize and engage with the fact that every individual is biased. In this research, understanding of this is necessary in order to achieve transparency in the research process and not to claim objectivity (as in positivist approach) in the data collected.

Interpretivism values human subjective experience (Andrews, 2012). While social reality is considered to be socially constructed, under interpretivism it is also objectified - meaning that reality is comprised of commonly understood meanings or facts, which are interpreted according to particular situations. Searle (1995) describes this position as ontologically subjective and epistemologically objective. Under an interpretivist approach, individual experiences are valued, where participants are the informants of their subjective world view (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As there is no one 'right answer' to these subjective world views, Cunliffe, Helin, and Luhman (2014) suggests that in order to understand the complexity of reality, the polyphony of the different voices involved in the phenomenon of study needs to be captured (see polyphony, Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). The idea of polyphony encourages researchers to uncover the diverse perceptions of individuals by using participatory and longitudinal methods in collecting data. Similarly, reflexive pragmatism allows the researcher to navigate between different interpretations and to offer alternative views on the same phenomenon of study. Reflexive pragmatism suggests that there are multiple interpretations to reality, and challenging these diverse interpretations helps to arrive at the strongest or most interesting result (Alvesson, 2010). Therefore, when investigating a phenomenon which is based on exchange or co-creation which can be interpreted in multiple ways, it is important to examine the phenomenon using a multi-voiced interpretivist approach such as those suggested by Alvesson (2010) and Cunliffe et al. (2014).

3.2.2 Using multi-voiced interpretivism in humour research

Humour is a social process where different meanings may be constructed by the interacting individuals (Holmes, 2006). For example, the same humour interaction may be interpreted differently, where one person finds the humour funny but others do not. The highly

contextual nature of humour means that the same joke cannot be expected to achieve the same result (such as laughter). Therefore, the impact of humour is different in every instance, and the humour process is influenced by contextual aspects such as culture. In the interactive processes, humour helps to build culture and culture also influences humour (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998), making humour a complex process to understand.

This research explores humour as a social process in Korean organizations. The aim is to explore individual perceptions and experiences of workplace humour, while recognizing the highly relational aspect of both humour and Confucianism within Korean workplaces. The experience of humour differs according to the environment, including the physical context and the communicators sharing the particular humour. The humour process is perceived differently and its meaning changes depending on the communicating persons, and it is difficult to achieve the same understanding or enjoyment using a particular joke or humour. This means that the humour needs to be examined through multiple interpretations rather than one, in order to understand the multiple realities constructed in the humour process. Therefore, this research adopts a multi-voiced interpretivist approach, where the complexities of humour and the perceptions of the associated relationship between interacting individuals can be investigated in detail.

3.2.3 The researcher

In every interaction there are multiple interpretations of realities which shift according to time, place, and in relation to others, and therefore meanings differ between the participants and also between them and the researcher, (Gergen, 2009). In order to explore the interpretive insights of organizational members as to how humour is engaged and exchanged within the workplace, every interaction is given its own context. The origin of our (humour) experience is not individual and cognitive but social and relational, with people being inherently responsive to each other (Cunliffe, 2008). This means that every experience is different - individuals respond differently even for repeated experiences, along with the change of meanings people convey in every instance through negotiation and interpretation.

Similarly, researchers construct multiple realities through the interactions with research participants. This allows interpretive insights to be achieved about organizational members in how they engage in organizational life (Hatch, 1997). The presence of the researcher

cannot be ignored, and the mere existence of the researcher during the interaction process already constructs different meanings of reality, including the one captured by the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Therefore, in the course of conducting research it is difficult to clearly label the researcher as an insider or an outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), but rather as one embedded as a part of the context (Alvesson, 2010). Rather than assuming that personal bias is removed, acknowledging that the reality captured in the course of this research is in fact constructed through the interpretation of the researcher provides transparency to the research.

Conducting research that adopts a multi-voiced interpretivist perspective means that the researcher must be able to realize this continuous reconstruction of realities by putting on 'different hats' and perform a 'dynamic interplay between 'insideness' and 'outsideness'' (Cunliffe et al., 2014, p.344) . In particular, Walker and Dewar (2000) suggests that in ethnographical style of research, the epistemological framework suggests that knowledge can only be understood when the researcher has 'gone native' and is embedded within the social process of the study. Walker and Dewar (2000) describe this process of 'going native' as 'the researcher no longer sees herself as interpreting the world but as fully participating in its social construction and as thus inside the body of her own research' (p. 718). Walker and Dewar (2000) also suggests that this idea challenges 'the traditional objectivist and rationalist views of inquiry, which keep the world, both physical and social, at a distance, as an independently existing universe, and which hold knowledge as reflecting, or even corresponding, to the world' (Steier, 1991, p.1). The irony lies in the fact that the traditional objectivist views see the process of 'going native' as something which diminishes the value of research, and goes outside the scope of the researcher. However, multi-voiced interpretivism suggests that a researcher has already 'gone native' at the commencement of the research, as s/he is engaged with the social phenomena by interacting with people (participants), and these people interpret and create meanings in reality, no matter how inactive they may feel in the process (Alvesson, 2010).

This research adopts Alvesson's (2010) assumption that the researcher is a part of the research context, and thus the researcher's presence is expected to be embedded in the context of the research. This means that the researcher is already involved within the (studied) situation and influences the interactions under observation, regardless of the attempt to be an 'objective observer' of the social process in its natural settings. Interactions between the researcher and participants (during interviews or observations) create new meanings of reality

which construct different implications for the participant and for the researcher. This again creates a need to acknowledge the fact that the data which is presented in this thesis is the researcher's own interpretation of reality, experienced through interactions within the studied context. For example, the researcher was given working roles within all three participant companies. Although these roles did not involve extensive work like that of the other organizational members (while the nature of the given tasks and expectations of other organizational members did change to have more significance in the later days of the data collection period) it contributed to influence their perceptions in terms of shifting the role of the researcher from that of a foreigner to 'one of us'. This increased the openness of the participants along with the richness of the embedded experience of researcher.

The relationship between the researcher and the participants changed, where to some participants, the researcher became someone that they could rely on in terms of both professional (work) and emotional matters. Sometimes this caused the scheduled interviews to become a setting for telling secrets or revealing sensitive feelings which organizational members usually would not expose in the workplace. This created new meanings of reality for both the participants and the researcher, as it was crafted through 'our' interaction. As this thesis is written by the researcher, what is presented in it is the researcher's interpretation of this shared experience, which heavily embeds the researcher's presence. However, it also presents the participants' voices and interpretations as a part of the co-constructed reality between the researcher and the participants.

3.3 Research design

Research design refers to the structure of an enquiry, which guides the process of data collection and analysis (Buchanan & Bryman, 2009). Due to the exploratory nature of this research, the best approach was determined to be a qualitative research design, using an ethnographic approach in multiple contexts. Humour in organizational research is often studied in quantitative terms, as a factor which moderates the relationship between other organizational processes (e.g. Avolio, Howell, & Sosik, 1999; Yue et al., 2016). This means that the humour process is rarely contextualized, and investigated in depth. In order to understand humour as a social process which is highly influenced by the context, humour is investigated within and across each of the researched companies. Each investigated company

is framed as a context, and provides an environment in which to analyse humour holistically. Since this research seeks to understand how and why workplace humour is used within Korean organizations, and involves complex influences of Confucian values, a qualitative, interpretive study best fits the purpose. Therefore, three Korean organizations are investigated, with each company being considered as a context which tells a rich, contextualized story.

3.3.1 Multiple stories

Humour is a contextual phenomenon; therefore humour must be investigated in relation to the context being studied. This study honours the context by providing a rich, thick description of the stories collected in each of the companies. This process involves examining humour through the combination of several qualitative methods, and avoiding reliance on one single approach (Knights & McCabe, 1997). In order to provide a greater confidence in the findings, the research uses interviews, participant observations, and documents to collect data (this is explained in more detail in section 3.4). Using a combination of these methods allow the humour process to be examined in depth, and capture rich stories in relation to the context.

However, the generalizability of qualitative studies is highly debated. This means that because findings from each company may only be relevant to the particular context which has been examined, the generalizability of this study may be doubted. This study does not attempt to objectify or generalize the results from the data collected, and this work acknowledges the subjective nature of the data presented. Instead of providing objective, generalizable data, the qualitative data from this research present rich descriptions of unique situations. The captured data illustrates an attempt to understand the complex relationships which occur in the studied organizations (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The organization is a context, but can also be a unit of analysis. Other examples of units of analysis include the individual, change processes, decision processes, respondent validation mechanisms, and events (Buchanan, 2012). However, if the qualitative study design has been appropriately informed by theory, and contributes to established theory, then generalisation can be performed. This is different to the statistical generalization referred in quantitative research, but is rather an analytic generalization, where the results from a particular study may be extended and developed into a theory that may be extended to other contexts (Yin, 1994).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) refers this as transferability rather than generalizability. Qualitative studies using a clear set of procedures to investigate different situations may be more reliable in supporting the same theory.

This study investigates three different companies in Korea, and these three companies provide rich data about the studied phenomenon in multiple contexts, in order to further the understanding of the complexity of the relationship between humour and Confucian relationships within Korean workplaces. Humour is a concept that is highly contextualised, and each environment exerts a different set of cultural influence on the humour used between the individuals. Conducting a qualitative, interpretive study in various contexts (involving industry and geographic variances) within Korea, provides a wider set of possibilities, when considering the Confucian culture as a part of each unique context. The multi-voice interpretivist approach allows each company to share a story of its own. Commonalities can be found between the studied companies, by analysing the 'threads' and generalizing or applying only to the researched set of companies, not to the general community. This is similar to much of the qualitative humour research conducted in the past, such as Plester's humour and organizational culture research in 2007. Humour is a universal phenomenon, but rich data relating to how different layers of culture impact humour in the workplace are still rare. Furthermore, Cooper's relational process model (2008) states that humour impacts the four social processes which determine the quality of interpersonal relationships created. While the cognitive process that impacts interacting individuals (e.g. feeling attraction towards an individual that they share a laugh with) is similar for individuals across all cultures, the social aspects of this model (e.g. whether the interacting individuals are in a relationship suitable to share humour) are very contextual. Therefore, due to the increased complexity of culture through globalization, a qualitative, interpretive approach is more suitable to an attempt to examine the influence of different cultural and organizational contexts.

Company selection should be made based on those situations where the expected learning will be the greatest (Stake, 2013). Conducting an interpretive study in Korea will provide the greatest learning through the in-depth examination of humour and social processes within a variety of workplace contexts, where the ethnographic approach taken to collect data will provide rich data sources and full establishment of the context (Wolcott, 1994). The process of company selection for this study will be discussed in more detail in section 3.3.2.

In order to honour the context, each of these selected companies are analysed and described in detail. Therefore, this study provides a separate chapter which describes the contextual background of each company (Chapter Four). Then patterns across the three companies are explored. This is achieved in two phases: the first was at the initial time of data collection, where themes and categories (patterns) were identified in the first participating organization. These themes and categories were then searched for in the next participating organization. The second phase is at the time of full data analysis, after the data collection period. This allows new patterns within each unique context to emerge. Then the new concepts can again be searched across different cases. The process of data analysis is explained in detail in section 3.6.

In order to fully capture the rich stories of each of the companies, member checking was also integrated into the research process. This was achieved by providing the researcher's interpretation of the data in the form of a summarized report for each of the participant companies, and giving it to the participants. This allowed participants to have the opportunity to discuss the interpreted data, and to check whether the researcher's interpretation was consistent with the participant's view of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). However, the lack of response from the participants and companies limited the purpose of using member checking in the research process. This is explained further in section 3.6.3.

3.3.2 Company selection process

The research was conducted in three different companies. Initially six companies were approached with regard to gaining access for the research, and three agreed to participate in the project. These three companies were introduced through the researcher's personal contacts (family members) based in Korea, although the personal contacts did not work at the approached companies. Going through personal contacts is critical in gaining access, as in the Korean context it is important to establish relationships with unfamiliar groups or companies through a third party (that already has an established relationship with them). This is termed *yongo* (similar to the concept of *quanxi* in China), where knowing someone that can provide support in establishing new relationships and often allows networking with parties that are inaccessible to outsiders, thus influencing the quality of the relationships that can be developed between individuals or groups (Horak & Taube, 2015).

Approaches regarding access were made at either middle management or senior management level. The first company was approached through a middle manager, who then gained consent from the CEO with regard to the research. This middle manager implemented the arrangement for access and was the key contact person throughout the research. However, after the research and when the summary report was presented (for the purpose of member checking), this middle manager had left the company. Therefore, communication was made directly with the CEO. The second company was approached directly through the CEO, but after gaining the consent for company access, one of the middle managers made the access related arrangements. The third company was approached through a senior manager who was an external contractor to the company, and was not a member of the company itself. However, this individual had authority similar to that of the senior managers within the company, and implemented the access arrangements via the CEO. In order to protect their identities, the three participant companies have been code-named Truscene, Mintrack, and Wisepath.

The participant companies were selected based on the potential richness of the stories that could be provided through their diverse and unique workplace environments. Therefore, the strategy used to select the companies was 'purposeful selection', which allows the researcher to obtain a variety of information about the studied phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013). Companies were selected based on the range of age groups of the organizational members, as the wide range of age difference between organizational members relates to the multiple hierarchy and status differences between individuals (organizational hierarchy and age-related hierarchy) that were key aspects in this study. This is consistent with Silverman's (2013) suggestion that when choosing groups to study, these groups must be relevant to the theoretical position and research questions. This information was gained though the key liaison person for each company, who provided the approximate age of the youngest member and the oldest member, and the different organizational positions existing within the company.

Data collection was conducted for a period of one month in each company. During this one month period, the researcher was engaged on a full-time basis within the company. This included collecting data during the normal business hours, ranging from eight in the morning until seven in the evening. However, data was also collected during after business hours and during weekends, when the researcher was invited to join activities such as the periodic formal training provided to organizational members during weekends, and informal meetings

such as dinner and drinking functions after hours. The one month time period was selected to provide the time needed to integrate with the participants and the workplace. This allowed the researcher to collect data from multiple companies.

The process of selecting the companies to study and determining when to complete the data collection was difficult. Pettigrew (1990) suggests that in determining when to stop collecting data, the researcher should consider different aspects such as the research question, the themes, time frames, and other issues such as resource constraints. In this research the time period for collecting data was approximated (rather than determined) prior to starting the data collection. This was because the participant companies were located in Korea, and the researcher was based in New Zealand, which meant that prolonged research might cause practical issues such as visa- and cost-related problems, as a part of the resource constraints mentioned by Pettigrew (1990). Furthermore, after data had been collected from the three companies, it was decided that sufficient data had been gathered, and the amount of data collected was large. Nevertheless, the 46 interviews across the three companies suggested data saturation (Bowen, 2008), and it was determined that the research question could already be answered. The Confucian-based hierarchical relationships and the use of humour according to these hierarchical differences between individuals were similar in the three companies, thus this supported the researcher's decision to stop data collection after the third company that was studied.

3.4 Data collection methods

In this research, the methods selected for the data collection were participant observations, interviews, and document collections. This is a common approach to conducting interpretive studies, and can be easily confused with conducting ethnography. However, this study used an ethnographic approach rather than ethnography itself, mainly due to the level of involvement and the time spent within the participating organization.

Investigating humour in a Confucian organizational context is a complex process. Humour is a contextual phenomenon, and individuals interpret humour interactions differently (Alden et al., 1993). This means that humour is an ambiguous process and it is difficult to understand such a complex process using a single method of collecting data. In order to capture the most realistic and detailed data with regard to this ambiguous process, the design of this research

had to be sufficiently flexible for the participants to use their own experiences for illustration, yet consistent enough for the researcher to compare the findings across the different organizational contexts (Eisenhardt, 1989). Therefore, by using participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document collection, the different stories and experiences of the research participants could be captured and extended (Patton, 2005) beyond their own perceptions of the humour interactions in the workplace. Furthermore, using a combination of these three methods helped to minimize the biases of collecting data by each of these methods. For example, examining the company brochure which describes the desired relationships orientation between organizational members (e.g. a collective group); the actual interactions between organizational members through observations; and the interviews, allowed the researcher to align the data to see what was really happening in the workplace.

The data collection methods selected also fitted the unique cultural orientation of this research. This relates to the expected role of the researcher which is dependent on the culture, where Michailova (2004) states that the researcher must also be contextualized along with the research. Participants' identification and expectations of researchers based on their age, nationality, cultural background, and language skills play an important role in fieldwork. In this study, the researcher is ethnically Korean and educated in New Zealand, and the researcher's cultural understanding and language abilities helped her to conduct research in the three Korean organizations effectively. Ethnic background and language ability were important in contextualizing the researcher particularly in this research, because Korea is a relatively homogeneous society in terms of ethnicity, and Korean is the common language used by the individual participants. This means that a person from a different cultural background might have experienced more difficulties in collecting data through interactive methods such as participant observations and interviews.

3.4.1 Participant observation

Participant observation involves a direct contact between the researcher and the subject of interest. Knowledge is gained by direct experience of events or specific situations, as a 'mode of being in the world' (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 249). The experience becomes conceptually and practically significant because what is encoded is not an artificially created social setting but the naturally emerging one. Therefore, in this research, the researcher became fully involved with the organizational members within the three

participant companies. The researcher attempted to behave like the observed members within each of the companies, where she was given a desk (workspace) amongst the organizational members to record data. In the manufacturing based company, in order to gather data in a variety of settings within the company the researcher was given an opportunity to be involved in both office and factory buildings. The process involved being introduced to the organizational members within each of the companies, and briefly explaining the purpose of the research. Then, the researcher approached each of the organizational members within the organization to gain consent in recording their everyday activities (this process also involved documenting the consent gained of every individual using the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Forms (Section 3.7 on Ethics). In this process, the researcher also gave out small bags of sweets to the individual members as a sign of 'thank you' to the participants. Although the original intention of the researcher was to provide the sweets to the participants on the last day of data collection, the CEO of the first participant company advised that it is culturally correct to provide gifts at the beginning of the research period. However, this process did not restrain some of the organizational members from refusing to participate in the research, or in asking for certain observation records to be erased in the later weeks of the data collection period. Therefore, in response to requests by the participants, some incidents were removed from the observation data.

3.4.1.1 Participant as observer

Gold (1958) outlines the different roles that a researcher may take in a participant observation, where these roles vary according to the level of involvement of the researcher within the context. These roles are complete participation, participant as observer, observer as participant, and complete observer. In this research, the researcher took the role of a participant as observer. In this role, the researcher becomes fully involved with the social setting, and the identity of the researcher is opened up to the research participants. In this research, the researcher was given a variety of tasks in each company (such as translation, reception duties, tour-guiding overseas partners, basic training for overseas partners, and dismantling devices in a factory). This allowed her to observe participants closely and in their daily duties, with minimal disruption to their work.

Participants were highly aware of the researcher's presence during the first week of the research. This may be because during the first week of the observation period the researcher gained participants' consent from the individual members, meaning that the participants were constantly reminded of the researcher's identity as an outsider. During this period, some participants avoided using any titles in addressing the researcher. Other participants used the full name of the researcher and the title 'ssi' ('Kim Heesun ssi'), where the word 'ssi' is one of the common ways to address another individual in a relatively formal manner, and is used within the Korean context between unfamiliar individuals where the hierarchical status is unclear.

However, after one week, participants began the treat the researcher as a part of the work group, and continued their usual work behaviour. At this point, the researcher was addressed as 'Heesun ssi' by most organizational members. Although the term 'ssi' is relatively formal, it is also commonly used towards an individual of lower hierarchical status. Some of the senior managers and organizational members who were older than the researcher used the researcher's first name only. This suggests that these individuals were aware of their relationally higher status. One participant addressed the researcher as 'unni', which is an informal title used towards an older individual by females (refer to Chapter 4, Figure 5 on 'Formality and the relational titles used within Korean organizations'). As the researcher was younger than most participants in the three participating companies, the titles used to address the researcher were relatively informal and were those used towards an individual of lower hierarchical status. This shift in titles used to address the researcher during the first week of data collection suggests acceptance, allowed the researcher to form interpersonal relationships with the participants, and resulted in participants' consent to interviews and improved data collection. The researcher was also invited to both formal and informal company events such as an industry fair, training sessions at weekends, dinner parties, informal after-hours drinking, formal drinking functions, karaoke sessions, and two-day company workshops. The researcher was expected to participate in these events, although most of the informal events were arranged spontaneously, with only a few of the organizational members invited to them.

The high level of involvement by the researcher provided realistic data, and helped her to understand humour used in these three Korean workplaces. As a consequence, the deep integration of the researcher within the companies may cause concerns of 'going native', where Gold (1958) suggests that being a participant as observer risks having too much

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involvement with the participating group, and the researcher loses their stance of being the researcher and takes up the participating group's world view (refer to Beynon's (1975) study of Ford and the emotional involvement of the researcher with the factory workers). However, under the multi-voiced interpretivist approach that is adopted for this research, the idea of 'going native' is part of the natural process in conducting research in the field, and this process allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participants and the phenomena studied (Alvesson, 2010; Walker & Dewar, 2000).

Fully participating within each of the companies helped the researcher to understand the complex humour used between the participants. The researcher was also a part of the humour interactions within the participant companies, and this experience allowed her to deepen the understanding and interpretation of the humour used within Confucian relationships. In particular, as Confucian relationships emphasize the hierarchical difference between the individuals, participant observations helped in the collection of data about the body language and rituals which represented these cultural orientations. Furthermore, participant observations helped to capture interactions and instances involving quotations and descriptions, and to gain rich raw data (Silverman, 2013).

Cooper's relational process model (2008) was used as a basic guide to observe humour interactions within the participant companies. The model helped to capture how humour interactions may affect the relationships between organizational members, and to ask impromptu questions to understand such relationships effectively. The four interrelated processes within the model also helped the researcher to understand her relationship with the participants, and analyse the humour instances which the researcher was involved in. This allowed the researcher to respond and communicate appropriately with the participants, and thus fully participate as a part of the research process.

In this research, data from participant observations were analysed simultaneously with the process of data collection. This means that observations, the evaluation of what to record, and the recording of these observations, were commenced at the same time, and were followed by primary analysis of the recorded data. At the beginning of the research, when the humour instances and other relevant observations were not frequent, this was effective and efficient. However, as the frequency of humour interactions increased in the later days of the data collection period, it was difficult to conduct analyses simultaneously. Furthermore, in events such as after-hours drinking, the researcher was also expected to drink along with

the organizational members. Therefore, primary analysis could not be conducted in these situations, and was completed during weekends.

3.4.1.2 Coding

In this research, to assist the researcher in collecting the relevant data in the field, and organizing these data throughout the data collection process, a coding system was used. This is because 'data collection and data analysis are tightly interwoven' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 59), and conducting a pre-analysis using a coding system helps participant observers to look for findings in the course of collecting data (Lichterman, 2002). Following the coding-and-observing strategy of Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin (as cited in Lichterman, 2002), codes were developed to document what data had already been found, and also to determine what to look for: and thus to construct an on-going dialogue for the researcher. The number of coding categories for observations in this research was 17, reflecting Sharpe and Koperwas's (2003) suggestion, for the sake of simplicity and reliability, of having a maximum of 16 to 20 categories,.

The 17 categories used in the observation process were not exclusive of each other, and some incidents crossed over two or more categories. For example, an observation of Mintrack members calling a young organizational member Ivory '*stupid'* was recorded as banter, repeated jokes, and top-down humour. While some incidents were categorized during the observation, others were categorized directly after the recording of observation notes. This is because most of the humour-related incidents needed to be captured as a whole (i.e. the entire conversation) and in detail, and thus the researcher may not have had time to organize the related categories in the midst of the observation.

The coding system used in this research was developed from the humour and Confucianism literature. Most of the humour-related categories were developed prior to the data collection, but the Confucianism-related categories were included during the field work stage, due to the increasing importance of this idea within both interview and observation data. Table 1 shows the 17 categories used to record the observation data, along with the definition of each category. The daily business activities within each of the organizations were important because they provided the context for each studied company. Because the different nature of formal and informal events (such as formality) influenced the humour used between the

participating organizational members, they were separately recorded. Artefacts and written material which displayed the culture of each participant company was recorded, along with rituals enacted by the participants. To identify the possible subcultures within the organization, work groups and social groups were also categorized. To explore the formality within the culture, and the emphasis on the hierarchy between the organizational members, the titles and language (such as honorifics) used were also observed. The underlying assumptions and values that each individual perceived as important (to the members and organization) were also recorded, but these records were based on both the physical observation and the interpretation of the researcher. The 'outcomes' category consisted of data that was linked to the ideas of performance, recruitment, retention, and job satisfaction. Formal and structured jokes were the most common form of humour shared between the participants and thus formed an independent category. Banter was also common, and the same joke was often repeated within the organization for days. The humour shared between organizational members was also recorded according to the hierarchical levels of the participating individuals, and was categorized as top-down (superior-subordinate), down-top (subordinate-superior), and same level. These hierarchical levels were divided by both organizational position and age.

Table 1. Coding categories for observation

Category	Definition
1. Business activities	Daily work-related activities conducted by participants
2. Formal events	Official work-related or formally arranged events
3. Informal events	Non-work-related or informally arranged events
4. Rituals	Ceremonial activities or instances with social meanings within the company
5. Artefacts	Items displayed in the workplace that had cultural significance or humorous intent
6. Displayed material	Written material reflecting humour or culture
7. Groups	Work teams and social groups
8. Titles and hierarchy	Titles used by organizational members to address each other
9. Language and honorifics	Formal/informal language used between organizational members
10. Values	Ideals and principles important to the individual and the organization, including social status
11. Banter	Joking insults or abuse
12. Formal jokes	Structured or traditional jokes
13. Repeated jokes	Similar themed humour shared on an on-going basis

14. Top-down humour	Humour shared by a superior with subordinate/s
15. Down-top humour	Humour shared by a subordinate towards superior/s
16. Same level humour	Humour shared by organizational members of the same hierarchical status (age and/or organizational hierarchy)
17. Outcomes	Recruitment, retention, satisfaction, performance related to humour or culture

Most of the observed humour activities were easy to recognize as 'humour' due to the structure of the jokes. The most common form of humour observed in the participant companies was formal jokes, and these followed a pattern of mimicking the trendy jokes which frequently appear in the Korean media. Therefore, during the data collection period the researcher invested time after normal working hours to study Korean entertainment programmes, and the jokes which were 'in trend'. Other types of humour were recognized through the voice tone and the body language of the participants. Although when the researcher entered into a new organization to observe these were not recognized immediately, spending time with the participants allowed the researcher to intrinsically realize the different expressions that participants made when sharing humour, in comparison to their discussion of normal work related tasks.

Observation data was recorded in as detailed form as possible. Humour interactions were mostly recorded (close to) verbatim, and other contextual information was also noted whenever possible. The purpose of this was to increase the reliability of the data and to minimize the influence of the researcher's personal opinions on the record of observed incidents (Seale, 1999). Although hand-writing the observed instances mean that the data may not be recorded in their entirety, audio or video recording interactions between the participants was not possible. At the beginning of the data collection period, some of the participants in the first company showed discomfort towards being recorded, and this reaction was greater when they saw an audio recorder (in comparison to writing notes). This suggested that the participants may not engage in their routine or normal conversations and interactions, and thus a note taking method was used to collect observation data. The process of recording observations were also systematized (Silverman, 2013) by the researcher taking notes during the observed incident, and then expanding these notes after the direct observation, and also recording, in a separate journal, the ideas and issues raised. These recorded data were analysed simultaneously. The researcher also reflected on the issues observed during the day and made notes on personal ideas and feelings about these incidents.

After the data collection period this reflective journal helped the researcher in the analytic process by refreshing her memory of her experiences.

3.4.2 Interviews

Qualitative interviewing tends to be flexible, and responds and adjusts to the interviewees. This research used both ethnographic and respondent approaches (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), where the ethnographic approach involves informal and impromptu questions asked in the field, and the respondent approach involves participants being asked to share their own experiences and perspectives in formal interviews (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012). In the case of formal interviews, semi-structured interviews were performed, where basic questions on fairly specific topics were covered, but flexible responses were allowed. In this research semi-structured interviews were most suitable, because they allow interviewees to explain in detail specific situations that they consider important. If a significant idea was mentioned by the interviewees', impromptu questions were also asked. This allowed the interviewees to show their own views, and enabled them to elaborate on the events, patterns and behaviour which might be important in explaining the phenomenon of interest (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

In total, 46 (formal) interviews were conducted. The main purpose of the interviews was to listen to the individuals' accounts of experiences within the workplace, and thereby to investigate the relationship between Confucian-based culture, humour, and interpersonal relationships between the organizational members. The sub- questions to this research assumed that there is a dominant culture which influences organizational members, therefore semi-structured questions relating to the overall organizational culture and to Confucian-based culture, were asked. Then, other questions relating to the quality of relationships and the social processes triggered in the use of humour were asked. These questions were based on the components of Cooper's relational process model (2008), which are affect-reinforcement, similarity-attraction, self-disclosure, and hierarchical salience. Therefore, the research questions formed the basis for the interview questions.

For the purpose of getting interview participants adjusted to the interview situation, each was first questioned about their individual background, and the interview then progressed onto the prepared semi-structured questions. However, when participants discussed ideas which were important to them, these were elaborated further by asking them (outside of the prepared

interview questions) to fully explore the idea. This process helped the researcher to gain insights about possible unexpected topics.

In order to use these interviews for analysis later in the research process, they were digitally recorded. In order to minimize the risk of malfunction (of the voice recorder), which would mean that the interview data may be lost, recording was conducted using two digital voice recorders. The recorded interviews were stored separately afterwards. Some of these interviews were transcribed as soon as possible, but most were transcribed after the data collection period in Korea, when the researcher had returned to New Zealand. Handwritten notes were also made during the interviews, which described the responses of the interview participants. This process had three benefits. First, the notes served similarly to other observation data, where the observed situation such as body language of the interviewee helped the researcher to interpret the interview responses more accurately. Second, written notes also helped to prevent situations where the recorded interview could not be deciphered properly. Third, the act of writing down notes helped the interviewees to divert their attention from the voice recorder and to focus more on answering the interview questions. For example, one of the interview participants was speaking into the voice recorder, consciously bending his body towards the device because '*it is an uncommon (experience) to be recorded like this*' but, at the same time, suggesting that '*I feel really nervous*'. When the researcher began to actively write down notes, the interviewee started to focus on the (paper) notebook instead, which allowed him to speak more comfortably and clearly.

3.4.2.1 Pilot Study

Prior to this research in the participant companies in Korea, a pilot study was conducted as a method of testing out the feasibility of the interview questions. Since this was the first time for the researcher to conduct interviews in the Korean language, the pilot study helped to test the research methods (Maxwell, 2013). In particular, this pilot study assisted in restructuring the interview questions, along with validating the linguistic legitimacy of the questions asked in the Korean language. This process involved seven interviews taking approximately 30 minutes to one hour each, with individuals of Korean ethnic backgrounds. These individuals were all fluent in speaking the Korean language, but had diverse backgrounds in terms of age, gender, and organization.

After the pilot study, minor modifications were made to the interview questions. These were generally associated with the choice of words in the Korean language. In particular, the word 'humour' was considered ambiguous to many of the participants, who asked the researcher to elaborate on what she meant by the word 'humour'. When these individuals were questioned how they interpreted the idea of 'humour', participants suggested that when the word 'humour' is used in Korean, it seems confined to describe word-play types of jokes only. For example, the word horseplay (*jang-nan* in Korean) was not considered as a part of the idea of humour. Therefore, in order to minimize confusion and to specify what humour means for the purpose of the research, humour-related words which were relevant to this research were explained before the interviews were conducted. These included humour (*humour* in Korean), jokes (*nong-dam*, meaning verbal jokes in Korean), horseplay (*jang-nan*, meaning mischievous play or pranks), and skits (*mom-gag*, meaning jocular physical acts). Interview questions were developed further to explain these different concepts which may be rarely used in Korean workplaces, and the pilot study thus helped to prevent misunderstandings of the interview questions and smoothed the interview process.

3.4.2.2 Interview participants

Organizational members within the participant companies that agreed to participate in the interviews were interviewed according to their availability. Each interview participant (but not all research participants) arranged a time which was considered most comfortable for interviewing, which included normal working hours, lunch breaks, and after-work. In all three companies, nobody was scheduled to be interviewed in the first week of the data collection period. Although many had submitted the Consent Form and had agreed to participate in the interviews, organizational members were reluctant to volunteer as the first person to be interviewed. However, in one of the participant companies, the CEO of the company agreed to be interviewed first, and this person was followed by other senior members of the company.

Organizational members volunteered for a variety of reasons. The most common reason was that they felt guilty about not participating when the researcher was doing favours (such as writing reports and translating documents) for the organization. These individuals related this feeling of guilt to the collective mind-set of the Korean people, where it is harsh to ignore the favour of a person (the researcher) who has become a part of their group. Others were

interested in the research process, and were simply curious about the interview procedures (rather than the research topic or project itself). These individuals suggested that the interview process might be a good experience for them, and might help them in some way in the future.

The researcher also actively approached other organizational members to participate in the interview. Generally, most members stated that 'I'll think about it', and postponed the answer to a later date. Some requested the researcher to come back to remind them when they were less busy. Many of these individuals who postponed the interview requests agreed to the interview at a later date. Only a small number of individuals declined to participate in the interview, but the reasons were mainly about their level of discomfort towards being recorded and the fear of being asked difficult questions. In two of the participant companies, most interviews were conducted near the end of the data collection period, but in one company, most interviews were conducted in the mid-phase of the data collection period.

3.4.3 Documents

Documents provide insights into organizational life, by providing detailed records of the organizational setting and the events which occur in the workplace. These documents include guidebooks on policies, procedures, prospective plans, minutes of meetings, newspaper reports, and government abstracts (Lee, 2012). Culture can be embedded in the documents, where signs and symbols are formatted to show the particular culture of the organization. Initially document collection was considered to be a significant part of the data collection methods (along with participant observation and interviews) for this research. However, the number of documents relevant to this research was limited within the three participant companies, and only two documents were collected from one of the three participant companies. These two documents provided some contextual information and are presented as a part of Chapter Four. Although the minimal number of documents collected means that this method does not contribute significantly to the research findings, the process of collecting documents and the intentions to engage in this data collection method is explained for transparency purposes.

3.5 Cultural challenges

3.5.1 Researcher presence and reflexivity

When the researcher started data collection in the participant companies, one of the efforts she made to fit into the companies was through using the common language (Korean) and keeping to the local customs. As all of the research participants were aware that the researcher was from a foreign country (New Zealand), one of the concerns raised in the access phase was the level of discomfort that the participants might feel towards the researcher, thus leading to non-routine behaviour or rejection of the researcher. Welch and Piekkari (2006) suggest that when conducting international research, researchers are encouraged to use the native language of the participants, which helps the participants to be 'more relaxed and open' (p.428). They also suggest that if the participants feel discomfort in using a foreign language, data accuracy and authenticity may be affected. Therefore, the researcher attempted to avoid this issue by using the Korean language in interviews and all other interactions with the participants.

Welch and Piekkari (2006) also suggest that interviewers who use the native language of the interviewees establish rapport with them more easily. This is because in comparison to using an interpreter in the data collection process, direct communication helps to reduce the psychological distance experienced between the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, Shariff (2014) suggests that researchers need to continuously negotiate their position and identity within the community under study. This means that as well as using the local language to fit into the studied community, the researcher needs to be conscious of other cultural norms and behaviour to align themselves with the local participants. In this study, the researcher followed both the local language (Korean) and the cultural norms to position herself within the hierarchical relationships of the participants. As both verbal language (such as titles and honorifics) and body language are dependent on the status difference between the communicators in Korean organizations, the researcher also accommodated her behaviour according to the relational age difference between her and the interacting participant. At the time of data collection, the researcher was younger than most participants in the three companies. Therefore, in order to diminish the diminish the perception of the researcher as an outsider, but as a member of the community, the researcher treated most participants as superiors, in a similar manner to that of other younger Korean organizational members (Kondo, 2009).

Although the researcher made efforts to fit into each of the participant companies, it is also important to recognize the influence of the researcher on the participants. This study views that researcher as a part of the studied social context (Alvesson, 2010; Walker & Dewar, 2000). However, this assumption may diminish the researcher's presence as an outsider investigating the phenomenon of interest, and thus decrease the reliability of the collected data. Therefore, reflexivity is an important part of the research, as it questions the experiences and knowledge gained from the research processes. This questioning allows researchers to re-examine the language, knowledge, and truth claims collected, in order to heighten transparency and deepen the understanding of the phenomena of interest (Lawson, 1985). This research incorporates reflexivity by using diary records throughout the research process. The diary records include notes about the interviews and observations. While the diary recorded participants' body language and other social cues, it also included personal reflection on each of the interview or observation instances. This was to help the researcher to keep an open mind about the data and the interpretations available from it.

3.5.2 Transcription and Translation

In this study, because the Korean language was the most comfortable language for the research participants, most of the data was collected in Korean (refer to Welch & Piekkari, 2006). Most observations of the interaction between the participants were also recorded in Korean, reflecting the language the participants used in their conversations. Both interviews and observation data from the audio records and handwritten notes were transcribed into electronic files in Korean, and were then translated in English.

Transcription for the interview and observation data was conducted separately. In order to organize the data as accurately as possible, observation data was transcribed from handwritten notes into electronic files throughout the data collection period. However, interview data was transcribed after the data collection period when the researcher returned to New Zealand. As transcription is a lengthy process, the audio records for the interviews were sent to a professional agency to assist with transcription. Each transcript was then checked by the researcher, and for accuracy was compared with the audio records, handwritten notes, and observation data. This process allowed the researcher to engage with each individual transcript for the first time.

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The transcribed data was translated into English by the researcher. Translation requires more than simply understanding the language and the exchange of words. Translations are often dependent on the perspectives of the translator, where their culture, lived experience, and knowledge about the language are reflected in the words chosen for the transcripts produced (Temple, 2002). This means that multiple translators may produce transcripts which are 'all incompatible with one another' (Quine, 2013, p. 27): the researcher was therefore the sole translator for this research. Temple and Young (2004) suggest that in international studies, it is important to show clarity in terms of how language was translated and transcribed, and this process should be clearly explained to avoid confusion or mislead the outcomes of the research. Informing when and how the data was translated and transcribed can affect the interpretation of the data presented, especially when using different languages in the course of research (Steyaert & Janssens, 2013). In this research, translation was a continuous process during and after the data collection. While all of the interview data was collected in Korean and then transcribed and translated after the data collection period, the observations which were recorded in Korean were translated by the researcher as soon as possible to maximise the accuracy of the translated data. The conversations observed between research participants were recorded in Korean, as concurrent translation (during the note-taking process) has a chance of producing different meanings to the data collected. However, because using English allowed the researcher to take notes more quickly and accurately, descriptive observation notes and reflective journal entries were mostly recorded in English.

As this research examines humour in the workplace, there is a need to be clear about how language was used between the participants. Language is 'an important part of conceptualization, incorporating values and beliefs. It carries accumulated and particular cultural, social, and political meanings that cannot simply be read off through the process of translation' (Temple & Edwards, 2008, p. 5). The use of the researcher as the only translator enabled the embedded meanings within the language used between the participants to be captured and to maintain its original meanings, which might have been lost if external translators had been used in the process. This is because interpretations that have been filtered through translators' choices of words have the likelihood of drifting away from the initial story (Tsai et al., 2004). Temple and Young (2004) suggests that researchers who speak the language of the communities under study fluently are rare and can be fortunate, as there are different opportunities given to them in terms of research methods. This approach also gives freedom to conduct analysis in different phases of the research, such as translation,

which can be important in sustaining the meanings of the data collected. In this research, the data was analysed through multiple processes, the transcripts being analysed in both Korean and English. This process helped the researcher to double check the embedded meanings within the collected data, and diminished the language issues that may cause disruptions in the analysis process (Welch & Piekkari, 2006).

3.6 Thematic analysis

This research used thematic analysis to investigate the data. The explorative nature of this research means that the data needs to be analysed with flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves coding and categorizing the data into themes. These processes are influenced by the aims of the study, the researcher's values and biases, the reviewed literature, and the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes are identified through 'careful reading' of the data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258), where patterns are recognized in this process, and become categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). However, this is not a simple process, and in this research, data was analysed through multiple stages. Figure 4 below illustrates the four stages of analysis conducted.

| **Stage 1:** Initial analysis during data collection period | → | **Stage 2:** Analysis within each company after data collection period | → | **Stage 3:** Combined codes and categories across all companies | → | **Stage 4:** Recoded and arranged into themes |
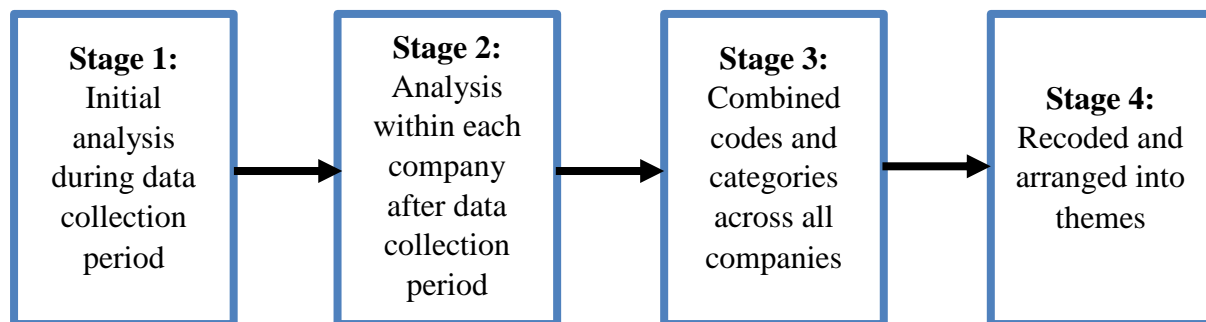
Figure 4. Stages of analysis

First, the researcher engaged with the data and conducted initial analysis while collecting the data in the field. After the data collection period, the data from each company was analysed individually, and then the data from the three companies were combined and organized into codes and categories using NVivo. These codes were then reorganized into 12 categories, and combined into three themes.

3.6.1 Data coding and NVivo

The data collected in this research was coded and categorized for analysis and interpretation. Coding is one of the most common analysis strategies in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). The coding process allows the researcher to understand large quantities of information, and to identify patterns in the data, where this involves uncovering repeated ideas expressed by the participants in different ways (Wong, 2008). While coding is useful in analysing large quantities of data, if it is conducted by hand (using paper to write and highlight codes), it can be very time consuming. Therefore, in this study, NVivo was used to organize data and to make the coding process more efficient. NVivo is qualitative data software which helps to organize data efficiently and allows large data sets to be more manageable (MacMillan & Koenig, 2004). While NVivo helps in the organization of data, it does not serve as an analytical method (MacMillan & Koenig, 2004). It offers assistance in managing and linking ideas as the researcher discovers patterns in the data, by offering flexibility in coding (Richards, 2002). This is because the programme enables the researcher to move between the coded data and the original documents (transcripts) more easily, thereby managing data and time so that the s/he may thoroughly engage with a large data set. Therefore, this research used NVivo 11 software to store, manage, and organize data. However, the researcher interpreted the data and created all of the codes and themes.

3.6.2 Familiarization with data

Thematic analysis involves coding and categorizing data through multiple steps. As illustrated in Figure 4, this research involved data analysis in four different steps. These processes were necessary in order to become familiar with the data, and code and to categorize the different pieces of information before creating the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this research, the researcher initially became familiar with the data by reading through the observation notes and coding during the data collection period (Stage 1 in Figure 4). After the data collection period, the interview transcripts (in Korean) and full observation transcripts were read multiple times, and then translated by the researcher into English. By re-reading the transcripts in both languages (Korean and English), patterns and recurring responses were identified in the data (Stage 2 in Figure 4).

3.6.3 Creating codes

In this research, codes were created throughout the research process, along with data analysis across different stages of the research. As illustrated in Stage 1 of Figure 4, the initial coding of the observation data occurred during field work. Different events and instances which were relevant to the research question were recorded under headings, and were then assigned to a specific category. The 17 categories explained in Section 3.4.1.2 (participant observation-coding) were used and the observed data was recorded in one or more relevant categories. These were then reviewed in the later stages and reorganized and expanded where necessary.

In Stage 2 of the analysis process, after the data collection period, the observation, interview, and document-sourced data collected from each company was analysed separately. This stage of the analysis was conducted after data had been collected in all three companies, and after the researcher returned to New Zealand. Although it might have been advisable to conduct analysis immediately after collecting data from each company, data collection for each company was scheduled consecutively across a time period of four months due to practical constraints, such as visa issues and the financial budget for staying in Korea. Stage 2 involved analysing the collected data for initial themes. The background information about each company was also analysed to indicate contextual factors, such as company size, type of business and activities, and the influence of Confucian culture and relationships between organizational members. These were analysed through the titles and language used by the participants.

As a part of the analytic process, the initial analysis of each company completed in Stage 2 was summarized into a report, and was provided to each of the participant companies within three to five months after the data collection period. These reports reviewed Confucian culture and relationships, and the humour used by the organizational members. The reports simply reflected these ideas through quotes from the organizational members, which were reported anonymously. The report was sent and circulated to the participants for the purpose of 'member checks', where findings are checked by participants and possibly benefit from further feedback (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). However, the participants provided fairly minimal responses to these reports, and thus member checking could not be fully conducted. Therefore, contrary to the initial intention to use member checking in the research process, this method had insignificant contribution to both data collection and analysis processes.

In this research, the amount of data collected through observations, interviews, and documents across the three participant companies was large. Coding allows large quantities of data to be handled efficiently and enables the identification of important patterns for interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998). Codes were created based on the basis of existing theory and past studies, along with those arising from the data, to explore new areas (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Specific codes were identified from the words mentioned by the participants, or implicit phrases which referred to an idea repeated by the participants (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Initially the data from all three companies were combined to create 21 categories. These categories were then reorganized and grouped into different categories to develop themes. This process is illustrated as Stage 3 of Figure 4. In the process of grouping ideas together to create categories, the researcher used NVivo to organize the coding groups. A 'parent' node was used to allocate a particular category, and a 'child' node was used to label the smaller codes which formed part of the category ('parent' node).

3.6.3.1 Example of coding

In order to show transparency in the analytic process, an example of the coding (interview transcripts) is presented below. Each coloured part represents a separate code, and the description of each code according to the assigned colour is explained in detail.

> *My perspective is that, some people act up a bit. I guess I might be stereotyping, but people shouldn't act up or misbehave in the workplace. Humour can be a part of this 'acting up'. Especially for the new staff members. Our CEO may be nice and just laugh over things like that, but it doesn't look good […] I guess it might be alright if it's just us (colleagues) in the room. But if it's outside the office, and for company events involving external people, we need to be especially careful. I know that some (entry level) staff members try to behave in strange ways, thinking that he's funny, but really, it just creates a bad impression.*
>
> Jade, 32, male, Truscene

Yellow- Coded under '*no place for humour*' child node under '*societal dissonance*' parent node.

Pink- Coded under '*humour differences in hierarchy*' child node under '*gender and hierarchical division*' parent node.

Green- Coded under '*maintain sound relationships*' child node under '*maintaining hierarchy and harmony*' parent node.

Blue- Coded under '*negative image*' child node under '*impression management*' parent node.

Grey- Coded under '*distinguish insiders and outsiders*' child node under '*friendship and family-like bonding*' parent node.

Red- Coded under '*extension of work*' child node under '*uncertainty outside the office*' parent node.

The yellow, blue, and red codes were created from the specific words used in interview responses. The pink, green, and grey codes were created from ideas implied by the responses rather than from specific words. For example, '*our CEO may be nice and just laugh over things like that*' implied that a reaction (laughter) to inappropriate or unfunny humour is made just to maintain good relationships and harmony in the workplace.

3.6.4 Identification of themes

After different categories had been identified from the collected data, these categories were organized into themes. This is presented as Stage 4 of the analysis process in Figure 4. This involved careful re-examination of the different categories and how each category is linked, so that the themes created in this process illustrate the meaningful pattern of the collected data (DeNardo & Levers, 2002). The identified themes provide important information about the research question, and the categories within each theme reflect a major part of the central theme. In this process, some of the categories identified in Stage 3 (in Figure 4) were collapsed into one theme. Identifying and collapsing categories into themes was conducted in multiple processes, and the researcher reiterated through the data and formulated new categories. For example, the categories of *top-down humour*, *down-top humour*, and *same level humour* identified in the observation data (refer to section 3.4.1.2) were collapsed into the category *humour direction*, then again merged into the category *gender and hierarchical division.*

Through this process, all the data collected in this research was coded and identified into specific themes. However, some of the themes identified in the analysis process were intentionally excluded from the findings of this thesis. Therefore, data reduction techniques (Silverman, 2013) were used in order to focus on the key stories of the participating

companies. 'Data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that "final" conclusions can be drawn and verified' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). Namey, Thairu, and Johnson (2007) suggest that data reduction may be particularly useful for achieving clarity in dealing with large data sets, enabling the researcher to focus on specific themes relating more closely to the research question of the project. Therefore, themes which represent the most significant incidents and ideas within the participating companies that related to the idea of Confucian values and humour were selected for presentation in the findings. Through this process, three themes and 12 categories within these three themes were identified. Table 2 displays these identified themes and categories.

Table 2. Themes and categories of thematic analysis

Themes	Categories
1. Confucian worldview	Friendship and family-like bonding
	Maintaining hierarchy and harmony
	Societal dissonance
	Avoiding conflict
	Chemyon (saving face)
2. Clashing worldviews	Emotion management
	Uncertainty outside the office
	Gender and hierarchical division
	Impression management
3. Organizational worldview	Collegial relationships
	Independent identity
	Situational boundaries

3.6.4.1 Example of theme identification

One of the major themes identified in this research was the *Confucian worldview* theme. This theme was put together by combining five coding categories:

1. Friendship and family-like bonding: 'Humour's like sharing a secret. It can create a bond just a bit less than (what I have with my) partner should I say.' (Peridot, 31, male, Mintrack)

2. Maintaining hierarchy and harmony: 'Traditionally we emphasize ourselves as people from the 'Eastern nation of Politeness'. Things like… respecting your elders are so

important in Korea. So I think this would influence quite a bit.' (Citrine, 33, female, Mintrack)

3. Societal dissonance: 'It (humour) doesn't fit with Korean culture. A workplace needs to be formal. Mixing (humour) with work makes you look arrogant, so it doesn't suit workplace settings.' (Agate, 30, male, Truscene)

4. Avoiding conflict: 'There's an old saying, you can't spit on a smiling face. So you make them smile by smiling and laughing first. That usually gives them a favourable impression as well.' (Peridot, 31, male, Mintrack)

5. Chemyon (saving face): 'Korean men tend to be ashamed when they haven't served in the army. So those who can humorously talk about their experience say that they served in the national security force or military police, because normal military soldiers train with a rifle and they don't. People in the national security force train with a pistol. So they say 'I didn't attend the normal military but wore a pistol' (national security force and military police are ranked higher than normal army soldiers). Next step down is attending normal military or served in the State-owned institutions. It sounds fancy, but it's just those doing administration work at defence related contractors. So there are different types like 6 month, and 12 months, so people joke about it. Men instinctively want to cover up their faults, you know. Wanting to show off and act a bit authoritative.' (Moss, 60, male, Wisepath)

This (Confucian worldview) theme focused on the responses that specifically stated or implied that humour reinforces some of the Confucian values such as formality, hierarchy, and harmony within the studied Korean workplaces. The central story of this theme was how the perception and use of humour reinforce the traditional structure of hierarchical relationships emphasized in the Confucian culture. These ideas were unrelated to other themes' categories.

In stage 4 of the analysis process, three themes and 12 categories were identified. These themes are: (1) *Confucian worldview*, (2) *clashing worldviews*, and (3) *organizational worldview* (as displayed in Table 2). These themes were identified as being essential to understanding the relationship between Confucianism and humour in Korean organizations. The themes were organized and presented to show a range from the most discussed theme to the least discussed theme. Full descriptions and examples of these themes and categories can be found in Table 6 (Section 5.3).

3.7 Ethics

This research was reviewed and gained approval by The University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee (http://www.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/re-uahpec) (reference number 010881). Due to the nature of the research, the researcher was aware that any sensitive information gained within the organizations through participatory observation method must be dealt with cautiously, and that the confidentiality of all participants must be secured. All participants were provided information on the research, and consent forms were collected in order to avoid misunderstandings on the purpose of the research, and how the findings may be used. In this process, the researcher's identity was clearly presented to the participants without any form of deception (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The ethics approval for this research was aimed at collecting data across both Korean and New Zealand business contexts. The original focus was to investigate the use of organizational humour in two different cultural contexts (New Zealand and Korea). However, after gaining ethics approval from The University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee, the research topic was developed further and with a narrower scope. Therefore, this research focuses on Korean organizations only. However, the data collection methods submitted for ethics approval remained the same for the research.

3.7.1 Voluntary participation

All participants were informed about the research and the data collection process. An email outlining the research was sent to all organizational members within the three participant companies. On the first day of the data collection period the researcher was introduced to the organizational members and provided them with a face-to-face explanation about the research. The researcher was also aware that employees may feel compelled to participate in the research when the general consent is given by the owner or CEO. The researcher made it clear at the beginning and during the course of data collection that the participants had their own right to participate or not participate, and that this would not cause any disadvantages to their employment. This information was provided to the participants through the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and Consent Form, which were presented to them prior to data collection. Therefore, each member was provided with the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C) which explained voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time

during the research. The data collection methods were also explained, and the contact details of the researcher were provided. Each organization was asked to sign a consent form to reflect their participation in this research (Appendix B). Each participating member was also asked to sign a separate consent form, which specified whether the individual was willing to participate in the observation and/or interview (Appendix D). Interviews were arranged after the researcher entered each company, and were negotiated with the participants personally. Individuals who participated in the interviews were presented with the Participant Information Sheet again to explain their rights in participating in the interview, and that they did not have to answer any questions which caused them discomfort, and that they could request the researcher to turn off the recorder at any time without providing a reason.

3.7.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

Another ethical issue that needed to be considered in this research was the confidentiality and anonymity of the organizations, participants, and their responses. Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms explained the procedures for maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. In particular, interview participants were made aware prior to the interview session that the recordings and transcripts would be available only to the researcher and the supervisors. A coding system that was known only to the researcher was used to identify individual participants in both interviews and observations. Therefore, the participants and their identities were disguised by false names when the data was used in the results and discussion chapters.

3.7.3 Other ethical considerations

Cultural sensitivity was another issue for this research, where the researcher or any part of the research process might unintentionally cause problems due to the different cultural understandings between the researcher and the participants. Therefore, careful consideration of the language used and actions taken by the researcher provided accommodation to the culture of the participants (Israel & Hay, 2006). This was achieved for the Korea-based companies by communicating in Korean. Furthermore, the possible emergence of incidental findings was considered as a part of the research process, and thus a plan to provide participants with counselling services was offered in case the participant was in any way

harmed when these incidental findings emerged. In the course of collecting data in the participant companies, this problem did not occur, and no participants in the data collection process were harmed or expressed distress.

3.8 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the methodological approaches, design, and data collection methods used in this research. The analytic process was also discussed and justified, through the showing of examples of the coding process in detail. Ethical issues which were considered in conducting the research were also explained, and these adhered to high ethical standards and minimized harm to the participants. The next chapter presents the context of each of the participant companies, and then Chapter Five offers the collated findings from all three companies, to display the organized data in detail.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE COMPANIES

The previous chapter developed the conceptual basis of the methodology for this research. This chapter will discuss the research context, which is an important part of situating the fieldwork process. Each participant company will be discussed in detail, in order to help readers to understand and analyse the data related to the concepts of workplace humour and Confucian relationships. As a part of the data collection process, each participant company was provided with an individual report with information relevant to their own company. These reports were constructed based on the information in this section. The reports were presented as a reflection of Confucian relationships, humour, and their impacts within the company.

4.1 The three companies

The research was conducted in three different companies. The results in this chapter were constructed using different sources of data within each of the companies. Firstly, observation notes were used as a primary source of data, to describe events and experiences within each participating company. While some notes were collected verbatim, others were constructed through interpretive descriptions of the observed events. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were used to collect descriptive data on each company, its culture, relationships, and humour activities, and these were then analysed and coded. Lastly, company documents were collected where possible and analysed with regard to business activities, culture, and guidelines provided to organizational members about communication and relationships. However, documents relating to culture and organizational relationships were uncommon.

An important feature of the relationships and culture of the companies is the language used between the organizational members. In particular, how organizational members of different levels of hierarchical status address each other is an indication of the level of formality maintained within the company, in accordance with the traditional Confucian values. Within Korean organizations there are several different ways of addressing another individual. Based on the observations made within the three companies, a list of titles is presented in Figure 5 below. This figure also shows the scale of formality indicated by the choice of each title.

Level of formality	Formal			Informal
Title used by superiors towards subordinates	Last name-organizational position-nim	Last name-organizational position	First name- ssi	First name
Title used by subordinates towards superiors	Last name-organizational position- nim	First name-organizational position- nim		First name- relational social position

Figure 5. Formality and the relational titles used within Korean organizations

Similarly to other cultures (such as Japan) that use the honorifics system in language, the title used to address another person is dependent on the relational position of the communicating individuals (McBrian, 1978). Primarily, this is based on the age of the communicators. However, within an organizational context, the organizational position complicates this title-honorifics system. Figure 5 shows how an individual of superior position, in comparison to an individual of lower hierarchical status, has more options in how to address another person. Furthermore, the words 'nim' represent the most respectful title an individual can use towards another person. This is similar to the word 'sama' in Japanese language, and 'sir' or 'madam' in English language. In contrast, the word 'ssi' is used in a more equal relationship, yet this still maintains some formality within the relationship. However, it is more often used by those of a higher hierarchical status towards those in lower positions. It also signals a more formal or professional relationship between the communicators.

Although this study does not intend to quantify the level of formality in each company, understanding the language and titles used between the organizational members helps to understand the unequal nature of the relationship between organizational members within Korean workplaces. Thus, this section will discuss a general overview of each company based on these Confucian relationships, and how humour is used within each company. The three researched companies were: *Truscene*, a small Information and Technology company; *Mintrack*, a small online gaming services provider; and *Wisepath*, a small metal recycling (refinery) company. A description is provided of each organization in terms of its key business activities, its culture, and, in outline form, its humour activities. Details of each of

the participating organizations will provide the reader with sufficient contextual background to accompany the findings in Chapter Five.

4.2 Truscene

Research at Truscene was conducted from mid-March to mid-April, 2014. The data from Truscene was collected through participant observation, interviews, and some documents. The documents comprise advertisements and internal documents on staff training which emphasize company culture and being '*different to other ordinary Korean companies*'. The company website also highlights the company culture and beliefs, along with other company activities. The company was willing to show as much 'culture' as possible by providing access to company training programme and events (there was a large exhibition for the industry during research period) which facilitated data collection in different situations including: formal (work related activities or events), informal (social related activities or events), within the workplace (physical office or during working hours), and outside the workplace (outside the physical office or outside working hours).

4.2.1 Business at Truscene

Truscene is a research-intensive software development company, offering customized product (programme) and assistance in the area of Information Technology (IT) in machinery production. The company conducts extensive business-to-business sales in both national and international markets, with six different teams supporting its clients. These teams include: Sales (local), International Sales, Programme Development, Communication and Design, Accounts and General Administration, and Manufacturing Management. The teams conduct key business activities for visiting clients, formulating customized software programmes and liaising with resellers. The teams also provide support for their international resellers that are located across China, Japan, and India. The company employs 49 individuals, including eight females who are mostly in the Communication and Design team, and Accounts and General Administration team.

Many respondents stated that the initial reason that they applied for a position at Truscene was the company's unique culture, as emphasized on the company website. The staff training

and development programmes which the company offered seem to create a feeling of originality for the company, making it different from other Korean workplaces. It was this uniqueness rather than the particular job that was considered to be an attractive feature. One respondent illustrated this in his interview:

> *I didn't really know what Truscene did, not even after the job interview. I just looked at the website and thought that the company really tries to look after its workers. It was a really different feeling. Not something you commonly see in Korea.*

> Agate, 30, male, Truscene

14 out of the 25 interview participants had no previous experience in the IT industry. Those with some experience in the IT industry were recent graduates with an IT related degree who over the years had built up their experience within Truscene.

4.2.2 Confucian culture and relationships at Truscene

Truscene was the only one out of the three studied companies that emphasized culture in the workplace. Truscene focuses upon building a learning-driven culture, where individuals are encouraged to develop themselves further through consistent learning, and also to develop communication skills which help them to '*speak out their minds*'. This is described as a '*culture of learning and relationship building*' which is illustrated through Truscene's website, other visual artefacts located within the office, and through the different programmes offered within the company. For example, some of the senior members of Truscene describe their unique culture:

> *Our company strives towards a culture of learning. Learning about people. Understanding about people is a central component to our culture here.*

> Alexandrite, 42, male, Truscene

> *I think our culture is completely different to other Korean companies. Our culture focusses on mutual communication and collaboration… our CEO tries a lot to develop this culture and employees also follow this well.*

> Amber, 40, male, Truscene

This sense of uniqueness was generally confirmed by other organizational members across different hierarchical levels. The participants suggested that Truscene's culture is very unique, and is contrasted with that of '*other Korean companies*' to imply that Truscene is not an average Korean company, where the notion of '*other Korean companies*' suggests a rather negative connotation. This sense of negativity is derived from (stereotyped) Confucian cultural values, where an average Korean company is perceived to have a patriarchal and oppressive environment. This suggests that through training and various programmes conducted within the company, Truscene attempts to diverge from the Confucian-based ideals of a typical Korean workplace.

The company conducts different programmes on a daily or monthly basis, in order to promote this culture of learning and collaboration. These include daily 'mind-sharing' meetings, and monthly 'emotional training' workshops, role-plays, and book reviews. The 'mind-sharing' meetings involve selecting two organizational members to share something about themselves with everyone, and are a part of the daily routine that all organizational members must attend. The meeting is then followed on by a short stretching exercise, a laughing exercise, and the repeating of the phrases 'thank you', 'I'm sorry', and 'please forgive me' three times each, to end the session. Repeating these phrases is intended to cultivate a sense of politeness and humility to help organizational members interact and communicate better with one another. This relates to the Confucian idea of harmony and promotes a collectivistic mind-set. Most organizational members enjoyed this daily gathering, where even those at the lowest hierarchical position were able to say something publicly. For example one of the entry-level staff members explained why she enjoys these morning sessions:

> *You don't really get to say things like this in front of your bosses. Plus it's kind of fun. And you can also develop public speaking skills. That's definitely not something you get to do every day.*

> Amethyst, 25, female, Truscene

However, some suggested that rather than actually enjoying the programmes that they must attend at Truscene, they get used to such activities and to the culture:

> *At first I really didn't understand it. I thought 'what's going on? What's this all about?' I really didn't know why these people are doing these weird things. But I guess now, I kind of- not a lot though- get that there's a culture like this. After I got used to it, it's alright now. I think I've adjusted to this company.*

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This 'mind-sharing' meeting seems to be a symbol of 'openness for communication' in which the company pursues as a part of its culture. Yet, activities such as repeating the phrases 'thank you', 'I'm sorry', and 'please forgive me' also seems to suppress individuals' desire to communicate and show independence, which conflicts with the objective of the 'mind-sharing' meetings. Instead, these phrases promote Confucian values of group harmony and collective identity, so that an individual's opinions or desire do not harm group harmony and the group's objectives.

'Emotional training' involves a two-day workshop focussed on helping individuals to communicate their own feelings, and to understand other people's feelings better. As a part of the training, every individual selects a nickname to use instead of their name or their organizational position which is usually used to address one another. The session is led by an external instructor, who is a respected teacher and a friend of the CEO. Although these 'emotional trainings' are conducted with the purpose of improving communication and sharing the feelings built up amongst the organizational members, observations show that the training actually helps individuals to hide their own feelings but to read other people's feelings more accurately, and develop *nunchi*. For example, an individual attempting to discuss his discomfort towards the CEO during one of these 'emotional training' sessions was criticized by many other organizational members for his '*carelessness*' and being '*insensitive*' towards the CEO. While individuals are encouraged to analyse what they are feeling in the workplace, the focus is on showing sympathy towards other people's feelings, making this more obvious, and verbally describing the emotional components. Other activities such as role-plays and book reviews serve a similar purpose.

This suggests that the variety of programmes or forms of training conducted at Truscene do indeed create a '*unique*' culture for the company, which the respondents find unfamiliar especially within the context of Korean workplaces. However, despite the fact that the participants found these cultural components at Truscene different and interesting, many of the younger lower level organizational members found the presented culture and the actual culture of Truscene to be different, which often caused ambiguity and conflict in the workplace. One of these ambiguities lies in the language organizational members' use, especially when addressing each other.

Hierarchy is reinforced by the senior (older) members within the organization. Individuals are strongly encouraged to use organizational positions to address each other, rather than using other descriptions such as 'unni' (direct translation as older sister by females) or 'obba' (direct translation as older brother by females) which tend to be more personal. In particular, those in lower hierarchical positions must use honorifics and the supporting title 'nim' after the person's organizational position especially to those who are older and hold senior organizational positions. Individuals in a superior position used a variety of titles to address their subordinates. The use of the subordinate's last name and their organizational position was the most frequent, followed by the first name and 'ssi'. However, the CEO and some of the older (senior) managers also used just the first names of the youngest (entry level) members. However, this idea of maintaining a strict hierarchy through language is not necessarily agreed to by all organizational members, thus creating conflict in the workplace. For example, one interview participant explained how not using honorifics with a colleague during a lunch break created trouble:

> *There's a formality, or a hierarchical system that needs to be maintained here… It was my first time to drink with company people. I kind of unleashed myself, since the casual atmosphere seemed like I could just joke around comfortably. I called everyone unni (older sister) and obba (older brother) instead of using their organizational positions to address them. Afterwards, Carnelian got told off for my behaviour, because she was my mentor at the time. Senior managers didn't like the way I was joking around, not using honorifics and stuff… I don't understand why we had to be told off for it.*

<div align="right">Aquamarine, 20, female, Truscene</div>

This suggests that unlike the objectives of the company training programmes which attempt to encourage communication and relationship-building amongst the organizational members, the strict hierarchy and separation between those of different hierarchical positions are reinforced in the use of language. These conflicting ideas create confusion and even distrust amongst the organizational members, especially by those of lower hierarchical positions towards the senior members who impose such controlling behaviours on them.

Therefore, organizational members within Truscene maintain hierarchical relationships which resemble Confucian values in a hierarchical relationship structure (unlike their initial descriptions). Within each department or team, this sense of hierarchy or Confucian-based

relationships is strongly imposed by each of the team leaders. For example, one of the middle-managers explained the excessive control his team managers tried to exert on him in order to promote a sense of togetherness and encourage team bonding:

> *Although I usually eat lunch with my team members, sometimes I do want to have lunch with other people - friends, you know. But when I told the manager that I wasn't going to join the rest of the team members for lunch today, I got that nunchi. I could see that he didn't like the idea. Seriously, even though he's my superior, he can't really blame me for wanting to have lunch with someone else. So that kind of stuff acts as a pressure. I can't even have lunch with people I want.*

<div align="right">Morion, 29, male, Truscene</div>

This example shows how an entry-level staff member explains how the meaning of 'communication' of the management differs to what she believed it meant:

> *It's good that our CEO is willing to listen to my ideas. Usually Korean managers don't even try to listen to those of lower hierarchical levels. We are expected to just do as we are told. But at least our CEO listens. But he really just listens. Then he says his thoughts and continues on to say that I should do it the way he suggested.*

<div align="right">Carnelian, 24, female, Truscene</div>

Despite the '*unique*' or non-Korean-like culture which is believed to be established within Truscene, interview responses suggest that the culture and relationships within the company is highly hierarchical, and formal, especially in the language used between organizational members. This is similar to Confucian relationship structures based on unequal relationships and formalities which help to maintain such relationships between individuals. However, organizational members in lower hierarchical positions often did not follow this ideal (i.e. using honorifics or organizational positions to address each other) when senior managers were not present. This shows a divide between the younger and the older organizational members within Truscene.

4.2.3 Humour at Truscene

When asked about humour at Truscene, respondents suggested that an '*adequate*' level of humour is acceptable at Truscene. However, all Truscene respondents stated that humour is

not one of the most important things at work. Organizational members in senior hierarchical positions suggested that humour may be useful in the workplace because it helps with the overall atmosphere. This was often related to the objective of improving work performance. Although this idea of humour influencing work performance was suggested in all three participating companies, Truscene's senior managers put the strongest emphasis on the conscious use of humour as a controlling mechanism. This essentially suggested that the purpose of humour differs depending on the hierarchical position of the communicators. In fact, organizational members lower in the hierarchy stated that humour should be carefully used, because it is often restricted by their superiors. Respondents suggested that the Confucian and military-based culture creates constraints when humour was used between individuals of different hierarchical levels, and that how individuals communicate is often 'strictly managed' within the workplace.

From the observational data humour tended to be 'announced' (rather than exchanged) by those of superior positions, or only amongst those of similar hierarchical positions. This humour was commonly short word-plays (such as puns) and light forms of humour, rather than practical jokes or physical pranks. The type of humour used in the workplace was highly dependent on the hierarchical positions of the communicators, where an individual in a subordinate position tended to be extremely careful about sharing humour, if it was used at all. Respondents in lower hierarchical positions cautioned about this tight boundary in using humour in the workplace.

> There's this line. If you go over this line, it can be dangerous. But it changes depending on the situation. Most people know it, so they don't go over it.

> Chalcedony, 27, male, Truscene

In contrast, humour exchanged between those of similar hierarchical positions was more relaxed, and different types of humour were perceived to be acceptable when exchanged in places away from their superiors. Although these were still not extreme (no practical jokes) humour, the respondents emphasized the relational aspects of humour used at work, and how it creates a feeling of bonding in the workplace. Such impacts of humour are summarized by one of the interview participants:

> I just use casual jokes, playing around with words, teasing… nothing major. But if I don't joke around, I'm usually a very angry-looking person. That's what my friends

say anyway. So by sharing humour, it makes it easier for other people to talk to me,
and make good relationships, and just make my work life more enjoyable.

<div align="right">Biron, 29, male, Truscene</div>

While most humour observed within Truscene was maintained within a certain boundary, this boundary was very different depending on the relational position of the communicator, but also different for each team. For example, the research team has its own specific team humour, which is only shared within its closed-off room, away from other teams and organizational members. Some respondents from the research team suggested that extreme banter occurs between the team members, where one specific organizational member is often targeted as the victim of jokes. This humour was also described as rather '*aggressive*', yet it is acceptable because it is only humour. However, this was not a common response by other organizational members from different teams. For example, one of the female respondents from a different team suggested that humour can create discomfort for the victim, but also for others around those exchanging the humour.

One of the male staff members changed his hairstyle, and someone joked about how
odd it looks. Like a yakuza (Japanese gang). Even though it was a joke, I don't like it.
I don't think it's appropriate at all.

<div align="right">Ruby, 35, female, Truscene</div>

Regardless of the hierarchical or team-based differences in how humour is used, all participants at Truscene appeared to consider work performance as their most prioritized objective. While they recognized that while humour may help to make their work tasks more enjoyable, they also noted its disruptive characteristics. From observations at Truscene, it was obvious that employees enjoyed some humour in the workplace. However, humour was approached very carefully when interacting with those in higher hierarchical positions. Interview responses showed that all respondents liked the idea of humour, yet were conscious of the negative impacts it may have on work. Nevertheless, those in subordinate positions were careful to consider how humour may create a negative impression of them, as it may make them look disrespectful to their superiors. Those in superior positions also showed conflicting responses by saying that humour is perceived positively in the workplace, yet observations showed that superiors controlled the humour used by their subordinates. This reflects the Confucian values of hierarchical roles and relationship structures, where the

humour used by those of lower hierarchical status may be perceived as uncivilized behaviour (Yue, 2014).

4.2.4 Response from Truscene

A summary which reflects the culture, organizational relationships, and use of humour, and any perceived outcomes, was sent as a form of organizational report for each participating company. A follow-up email was also sent asking for feedback from each company, in response to the report. This allowed to member-check the data gathered from each company. As my original contact at Truscene (a middle-manager from the company) had left the company soon after the research period, the CEO responded directly to my email, acknowledging that the report had been received. The CEO suggested that I prepare a full presentation about the research, as he felt that the report was too brief. However, due to practical constraints this could not happen.

The general response from the CEO and one other senior management member was that they found the research process to be very interesting, but would appreciate more emphasis on their unique organizational culture. However, they considered that some parts of the organizational report were unexpected. In particular, they did not agree that the organizational programmes and relationships illustrated Confucian values of hierarchy, but rather considered the relationships between other organizational members to be more horizontal. However, they appreciated that if the employees perceived otherwise, they are willing to work further to diminish this perception of hierarchical differences.

4.3 Mintrack

Mintrack was researched from April to May, 2014. Most of the data was collected through participant observations and interviews, along with some copies of the email exchanged between two teams. These were collected as a form of document. The company has been in business for 20 years, and has established a benchmarking success for the Korean online gaming industry. However, for the past few years the company has been experiencing an on-going change, impacting both the operations and the culture of the company. There is no articulation of culture or humour in the company's formal documents nor on the company

website. The workers drive an exclusive, team-based culture within the workplace, such as organizing team relationship-building programmes amongst the workers, which are self-funded by the individual workers. However, the participants described the company to be very '*gloomy',* where organizational members are remaining within the company due to the '*relationships established within the organization rather than for the work task or the pay*'. The observation data for Mintrack was collected within various contexts, both in the physical workplace (office) and outside it. This included observations recorded at the local cafés during work hours, in bars after hours (drinking alcohol), and at the team relationship-building workshop which was held across two days at a holiday house located in a rural region.

4.3.1 Business at Mintrack

Mintrack is one of Korea's very first online gaming companies. The company develops online gaming platforms for customers, while providing consistent server maintenance and upgrades to the game programme itself.   The company operates across 54 different countries (including America, Russia, China, Indonesia, and Brazil), by exporting licences for the games and providing on-going maintenance services. The key business activities include administration, sales consulting, programme development and maintenance.

At the time of the research, Mintrack employed 33 people in teams of Product Planning, Game Programming, Product Testing, Art and Design, Customer communication and Sales, and General Administration. In terms of gender, only four were females. However, during the research, four people left the company due to downsizing. Most of the staff members were concentrated in the programming and design teams which perform the basic operational functions for the company product (online games). Comparatively, other supporting staffs were kept at a minimal level, which affected the internal operations. For example, human resources and internal administration duties were conducted by a single employee. Out of the 33 workers at Mintrack, 14 individuals agreed to participate in interviews.

4.3.2 Confucian culture and relationships at Mintrack

Many of the respondents suggested that there is a constant change going on within Mintrack, which was described as creating a '*depressing environment*' for the organizational members. In the recent years the company has been downsizing, and this has had an impact on the business outcomes and culture of Mintrack. Most respondents suggested that the main reason that they remained in Mintrack was the people of the company who have been working there for a long time. Thus, the members attempt to overcome the difficult situations created by the organizational change that they experience, by bonding between individuals. This emphasis on the interpersonal relationships developed within the company is described as both good and bad, by one of the respondents:

> *You develop family-like relationships here. There's surprisingly little politics going on around here, and everyone is personally close. But this closeness impacts work as well, so it's not necessarily all good… for example, it's difficult to conduct tasks in the most efficient manner between teams, because I'm friends with another person. If they ask me to do something outside of my duties, I end up doing it… So it creates both good and bad situations.*

<div align="right">Chrysocolla, 34, male, Mintrack</div>

It is suggested that in Mintrack a personal (rather than professional) and family-like culture exists. This is also supported by the language used between the organizational members. Most of the organizational members do not use their organizational positions to address each other. Instead, more personal addresses such as 'unni' (direct translation- older sister by younger females) and 'obba' (direct translation- older brother by younger females) are used by the younger members. Similarly, the older members address the younger members by their first names and do not use any other titles. Within a Korean organizational context, this is the most informal manner to address others (illustrated in Figure 5).

Furthermore, while some organizational members use honorifics when communicating with others, others do not, and this includes individuals in subordinate positions, which is unusual in Korean workplaces. One of the middle-level managers suggested that this casual style of language and communication is one of the reasons behind the development of the family-like culture at Mintrack:

If you make an environment where it feels more casual, you can talk about personal things, and that develops relationships faster. Getting to know the person more, what they like and stuff. How you call them is one of the first steps.

<div align="right">Emerald, 28, female, Mintrack</div>

The casual style of language tends to be used only between members of the same team, while individuals communicating with those in different teams showed more formality and respect in addressing one another. This may be due to the lack of interaction between the members of different teams, as organizational members frequently enjoy social gatherings *within* their teams. These social gatherings include having coffee at the local café, after-hours drinking, karaoke, monthly fancy dinner nights, going to the cinema, and team relationship-building workshops.

The level of formality tended to be greater for the relatively newer employees, in comparison to those who had longer tenure at Mintrack. While this sense of relative formality is consistent with the Confucian traditions and hierarchical relationship structures, some respondents suggested that a high level of formality exemplified a form of distrust between the organizational members. This means that using informal titles is considered to indicate closer interpersonal relationships between organizational members, and that this is preferred over more formal and professional types of workplace relationships. From a traditional Confucian perspective, the culture and nature of relationships in Mintrack is ambiguous. This is because the strict hierarchical differences between individuals are not maintained in the language used (such as honorifics and titles), yet a family-like bonding and closeness is also valued, which is another important aspect of Confucian traditions.

4.3.3 Humour at Mintrack

During the observation period, Mintrack displayed the greatest number of humour instances of the three studied companies. All the participants from Mintrack suggested that humour is a natural part of work for them, but they also recognized that this is unusual in Korean workplaces. While the extent of permissible humour was different for each team at Mintrack, the general workplace atmosphere allowed any type of humour to be enacted. For example, one of the middle managers described her feelings when she first started work at Mintrack.

I was really surprised to see so much laughing and joking. The lively atmosphere was created naturally. I wasn't used to such an environment, so I needed a few days to adjust. But I think this is better, this atmosphere I mean.

<div align="right">Citrine, 33, female, Mintrack</div>

Humour was very obvious and frequent at Mintrack, where participants emphasized the importance of humour in releasing stress and anxiety accumulated in the workplace, while also adding fun and enjoyment to the work processes. Some participants suggested that the reason why there is more humour at Mintrack is the unstable workplace environment, caused by the rapid change experienced by the company. Many organizational members had exited the company recently, and in fact, four individuals left the company during the period of research at Mintrack.

I think emotionally everyone is quite down at the moment. The restructuring and change is influencing the workers, and it sometimes feels like people are forced to work, and not enjoying work […] so in order to release these negative feelings, I guess one of the solutions taken up by some of the people is humour.

<div align="right">Heliotrope, 36, male, Mintrack</div>

Generally the humour used was quite aggressive. All respondents stated that the deprecating style of humour was most frequently used by the organizational members. Observations supported this claim, where most instances of humour involved verbal, teasing style of jokes, but not many practical (physical) jokes. Within the office, most humour involved banter or teasing of a particular victim. There were distinct victims who were frequently targeted in humour, and were teased and mocked by multiple organizational members at the same time. The youngest and most junior were the most frequently targeted victims, but the humour was accepted by the victims as a signal of care and inclusion, despite the fact that the contents of the humour was quite personal (rather than being work-related). However, the extent of the humour used varied between different teams, the most brutal humour occurring in groups with low age gaps between the organizational members. Such humour commonly included swearing, mocking about other people's appearances, behaviour, and marital status (especially for females).

Organizational members used more extreme forms of humour when interacting outside the physical office. These occurred during late dinners, after-hours drinking sessions, and the

team relationship-building workshop. Unlike the dinner and drinking session which occurred on a weekly basis, the team relationship-building workshop was a one-off occasion where two teams (the administration and programming teams) jointly spent two nights at a holiday house. This was an unofficial social function; the workshop was not funded by the company, but by the individuals attending the workshop. Observations show that in these social occasions the degree of swearing and mocking through humour was extended. In particular, individuals of lower status (younger and in lower hierarchical position) used humour more frequently. Furthermore, superiors accepted such (humouring) behaviours of their subordinates by '*laughing it off*'. However, the humour used by subordinates was softer, and was more self-directed than directed towards others (i.e. superiors). For example, two practical jokes were observed at Mintrack, all members participating in a practical joke which was planned and directed by one of the senior members of the group. One of these instances was during the two-day team relationship-building workshop, involving the administration and programming teams. This prank involved 'setting up' a particular individual in an awkward situation, similar to that of 'candid camera' programme. The prank was directed by the older male member, Iolite, and was targeted at two of the lower level members. Although these targets were not new to the company, this was the first time they had attended such a workshop with other members, thus becoming a target for the prank. Although this prank resulted in making one of the targeted individuals cry from the shock they had from the prank (this prank involved the senior members screaming at the targets for nonsense reasons), the victim described this experience as '*funny, and it shows that everyone cares enough about me to put in this much effort*'. This shows the ambiguity of humour being funny and hurtful at the same time. This is because while the contents of the humour used may create shock and hurt feelings for the victim, being targeted in humour by other organizational members also means inclusion ('*care*') for the individual. This is discussed later in Chapter Five.

The humble response of the victim relates to the Confucian value of harmony and hierarchical relationships emphasized in Korean workplaces. Unlike those in the other two studied companies, the participants at Mintrack stated that humour can be used by anyone within the organization, regardless of their hierarchical position. This means that although the frequent use of humour and allowing humour from individuals of lower hierarchical status signal a deviation from the traditional Confucian values, this does not mean that Mintrack excludes Confucianism from organizational members' relationships. This is supported by the conscious limit some organizational members set when using humour in

(and outside) the workplace, and the participants' perception that the boundaries of acceptable humour varied according to the relational hierarchy between the communicating individuals. For example, observations show that extreme sexist humour could be used by those in senior management positions, and this was accepted by those lower in the hierarchy. However, individuals in lower hierarchical positions restrained the use of such extreme (and potentially offensive) humour. Participants suggested that this was due to the Confucian values, where using humour which could potentially offend a superior is considered to be rude, thus conflicting with the '*need to respect your elders*' which is an important part of the Korean culture. This underlying societal value was observed through the decreased extent of humour used by individuals in subordinate positions towards their superiors.

All respondents affirmed that humour helps organizational members to bond and to develop in-depth interpersonal relationships. Most respondents perceived that humour is perhaps the reason why the organizational members within Mintrack have strong bonding. However, they were also aware that sharing humour which only certain organizational members understand creates a form of exclusiveness, which also creates isolation for others. One of the middle managers explained how such use of humour divides up the teams within Mintrack, and disrupts the overall harmony of the company.

> *Joking does create that feeling or bonding- but it is strictly limited to those who understand it. Using humour like that loudly in the office feels like they are trying to look special, different to other members that are not included in that humour interaction. I think my team members feels really left out at times, and it can be bad for the company culture if we look at it holistically.*

> Heliotrope, 36, male, Mintrack

Although this response emphasizes the divisive effect of humour at Mintrack, it also means that humour shared within the workplace is perceived to develop and bond individuals who share the humour. Similarly, many of the respondents focussed more on the feeling of closeness and development of interpersonal relationships when they shared humour within the workplace than on the impact humour may have on work performance or processes. This contrasts to the other two participating companies, where the influence of humour on work performance was more frequently addressed by the respondents. This shows that the humour used at Mintrack is perceived as a socializing medium that may be used by any individual

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regardless of their hierarchical status, rather than just a form of control by those in senior positions.

4.3.4 Response from Mintrack

No formal response was received from Mintrack with regard to the organizational report. As the company was acquired by another Online Entertainment company soon after the research, I assume that the issues involved in this process prevented communication from my point of contact. However, the HR manager replied in a short email to recognize the receipt of the organizational report. The manager agreed with the findings, and in particular that the extensive humour used in Mintrack is due to the high level of stress experienced by the organizational members. She suggested that the combination of stress and humour at Mintrack is likely to continue for the time being. She also doubted that any change would be made at Mintrack with regard to the culture, the nature of the organizational relationships, and the use of humour in the workplace,. However, she suggested that since many existing organizational members were planning to exit the company, the new employees might be able to drive some sort of change to Mintrack.

4.4 Wisepath

Wisepath was researched in the period of May to June 2014. Wisepath was the most difficult of the three researched companies to collect data from, due to the nature of the business. Because Wisepath was a manufacturing-based company, most workers were working in factories, and safety protocols limited access for observations in these areas. Because the administrative staff member who had access to company documentation was reluctant to provide data, it was collected through only participant observations and interviews. Although not the smallest in size, this company had the lowest number of participants in this study, and many of those who did sign the consent form did not wish to participate in the interviews as they had limited time available for interviews, as their work time was strictly scheduled and managed by the company.

4.4.1 Business at Wisepath

Wisepath is one of the first Korean companies to engage in metal recycling. Waste products such as mobile phones are collected, and recycled to extract precious metals and other reusable materials, and to refurbish these resources for re-sale. As a part of this process, the company focuses on developing technology to recycle and reproduce under an environmentally friendly process. While the company primarily conducts the majority of its operations in its Korean factory, it also has branches in China and America.

The company employs approximately 63 people, with 46 permanent workers and 17 temporary workers. The number of temporary workers is based on the number of people I have encountered on the premises, as I was unable to obtain the total number of workers-including temporary workers contracted at the time of research. Out of the employees identified, 17 individuals agreed to participate in this research, and 7 participated in interviews. These employees were divided into key areas of Administration, Sales and Trades Consulting, Research, Production and Refinement, Material Management, Distribution, and Property Maintenance. Due to the wide range of business operations, the company is divided into two sections, office and the factory. The separate buildings operate in very different routines, the office building housing 'white collar workers' and management level staff members. There are four other buildings that operate under factory conditions, for 'blue-collar workers'. The tasks for 'blue-collar workers' range from sorting out the waste products in open warehouse space to dismantling the waste products into different parts, and actual soldering the precious metal for re-sale. Many of these workers are temporary contract workers. The key business activities included purchasing materials, refining and recycling materials, and liaising with various vendors.

4.4.2 Confucian culture and relationships at Wisepath

While the company website does outline the importance of creating a new form of organizational culture, it also emphasizes the value of collaboration, cooperation, and the collective culture for the business. These features resemble the Confucian values which are common in Korean workplaces. Furthermore, the physical ornaments observed within the office building suggest a very traditional, superstitious Korean culture. For example, a dried Pollack wrapped in white silk threads was placed above the main entrance door. This

represents 'pushing out' bad spirits and 'bringing in' long lasting prosperity for the company, which is an old Korean tradition. Although this does not relate to Confucianism, the ornaments and rituals resemble Korean traditions, and suggest a culture less Westernized than that of other modern companies in Korea.

Similarly, the relationships between the organizational members were strongly based on the idea of filial piety (respect toward elders). Most individuals used honorifics and titles based on their age and organizational position. This means that those in a superior position used the first names to address their subordinates, while the subordinates use the last name, organizational position, and the word 'nim' to address their superiors. This formulation resembles the unequal relationships expected between organizational members, in accordance with Confucian values. This feeling of respect within organizational relationships is described by one of the oldest workers in the company:

> *Korean culture maintains a family-like structure across all contexts. At a smaller scale, a family would have the mother and the father as the most senior person. In the workplace, the CEO and the management are the most senior. At a larger scale, the president is the most senior within a country. This idea is solid in our minds.*

Coral, 64, female, Wisepath

The hierarchical relationship structure was also reinforced through the body language of the organizational members at Wisepath. Due to the seniority system, most organizational members' age and their organizational positions were parallel, meaning that the more senior members were also older. However, there were a few exceptions at Wisepath, where three of the organizational members were much older than others, yet were placed in entry-level positions. Due to the nature of their jobs, they were unable to progress further up in the organizational hierarchy, creating incongruence in the hierarchical relationship structure between the organizational members. However, these members adjusted the hierarchical relationships by using honorifics to members of higher organizational status (regardless of age) but limiting their body language depending on the amount of 'respect' needed to show to the other person. For example, the respondent quoted above used honorifics and bowed politely when greeting the CEO and members of senior management. However, she did not bow but simply waved her hand when greeting other organizational members, thus balancing and maintaining the conflicting hierarchy between age and organizational position.

The culture and the nature of the relationships amongst the office- and factory-based workers also showed great differences, dividing the two groups within the workplace. This divide may have been encouraged through the different hierarchical system applied to each work area (office and factory). Wisepath has a highly stratified hierarchy, where the management or managing directorship level has four different levels. The office-based workers operate with six levels, and the factory-based workers are divided into two levels (contract workers are excluded from this hierarchical system). With the exception of the entry-level position, it is unclear which positions from the office-based system are in parallel with those in the factory-based system. Even though identifying the relational hierarchy is an important part of the Korean culture, this ambiguity creates uncertainty for the workers in establishing clear relationships between organizational members,.

4.4.3 Humour at Wisepath

The business in which Wisepath operates did not provide a suitable environment for organizational members to use humour frequently. In particular, organizational members working in the factory section had health and safety issues which caused many of them to wear a mask during work hours, meaning that communication was kept at a minimum. While organizational members working in the office had more physical freedom to use humour in the workplace, they only engaged in humour occasionally. In situations where organizational members did engage in humour, this occurred in the form of a top-down approach, where the superior would initiate the joke and the subordinates would laugh along. This is consistent with the highly hierarchical relationship structure maintained within Wisepath.

Most instances of humour were exchanged during the lunch break or, for the factory based workers, the short 15 minute shift breaks. Organizational members tended to exchange humour with individuals of the same gender group, and were more careful with the humour used between genders. Female members were extremely conservative with the use of humour and avoided targeting any particular individual through humour. For example, the office-based female members often joked about the food served during lunch, where the company provided a buffet style of lunch for all employees. However, a few of the male members used more aggressive forms of humour, such as sexual humour. These were not targeted towards female members within the organization, but towards other females known

to the organizational members. For example, one of the senior members joked about a middle-aged female waitress at the local Japanese restaurant.

> *She had a little stain on her white t-shirt. So it was very visible. Having that stain right where it was [pointing towards his own chest] it's like inviting for me to wipe it off for her! But that would be inappropriate so I didn't do it. It's a shame.*

> Jasper, 47, male, Wisepath

While this is an exemplar of the humour used by the male, and in particular, the senior members, sexual humour was only used with other male members. This type of humour seemed to assist in unifying the male members, because a number of male organizational members emphasized the role of humour and the fun of developing workplace relationships.

> *When I first started work here, everything was new and I didn't know what to do. Then I decided that just joining every social occasions and conversations is the way to go. Like I never missed a single drinking function here. I think the whole having fun and sharing humour during these fun occasions help people to bond, and learn about what I should do, in order to join this group of people. Especially for guys.*

> Marcasite, 32, male, Wisepath

While the other two participating companies discussed that humour can '*control*' and create a feeling of '*bonding*' in a separate manner, many of the respondents at Wisepath, when discussing the use of humour in the workplace, combined these two ideas. This may be due to the strong idea of Confucian based relationships that organizational members hold, where the strict hierarchy exists in all relationships between individuals. This means that the feeling of '*bonding*' created through humour is considered as a path to '*control*' the behaviours of others, although this form of control may be related to work performance or may be social. This relates back to the fact that only organizational members in senior hierarchical positions, or those relationally superior in an interaction, engage in humour. Therefore, most humour interactions at Wisepath are perceived as a controlling behaviour by the senior managers, although organizational members recognize that the use of humour influences and develops the interpersonal relationship between the communicators. However, this also means that the use of humour is not frequent, nor is humour freely expressed by all organizational members, but only by selected few, making it a very limited behaviour within Wisepath.

4.4.4 Response from Wisepath

No follow-up response has been received from Wisepath after it was sent the organizational report. An email with regard to the organizational report has been sent to my key liaison contact and the administrative team of Wisepath, but neither responded. Other forms of communication (phone call) were also attempted, but were unsuccessful. Due to the geographical limitations (as the participating company is located in Korea and the researcher in New Zealand) it was impossible to use any other methods such as face to face contact in communicating with the company. Therefore, the data collected in Wisepath could not be member-checked with the employees.

4.5 Chapter summary

In order to provide a contextual background this chapter has presented each of the participating companies as an individual entity. Illustrating these contextual characteristics for each of the companies is important in understanding Chapter Five. While all three of the participating companies presented a similar underlying assumption of 'respect' and 'hierarchy' in organizational relationships, each company also showed a unique and specific culture and style in its communication and in use of humour. Thus, this chapter has presented descriptions of each of the three companies and their Confucian-based relationships and humour activities.

Each company showed different levels of formality through their use of language, such as honorifics and different titles used to address other organizational members, and also through their body language. These formality-based behaviours reflected the organizational members' perceptions of Confucian relationship structures, which emphasize hierarchy and unequal relationships. Organizational members of higher hierarchical status reflected this unequal relationship structure by using humour more frequently than did those of lower status.

The contextual information provided in this chapter will help the reader to explore the impact of organizational humour in Confucian relationships. This will also be integrated into the discussion, as the context of each participant company will provide different interpretations and outcomes of the research.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

The previous chapter discussed each participating company and their workplace humour. Chapter five combines the results from all three companies and is organized into seven sections that present the key findings on workplace humour and Confucian relationships. These sections are derived from the themes identified through data analysis, which are presented in order of importance. Considering that humour can be interpreted differently by individuals, under an interpretivist approach both interview responses and observations of humour instances are used as a part of the data analysis in order to present the different perspectives. This provides multiple voices or perspectives for interpretation of the data. This chapter aims to present the findings on humour in Korean organizations, by firstly explaining the research context and the three participating companies. This is followed by details of the individuals participating in the research. The summary of results from coding will also be presented, along with examples which will help to illustrate each of the coded ideas. Each of the themes and categories addressed in this summary are explained in detail as separate sections, and finally, to conclude the chapter, the results are summarized.

5.1 Research context

This section provides a contextual summary of the companies participated in this research, and therefore restates some of the material already presented in Chapter Four. The research was conducted in companies from three different industries in Korea. This was in order to ensure breadth and diversity among the research participants. These three industries are Information Technology (software), Online Gaming, and Manufacturing.

For the Information Technology industry, a small to medium sized machinery-software development company was chosen. For the purpose of this research this company is code named as Truscene. Truscene is one of the fastest growing companies in the machinery-software segment in Korea, with branches and resellers across China, Japan, India, and other locations worldwide. This company encourages interactions between organizational members at different hierarchical levels, through social activities and communication-related

training. However, in communication, organizational positions and honorifics are strictly used.

For the online gaming industry, one of Korea's very first online gaming companies was chosen. Code named as Mintrack, this company operates globally, exporting its games (licence) across 54 different countries, including America, Russia, China, Indonesia, and Brazil. The company provides consistent maintenance services to these exported gaming companies in the form of server updates. Organizational members within this company have a casual style of communication, with most members only occasionally using honorifics, and either using first names or a family-based appellation (such as *unni* - direct translation, 'older sister') to address each other.

Lastly, from manufacturing industry, one of Korea's first metal recycling (refining) companies was chosen. This company is code named as Wisepath. Wisepath conducts its main manufacturing operations in its Korean factory, with branches in China and America. This company also encourages interactions between organizational members at different hierarchical levels through social activities such as drinking functions. However, formal communication structure (using honorifics and organizational positions) is maintained only by those in lower hierarchical positions.

5.2 Participants

The research participants consisted of 58 individuals across three different companies. 46 of these individuals also participated in interviews. The 12 individuals who agreed to the research but did not participate in interviews were included in the observation notes. All of the participants were full time employees, except for one individual who was the owner-manager (CEO) of one of the participating companies. Table 3 (below) displays the demographic details of interview participants. There were 35 males and 11 females in the interview component of the study. This imbalance of gender reflects the general proportion of female workers within the participating organizations. Table 4 indicates the total number of male and female workers in each participating organization.

Table 3. Participant companies and demographics of interview participants

Company code name	Truscene	Mintrack	Wisepath	Total
Industry	Information Technology	Online Gaming	Manufacturing	
Gender				
Male	20	10	5	35
Female	5	4	2	11
Age group				
20-24	4	2	0	6
25-29	8	5	0	13
30-34	7	5	1	13
35-39	2	1	0	3
40-44	4	1	0	5
45-49	0	0	1	1
50-54	0	0	0	0
55-59	0	0	3	3
60-64	0	0	2	2
Organizational hierarchy				
Staff	10	6	4	20
Manager	5	1	0	6
Deputy section chief	3	2	0	5
Section chief	3	3	0	6
Deputy department manager	2	1	0	3
Department Manager	1	1	0	2
Deputy managing director	0	0	2	2
Managing director	0	0	1	1
Vice-CEO	0	0	0	0
CEO	1	0	0	1
Tenure				
0-2	17	9	3	29
3-4	0	3	0	3
5-6	3	0	1	4
7 +	5	2	3	10

The age range of the interview participants was concentrated in the mid-20 to mid-30's, with 13 participants being 25-29 years old, and another 13 in the 30-34 years old range. Six participants were between 20-24 years old, three 35-39 years old, five 40-44 years old, one 45-49 year old, three 55-59 years old, and two 60-64 years old. The organizational position of participants varied across ten levels of hierarchy, from entry-level staff to Chief Executive Officer (CEO) that are all positioned vertically. 20 participants were entry-level staff, six

were managers, five deputy section chiefs, six section chiefs, three deputy department managers, two department managers, two deputy managing directors, one managing director, and one CEO. The tenure of the participants varied from less than two years to over seven years, with 29 participants having less than two years of tenure, three participants three to four years of tenure, four participants five to six years of tenure, and ten participants over seven years of tenure. The ethnicity of all interview participants was Korean, but three of the interview participants had non-Korean nationality. Two observation participants were ethnically Chinese. Observation data from non-participating individuals were excluded retrospectively.

Table 4. Total number of males and females within the participant companies

Company code name	Truscene	Mintrack	Wisepath	Total
Gender				
Male	41	29	56	126
Female	8	4	7	19

All three participant companies were dominated by males: Truscene had 8 female workers out of 49 workers, Mintrack had 4 female workers out of 33 workers, and Wisepath had 7 female workers out of 63 workers in total. However, unlike in Truscene and Mintrack, the number of workers at Wisepath represents those identified by the researcher at the time of data collection, rather than the actual number of workers (refer to Chapter Four). These numbers illustrate the total number of workers in each participant companies, rather than the number of participants in this current study, as some of these individuals did not agree to participate in the research. Furthermore, only four of the 19 female workers identified in the participant companies were middle-managers, and two of these female middle-managers participated in the interview. The hierarchical positions of the female middle managers were deputy section chief and section chief. In all three companies, all members at the senior management level were males. Table 4 illustrates the number of male and female members identified in each participant company, including non-participants in the study. Table 5 illustrates the multiple levels of hierarchy that exist in the participant companies, and also highlights the hierarchical positions that the female members are placed in each of the organization.

Table 5. Hierarchical levels of female members within the participant companies

Company code name	Truscene	Mintrack	Wisepath
Organizational hierarchy			
CEO			
Vice-CEO			
Managing director			
Deputy managing director			
Department manager			
Deputy department manager			
Section chief		√	√
Deputy section chief	√		
Manager	√	√	√
Staff	√	√	√

5.3 Results of coding: Themes and categories

The results paint a picture of ambiguity, confusion, and tension in the use of humour within the studied Korean workplaces. The data suggest that individuals express their different values or perspectives through humour, which may create conflict between organizational members. Thematic coding generated three key themes. The themes are arranged in hierarchical order from most discussed to least discussed in both interviews and observations. These themes are (1) *Confucian worldview*, (2) *clashing worldview*, (3) *organizational worldview*. These were developed from the analysis of data across all three organizations, by a search for themes that cut across different organizations. This is useful because a key idea may be explained in different ways by analysing material from multiple organizations. However, some data are included in more than one theme, as there are examples which overlap across different themes.

The most prevalent idea or theme is that of the *Confucian worldview*. This theme focuses on the expression, in humour, of Confucian assumptions which are relevant to the wider Korean society, yet also suggests that humour is inappropriate for use within the workplace. These conflicting perceptions show a tension in using humour within these Korean workplaces.

Key categories within the *Confucian worldview* theme are: (1) friendship and family-like bonding, (2) maintaining hierarchy and harmony, (3) societal dissonance, (4) avoiding conflict, and (5) *chemyon* (saving face). This theme suggests that humour may help to maintain Confucian relationships involving hierarchy and harmony in the workplace.

Individuals may develop in-depth relationships through humour, and develop intimate relationships such as friendships with individuals of same age, and family-like bonding with those in different age groups. This suggests that in the workplace humour may help to develop relationships similar to the family-like relationships emphasized under the Confucian traditions. Furthermore, the perceived fun and easy-going aspects of humour help individuals to avoid open conflict by communicating in an indirect manner. In this process, humour offers a way to gently reinforce social roles and boundaries under the Confucian hierarchical relationship structure. The *chemyon* (face) of individuals and associated groups may also be protected by the reinforcement of social roles and relationship structures within the workplace. Individuals may save *chemyon* either by elevating their own social status or by hiding embarrassing moments through humour. This means that individuals may redefine their social position and save face in troublesome situations through the use of humour, which can cultivate harmonious groups within the organization.

Conversely, the Confucian value of formality suggests that a workplace should be serious, and humour should be restricted in the workplace. This creates a conflict between the perception (humour should not be used) and the reality (humour is used) of using humour within the studied Korean workplaces. Due to this Confucianism-based perception, individuals may be cautious in using humour in the workplace, or may consider humour as an unimportant part of work processes and work relationships. Yet the data will show that humour still exists in these Korean workplaces. Its use may therefore create ambiguity and tension due to the conflicts created by Confucian values.

The next most discussed theme from the analysis is *clashing worldview*. The categories comprising this theme include: (1) emotion management, (2) uncertainty outside the office, (3) gender and hierarchical division, and (4) impression management. This theme suggests that humour creates, and at the same time negotiates, conflict and confusion amongst organizational members, due to their different perspectives or assumptions, thus creating a 'clash' of perspectives.

Humour can create ambiguity, and this ambiguity may cause individuals to experience stressful or tense emotions in the workplace. These stressful situations occur especially frequently between organizational members from different demographic groups. While the different perceptions of demographic groups (such as those delineated by age) can be communicated through humour, these different expectations may in the process also create

conflict and divide groups. Similarly, humour may cause individuals to experience unintentional changes to their own impressions. Impression of an individual can be important in organizational relationships (either personally or work-wise). While sharing humour in social contexts may positively affect the portrayed image or impression of the user, humour may also have damaging consequences in work-related contexts. This means that the use of humour may provoke an undesired, unprofessional image of the individual. However, regardless of the situation (social or work-related), this negative perception towards humour may exist consistently. This is because the traditional Confucian values emphasize that a level of formality should be maintained by individuals, and humour can be perceived to damage this desired formality. These different values and beliefs create uncertainty in how humour is used and interpreted between individuals, and this uncertainty escalates outside the office. When organizational members interact outside the physical office or working hours the degree of acceptability in using humour becomes more unpredictable, and thus increases the complexity of using humour. Therefore, this theme suggests that problems and uncertainties that organizational members may face in using humour are due to the different perceptions they have in how humour may or may not be used in the workplace.

In comparison to the previous themes the *organizational worldview* theme discusses a more embedded role of humour within the organization. This theme suggests that humour may express organizational assumptions and show how humour influences organizational processes and work relationships, which may differ from the traditional Confucian assumptions. Categories within this theme include: (1) collegial relationships, (2) independent identity, and (3) situational boundaries. Humour may help individuals to develop in-group and out-group relationships within the workplace by providing a shared experience amongst the communicators. These may involve work-specific relationships rather than in-depth personal relationships, and humour may help to develop bonds between members in different organizational positions or positons in the hierarchy. Individuals who display their confidence and gain the attention of others through the use of humour may also attain control and power. Through humour, individuals may express their individuality and even develop a unique identity within the workplace, separate from the collective identity sought within Korean workplaces.   However, humour may also signal boundaries, and the boundaries of humour may change depending on the situation. This includes the context of when and where humour is shared, and with whom humour is exchanged, to suggest that there are limits to how humour may be used within the workplace. Because the suggested

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role of humour within the organizational context conflicts with some of the Confucian values emphasized in the Korean society (such as formality and hierarchy), this theme contrasts to the *Confucian worldview* theme.

Table 6 below shows a summary of all of the identified themes and categories, and the number of times each category was referred to by the respondents during interviews and recorded in the observation data. Table 6 also presents examples of interview responses which best represent each category. Observation examples are not included in this table, but are used later in this chapter to explain each of the categorized ideas in depth. These themes and categories are collated from the data collected from all three participant companies. While the number of recorded data (interviews and observations) is not equal across the three companies, this is due to the culture of the individual company, rather than the preference of the researcher. Furthermore, all three companies displayed similar themes through the observed humour instances and interviews, and the most distinctive example is used in this chapter to represent each theme accordingly.

Table 6. Results of thematic analysis

Theme	Description	Categories	Representative examples
1. Confucian worldview (845 references)	This theme refers to how humour expresses the Confucian philosophy within the workplace	Friendship and family-like bonding (44 sources, 237 references)	'Humour's like sharing a secret. It can create a bond just a bit less than (what I have with my) partner should I say.' (Peridot, 31, male, Mintrack)
		Maintaining hierarchy and harmony (41 sources, 213 references)	'Traditionally we emphasize ourselves as people from the 'Eastern nation of Politeness'. Thing like… respecting your elders are so important in Korea. So I think this would influence quite a bit.' (Citrine, 33, female, Mintrack)
		Societal dissonance (37 sources, 158 references)	'It (humour) doesn't fit with Korean culture. A workplace needs to be formal. Mixing (humour) with work makes you look arrogant, so it doesn't suit workplace settings.' (Agate, 30, male, Truscene)
		Avoiding conflict (40 sources, 137 references)	'There's an old saying, you can't spit on a smiling face. So you make them smile by smiling and laughing first. That usually gives them a favourable impression as well.' (Peridot, 31, male, Mintrack)
		Chemyon (12 sources, 100 references)	'Korean men tends to be ashamed when they haven't served in the army. So those who can humorously talk about their experience says that they served in the national security force or military police, because normal military soldiers train with a rifle and they don't. People in the national security force train with a pistol. So they say 'I didn't attend the normal military but wore a pistol' (national security force and the military police are ranked higher than normal army soldiers). Next step down is attending normal military or served in the State-owned institutions. It sounds fancy, but it's just those doing administration work at defence related contractors. So there are different types like 6 month, and 12 months, so people joke about it. Men instinctively want to cover up their faults, you know. Wanting to show off and act a bit authoritative.' (Moss, 60, male, Wisepath)

2. Clashing worldview (345 references)	This theme refers to how humour shows a clash between different worldviews within the workplace.	Emotion management (33 sources, 97 references)	'It makes me feel anxious. Sometimes people overdo jokes, and it's mischievous, and confusing. The consequences are quite unpredictable, but they do it anyway.' (Zircon, 41, male, Mintrack)
		Uncertainty outside the office (30 sources, 92 references)	'During work, it's not good to use humour because then you can't concentrate. But when we go out for coffee or something, then I like the whole liveliness and joking and all. But then again when it's associated with work, I don't like the loud and lively… no, I do like it. It's kind of confusing.' (Peridot, 31, male, Mintrack)
		Gender and hierarchical division (24 sources, 84 references)	'Once I got told off by a passing-by manager for joking around with someone in the company kitchen. He asked who has the longer tenure, and only when I told him that we were only a month apart (in organizational tenure), he backed off.' (Carnelian, 24, female, Truscene)
		Impression management (32 sources, 69 references)	'I don't want my superiors to think badly of me. But yes, I like being the funny character and all, but then again I don't want people to think I don't take work seriously… so I try to restrain (humour) at times.' (Diamond, 30, male, Mintrack)
3. Organizational worldview (259 references)	This theme refers to how humour expresses the organization-based mind-set within workplace context	Collegial relationships (40 sources, 152 references)	'I think humour can develop relationships between people, quite quickly. So you get closer relationships and bonding, that can improve your work life as well.' (Emerald, 28, female, Mintrack)
		Independent identity (36 sources, 94 references)	'I'm not too sure whether you can say it's all about humour, but those who are humorous and talk in an interesting way are definitely the more popular ones.' (Peridot, 31, male, Mintrack)
		Situational boundaries (11 sources, 13 references)	'There's this line. If you go over this line, it can be dangerous. But it changes depending on the situation. Most people know it, so they don't go over it.' (Chalcedony, 27, male, Truscene)

5.4 Confucian worldview

This subsection discusses the *Confucian worldview* theme. This theme refers to how humour expresses the Confucian assumptions of formality and hierarchical relationships within the studied Korean workplaces. However, the data show that some of the Confucian ideas expressed through humour contradict one another. Confucian ideas are illustrated within the identified categories that explore concepts of friendship and family-like bonding, maintaining hierarchy and harmony, societal dissonance, avoiding conflict, and *chemyon* (saving face). This subsection will discuss the Confucian values expressed through humour, which lead to reinforcement of hierarchical relationship and harmony between organizational members. However, the irony lies in the fact that the idea of humour itself conflicts with the Confucian value of formality, creating negative perceptions of the use of humour in the workplace, thus creating confusion and ambiguity in the studied Korean workplaces.

5.4.1 Friendship and family-like bonding

When discussing how humour influences the relationships between organizational members, almost all of the interview participants suggested the development of friendship or family-like bonding. This idea refers to an intimate feeling or bonding between individuals that distinguishes them into social groups. Within these social groups, humour interactions may help to develop in-depth relationships or in-groups with less of an emphasis on organizational hierarchy. This relates to the concept of 'i' (collective good) and 'xin' (loyalty) under Confucianism (Yum, 1988), where individuals are faithful and loyal toward fellow members within the group, and display relationships stronger than collegial relationships, such as friendships. In this study, most research participants described humour as a shared experience that brings people together as a collective group in the workplace. It is suggested that humour is a form of shared experience or event, serving to create strong ties between individuals:

> *Humour's like sharing a secret. It can create a bond just a bit less than (what I have with my) wife should I say.*

> Peridot, 31, male, Mintrack

This example suggests that by sharing humour, special bonds may be developed to extend the quality of interpersonal relationships. This respondent describes his relationship as '*just a bit less than wife,* which implies a close in-group relationship similar to that of a husband and a wife. However, the majority of the interview participants also implied that humour divides in-group members from out-groups:

> *For me, I separate people this way I guess - frequently joking about what only we know, with my friends.*

<div align="right">Moss, 60, male, Wisepath</div>

This response implies that humour can be used to separate in-group members or '*friends*' from out-group members. Through the sharing of a joke which only in-group members can understand, a feeling of exclusiveness can be created, which strengthens the bond. Conversely, humour also creates a feeling of neglect for out-group members who are not included in the joke:

> *I think they feel a bit neglected. I can actually see that. When we joke amongst ourselves, others would look at us with that odd expression. Stare at us when we laugh. Things like that.*

<div align="right">Apatite, 24, male, Truscene</div>

While humour may signal a distinct division between workplace in-group and out-group relationships, it can also display the level of intimacy within the in-group relationships. For example, an observed example shows how humour is privately shared between two individuals amongst a larger group of co-workers (a large in-group) to signal their more intimate relationship:

> *Seven members from the administration and programming team gather at a café, located outside the office building. The group of co-workers sit around one large table, where Emerald and Diamond sit side by side in the corner, next to a large window. While the other members are talking, Emerald and Diamond start their own conversation. Emerald suddenly makes a dramatic facial expression, with one hand reaching upwards and the other downwards, as if she is dancing. Emerald is mimicking the facial expressions and posture of Yuna Kim, an Olympic gold-medallist figure skater, and her most famous finale posture in performing 'Danse Macabre Op. 40' which is printed on a magazine, placed in front of Emerald. She repeats this*

posture three times for Diamond as he laughs loudly at her. Then Diamond calls out to the others sitting around the table, asking them to see what Emerald is doing. As the group's attention focuses on Emerald, she stops what she is doing, turning her body towards the window (away from people) and pretends to play with her smartphone. Everyone waits for Emerald to perform her mimicking act, but she doesn't. Everyone sits in awkward silence for a few minutes, just waiting, but nothing happens. Someone lets out an annoyed sigh, and independent conversations re-engage between the group members.

April 21, Mintrack Observation notes

This situation shows that humour is (unintentionally) used to identify the most intimate in-group relationships which occur within the organizational groups. All seven individuals in this example are considered to be a close in-group within the organization, and they frequently meet after work and during weekends to socialize. However, this particular incident shows that in this case, the humour is only shared between two individuals. This identifies a close relationship, where the particular individual initiating the humour (Emerald) performs it to one person only (Diamond), and refuses to perform for others when requested. The '*awkward silence for a few minutes, just waiting*' and '*an annoyed sigh*' suggests that negative feelings are created when Emerald refuses to share her humour with the whole group. This example suggests that humour can signal a particular level of closeness or intimacy in a relationship, even within in-groups.

In particular, some research participants suggested that humour can unite and divide organizational members into demographic groups. Individuals expect their own demographic groups to have similar expectations in terms of humour and other interests, leading to more willingness to engage with their own demographic groups:

> *Young people these days don't like old-fashioned stuff. When I'm with young ones, I have to adjust to their interests. But when I'm with my own age group, I can joke about the concerns that we have at our age.*

Larimar, 55, male, Mintrack

This example implies that it can be difficult to communicate with an individual of a different age group. While individuals belonging to the same age group are expected to have the same concerns, communicating with individuals of any other age group requires adjustment

('*adjust to their interests*'). This means that individuals expect others of different demographic groups to have different interests, making it more difficult to share humour successfully. However, how an individual determines their own demographic group - or the individuals that they can share humour safely with - is ambiguous. Although demographic groups such as those based on gender are more obvious, age groups are difficult to divide. For example, the above respondent implies that he is a part of the older group, as he describes others as '*young people*'. However, there are no universal standards in dividing young and old age groups, and individuals make their own assumptions in dividing the groups. This means that although a successful use of humour may support an individual's assumption with regard to these groupings ('*when I'm with my own age group, I can joke about the concerns that we have at our age*'), humour between individuals with dissimilar assumptions may create confusion or even conflict.

Some research participants suggested that humour may also unite individuals of different demographic groups by establishing a family-like feeling. For example, an interview participant explained how the use of humour by his male manager who was more than 10 years older created a feeling of closeness:

> *I talk to my manager often, even when he is away on a business trip. He talks in a funny way, and makes me feel quite close (to him). Of course, not all of his jokes are funny, but he's good. For me, that makes him feel like a brother, or an uncle.*

Apatite, 24, male, Truscene

In this example, the manager is described as a '*brother, or an uncle*' to suggest a family-like feeling. Although this may portray another form of hierarchical relationship, the comparison refers to a family rather than an organizational relationship. This interview participant implies that humour used by his manager ('*He talks in a funny way*') creates a feeling of closeness, and leads to an intimate relationship beyond that between a superior and a subordinate. This is perhaps similar to a feeling of friendship. However, the interview participant does not describe this bond as a friendship, as the term friend in Korean language is only used between individuals of same age. Therefore, although humour may create a feeling similar to that of friendship between individuals of different demographic groups, terms associated with family-based relationships ('*brother*' and *'uncle'*) are used instead to describe the in-depth bond between individuals, and to maintain respect for older people.

5.4.2 Maintaining hierarchy and harmony

This theme (Confucian worldview) also includes the idea of maintaining hierarchy and harmony. Almost all of the respondents discussed how humour, by cultivating a boundary between individuals of different hierarchical positions, may help to maintain harmony. At a societal level, Confucianism emphasizes the importance of harmony between individuals, which refers to a social state whereby the members of a social group remain within their hierarchical roles. Therefore, harmony in the societal context underpinned by Confucianism is achieved by managing a certain boundary (and hierarchy) between individuals. This societal idea of maintaining harmony is transferred into the organization, and the data suggest that humour is used as a part of this boundary maintenance, so that humour helps to maintain the expected roles of individuals, which are subject to the individual's organizational position and age. This means that within the studied Korean organizations, organizational members interact according to a complex and interrelated mix of two different hierarchies, both organizational and societal. Consequently, two different standards or expectations of hierarchical relationships may be reinforced and maintained through the use of organizational humour. These findings help to answer a part of the research question, that of understanding the relationship between Korean Confucianism and workplace humour, by showing how individuals perceive the influence of humour between members of different organizational hierarchical levels.

At a societal level, the idea of maintaining social roles relates to the idea of politeness and respect within the Korean culture. This relationship between social roles and politeness was suggested by participants across all three companies, regardless of age, gender and organizational position, and thus suggests this societal impact on these studied organizations. For example, one of the interview participants implied that due to this cultural value humour should be limited:

> *Traditionally we emphasize ourselves as people from the 'Eastern nation of politeness'. Thing like… respecting your elders are so important in Korea. So I think this would influence (humour) quite a bit.*
>
> <div align="right">Citrine, 33, female, Mintrack</div>

The use of title '*Eastern nation of politeness'* suggests a sense of pride and dignity as a Korean person, leading to a boundary created around the idea of respect. This boundary relates to the Korean moral standards of *rules of politeness*.

In this study, just under half of all interview participants felt that in order to stay within the boundaries of *rules of politeness* they must be cautious in performing humour. *Rules of politeness* refer to the idea that in everyday life individuals must behave in a polite manner. Although this societal-wide idea is common to most people in Korea (Park, 1993), it also affects organizations and their members at all hierarchical levels. The emphasis is on respecting those who are hierarchically superior, and in these studied workplaces, hierarchy relates to both age and organizational positions. However, as with most other societal norms, there are no written rules with regard to the *rules of politeness*. This is an important underlying concept to consider when exploring the relationship between Korean Confucianism and organizational humour, as it appears that organizational humour is expected to be performed within the boundaries set by the *rules of politeness* in a Confucian society. The majority of participants perceived that humour needs to be restrained when communicating with organizational superiors, in order to fulfil the societal *rules of politeness*. For example one of the manager-level participants responded:

> *When it comes to communicating with a superior, you need to be careful. In Korea, you need to respect elderly people. Be polite. Things like that are considered important. And I agree… so I do things carefully. Including humour.*

> Emerald, 28, female, Mintrack

This suggests that although humour occurs, individuals are more bounded in terms of their use of humour towards their organizational and societal superiors (‘*so I do things carefully. Including humour’)*. In this response, superiors do not mean only those in higher organizational positions, but also elderly people in general (‘*you need to respect elderly people’)*. The statement ‘*In Korea* […] *Things like that are considered important’* suggests that this idea is common within the wider Korean society. Although this is also important in many other cultures, it is especially highly emphasized in Korea.

Going beyond this rule and using humour inappropriately may damage the harmony sought by the wider organizational group. These examples suggest that organizational members maintain boundaries in using humour, especially when superior organizational members are involved in the interaction. Individuals are conscious about the limits of their behaviour with regard to the *rules of politeness*, in order to maintain harmony in society, and this is also

important in organizational life. However, this is focussed more towards achieving the general harmony of the wider group, rather than in specific interpersonal relationships.

Research participants suggested a more lenient attitude towards a superior organizational member's use of humour. In this study, many of the research participants felt that humour used towards them by a superior is a form of attention given to them as subordinate members:

> *I think most people would agree with me on that, teasing and name-calling is similar to asking how your day has been. So I think saying things like this is a sign of care and closeness (by superior).*

<div align="right">Ivory, 25, female, Mintrack</div>

This example suggests that even humour of a deprecating nature ('*teasing and name-calling*') may be considered a sign of closeness when used by a superior organizational member, as humour is '*similar to asking how your day has been*'. The expression of '*care and closeness*' implies the creation of a positive feeling and relationship between the individuals.

However, humour used by an individual in a subordinate position appears to be perceived differently. Here, humour is approached with more caution. For example, one interview participant discussed the social roles embedded in the organizational hierarchy, from a subordinate's perspective:

> *Korean culture maintains a family-like structure across all contexts. On a smaller scale, a family would have the mother and the father as the most senior persons. In the workplace, the CEO and the management is the most senior. On a larger scale, the president is the most senior within a country. This idea is solid in our minds. So you can't really joke around with seniors.*

<div align="right">Coral, 64, female, Wisepath</div>

This example suggests the strict social roles embedded in the organizational hierarchy, which are comparable to family roles and societal constraints. These expectations suggest that humour should not be used with those who are hierarchically higher ('*so you can't really joke around with seniors*'). In contrast, subordinates also fulfil their roles by responding or accommodating to the humour initiated by superiors. For example, one of the interview participants from Mintrack discussed the expectations involved in responding adequately to a

superior's humour, although Mintrack is the least formal and hierarchical of the three participant companies:

> *What can I say, he's the boss. Of course I respond actively (laugh) to the boss. But it's not really that funny… well, if the same joke is shared with people my own age or position, and comparing the same joke shared with people positioned higher than me… it's different.*

Jet, 28, male, Mintrack

While this may seem similar to the caring role of the superior suggested in the previous example, the humour in this case is strictly limited to providing reactions to a superior's creation of humour. Individuals in subordinate positions are expected to respond adequately ('o*f course I respond actively (laugh) to the boss'*) although the joke is not funny ('*but it's not really that funny'*). This means that in sharing humour in the workplace individuals consider the relative hierarchy of the interacting people, and their response is influenced by the humour creator's status. However, the respondent is ambiguous when discussing whether it is the age or the organizational position of the superior that influences his response to humour:

> *I think it's because he is the CEO. CEOs are difficult you know, since I'm just a low level employee. But then again, it might be the age difference… he is much, much older than me. I think it's the age.*

Jet, 28, male, Mintrack

This shows confusion in whether it is the organizational position or age that determines the hierarchical differences between individuals. This may be because traditionally Korean companies operate under a seniority system, where age and hierarchical status are linked. As the above respondent works at a company which implements a seniority system in promotion (therefore, organizational tenure and position are parallel), it is difficult to consider these separately. Therefore, the relative social role an individual takes may be identified by a combination of these categories, where a superior is senior in age, organizational position, and tenure, while a subordinate is junior in age, organizational position, and tenure.

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5.4.3 Societal dissonance

One of the most interesting themes that emerged during the analysis was the idea that humour does not belong in the workplace, and is not appropriate to use there. In this study, 37 interview participants across all three companies indicated that they felt humour should be limited or not used at all within the workplace. This is inconsistent with all other themes and categories within this research, which all discuss the impact of humour and how it is being used. For example, some research participants indicated that humour is not an important part of the Korean workplaces:

> *Humour isn't crucial. Not having it won't stop you from having decent conversations.*

> Turquoise, 35, male, Truscene

> *Work is the focus, when you come into work. Not things like humour and joking around.*

> Opal, 24, female, Mintrack

> *You don't die because there's no humour at work.*

> Jade, 32, male, Truscene

These examples suggest that humour may be considered insignificant within Korean organizations. Furthermore, the statement '*not having it won't stop you from having decent conversations*' implies that humour is perceived not to have any specific role in the processes of communication between organizational members. However, the response '*decent conversations*' is ambiguous as to whether it concerns work-related conversations or interpersonal (socializing) conversations, or both. All the examples above suggest that individuals should consider work tasks as the focus within the workplace ('*Work is the focus*'), and that humour is not associated with this work process. However, another interview participant suggested that this may relate more to the social aspect of communication:

> *Without humour…I guess it'll be less fun. But it's nothing special. Just less fun that's all.*

> Jet, 28, male, Mintrack

In this response, the use of humour is acknowledged to provide more '*fun*' to the workplace, but the idea of having '*less fun*' is considered common in Korean organizations ('*it's nothing special*'). Thus, humour is not considered by the majority of these participants as an important workplace interaction.

These responses indicate that some individuals view lack of humour as a common workplace norm, and accept the idea that humour may be restricted within Korean workplaces. For example, when asked why humour is not expected in Korean workplaces, one of the interview participants stated:

> *Under the Korean culture, we want discipline. So that's why we are strict on these things…*

<div align="right">Obsidian, 59, male, Wisepath</div>

This example implies that humour should be controlled ('*we are strict on these things*'), and that this form of control is expected within the wider Korean society ('*under the Korean culture, we want discipline*'). A potential reason suggested to be behind this expectation is the emphasis on formality:

> *It doesn't fit with Korean culture. A workplace needs to be formal. Mixing (humour) with work makes you look arrogant, so it doesn't suit workplace settings.*

<div align="right">Agate, 30, male, Truscene</div>

This suggests that it is a part of the Korean culture to expect formality in the workplace ('*a workplace needs to be formal*'). However, humour is perceived to damage this sense of formality, and not to '*fit with Korean culture*'. At first, a majority of the interview participants implied that their negative perception of humour was because it is considered to diverge from their general understanding of workplace culture. However, most also discussed alternative (positive) views of humour, thus creating themes in conflict with the idea that humour does not fit within Korean workplaces. Using humour can be perceived as a conflicting act against this (traditional) general understanding, which makes the individual '*look arrogant*'. This suggests that the use of humour may also influence organizational relationships negatively. This influence seems more evident for individuals in lower hierarchical positions. For example, one of the interview participants explained her indirect experience which limited the use of humour in the workplace:

One of my colleagues, he was seriously criticized by the manager for joking around […] maybe he was over-doing it. But he was so beaten down about it that he never jokes anymore. The same applies to me, so I try not to use humour. I don't even think about the very idea of using humour in the workplace.

Aquamarine, 20, female, Truscene

This example suggests the consequences of going against the traditional formalities emphasized in the studied Korean workplaces. The interview participant suggests that humour is not allowed to be used, and will be '*seriously criticized*' and '*beaten down*' for '*joking around*'. This example illustrates the general perception that humour should not be used in Korean workplaces. This is also consistent with the idea of hierarchical relationships and the social roles that are expected to maintain harmony amongst organizational group members (discussed in section 5.4.2). The interview participant was an entry-level staff member, and her '*colleague*' who was criticized for using humour in the workplace was also at the lower level within the organizational hierarchy. This is verified because in Korean workplaces the word '*colleague*' is only used between individuals in similar organizational positions. Therefore, this shows how the use of humour by individuals of a low hierarchical position may be corrected and criticized by their superiors ('*manager*'). This reinforces the idea that according to these participants humour should not be used in Korean workplaces, especially for those in lower hierarchical positions.

5.4.4 Avoiding conflict

When exploring how humour is used within the studied workplaces, it is important to consider how the concept of humour relates to the traditional values or assumptions of the individuals. Almost all of the interview participants in this study discussed how humour helped to avoid conflict within the workplace. This idea relates to the earlier category of *maintain hierarchy and harmony*. This category shows that workers try to maintain harmony between the collective members of the organizational group. It is important to them to maintain peaceful relationships by avoiding direct conflict, and this is apparent for people at all hierarchical levels across all three participant companies.

The idea of *nunchi* was raised by the research participants, as a way to conduct humour effectively between individuals. *Nunchi* refers to reading the atmosphere- and it involves

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suggesting or catching non-verbal signals to capture the intentions of the interacting individuals. *Nunchi* is used to assess the boundaries of humour that are created in the workplace. Depending on the context and the relationship between interacting individuals, the limits of humour can change. This includes when to engage and when to stop humour. For example, one interview participant discussed the importance of *nunchi* when using humour in the workplace:

> *I think it's all about nunchi, doing good nunchi. If I feel that even if I say everything right, there's no guarantee that I'll develop a good relationship with this person. So in this situation, I shouldn't risk (using humour) and develop a bad relationship. It's just better to restrain myself.*

<div align="right">Peridot, 31, male, Mintrack</div>

This example suggests that *nunchi* is a vital process in sharing humour in the workplace ('*it's all about nunchi*'). Through invoking the social concept of *nunchi*, humour can be used appropriately in most organizational relationships. Some interview participants suggested that in order to maintain a good relationship between the communicating individuals, *nunchi* and humour can be used simultaneously.

Similarly, humour may be used to avoid challenging moments and to diminish conflict between individuals. This idea is termed 'good-is-good', which is a Korean saying, meaning to resolve a problem without creating conflict, in order to achieve a general harmony amongst the group. Thus, the focus is on indirectly negotiating an action or task to diminish disruption to relationships and to the wider group. This idea suggests that provoking laughter through humour helps to avoid conflict. Good-is-good is more about the avoidance of direct conflict. For example, one of the interview participants discussed how humour helps to avoid a troublesome situation:

> *I was involved in this group project, and someone made a mistake in their part. He made a joke about it, but I was quite annoyed because I could feel that he was just trying to escape from the problem. Everyone laughed at that joke which was obviously made to avoid that very moment. I could see what was going on, but I couldn't do anything further.*

<div align="right">Ruby, 35, female, Truscene</div>

Although the respondent did not enjoy the humour created by this person ('*I was quite annoyed)*, she laughed along with the humour to maintain peace in the workplace. She states that she was unable to directly criticize the mistake made on the group project, which could potentially create conflict ('*but I couldn't do anything further'*). Although Truscene is a highly hierarchical organization and humour is generally not encouraged by superiors, humour used to avoid conflict was still accepted by this respondent. This suggests that engaging in humour may avoid direct conflict, but this does not also protect the quality of relationship between the communicators. This is because humour provides an opportunity to laugh off mistakes, which helps to evade the troublesome situation rather than to resolve the actual problem. Another interview participant describes the reasons to deal with such situations by engaging in humour rather than using any other methods:

> *There's an old saying, you can't spit on a smiling face. So you make them smile by smiling and laughing first. That usually gives them a favourable impression as well.*

<div align="right">Peridot, 31, male, Mintrack</div>

The phrase '*you can't spit on a smiling face'* is a proverb that means that you cannot ill-treat a person who is treating you nicely. Participants suggest that humour is a form of 'niceness' and creates a chance to resolve conflict peacefully. Humour acts as a process to relieve aggression between communicators, to reach an outcome without open conflict, and to achieve harmony amongst the collective group. This desire to avoid direct conflict is reflected in the old Korean proverb (good-is-good), and shows the traditional Korean value of collective harmony. This relates to the Confucian ideas of 'jen' and 'i', which are about the obligations individuals should have in interpersonal relationships, such as harmony, kindness, and striving for the common good rather than for the self.

5.4.5 Chemyon (Saving face)

When discussing how humour is used by individuals within Korean organization, 12 interview participants implied that humour can be used to maintain *chemyon* or face. For the purpose of protecting *chemyon* (or face) within the collective group individuals may elevate their social position or may hide shameful moments. For example, this interview participant discussed the relationship between humour and *chemyon*:

It kind of emphasizes our value on how you are viewed to others.

<div align="right">Turquoise, 35, male, Truscene</div>

This response suggests that humour shows how conscious Korean workers are of other people's perceptions. Individuals attempt to elevate their social positions by using humour as a form of indirect communication within the communicating group. Some interview participants suggested that by teasing or deprecating another individual through humour, the lowered social position of the victim allowed the humour initiator's relational position to be elevated. For example, one of the interview participants explained how he uses humour to '*pick on others*':

> *I can only joke well when there is a suitable target. My style of humour is really about picking on others, so when there is a target that can be smashed and go under (me) the situation works out well.*

<div align="right">Spinel, 31, male, Mintrack</div>

Observation data also supports Spinel's claim that he used humour to depreciate others. In this example, Spinel teases a female organizational member (Ivory) who is positioned hierarchically lower than he is:

> *Spinel stands up from his desk, bending his body forward as if to see Ivory better. Other members (Diamond, Emerald, and Sapphire) are whispering to each other in a joking way, pointing their fingers at Ivory, laughing at her. Ivory covers her fringe with both her hands, while seated at her desk.*
>
> *Ivory: My fringe was chopped by a weirdo hairdresser yesterday. I need to get it fixed up.*
>
> *Spinel: It looks stupid. You look really stupid.*
>
> *Diamond: Yeah you look really stupid.*
>
> *Emerald: Sorry, you kind of look stupid.*
>
> *Ivory makes a sad expression, making eye contact with each of the individuals as they comment about her hair. Her gaze stops at Spinel. Spinel smirks, and shrugs his shoulders.*
>
> *Spinel: I told you to think twice then three times (before getting the haircut) if needed. He laughs continuously, and points his index finger at his own fringe.*
>
> *Spinel: But then again, it's not all too… yes it is too bad.*

Ivory covers her face with her hands and makes a crying sound.

This example suggests that humour is often used to undermine another person or place them socially '*under*' the joking individual. A feeling of superiority is shown from this particular interview example ('*a target that can be smashed and go under (me)*'), established, in terms of sharing humour in the workplace, through a rather abusive mind-set. Spinel describes how the targeted individual needs to be '*smashed*' in order for the situation to '*work out well*', meaning that a successful humour instance needs to heighten his own social position, at the victim's expense. Spinel uses humour to put down another organizational member ('*you look really stupid*') who is positioned lower in the organizational hierarchy. He is the one in power, therefore he leads the put-down joke, and other organizational members mimic his words to escalate the joke further, until the victim signals defeat by making a '*crying sound*'.

Conversely, some interview participants suggested that humour can elevate self in a form of showing-off or taking credit. Humour is used to focus attention on the individual, by emphasizing their experience or characteristics. Unlike the first approach, this does not involve putting down another individual. For example, an interview participant explained this process by using a topic often raised between Korean men, that of military duties:

> *…Those who can humorously talk about their experience say that they served in the National security force or military police, because normal military soldiers train with a rifle and they don't. People in the national security force train with a pistol. So they say 'I didn't attend the normal military but wore a pistol' (national security force and military police are ranked higher than normal army soldiers) […] wanting to show off and act a bit authoritative.*

In this example, humour creates a platform for Korean men to boast about their experience in the military, which creates a higher social position for the individual. Serving in the military as a member of the special force (such as '*national security force or military police*') is suggested to be an experience to '*show off and act a bit authoritative*'. This means that such experiences are perceived to heighten one's social position. This type of humour may also divide the genders, as military service is compulsory only for males. This means that military service is experienced proportionately more by the male population than females, and creates

a feeling of exclusiveness amongst male members who have served in the military. Therefore, regardless of whether they actually served under such circumstances, humour can be used to elevate the self temporarily.

Another method of maintaining *chemyon* is to use humour when an individual feels ashamed. While this idea of shame was not raised in the interviews, observing humour incidents and the associated body language of individuals provided interesting data. Humour helps individuals to hide or ignore specific moments, mainly those associated with embarrassing acts or mistakes they make in front of others. For example, an observation of three female workers in Mintrack (Ivory, Emerald, and Citrine), during a lunchtime drawing session displayed this:

> *Ivory spills the contents from her large pencil case, picking up a small, silver colour craft knife. She turns around to Citrine, who is busy drawing her own picture, and offers to sharpen Citrine's pencil with the knife. Citrine hands Ivory the pencil she is using. Ivory slices away the wooden pieces from the pencil on a paper positioned on her lap, but the sharpened pencil is not 'sharp', but rather bulky. Citrine grabs her pencil from Ivory, and starts to sharpen it again herself. Ivory stares at Citrine and whispers "oh my gosh, I better practice my pencil sharpening skills to seduce your hearts" in an animated tone of voice. Both Citrine and Emerald does not respond to Ivory's comment. Ivory smiles, faces down, and starts to pick on her fingers.*

> April 17, Mintrack Observation notes

This example show that Ivory is using humour *('I better practice my pencil sharpening skills to seduce your hearts'*) to cope with an embarrassing situation. Humour in this example is suggested to lessen the embarrassment Ivory feels as she fails to sharpen Citrine's pencil properly. This situation is considered shameful, as Ivory makes a grand announcement to the other members that she can accomplish the task (sharpening the pencil) with great skill, yet she fails to do so. The shame experienced by Ivory is observed through her body language, where she is still smiling, but she faces down towards the ground and starts to pick on her fingers, as if trying to avoid this uncomfortable situation. However, when Ivory was asked about this in a spontaneous interview, she simply stated that '*it was embarrassing*', and did not respond further. This refusal to respond reinforces that Ivory was feeling shameful in this particular instance. Therefore, this may imply that the humour was used to turn other people's attention away from a shameful situation, although it did not fully eliminate the

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shameful feelings experienced by Ivory. Thus, this shows that *chemyon,* or saving face, can be achieved through humour.

This theme of protecting *chemyon* of individuals is strongly supported in the observations notes. Across all three participating companies, 34 instances of humour were recorded where humour was used to for the purpose of saving one's *chemyon*. However, the number of interview responses regarding this topic was much lower than for other themes. This may be because individuals consider discussing (with the researcher) incidents involving humour and saving *chemyon* as an exposure of their shameful moments. They may be unwilling to share such experiences in interviews, but several such incidents were observed in the organizations.

5.4.6 Theme summary

The findings in this theme (*Confucian worldview*) help to answer a part of the research question. The data shows that the humour used within these Korean organizations expresses the traditional Confucian values of formality, harmony, and hierarchical relationships. However, humour reinforces a variety of values expressed in Confucian ideals, which sometimes contradict one another. While the general perception is that humour should not be used in the workplace (due to formality), humour is still used by individuals to express other Confucian values such as harmony. This shows that the process of displaying Confucianism through humour is complex and ambiguous, and organizational members using humour may experience confusion and conflict as each one interprets humour in their own way.

Most interview participants also felt that humour creates a feeling of togetherness for individuals of similar demographic groups, leading to the development, between organizational members, of intimate relationships such as friendship and family-like bonding. Individuals perceive that others in similar hierarchical positions or demographic groups have similar perceptions of humour. Observation data also show that humour is exchanged more actively with individuals belonging to the same in-group, while isolating the out-groups. Demographic groups are also formed through dimensions such as age, gender, and organizational tenure (position). However, it is important to note that because the studied Korean workplaces use a seniority system, the demographic categories of age and organizational tenure (position) are grouped together. Therefore, humour shared amongst in-group members reinforces strong bonds, within and between demographic groups to create

in-depth relationships such as friendship (for those of same age) and family-like relationships (for those of different age and other demographic groups) between the members.

However, the data show that most research participants also expected to use humour to maintain the structure of their hierarchical relationship. The interview responses show that humour is approached differently by individuals, depending on the relative hierarchical position of the communicators. The data show that humour may assist in fulfilling the social roles of the individual. While a superior's use of humour is perceived by his/her subordinates to be a signal of care, a subordinate signals their supportive or accommodating role by responding actively to a superior's humour. This means that humour is generally restrained by those in subordinate positions. Most research participants considered this role as fulfilling behaviour to align with the Korean *rules of politeness*. Under this unwritten rule in how to treat others with respect, participants perceived humour as a form of communication which should be carefully used within the strict boundaries created by these rules. Most respondents felt that humour used within these rules helped to maintain harmony within the organizational group, and reinforced the hierarchical relationships between organizational members.

The findings also show that in using humour in the workplace, individuals value concepts of *nunchi* and *good-is-good*. Many respondents indicated that it is essential to use *nunchi* when sharing humour with others, as it will diminish the risk of creating conflict through the use of humour. Respondents identified two dimensions of using *nunchi* - the context and the quality of relationship between the communicating individuals. Individuals perceived that *nunchi* helps to assess the boundaries of humour, as each humour interaction has ambiguous boundaries of permissible humour. Both interview responses and observation data show that humour that takes *nunchi* into account enables individuals to communicate smoothly and to avoid conflict in difficult situations. This mainly involves interpersonal situations, as a part of the effort to avoid direct conflict between organizational members.

Conversely, most of the interview participants perceived humour as an unnecessary phenomenon in the workplace. These data shows that there is a difference between attitudes to humour and the actual enactment of it in the workplace. Humour is perceived to harm the formality encouraged by Korean traditions under Confucianism. Therefore, humour is considered unimportant and as something that may create negative relational outcomes for individuals sharing humour. However, this is mainly focussed on the work-specific situations,

rather than on social contexts. Despite these attitudes to humour, humour still occurs in Korean workplaces, which somewhat contradicts the Confucian value of formality. However, humour also helps to uphold other Confucian values. The data shows that humour can be used to maintain *chemyon* or face, which is an important part of maintaining hierarchical relationships under Confucianism. Research participants perceive that humour helps to save face by highlighting their accomplishment in order to temporarily elevate their social position, or hide shameful situations. Although these findings may relate to the individual's preferences or characteristics rather than Confucianism, the concepts raised in this study reflect Confucian ideals. This means that within the studied Korean workplaces humour may play an important role in expressing traditional Confucian values and relationships.

5.5 Clashing worldview

This subsection discusses the *clashing worldview* theme. This theme refers to how humour shared within the studied Korean workplaces may create confusion, ambiguity, and even conflict, due to the different perceptions of organizational members. The data show that there may be a clash of cultural values embedded in the wider traditional Korean society (Confucianism) and the organization, in relation to the concept of humour. These ideas are illustrated within categories that explore concepts of managing the emotions of individuals, having uncertainty outside the office, divisions of gender and hierarchical groups, and managing impressions. This subsection will discuss the different perspectives between organizational members, which lead to ambiguity and misinterpretation, and often unintended outcomes when using humour within the studied Korean workplaces.

5.5.1 Emotion management

When discussing how humour is used within the studied Korean workplaces, some respondents suggested that humour significantly influenced their emotions. Emotions may intentionally be managed by engaging in humour, but humour may also unintentionally influence the emotions of oneself and others. This impact on emotion has both positive and negative aspects, as it was perceived that could release stress but could also create stressful or tense feelings in the workplace. For example, 13 interview participants across all three

companies suggested the benefits of humour, and how it can ease tension in the workplace. However, these participants were mostly under 30 years old:

> *I always use humour to ease tension and to make people laugh.*

<div align="right">

Garnet, 29, male, Mintrack

</div>

This example suggests that humour is consciously used to make people laugh. It is suggested that as humour is used repetitively in tense situations, humour can be perceived as an effective method to release stress and tension within the workplace. Observation data from one of the participating companies Truscene supports this. In this example, three male staff members who are assigned to speak at the company seminar (which involves presenting their new product to their clients and distributers) use humour to release stress before heading off to the seminar venue:

> *Biron, Lapis, and Topaz gather around the round table located at the centre of the office. The office is empty, as other organizational members have already left to set up the venue. All three members seem to practice their speech quietly, as if whispering under their breath. Lapis's face is slightly flustered, and he flaps the A4 sized script in front of his face. Topaz slowly circles around the table, while reading his script quietly. Biron places his own script on the centre table, making a loud sound. He then jumps up to sit on the table, and swings his legs forward and back. He starts to say a part of his speech (in English) out loud, but intentionally emphasizing his Korean accent.*
> *Biron: Hello, nice to meet you. I will see you at the global seminar soon!*
> *Lapis and Topaz stop what they are doing, and start to laugh at Biron. Lapis mimics Biron's statement with a bubbly tone of voice, repeating the word 'hello'. Then all three members look at the clock located on the wall, fold their scripts, and individually put them in their bags. Biron jumps off the table upon which he was sitting, starts to whistle a melody, and rhythmically walks out of the office. Lapis and Topaz laugh, looks at each other, and follow Biron. Topaz walks beside Lapis and comments with a smile.*
> *Topaz: I feel a bit better now.*
> *Lapis also smiles, and rubs the back of Topaz's head.*

<div align="right">

April 8, Truscene observation notes

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This observation example shows how Biron uses humour to ease the tension amongst the group members. As the individuals are getting ready for their speech, this important task creates nervousness and stress for the individuals. This is signalled by the continuous practice of their speeches, and body language such as '*Lapis's face is slightly flustered*' and '*Topaz slowly circles around the table*'. Biron engages in humour, consciously using bad English pronunciation to make the others laugh at him. This is a deliberate 'act' as Biron lived in Australia for a few years, and his English is actually quite fluent. Biron's humour provokes laughter, and Topaz states '*I feel a bit better now*' to suggest that he is now less stressed. This example shows how humour can be intentionally used in tense situations, to decrease the stress experienced by organizational members.

Although this observation example illustrates a self-depreciating style of humour, the humour engagement in this example appears to influence both the instigator and his colleagues positively. Similarly, even being the subject of humour can positively affect the (victimized) individual's emotions. For example, one participant described her experience of being the subject of humour, where multiple organizational members exaggerated her behaviour and joked about her as a 'backstabber':

> *We exaggerate a lot. So if someone says something, this statement will be mutated - or snowballed, should I say. People will intentionally criticize you for saying something that you didn't really mean. But it's really funny. It's good even if I'm the one being criticized. If it doesn't get too personal, it's all good.*

<div align="right">Emerald, 28, female, Mintrack</div>

Although Emerald was being criticized for something she did not do (backstabbing someone), she described this experience as funny. Even as a victim of the joke, she considers the humour experience '*good*' in signalling enjoyment and positive emotions. However, the appropriateness of humour seems to be limited to it being not '*too personal*'. This is rather ambiguous as the boundary of humour being *personal* can differ for each individual. Therefore, humour can also negatively influence the emotions of an individual, if humour goes beyond this acceptable boundary, but because of interpersonal variations it can be difficult to identify this.

In this research, 29 interview participants discussed how workplace humour provoked negative emotions. These negative emotions refer to feeling hurt through targeted humour, discomfort in seeing another person being victimized through humour, or being stressed by

the confusing message conveyed within the shared humour. All of these relate to the experience of stress and tension in humour interaction. One of the interview participants explains how workplace humour hurts her feelings, expressing confusion and tension she experiences:

> *Something that I recall about humour at work is… well… rather than saying that it's been bothering me, I sometimes wonder whether I have changed. Have I really become what everyone is saying? Sugilite (ex-employee) said to me before he exited the company, is that I'm stone-headed. So along the same line [laugh] people keep on saying that I'm a stupid, but a nice person. So these days, I keep on thinking whether I'm really stupid, and sometimes people also say that I act fake. You heard it a couple of times, right? But it's like, I wonder whether I'm just acting fake, or is it just my personality? I was thinking like that before. My younger sister behaves the same and I'm like this so… but if I think about it, I might actually look like a real flirt to them. But well, I keep on thinking to myself that people are just making fun of me, but again thinking that they are just joking, just joking, just joking, thinking like that over and over actually made me feel worried that, what if they actually think of this for real, well that kind of way. So a reasonable boundary? …when I hear the word fake, it doesn't really feel good, but I do laugh it off…it doesn't feel good.*

<div align="right">Ivory, 25, female, Mintrack</div>

This example captures the mixed feelings an individual can experience through humour, despite the fact that out of the three participant companies, Mintrack is the company with the greatest number of humour instances at all levels of organizational hierarchy. As the victim or target of workplace humour, Ivory is labelled as a stupid and fake person. The humour is not accepted as '*just humour*' but as something that conveys a meaning. Ambiguity is created from the repetitive humour, where the victim is concerned whether she is really stupid: '*these days, I keep on thinking whether I'm really stupid*'. The respondent also tries to persuade herself to take the humour just as humour, when she states '*thinking that they are just joking, just joking, just joking, thinking like that over and over actually made me feel worried*'. However, this process leads to negative feelings or '*worry*'. In this case, the humour provides only negative emotions to the victim of the humour as it '*doesn't feel good*'. The victim is forced to play along and laugh, despite her true emotions. Observation data

also supports this, where the respondent Ivory is subject to humour by her superiors at a café during lunch break, and is called '*a stupid, but a nice person*':

> *Ivory, Diamond, and Emerald sit around the square table, each drinking their iced coffee. Emerald starts a conversation about the working holiday programmes, and Emerald asks questions about working in New Zealand, and what type of farm work may be available for Korean visitors with working holiday visa. Ivory suddenly widens her eyes and blurts out,*
>
> *Ivory: Bananas! I saw once on TV, aren't bananas overseas green? And not yellow? And you cook them rather than eating them raw?*
>
> *Emerald looks at Ivory pathetically, shakes her head sideways, and covers her face with one hand.*
>
> *Emerald: Oh my god, I am so embarrassed, I think you just (misleadingly) watched the TV programme 'The Law of the Jungle', not any educational TV programmes.*
>
> *Diamond laughs, then quickly frowns again.*
>
> *Diamond: I think you are settling with the 'nice but stupid person' image. You are seriously stupid.*
>
> *Emerald: Are you doing that on purpose, Ivory?*
>
> *Ivory laughs, but her face turns red. She starts to gaze around the café, as if not to make eye contact with anyone. Ivory then turns around to face me (researcher), and whispers in my ear.*
>
> *Ivory: It feels like I'm on a minefield. Bombs everywhere.*

<div align="right">April 18, Mintrack Observation notes</div>

This observation example shows how Ivory is jokingly criticized by others. She is called stupid ('y*ou are seriously stupid'*) and fake ('*are you doing that on purpose'*), due to her incorrect knowledge about banana farms. Ivory's behaviour ('*her face turns red. She starts to gaze around the café, as if not to make eye contact with anyone')* suggests that she is embarrassed. Also, her comment '*It feels like I'm on a minefield. Bombs everywhere'* suggests that the humour used by other members feels threatening ('*minefield'* which can detonate any time*)* and perhaps hurts her feelings, although she laughs along with the joke.

Another interview participant suggests that this confusing aspect of humour creates unpredictable consequences:

It makes me feel anxious. Sometimes people overdo jokes, and it's mischievous, and confusing. The consequences are quite unpredictable, but they do it anyway.

<div align="right">

Zircon, 41, male, Mintrack

</div>

This example also elaborates on the negative emotions created through humour. Humour is described by the participants as mischievous, confusing, and unpredictable, which can also make individuals feel anxious. Despite these potential negative outcomes, humour is still practiced in these workplaces, and organizational members consistently use humour (*'but they do it anyway').* This suggests that because humour is interpreted in different ways, individuals approach humour and humour interactions based on their own perceptions. While humour may create confusion for some individuals, it may also emotionally damage others, especially those subject to targeted humour.

5.5.2 Uncertainty outside the office

In discussing the boundaries of workplace humour, some interview participants suggested that this boundary changes outside the office. The separation includes that between the inside and the outside of the (physical) office building, and that between within and outside working hours. This separation is supported through observation data. When observing humour between organizational members, some participants behaved differently according to the context the interaction occurred in. For example, a young male organizational member, Tourmaline, who was always targeted as the victim of extreme humour within the office behaved differently at a company workshop. The company workshop involved staying overnight at a holiday house out in the countryside, mainly for the purpose of drinking alcohol and playing games to promote the development of relationships between organizational members:

> *While everyone is still eating and drinking in the outdoor BBQ area, Diamond stands next to the BBQ grill, where Iolite is cooking the last few sausages left. They discuss about religion, and Diamond suddenly questions Iolite in a loud voice, holding up a bottle of beer in his hand.*
> *Diamond: Of course I believe in God! I was born a Christian! Do you even know who Abraham is?*
> *Tourmaline: Lincoln.*

Tourmaline, who is passing by the BBQ grill with an empty plate in his hand answers Diamond's question. Diamond looks startled, as Tourmaline has suddenly appeared behind him. Diamond and Iolite frown, stare at Tourmaline for a few seconds, and both laugh hysterically. Diamond nearly drops his beer bottle, and then grasps the bottle with both hands while breathing heavily in an exaggerated way. Iolite laughs while shaking his head from side to side, as if disapproving of the situation, but continues to cook the sausages on the grill.

May 23, Mintrack Observation notes

It was observed that within the normal workplace settings, Tourmaline does not engage in humour, or responds to humour in which he is targeted. However, in this example, Tourmaline voluntarily engages in humour interaction by responding to his superior's joke (creating incongruity by mentioning Abraham Lincoln instead of Abraham of Faith in the Christian Bible). This would usually be unacceptable behaviour as both Diamond and Iolite are positioned hierarchically above Tourmaline. However, both Diamond and Iolite play along with the joke and they laugh loudly to signal their consent to Tourmaline's behaviour. This incident suggests that individuals may engage in, and interpret, humour differently outside the office, and that context influences and changes the boundaries of acceptable humour (discussed in section 5.6.3).

Expectations towards humour (of what is acceptable and what is not) also differ when humour is used outside the office. 28 interview participants discussed the changing perceptions and expectations towards humour outside the workplace. For example, one interview participant suggested the confusing standards applied to humour when communicating inside and outside the office, even during working hours:

During work, it's not good to use humour because then you can't concentrate. But when we go out for coffee or something, then I like the whole liveliness and joking and all. But then again when it's associated with work, I don't like the loud and lively... no, I do like it. It's kind of confusing.

Peridot, 31, male, Mintrack

This confusion escalates in after-hours drinking sessions. The complexity behind how humour can be used during these drinking sessions is suggested by one of the interview participants:

In terms of how you behave during drinking sessions, I guess you can say that there's an unspoken agreement, to let loose. But then again, you'll die if you misbehave towards your superiors.

<div align="right">Jade, 32, male, Truscene</div>

It is implied that humour is used freely in such occasions, as individuals are allowed to '*let loose'*. However, there are still limitations in interacting with superiors. The statement '*you'll die if you misbehave towards your superiors'* suggests serious negative consequences for inappropriate behaviour or interactions with hierarchical superiors. This is consistent with the Confucian focus on the importance of hierarchical relationships. These contradictory ideas on humour create ambiguity, as they raise questions about how much and what type of humour is considered to be '*misbehaviour'*. This implies that while more humour is allowed than what is usually expected within normal working hours, the limitation is uncertain. This means that participants are unsure where the boundary has moved to in out-of-office contexts.

Crossing these uncertain boundaries can result in a strict form of control. For example, one interview participant discussed how the different perceptions of humour in the company drinking session resulted in a conflicted outcome:

It was my first time to drink with company people. I kind of unleashed myself, since the casual atmosphere seemed like I could just joke around comfortably. I called everyone unni (older sister) and obba (older brother) instead of using their organizational positions to address them. Afterwards, Carnelian got told off for my behaviour, because she was my mentor at the time. Senior managers didn't like the way I was joking around, not using honorifics and stuff… I don't understand why we had to be told off for it.

<div align="right">Aquamarine, 20, female, Truscene</div>

This example shows a clash between the expectations on boundaries of humour. While the '*casual atmosphere'* of the drinking session had created an expectation of where humour could be used comfortably, the respondent and her mentor were punished for this action. This suggests that the ambiguity in using humour at drinking sessions had been heightened, as the seemingly comfortable environment (which differed from the usual office environment) misled individuals to set a broader boundary in terms of humour interactions. The statement '*I don't understand why we had to be told off for it'* suggests that there was a clash between

expectations that were unable to be accommodated, as the specific expectations or rules of humour usage were not understood or accepted. This also relates to the Confucian value placed on hierarchical relationships and formality. The respondent's failure to use honorifics, and her informal manner of addressing other organizational members informally ('*I called everyone unni (older sister) and obba (older brother) instead of using their organizational positions*') disrupted the structure of the hierarchical relationships, which in Korean workplaces are maintained through formal language and organizational positions. This shows the difficulties of using humour outside the office, as the heightened ambiguity can potentially create conflict and confusion between organizational members that can have serious repercussions.

5.5.3 Gender and hierarchical division

Observation and interview data also suggest that in the use of humour within the studied Korean workplaces there is conflict and division between demographic groups. Interview participants suggested that humour helps to communicate the different expectations between demographic groups; but these participants also discussed the divisions created in the process. This category exploring the demographic groupings and characteristics is similar to the *friendship and family-like bonding* category (discussed in section 5.4.1), because individuals of similar demographic characteristics are expected to have similar expectations of humour, which encourages individuals to develop in-depth relationships. However, humour used by individuals from different demographic groups may be misinterpreted, thereby creating confusion and conflict.

One of the research participants explained how the use of humour is controlled by a superior, displaying the different perceptions towards sharing humour between different hierarchical levels:

> *While our company seems really friendly, the whole top-down hierarchy is really important here. Once I got told off by a passing-by manager for joking around with someone in the company kitchen. He asked who has the longer tenure, and only when I told him that we were only a month apart (in organizational tenure) did he back off. It was strange.*

> Carnelian, 24, female, Truscene

This example displays ambiguity in the use of humour in the workplace. The manager in this example restricted the use of humour, and checked who had the longer organizational tenure. This implies that humour is considered to be an inappropriate form of communication to use between individuals of different tenure, implying a higher status for those who have longer tenure. This may be because most Korean organizations are promoted based on a seniority system, which means that longer tenure will signal higher position within the organization. This perception is strongly imposed on the respondent, who was '*told off*' by the manager for using humour, as the manager was unsure of the relational hierarchy between the joking individuals. However, as soon as the manager found out that the two individuals were of similar organizational tenure ('*only a month apart*'), he '*back off*' and only then permitted the use of humour. This suggests while the manager considered humour as something which can only be shared with peers (those of similar organizational tenure), the respondent disagreed with this perception and considered this perception '*strange*'. The age difference between the respondent in her early 20's and the manager in his late 30's may have been one of the reasons behind the conflicting perceptions. This suggests that due to the Confucian value placed on hierarchical relationships, age may relate to how an individual perceives the use of humour in the workplace. This shows two different perceptions about humour sharing within the organization, which may create conflict between individuals in different hierarchical positions.

Another issue raised from this example is that there are different expectations to how humour can or cannot be used in the workplace. In the above example, '*a month apart in organizational tenure*' is implied to be adequate (in) difference to share humour. However, this still constitutes a difference in organizational tenure, and creates further ambiguity as to the time period (of tenure) which creates hierarchical seniority. Some interview respondents considered the incoherent behaviours of senior level organizational members to be the source of this confusion:

> *I think there's a problem with the CEO. So, it would be great if he could restrain himself a bit I mean. For example, there are people who would joke about quitting their job to the CEO. He tends to just laugh it off, and take it simply as a joke, making it easy for other employees joke about things like that. They probably think that joking like that is alright, and they do it often. I guess some people wouldn't really care about this, but others will think that such humour is appropriate to use in*

the workplace, and repeat it. I see a repetitive pattern here. The thing is, the CEO
will always be the CEO, and employees are just employees.

Rubelle, 34, male, Truscene

This shows a contradictory approach to workplace humour amongst the senior members of the organizations. The CEO accepts humour, but the interview respondent (senior manager) does not, even suggesting that the CEO should restrain humour. This example shows how a senior-level manager perceives humour used between individuals of different hierarchical positions negatively, which is consistent with the Confucian value of formality and maintaining hierarchy. The CEO's approach to humour and '*just laughing it off*' is considered inappropriate, and it implies that this can establish a norm in the workplace ('*they probably think that joking like this is alright*'), which may confuse individuals in their relational (hierarchical) roles. It is implied that humour damages the relationships between individuals, as it goes beyond what is considered appropriate according to their hierarchical position ('*the CEO will always be the CEO, and employees are just employees*'). These different perceptions towards hierarchical relationships and humour by senior organizational members (such as the CEO and senior manager) may create ambiguity and confusion to individuals of lower hierarchical positions, as it is unclear whether they are able to engage in humour with those senior to them.

Similarly, gender is another aspect which divides or unites individuals through humour. Different expectations towards gender can either unite or separate individuals and groups. While individuals belonging to the same gender are perceived to have similar expectations and interests towards humour, the idea of gender is approached in different ways, causing confusion and potential conflict. Some participants recognized this difference, and suggested that individuals should be cautious in using sensitive topics such as gender in humour interactions. For example, Truscene is a participant company which has a large proportion of male workers in comparison to females. All of the senior managers are males, with only two females at the deputy section chief level. Truscene frequently conducts educational programmes to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace, and programmes include training about sexual jokes. This shows the company's efforts to achieve gender equity in the workplace, although there are no formal company policies about sexual harassment and discrimination issues and the trainings are conducted by an external instructor. The CEO of Truscene explained the contextual issue in sharing gender related

humour:

You can hurt someone else's feelings, if you don't have enough understanding of that communicating person. For example, one of the most recent issues in Korean culture is sexual harassment in the workplace. There are people who will joke around about things like that. But that's really a male-centred idea. Even in our manager-level meetings, we casually use sexual jokes. Because it doesn't affect us, it's funny. But if you imagine that there's a female in the room, she would really feel uncomfortable and even humiliated. So that's different. You need to consider what type of humour is okay or accepted, when there's different members forming the conversing group. If you look into this grouping and understand things from their perspective, you can make jokes that can be enjoyed by everyone, but if you just joke around randomly, you can easily hurt someone [...] so it depends on the person. As an individual, you need to be able to look out for other people's discomfort, but also you have to consider how uncomfortable the joking person will feel, if I react in an uncomfortable way because of my own background. So you should really say out loud "I feel uncomfortable or hurt when you joke like that. It would be appreciated if you could avoid jokes in that manner". That will really complete your relationship. If you can develop your relationship like this, you can avoid being hurt. My recent thoughts are that people who feel hurt from humour are the problematic ones, rather than those who do the humour.

Alexandrite, 42, male, Truscene CEO

This suggests that in the past, sexual humour was considered to be appropriate within the workplace. However, Korean culture is changing and such humour is becoming unacceptable, and even considered to be a form of sexual harassment. This example suggest that there are mixed messages in how humour is perceived in the workplace. As the CEO of the company, the respondent is in a place of power, in terms of organizational hierarchy, age, and gender (male). He is placed at the top of the relationship pyramid in both organizational and social contexts. He assumes that sexual humour is a '*male-centred idea'* and considers that it should be avoided in mixed groups because it can provoke discomfort to some people.

Despite this recognition, some sexual humour is still shared when communicating with individuals belonging to the same demographic and hierarchical group, such as in '*manager-level meetings*'. These meetings involve male managers aging from mid-30 to late 40's. This suggests some emerging change in these organizations, as these managers want to use sexual

humour among themselves while understanding that it is inappropriate to use in the wider organizational context. This ambiguous position is created in the incongruity between the CEO's statements as seen in the last sentence, *'my recent thoughts are that people who feel hurt from humour are the problematic ones, rather than those who do the humour'.* The CEO believes that the victims of humour are the ones to blame, as he suggests that they should try to communicate their hurt feelings and thus avoid future occurrences. This implies a superior and patriarchal attitude, which is a result of the conflict between the traditional Confucian relationships that prescribe male superiority, and the modern societal and organizational pressures to achieve gender equity.

Although the CEO's comment suggests that the victims should let others know about their feelings, data suggests that the studied workplaces (including Truscene) are culturally unsuitable for victims to communicate this issue. Therefore, this example illustrates contradiction and complexity in how humour can be used within these workplaces. Sexual humour is acknowledged as problematic, yet it is still used, and it is also considered to be the victim's responsibility to avoid it, or communicate their discomfort. This is highly ambiguous and contentious, and does not take into account the power and hierarchical differences between organizational members, thus paying only superficial attention to issues of gender and sexual harassment.

A female member of Truscene explained the complex feeling she received from the CEO and his use of humour:

> *I guess you really need to know the person to understand (their humour). Especially our CEO. If you don't know him, his humour seems a bit perverted and stuff. Like, at first he seemed like a very caring and encouraging person. And he's consistent like that. So he's really just a person who expresses his care in that way, and that's how I understand him. Knowing that, I need to just get over it, react in an appropriate way, and so on.*

<div align="right">Ruby, 35, female, Truscene</div>

In contrast to the CEO's statement that there is no sexually inappropriate humour used between organizational members of different genders, the interview respondent above describes the CEO's humour to be *'a bit perverted'*. Humour used in this sense is considered to be uncomfortable, as she needs to *'just get over it, react in an appropriate way'*. This also means that in order to avoid further conflict she must overcome this discomfort and

consciously behave in a certain manner. This is consistent with the CEO's stance of describing the victim as '*problematic*', thus the respondent (the victim) is the one to make an effort to resolve the problem. This relates to the Confucian value of harmony, where individuals (especially ones in the lower hierarchical positions) should take care to avoid conflict between group members.

Some extreme cases of humour are questionable in terms of their intention: this creates further confusion and conflict in organizational relationships. For example, this observation data shows the use of extreme sexist humour by a superior:

> *The vice-CEO casually walks up to Ivory's desk, where she is busy working through her daily tasks. As soon as Ivory notices that the vice-CEO is approaching her from the back, she stands up from her chair and greets him with a formal bow. The vice-CEO acknowledges her greeting with a small nod, and hands her a half-cup of coffee (the vice-CEO occasionally gives half cups of leftover coffee to employees, as this is a special coffee mixed with herbal tea, which the vice-CEO considers too valuable to throw away). As Ivory places the cup of coffee on her desk, the vice-CEO smiles and points a finger towards Ivory's smartphone which is faced upside down on her desk.*
> *Vice-CEO: Are you still dating your boyfriend?*
> *Ivory: Yes…*
> *Vice-CEO: You should really break up with him because your current boyfriend seems so (financially) poor. You need to find a rich man instead. I say women are like a bitch. If you meet a good owner, you get to eat meat all the time. But if you meet a bad owner, you have to eat garbage.*
> *Ivory: Really? I don't know…*
> *Ivory continues to laugh, while the vice-CEO turns around to head back into his office.*

> April 25, Mintrack Observation notes

This example shows how humour is used to project the vice-CEO's perception towards gender roles. Women are described as '*a bitch*' and men as '*owners*'. By describing women as an animal (dog) belonging to men (owners), men are portrayed as the ones in power to make decisions for women. In particular, the phrase, '*if you meet a good owner, you get to eat meat all the time. But if you meet a bad owner, you have to eat garbage*' suggests that the quality of life that a woman can enjoy depends only on her husband or partner. Therefore, the Confucian perspective on gender roles is emphasized in this humour, and portrays women

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as subordinate to men, thus depicting men as providers even though the respondent (woman) is employed and earning her own wages. This relates back to husband-wife relationships under the *Five Relations* of Confucius, which suggests a natural subordination of women in regard to their husbands. The victim of this sexist humour, Ivory, laughs at the vice-CEO's joke in the observation note, but this does not signal that she agrees with the vice-CEO's perception of gendered roles. Instead, this shows a manifestation of her subordinate role in this organization. In the subsequent interview about this interaction, Ivory commented:

> *No, I don't find the vice-CEO's jokes funny at all. But I do feel sorry for him. I guess he's making these jokes because he wants to talk to the staff. I understand, so I don't get offended. I guess he could really be worried about me, and that is nice of him in a way. But then again, his jokes can be a bit awkward. I think he just has a really old way of thinking.*

<div align="right">Ivory, 25, female, Mintrack</div>

Two different perspectives towards gender roles are recognized by Ivory in this response. The traditional gender role under Confucianism is acknowledged through the comment '*I guess he could really be worried about me, and that is nice of him in a way*'. Rather than describing the vice-CEO's joke as sexist, she perceives it as indicating his concern - that he truly wishes Ivory to live a happy and prosperous life by meeting the right man. This shows the embedded Confucian ideals in this organizational context, while also relating back to the caring role a superior must take towards his or her subordinates (discussed in section 5.4.2). However, Ivory also suggests a different perspective towards gender roles, as she does not find the joke funny. When she describes the vice-CEO as someone with a '*really old way of thinking*', she is rejecting the Confucian approach to gender. This means that the vice-CEO's humour displays a different (old) mind-set to her own, and gender roles may be perceived differently in current society. Thus this excerpt highlights the changes starting to permeate modern Korean organizations.

5.5.4 Impression management

Impression is another concept raised by the research participants. Research participants perceive that humour influences the impression of an individual both positively and negatively. This includes situations both of initiating and of responding to humour. However,

this perception of how humour influences an individual's impression was not consistent within these Korean workplaces, and creates ambiguity and some concern about humour. One of the research participants expressed his concern about how humour may impact other's impression of him within the workplace:

> *I don't want my superiors to think badly of me. But yes, I like being the funny character and all, but then again I don't want people to think I don't take work seriously… so I try to restrain (humour) at times.*

<div align="right">Diamond, 30, male, Mintrack</div>

This example displays the conflicting perceptions of an individual using humour. Firstly, humour is considered to affect an individual's impression negatively, when he or she is in the position of a subordinate. This is shown in the statement '*I don't want my superiors to think badly of me',* as it suggests that superiors consider subordinates who use humour unfavourably. This is because using humour in the workplace is perceived to mean a lack of professionalism, or not '*taking work seriously*'. Humour may be considered as an activity which should be restrained in order to avoid such unfavourable impression. This in effect clashes with the interview respondent's desire to use humour freely and be the '*funny character'.*

In contrast, two interview participants implied that humour may create a positive impression for a worker:

> *I guess I could think favourably of that person, because it's funny.*

<div align="right">Aquamarine, 20, female, Truscene</div>

Most of the interview responses suggest that a negative impression is created by a person's humour at work. However, the above response suggests that humour helps to develop a favourable impression, but in a socializing context rather than in a work-related situation. For example, Emerald suggests that humour helps to develop interpersonal relationships faster, as it establishes a positive impression:

> *I think you can get along well, or faster, when there is humour. So humour creates a good image which helps you to lead a better work life.*

<div align="right">Emerald, 28, female, Truscene</div>

This suggests that humour helps to create a positive impression or image, which contributes towards constructing a good '*work life*'. This '*work life*' relates to the quality of organizational relationships rather than work competence. The changing perception of humour may relate to context, where humour shared while conducting work tasks may negatively influence the individual's impression regarding work competency, and humour shared in a socializing situation may positively influence the individual's impression regarding interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, these positive attitudes to humour were mainly expressed by the younger workers across the participant companies, to suggest a more Westernized perception than that of the older workers.

However, humour does not always create a favourable impression. For example, one interview participant suggested that due to the Confucian cultural influences any humour used in the workplace creates a negative impression:

> *Old people like us have been educated based on Confucianism. Traditionally, our ancestors, father, and mother… they taught us that joking and laughing makes us look frivolous. Too much of it will make us look vulgar. So these ideas definitely make us different to the younger generation now.*

<div align="right">Obsidian, 59, male, Wisepath</div>

In this example, humour is in general perceived negatively. It is suggested that Confucian ideals divide perceptions of humour, showing a contrast with the views of Emerald and Aquamarine (above). Under this highly Confucian view, humour creates negative impressions which creates '*frivolous*' or '*vulgar*' images of individuals. This relates back to the *societal dissonance* category, where Confucian values influence perceptions, and humour is considered to be unsuitable in the workplace.

Despite such perceptions, humour still occurs in these workplaces and therefore it creates conflicts and influences the impressions that are formed of those using humour. For example, one incident which occurred at Truscene illustrates these multiple interpretations of humour, resulting in contradictory impressions of a new organizational member. This was an incident described retrospectively by four different individuals, concerning when Morion (one of the organizational members at Truscene) first had his chance to talk publicly at the company morning meeting:

It was my first day of work at Truscene. *You know how we have the morning meeting here? Well, I was given a chance to say hello, and introduce myself there. I was pretty confident, since I entered the organization with some past work experience, so I know how things work. The CEO insisted that I share something interesting, so I thought it would be good to share a funny story I heard. It was basically about a one-night-stand experience that my friend had. My friend, the guy, really doesn't like touching dirty things, sort of like mysophobia. So, they were having sex, and he was doing it from behind. He refused to hold onto any part of her because she was sweaty and all, so I guess the girl felt it was a bit insecure down there. She asked him to hold her waist for a better grip. Guess what happened next? He only heard the word waist, so he continued to hump her while putting his hands on his own waist. Some people at the meeting found this story funny, some didn't I guess. But I found it really funny.*

Morion, 29, male, Truscene

This situation again, involved using sexual humour in a work-related context, the company morning meeting. Most organizational members, including the senior managers, attended this meeting. As a new employee, Morion entered the organization as a manager. This means there are many organizational members at this meeting who were of superior position to Morion, but also many who were in subordinate positions. As previously discussed, the Confucian value of formality may create an expectation for lower level organizational members such as Morion to restrain their humour, especially in formal meetings. This is particularly emphasized in workplaces such as Truscene, which stress a hierarchical relationship structure between organizational members. However, the '*CEO insisted that I share something interesting'* signalled a casual nature for the meeting. This creates ambiguity in determining the nature of this morning meeting at Truscene. The level of formality expected by Morion in this situation is unclear, as was whether he was actually allowed to use humour in front of his superiors. However, Morion shared humour according to the instructions given by the CEO ('*I thought it would be good to share a funny story I heard')*, although he acknowledged the ambiguity of humour and that some individuals may not have enjoyed his joke. Nevertheless, Morion's statement '*I know how things work'* suggests that he has had past experiences where sharing humour created good impressions of him in the workplace. Despite his intentions, the humour shared by Morion was interpreted in multiple ways, and also resulted in conflicting impressions of Morion. One interview

participant positioned at a hierarchically lower level than Morion, responded positively to Morion's humour:

> *I remember trying really hard to stop myself from laughing. The room was relatively quiet, so it would've been rude to just laugh loudly. But it was so funny! I thought, 'here's an interesting new character at work', and I really liked him.*

<div align="right">Carnelian, 24, female, Truscene</div>

In this case, enjoyment created through humour was linked to a positive impression of Morion. This may be interpreted in two opposing ways. Firstly, since the respondent was positioned at a hierarchically lower level, she might have taken a lenient attitude towards a superior organizational member's use of humour, in order to maintain the Confucian value of hierarchical relationships (discussed in section 5.4.2). Secondly, her amusement may be because she was relatively young, and more open to using humour in the workplace (discussed in section 5.5.3). However, some interview participants displayed a very opposed perception:

> *It was inappropriate. It was awkward. I didn't know what to do at that meeting. I know he's a nice person now, but back then… gosh, I thought he was a pervert. Using humour at a meeting was wrong, and sexual humour was even more wrong. At the time, I had so much concern for Amethyst, our female staff member who would have to work with Morion side by side.*

<div align="right">Pearl, 29, female, Truscene</div>

The same humour instance is here described to be highly inappropriate by this respondent, who is hierarchically positioned one level above Morion (and is his superior). While the (sexual) content of the humour is considered '*wrong*', the act of using humour within a workplace meeting is also described to be '*wrong*'. This behaviour resulted in creating a bad impression for Morion, as suggested by the respondent's description of him as a '*pervert*' and her concern for other organizational members who would be working with Morion. This relates back to the traditional Confucian value of formality and hierarchy, where a superior may perceive the use of humour by a subordinate to be rude (discussed in section 5.4.2 and section 5.4.3). Pearl's interpretation of Morion's humour portrays a traditional Confucian perspective, but also relates to the Westernized perception where she considers that sexual humour is inappropriate at work.

However, this sexual humour does not necessarily divide the genders, as the two female respondents above (Pearl and Carnelian) provide different interpretations. Carnelian accepts Morion's sexual humour, and perceives Morion more favourably, displaying a conflicting reaction to that of Pearl. In this case, it appears that the participants' hierarchical positions may affect their interpretations of the humour shared. Although the positive attitude Carnelian expresses towards Morion's humour may signal a more relaxed perspective to sexual humour, the fact that Carnelian accepts highly inappropriate humour could imply that she is doing so because Morion is hierarchically superior to her. This suggests that humour can influence how an individual is perceived within the workplace, and impressions created may depend on the hierarchical positions of the communicators.

5.5.5 Theme summary

The findings for this theme (*clashing worldview*) help to answer some of the research questions by showing how humour can create conflict or unintended outcomes between individuals. In this study, humour created conflicting outcomes in the workplace, because the concept of humour is approached differently by individuals. Many individuals in this study perceive that humour often creates confusion and ambiguity, and this may be both intentional and unintentional.

While many of the interview participants describe humour as a way to manage their emotions in the workplace, humour is also perceived to create some negative or stressful emotions for individuals. In particular, individuals suggest that the ambiguous messages embedded in humour create anxiety, as it is difficult, in responding to humour instances, to assess what the socially correct behaviour should be. This means that humour can lead to more confusion and negative relational outcomes between individuals. Similarly, individuals perceive that this ambiguity in humour escalates when organizational members interact outside the workplace. As the changed context also alters the acceptable boundaries of humour, humour is perceived to have a higher risk of damaging relationships than is the case within the office. However, it is observed that some people use more humour when outside the office confines. This means that the boundaries of humour may also be expected to expand. Such contrasting perceptions of humour boundaries show that individuals have changing expectations regarding humour, and that context is highly influential and dynamic.

This theme also suggests that humour creates conflict and division between demographic groups. Some interview participants suggested that the concept of humour is perceived differently by individuals on different organizational hierarchical levels. Individuals in a superior (hierarchical) position show strong controlling behaviour towards the use of humour. It is considered that humour should only be used by those at the same hierarchical level or towards individuals in lower positions. However, the interpretation of hierarchy differs between individuals, so that a relative hierarchy may be determined through age or organizational tenure. This difference in defining hierarchical groups creates conflict between organizational members in using humour. However, it is important to note that due to the seniority system used by these Korean organizations (for promotion) most of these hierarchical positions also correlate with age. It is therefore not clear whether the different perceptions of humour relate to the individuals' organizational positions or their age. Furthermore, some interview participants also perceived that humour is enacted and interpreted differently according to gender. While most interview participants suggest that individuals must take care in using humour between different genders, some (especially senior male members) displayed a patriarchal approach towards gendered humour. This reflects the traditional husband and wife relationship in the Five Relations of Confucianism, which prescribes a hierarchical relationship between males and females. These differences can create conflict between individuals of different demographic groups, and encourage a division through humour.

Humour may also influence an individual's impression communicated to others in the workplace. Many interview participants perceive that humour influences impressions of an individual's both positively and negatively. While some consider this perception to be dependent on individual differences, others consider that Confucian principles are the reason. This means that an individual with a strong belief in the Confucian value of formality and hierarchical relationships will dislike another individual's use of humour, and this will create an unfavourable impression. However, as it is difficult to predict the beliefs and values held by each organizational member, using humour in Korean workplaces may create unintended (positive or negative) impressions of the user. Since organizations are comprised of diverse people, some organizational members maintain traditional Confucian ideals, while others develop different values through external cultural sources. These different cultural values and expectations may clash, thus creating confusion and conflict, especially when humour is

shared in the workplace.   These different approaches to humour may unintentionally affect the relationships between organizational members.

5.6 Organizational worldview

This subsection discusses the idea of *organizational worldview*.   This theme refers to how humour can highlight the organizational assumptions that influence work relationships and organizational processes. Data show that while humour can constructively influence organizational processes, it may also cause confusion as the humour interaction within an organizational context can be interpreted differently due to wider Korean societal norms. Categories in this theme explore concepts of developing workplace (collegial) relationships, independent identity, and the situational boundaries of humour. This subsection will discuss the organizational or workplace values expressed through humour, which may differ from the widely accepted Confucian-based values and relationships within Korea.

5.6.1 Collegial relationships

When questioning the perceived influence of humour between organizational members, many of the interview participants identified that humour can help to develop or influence the quality of workplace relationships. This is similar to creating a feeling of togetherness, where organizational members bond and develop in-depth relationships as a collective group (discussed in section 5.4.2). However, although the prior category (friendship and family-like bonding) is also concerned with in-groups and interpersonal relationships at work, this current category concerns more superficial relationships between organizational members, such as collegial relationships. Thus this category examines strictly workplace-only relationships and groups, and does not consider the deeper relationships seen in friendships. For example, one of the interview participants described the relationship between humour and the development of good work relationships:

> *Although there are hierarchical differences, we can joke around and play around, and be flexible as if there are no hierarchical differences. It's like regardless of your position, it's just like playing around with your colleagues.*

Pearl, 29, female, Truscene

In this example, the interview participant suggests that '*joking around*' leads to a feeling of collegiality. This idea of '*colleagues*' in Korean language is translated to peers or fellow workers of the same age or organizational position only. Individuals of different ages or hierarchical positions are usually not described as colleagues. Therefore, the above example suggests that humour may develop peer-like relationships between individuals at different organizational levels, where this is usually unacceptable in Korean workplaces. This implies a type of relationship similar to that of collegial relationships in Western organizations, where age and organizational hierarchy are less restrictive to the development of interpersonal relationships between organizational members.

A few interview participants suggested that humour may also be useful in managing workplace politics. This idea was more evident amongst individuals lower in the organizational hierarchy, who felt the need to develop intimate relationships with their politically stronger superiors:

> *Technical skills are indeed important to maintain a good communal working life, but which political line you side with is really important as well. So if you see that line or a position (with someone of organizational power) you need to do it quickly and swiftly. If you want to do that, using humour, being a humorous character helps (to swap political sides).*

<div align="right">Diamond, 30, male, Mintrack</div>

In the above response, '*lin*e' refers to a small group of in-group members that a superior looks after. Regardless of the contractual duties or roles (such as direct employee and supervisor relationship), individuals belonging to a specific superior's '*line*' are often provided with benefits, including advancement within the organizational hierarchy. In this example, using humour is frequently perceived to give individuals more freedom and even acts as a catalyst ('*do it quickly and swiftly'*) to develop such workplace relationships. This implies that humour helps individuals to maintain their relationships in multiple in-groups within the workplace, rather than being devoted to a single in-group or '*line*'. However, this process can be perceived negatively to other workers:

> *Well, there are people who use humour to basically suck up to the boss.*

<div align="right">Ruby, 35, female, Truscene</div>

While the use of humour can help manage workplace relationships and politics, the '*suck up*' quote suggests that humour with this purpose may create unfavourable workplace relationships. The phrase '*suck up to the boss*' in Korean language contains a very negative connotation, and implies an adverse emotion experienced by the interview respondent. This phrase means that humour may not be used for simply fun and enjoyment, but with a specific intention to entertain the superior and thus develop and a useful positive relationship that may provide the employee with benefits.

A few interview participants suggested that humour is a part of work. This is because individuals are expected to invest effort, such as using humour, to maintain their social position within the workplace community:

> *You could say it's (humour's) an extension of work. If you talk to someone related in any way to your work, then you can use it (humour) to survive in that relationship.*

> Moss, 60, male, Wisepath

In this example, humour is considered to be '*an extension of work*' which is important in maintaining workplace relationships. This means maintaining good relationships at work is considered to be an important part of the Korean workplace, and using humour may be a conscious strategy to stay in favour of other organizational members. This implies an expectation of maintaining smooth and non-conflicting relationships at work, with the objective of retaining harmony in a collective group (discussed in section 5.4.4).

Observation notes also indicated that collegial relationships are developed through humour. In one of the participating companies (Mintrack), humour shared between two organizational members from different hierarchical levels suggested that there was a relatively close relationship between the two individuals, more than that usually seen in a superior-subordinate relationship. In this example, Diamond is the direct supervisor of Ivory. As Diamond is older in age and positioned higher within the organizational hierarchy, he has the superior role, while Ivory has the subordinate role:

> *Diamond grabbed a small carton of milk from his desk, and twitched his eyebrows while staring at the milk carton. He turned around to Ivory, and shook the milk carton in front of her face.*

Diamond: Ivory, do you want to drink this?

Ivory: Hey it's the milk you asked me to deliver. I put it there last night. Didn't you drink it?

Diamond: I know. You finish it off. I don't want it.

Ivory: That milk is due by May 3rd, so it should be fine. But the pack did expand slightly.

Diamond: So you wanted me to drink gone-off milk?

Ivory: Alright, then let's play rock paper scissors, and the loser has to drink it.

Diamond and Ivory started to play rock paper scissors, where the person losing 2 out of 3 games has to drink the milk. Diamond agrees.

Diamond: The loser must finish it in one go.

Ivory loses the game and is forced to drink. Several staff members stopped while passing in the corridor, to watch the two. Ivory frowns and starts to make twisting motions with her upper body.

Ivory: But I have milk allergy.

Diamond: No you don't.

Diamond brings Ivory a plastic straw from Emerald's desk (located directly in front of Ivory's desk) and gives it to Ivory, making a gesture for her to drink it. Diamond and Ivory both laugh hysterically this process. Ivory grabs the straw and the milk, and starts to complain in an annoyed, high tone of voice.

Ivory: But the milk may have gone bad as the package, you can see it expanded slightly here!

Diamond laughed even more loudly, and pointed his index finger, pushing the milk carton towards Ivory.

Diamond: So you tried to make ME [sarcastic tone] drink this instead because you assumed it has gone off right? I'm so hurt.

Ivory and a few others who were watching started to laugh, and Ivory quietly slips the milk into a small plastic bin located under her desk, while giving a shy smile.

April 28, Mintrack observation notes

In this observation, humour is initiated by Ivory, an individual in a lower hierarchical position than Diamond. She initiates humour from the statement '*Alright, then let's play rock paper scissors*'. Although Diamond is quite serious when he starts to talk to Ivory about the milk, and even slightly angry when he says '*So you wanted me to drink gone-off milk?*' Diamond

accepts and continues on with Ivory's humour. Due to the hierarchical relationship structure in Korean workplaces, humour is more often initiated and led by the hierarchically superior individual within the interaction. However, in this example, Ivory initiates humour with the statement '*But the pack did expand slightly*', while Diamond plays along. This statement is considered as humour as the '*expanded*' milk carton suggests that milk has gone off. The jocular offering of bad food (milk in this case) is perceived as a form of banter, as the individual offering it makes it clear that she will not drink it herself ('*the loser has to drink it*'). Even through humour, offering bad food to a superior would usually be considered rude and unacceptable within a subordinate-superior relationship. However, in this case, Ivory's humour is accepted because Diamond plays along with the joke. This suggests that the relationship between these two individuals is beyond that of a superior-subordinate relationship. This is because allowing a subordinate (Ivory) to initiate humour signals a boundary beyond that of the traditional superior-subordinate relationship in Korean workplaces, thus this is closer to that of a collegial relationship. This example shows that individuals may use humour to extend organizational relationships from the traditional hierarchical structures in the studied Korean workplaces. The sharing of humour may develop collegial relationships, and eliminate hierarchical stratification between individuals which is usually discouraged between organizational members, and thus a feeling of collegiality is created, which is similar to that in Western organizational contexts.

This observed interaction also shows how Diamond attempts to re-establish his hierarchical position as a superior, by making Ivory the victim of her own joke. This is illustrated when he forces Ivory to drink the milk rather coercively by bringing Ivory straws and '*pushing the milk carton towards Ivory*'. Similarly, Diamond's emphasis on the word '*me*' with sarcasm hints that the subordinate (Ivory) should realize that she is offering bad milk to her superior. Thus, the statement '*so you tried to make ME [sarcastic tone] drink this instead*' implies that Diamond is trying to remind Ivory of his hierarchically superior position. However, Diamond's playful expression following soon after Ivory's joke also implies that he is unlikely to be suggesting a shift back to the traditional superior-subordinate relationship, but just a giving reminder that their relationship is still work-based.

5.6.2 Independent identity

Another idea that was raised by the interview participants is independent identity. The majority of interview participants perceived that humour has some form of influence on the communicating individual's identity. This identity refers to the development of an individual's impression, confidence, and the ability to gain attention through the use of humour, thus highlighting his or her presence. Using humour can create a unique identity for the individual which may differentiate them from the (organizational) collective group. 32 interview participants suggested that the use of humour can create a specific image for the individual using humour. This perception was targeted at both self and others, meaning that individuals are very conscious of how they are perceived by others. Participants suggested when they use humour, a unique impression or even a stereotype for the humour instigator can be established, and that such an impression can have differing effects, as seen below:

> *People don't use humour because it makes them look bad. It creates an unprofessional image. Like they are never serious.*

Tanzanite, 30, male, Truscene

In this particular example, workplace humour is perceived to create an '*unprofessional image'* for the user. The interview participant suggests that seriousness is the attitude expected in Korean organizations ('*Like they are never serious'),* thus, the use of humour is perceived negatively, because it does not fit in with the expected attitude or professional impression expected of Korean organizations. This relates back to the idea that humour does not belong in Korean workplaces, due to the societal Confucian values which spill into organizational contexts (discussed in section 5.4.3). This implies that by going against the general norm (in the wider Korean society), and using humour which '*makes them look bad'*, the individual using humour is separated from other organizational members who follow the usual norm (of not using humour). The use of humour can also be perceived to create a unique image or identity, and differentiate the individual from the wider workplace group.

While some interview participants suggest that the use of humour may create a negative impression because it goes against the norms of the wider group, other interview participants described the use of humour more favourably. For example, seven interview participants explained that humour can show an individual's confidence, in excerpts like these:

I think it's (humour's) the courage to express yourself.

Ruby, 35, female, Truscene

I guess I envy those people (who can use humour). Because you are expressing yourself without hesitation.

Obsidian, 59, male, Wisepath

These interview responses relate to the idea of self-confidence. In the above example, Ruby describes humour as a means to '*express yourself*'. This means that by using humour, an individual may communicate their ideas and display their unique identity. However, humour is described as '*courage*', which implies that using humour is an uncommon or a difficult task within Korean workplaces. These responses were more prevalent in Truscene and Wisepath, where organizational hierarchy and formality were stressed amongst organizational members. Therefore, expressing oneself through humour is implied to be a hesitant act in the studied Korean workplaces, and jokers may even be envied because they can use humour.

The idea of expressing self or independent identity contrasts to the idea or desire to blend in as one of the members of the collective group. Research participants describe humour as both showing and hiding oneself as a part of the collective group. This means that individuals perceive that humour may be used as a way to highlight or diminish their presence, as a member of their workplace community.   While such different interpretations to humour may create confusion and ambiguity amongst organizational members, some interview participants acknowledge that humour may attract more attention to the user:

I'm not too sure whether you can say it's all about humour, but those who are humorous and talk in an interesting way are definitely the more popular ones.

Peridot, 31, male, Mintrack

In this example, the respondent links the ideas of humour and popularity. Individuals who use humour '*in an interesting way*' are perceived as '*popular ones*'. This may mean either that the use of good humour creates popularity, or humour used by popular individuals is considered interesting. Either way, this example suggests that humour contributes towards creating a positive social image for the individual, and makes him or her stand out from the crowd. Another interview participant explained that this helps to build their confidence:

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When I was in Canada, I maintained a good reputation as an OOC, which stands for
Official Office Clown. I made people laugh, and I was proud of myself for doing that.
Then after I got here, things aren't the same, and people aren't the same, but I am
trying to regain that position, eagerly… it's gonna do good things for my self-esteem,
I think. I think I feel more important when people laugh at my joke. It might sound
pathetic, [laugh] but I think it that way. I become, like, an energizer when people get
really, really tired at work.

Garnet, 29, male, Mintrack

This example suggests that humour can build up an individual's self-esteem, as the laughing audience makes the joking individual '*feel more important*' to the group. In this case, the respondent perceives that using humour creates a role of being '*an energizer*' to assist others in the workplace. The respondent also implies that he enjoys his humour experiences, as he describes himself as the '*Official Office Clown*' with a '*good reputation*'. Within Korean society the word '*clown*' usually conveys a negative meaning, but in this case, the respondent is eager to '*regain that position*' to suggest that he perceive this as a favourable image to have within his workplace.

Observation data also supports and explains why gaining an independent identity may be considered useful in the studied Korean workplaces. For example, a humour exchange between two organizational members, Iolite and Diamond, displayed this idea of independent identity. These two individuals work in different departments within Mintrack, but occasionally interact in work and social situations. Iolite is hierarchically *superior* to Diamond, as he is older in age and positioned higher in the organizational hierarchy. This observation example shows a humour instance which occurred as they were heading home after work:

The group of 5 individuals (Diamond, Emerald, Sapphire, Iolite, and Citrine) meet up
on a Monday evening after work, to watch the new Spiderman movie. After the movie,
the group walks through an underground passage, heading towards the subway
station to catch a train home. While walking through the underground passage, Iolite
and Citrine hold hands (they are an engaged couple) and walk ahead of the group,
acting as if they do not associate with the other group members. Diamond, making
shooting sounds while reaching out his wrist towards Emerald to mimic the
Spiderman, stops and calls out to Iolite.

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Diamond: Iolite hyung! ('hyung' directly translates as older brother)

Iolite ignores Diamond's call. He turns towards Citrine, bends down towards her ear, and covers one side of his mouth as if whispering.

Iolite: Don't look behind (at Diamond)

As Iolite's voice is loud enough for Diamond to hear, Diamond makes a grumpy expression, and continues to call out to Iolite loudly, for about 5 minutes. Iolite continue to ignore Diamond. Diamond smirks, and gathers his hands in front of his mouth to amplify the sound.

Diamond: Hey you, the guy who looks like Jang Dong Geon! (Jang Dong Geon is a famous Korean actor)

As soon as Iolite hears Diamond's statement, he turns around and answers 'yes?' with a big smile. Citrine, standing by Iolite's side laughs as she watches Iolite's reaction. She hit Iolite's arm softly.

Citrine: I told you not to do this!

Although Citrine's voice sounds sharp and perhaps agitated, her expressions show that she is trying hard not to laugh too much. Diamond watches the couple converse, turns his body around towards Emerald again, and folds his arms across his chest.

Diamond: Oh my god this (Iolite) is so embarrassing, let's go Emerald!

<div align="right">April 28, Mintrack Observation notes</div>

This example shows that humour may be used to temporarily restructure relationships by allowing individuals to express themselves freely. Although the above observation example occurred outside the office, the relationships between the communicators (Diamond and Iolite) are still bound within the hierarchies of workplace relationship. As Iolite is much older, and is also positioned higher in the organizational hierarchy than Diamond (and any other individuals present at the scene), his act of ignoring Diamond's call is socially appropriate. This means that as a subordinate, Diamond should not force Iolite into a conversation, as Iolite has already signalled rejection ('*Iolite continues to ignore Diamond).* However, Diamond's use of humour (the joking compliment that Iolite looks similar to a famous actor) is accepted by Iolite, disrupting the expectations of abiding to Iolite's decision to ignore Diamond. Iolite explained his reason in an impromptu interview:

To be honest, personally I don't like Diamond. But when he talks to me in a joking

way like that, it's difficult to not respond. Yes, I could just tell him to shut up since

I'm (hierarchically) higher, but he's just a character like that. Joking all the time.

Iolite, 36, male, programmer, Mintrack

In this example, the respondent explains that it is '*difficult to not respond*' to humour. This conflicts with the hierarchical relationship structure between Korean individuals, and the respondent acknowledges that it is socially acceptable to reinforce this hierarchy, since he is placed in a higher position ('*I could just tell him to shut up since I'm higher*'). However, he also implies that the continuous use of humour ('*joking all the time*') disturbs his right to reinforce hierarchy. Commonly, a close interpersonal relationship between the communicators may be a reason to ignore hierarchy, but this does not apply to this particular situation, as the respondent clearly expresses his dislike towards Diamond. This means that there is no reason to exempt Diamond from the rules of hierarchy which structures relationships in these Korean workplaces, except for the use of humour. Using humour creates a unique position for Diamond, and this deviates from the collective group's rules and norms. This is again suggested in the latter part of the observation data, where Diamond says '*Oh my god this (Iolite) is so embarrassing*' to Emerald- a female organizational member placed hierarchically lower than both Diamond and Iolite. By implying that Iolite - his superior - is embarrassing, he has delivered what can be considered as an insult to Iolite, as it damages Iolite's face as a superior. This again is unacceptable in Korean society, and would usually be corrected by Iolite or any other members of the group, in order to restore order and hierarchy within the group. However, this is not corrected by anyone within the group, and suggests an exception or independence to the usual hierarchical relationship norms, an exception that has been created by Diamond's humour.

5.6.3 Situational boundaries

When discussing how humour is shared between organizational members, some research participants mentioned the changing boundaries of humour. Boundaries refer to the different standards or limitations implied when using humour within the workplace context. Research participants implied that different organizational situations create different boundaries as to how humour can be used. This means that individuals may find it difficult to use humour,

especially in unfamiliar situations. For example, one of the interview participants stated that there are boundaries in using humour during after-work drinking functions (outside working hours):

> *There is a boundary in joking around with each other, even in after-work drinking sessions.*

<div align="right">Coral, 64, female, Wisepath</div>

This example implies that this boundary applies to all conversing organizational members. The phrase '*with each other*' in Korean language addresses individuals of similar hierarchical positions (contextual translation suggests a meaning close to 'amongst ourselves or us'- this usually refer to individuals of same age or organizational position). This also suggests that humour has a different boundary when used during working hours. Coral suggests that this boundary affects interactions outside the working hours, '*even in after-work drinking sessions*'. However, this boundary seems to change, depending on the relational positions of the individuals engaging in humour. For example, one of the senior managers responded differently when questioned about the use of humour after working hours:

> *When you are in a situation involving alcohol, it makes humour seem… very natural and a little bit more aggressive. I think the comfortable atmosphere definitely makes things rough, and sexual, and things like that happen naturally… although it is an official after-hours drinking session, the atmosphere is changed [...] It's like a catalyst to open people's minds, so in terms of humour, you can really lash out more. Much more casually and comfortably than what you would do during normal work hours.*

<div align="right">Onyx, 41, male, Truscene</div>

Although the above example may suggest that humour can be used without any boundaries in the after-hours context ('*you can really lash out more')*, the emphasis here should be on the phrase '*much more casually and comfortably than what you would do during normal work hours'.* As humour in normal work hours is expected to be very limited, the scale of being casual does not mean that individuals can communicate without boundaries. The embedded meanings of this statement is explained by one of the research participants in a subordinate role, who experienced multiple after-hours drinking functions with the senior manager, Onyx:

> *There's this line. If you go over this line, it can be dangerous. But it changes depending on the situation. Most people know it, so they don't go over it.*
>
> <div align="right">Chalcedony, 27, male, Truscene</div>

The above example explains that there is a boundary in humour ('*there's this line*'). This includes during drinking-sessions, where the boundary changes in terms of how humour is used during normal working hours ('*it changes depending on the situation*'). The contextual nature of humour is highlighted through these examples, yet it is difficult to determine the acceptable boundaries, due to the different perceptions of individuals. However, the boundary concept is assumed by the organizational members, where they take care to not '*go over it*', as using humour creates a risk, and may result in unpredictable consequences. When individuals interact outside the organization (i.e. drinking-sessions at the local bar), this change of context also changes the boundaries of humour between organizational members, which can create confusion and ambiguity (discussed in section 5.5.2). Thus, many of the participants perceived that there is a risk in using humour both inside and outside of their workplaces.

Observation data also supports the idea of changing boundaries, and that even subordinates may set the boundaries in humour interactions. In this observation example, Diamond (superior) is the direct supervisor of Ivory (subordinate), and frequently plays pranks on Ivory. Ivory usually plays along and responds to Diamond's jokes well, but in this example, she refuses to do so:

> *At 11:25am, Ivory leaves the office to go to the bank. Diamond runs over to Ivory's computer as soon as he sees that she left the office, and changes the background image to a page full of words 'stupid Ivory'. Typing as quickly as he can, Diamond bends over Ivory's desk to conduct his prank in an uncomfortable looking position, constantly looking towards the hallway to see whether Ivory is coming back. After about 15 minutes, Ivory returns and sees her computer. She does not show any particular reaction to the words 'stupid Ivory' covering her desktop computer background, but just laughs slightly (in a sarcastic tone) under her breath, sighs, then changes the background image to normal and continues with her own work. Diamond peeks over his divider to see Ivory's reaction, but as she does not show much emotion to his prank, he frowns and goes back to work silently.*
>
> <div align="right">April 30, Mintrack Observation</div>

This observation example shows how humour can result in different outcomes, even when shared between the same individuals. This means that sometimes jokes may work (resulting in fun and laughter) but other times it may not. This particular observation example shows the latter situation. The two individuals in this example, Diamond and Ivory are the same individuals who appear in the observation example in section 5.6.1, which discusses the influence of humour in developing workplace relationships. Unlike the previous observation where Ivory actively interacts and accommodates to Diamond's milk carton joke, the above example show that Ivory rejects Diamond's humour by not playing along with the joke (*'just laughed slightly (in a sarcastic tone) under her breath, sighs'*). While Diamond's act of *'peeking over his divider to see Ivory's reaction'* suggests his expectation that Ivory will accept and play along in the joke, this expectation is not fulfilled. This shows a mismatch between the boundaries of humour for Diamond and Ivory. For Diamond, this humour instance is within his acceptable boundaries, while for Ivory, it is not. This is assumed to be because of the phrase *'stupid Ivory'* used in this particular instance. During an interview with Ivory, she explained that there is an on-going joke about her being stupid and fake:

> *People keep on saying that I'm a stupid, but a nice person [...] So a reasonable boundary? ...when I hear the word fake, it doesn't really feel good, but I do laugh it off...it doesn't feel good.*

<div align="right">Ivory, 25, female, Mintrack</div>

While this particular joke about Ivory being stupid and fake was started by an ex-colleague, this joking phrase had been continuously used by many other organizational members. Ivory displays her frustration and annoyance ('*it doesn't really feel good'*) towards this joke. This means despite the fact that Ivory is willing to accept most humour created by Diamond, the word '*stupid*' creates a boundary for Ivory, making this particular humour instance unacceptable to her. This is expressed through her subtle reaction, where her slight laughter appears to show sarcasm rather than genuine or hearty laughter signalling acceptance. Furthermore, deleting the image on her computer and returning to work as usual without communicating with Diamond shows her intention of ignoring Diamond's humour. Ivory's non-confirmatory reaction of not openly laughing also indicates her refusal to engage in this humour.

5.6.4 Theme summary

This theme discusses ideas that relate to how humour expresses organizational values in the studied Korean workplaces, which may or may not be consistent with the wider societal (Confucian) values. In this study, humour is perceived to mostly develop constructive workplace relationships and work processes. However, the circumstances in which humour is successful are uncertain and situational. The norms of behaviour maintained in the Korean society (such as hierarchical relationships) conflict with the notion of humour, leading to confusion and uncertainty for individual workers when they interpret humour in the workplace. This shows that while using humour successfully may improve some organizational outcomes and relationships, the ambiguity of humour may also create disturbance in organizational processes and conflict within organizational relationships.

Most research participants discussed the idea that humour develops good collegial relationships within the workplace. This involves formation and reinforcement of in-groups and out-groups in the workplace.   Participants suggest that humour creates a feeling of collegiality or peer-relationships between individuals across all hierarchical levels and age groups, however, the quality of relationships is less than that of friendships and the relationships are rather superficial. This situation is perhaps similar to collegial relationships described in Western organizations, where humour plays a significant role in relationship building. However, this conflicts with the traditional hierarchical relationship structure maintained within the wider Korean society, as the word colleague or peer is only used to describe co-workers of the same age. Thus while humour may create collegial relationships in the workplace, it may also create discomfort due to the traditional value of hierarchical relationships. Research participants also suggested that individuals may use humour to manage work relationships for political purposes. This means that individuals use humour to create favourable relationships with those in power within the organization, in order to gain some form of benefit. However, some participants perceive such use of humour unfavourably, showing the tension created by humour in these organizations, and the different perspectives on it. Unlike situations where individuals use humour to develop intimate relationships (such as friendships), some participants explain that using humour to develop collegial relationships is an expected part of their work. This may be because maintaining adequate relationships with other organizational members is necessary to survive within the workplace, especially in superior-subordinate relationships.

Another idea raised by the research participants is that humour creates some form of independent identity, which helps to highlight and individual's presence within the workplace. While some individuals perceived that using humour creates negative or unprofessional impressions for the individual, others perceived that humour may be a form of expressing oneself to other organizational members. This use of humour was often associated with popularity and the level of confidence of the individual. Using humour was described as courageous, suggesting that using humour to express an individual's unique characteristics is uncommon in Korean organizations, as the Confucian value of harmony encourages individuals to fit in as a part of the collective group, rather than to stand out. However, such creation of an independent identity through the use of humour may create a unique position, away from the collective group's rules and norms, such as going beyond the social role of the individual within a hierarchical relationship structure.

The data also shows that the boundaries of humour differ according to the situation. This means that the context in which humour is shared creates different outcomes. This context includes the relational positions of the individuals sharing humour, and contextual circumstances such as humour shared in after-hours drinking sessions. Research participants suggested that individuals need to use humour carefully, as the changing boundaries of humour may not always be obvious, and may sometimes even be misleading. Not realizing these boundaries may result in negative consequences, such as damage to organizational relationships, which may be signalled through gestures of unlaughter.

5.7 Chapter summary

This findings chapter presents a combined result from all three participant companies. Three themes were identified from the data collected across the companies, to show the different cultural values that organizational members express through humour within the studied Korean workplaces. The findings show that humour sometimes reinforces the traditional Confucian values of formality and hierarchical relationships between organizational members. Participants suggested in their interviews that humour does not belong in Korean workplaces as it is not suitable to the Korean culture because it may be misunderstood as a sign of disrespect to others. Despite such negative perceptions of the use of humour, some observation data shows that participants often do use humour in the studied workplaces. The

use of humour helps to develop interpersonal relationships such as friendships and family-like relationships between organizational members. Organizational members also use humour to avoid direct conflict and maintain *chemyon* (face). Therefore, the use of humour helps to maintain a harmonious workplace by reinforcing the Confucian traditions and hierarchical relationship structure between individuals.

The findings also show that the use of humour does not always unite organizational members and develop positive relationships. Observations and interview data show that the use of humour may actually highlight the cultural clash between organizational members, creating a division in the workplace. This division appears to be focused by the different gender and hierarchical groups, according to their age and organizational positions. Due to different cultural expectations, using humour results in unpredictable outcomes, and this unpredictability escalates outside the workplace. Participants suggested that the use of humour may create different impressions for different individuals, and may also affect the emotions of the communicators.

Humour used by the participants also suggests a development of organizational relationships different to that of the family-like structures encouraged through Confucian traditions. Observations and interview data suggest that organizational members developed collegial relationships similar to that of collegial relationships in Western organizations. Findings suggest that humour may momentarily reduce the hierarchical difference between organizational members, and this effect was more common among the younger members in their 20s. Furthermore, the use of humour helps individuals to construct an independent identity away from the collective group, and thus momentarily relocates individuals' social position from the hierarchical relationship structure. However, it is suggested that achieving these effects is difficult because the boundaries of humour are ambiguous, and different for each situation. Although organizational members of superior status in the studied Korean workplaces most commonly set the boundaries when sharing humour, those in subordinate positions occasionally set the boundaries as well.

This results chapter has described how humour is used within the three studied Korean companies. The following chapter provides a discussion of these findings by relating back to the reviewed literature, and the discussion shows the contribution this current research makes to organizational humour and Confucian cultural research.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses changes in values, relationships, and humour in the Korean workplaces studied. Humour offers a lens to understand these changes in the values and relationships of organizational members. While it is logical to present the most significant findings first, it is important to unpack the story of change that humour shows within the workplaces, and how this change leads to ambiguity and sometimes challenges for the workers. The findings illustrate a progression of how the use and perceptions of humour show both traditional Confucian values characterizing, and modern Western values beginning to permeate these workplaces. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the key findings in relation to research and theory. First, the Confucian perspectives of humour found in the studied Korean workplaces will be discussed, and will be contrasted with current knowledge about humour effects in Western contexts. Second, how this current study both supports and further extends the existing literature on humour effects in the workplace will be discussed. This is related to changing interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and how these changes divide organizational members through humour. Third, the impact of humour on individuals will be discussed, particularly for those in lower hierarchical positions. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the ideas discussed.

6.1 A dilemma: Humour in Confucian relationships

The Confucian value of formality conflicts with the idea of humour, and thus humour is generally not favoured in Confucian-based cultures and organizations (Yue, 2014). However, findings from the current study show that humour nevertheless exists in these workplaces. Organizational members within the workplaces used humour to maintain Confucian values of harmony and hierarchical relationships, while also helping to save the *chemyon* of organizational members. Therefore, this section discusses a dilemma faced within the workplaces, where the use of humour both reinforced and rejected different Confucian values.

6.1.1 Conflicting Confucian assumptions and humour

Organizational studies have emphasized the benefits of humour in the workplace. Humour helps to alleviate boredom (Roy, 1959), relieve stress (Morreall, 1991), increase group cohesion (Brown & Levinson, 1978), increase creativity (Isen et al., 1987), and develop interpersonal relationships between organizational members (Cooper, 2008). However, most of these humour studies are based on Western contexts, yet humour is a universal phenomenon that exists in all cultures and organizations (Alden et al., 1993). Yue, Jiang, Lu, and Hiranandani (2016) note the differences between Western and Eastern cultures in the use of humour, and the need to understand the potential problems of taking a Western-based understanding of humour into China and other Confucian-influenced societies. Humour may be interpreted differently in non-Western organizational contexts, and thus have different implications when it is shared by organizational members.

In the current study, almost all of the participants across the three Korean companies perceived that humour does not belong in the workplace setting, and should not be used. This perception was consistent, regardless of gender, age, and organizational position, indicating a general negative attitude to organizational humour. Yet, this perception conflicts with the observation in each of the participating companies, where humour does occur, and where observations clearly show that humour does exist in these Korean workplaces. This reflects the complex role that humour plays in Korean workplaces, where it both supports and clashes with Confucian values of hierarchy, harmony, and formality (Yao, 2000).

The Confucian value of formality creates a perception of '*discipline*', where there are formal rules or rituals that individuals must undertake as a part of the communal norms (Deuchler, 1992). This follows the Confucian core value of 'ren'*,* which aims to teach people to behave seriously and formally, and also restrain laughter (King & Bond, 1985) in order to maintain formal practices. The practices include the use of honorifics and appropriate body language when addressing older individuals, and also unfamiliar individuals, in order to maintain a formal and respectful attitude towards others. The importance Confucianism attributes to formality means that humour, which in Confucian societies can craft a sense of disrespect towards others, is devalued.

Research participants from all three companies suggested that humour is not an important part of work. However, this perception appears to be a result of Korean cultural norms rather than of the participants' personal preferences. This means that conceptually humour or fun is

separated from the idea of work in Korean culture. Humour was not considered to be a part of the work-related interactions, and was thus perceived '*unimportant*' within the organizational settings. This relates to the work of Mallett and Wapshott (2014), whose study of humour in SMEs showed that operational processes are disrupted through the use of humour, which promotes ambiguity and informality in the workplace. This means that within a work context that requires, and wishes to promote, formality, individuals should stick to formal work agendas than humour. Similarly, because formality is considered an important virtue within Confucian workplaces, having a sense of discipline is favoured over humour, and may promote effective work processes and strict hierarchical (organizational) relationships.

Under such assumptions, participants in this study (especially those in lower hierarchical positions) who transgressed this norm of formality by using humour were described as '*arrogant*'. This is because such behaviour of going against the group norms is problematic, especially in Korean organizations where there are many layers of hierarchy. Humour may damage the formality surrounding these hierarchical relationships, because it may allow individuals to jokingly violate the relationship structures. Due to the informal characteristics of humour, it may cause individuals to experience excessive comfort in the workplace, and to interpret their work and social roles differently from the expectations of others (Misztal, 2002). This means that through humour interactions an individual may forget their appropriate role (relative to their hierarchy and associated formality), thus being considered a rude and '*arrogant*' person.

In the companies studied, formality was emphasized through the organizational structure and positions, and all three companies had multiple layers of hierarchy. In particular, Truscene was structurally very formal, with nine different hierarchical positions which divided the individual members (refer to Chapter Five, Table 3, demographics of study participants). These organizational members were strictly controlled in only using their organizational positions or titles to address each other (e.g. 'Good morning, deputy section chief Park'). Truscene also displayed the most control over the use of humour in the workplace. This included instances where humour used by subordinates conflicted with the formal use of honorifics and body gestures which should show respect towards others (especially towards those hierarchically superior). For example, one of the younger organizational members at Truscene explained that while she was joking around with her work mentor, she used the term 'unni' (which directly translates as 'older sister') instead of the formal organizational

title. She also explained that her mentor was '*told off*' by one of the senior managers because of her behaviour. This is similar to findings by Yue (2010) who argues that Confucianism is culturally responsible for devaluing humour, deeming it to be the act of uneducated and uncivilized people. This is because Confucianism devalues humour due to its potential to undermine the five cardinal relations such as the father-son relationship (Yue, 2010; Fung, 1997), which are the basis of the hierarchical, unequal relationships that structure the people within Korean society (Deuchler, 1992).   The use of humour by subordinates may be considered a challenge to this relationship structure, and such challenges are perceived to be only committed by uneducated persons (Yue, 2010). This leads to superiors correcting this (humour) behaviour to restore order and formality in workplace relationships, and thus in the above example from Truscene, the mentor was reprimanded for allowing a subordinate to use humour and challenge the hierarchical relationships within the workplace.

Regardless of the level of formality displayed through the organizational structure and relationships, organizational members from all three participating companies suggest some form of relationship between the Korean culture and humour in the workplace. With this general perception that humour '*doesn't fit with Korean culture',* this current study shows that such negative perceptions of humour under Confucian beliefs is strongly embedded within these Korean workplaces, as organizations are considered to require formality and order. This general perception of humour signals the influence of Confucianism within Korean workplaces, and this perception may also impact the quality of interpersonal relationships between organizational members.

6.1.2 Maintaining harmony

6.1.2.1 Achieving harmony through hierarchy

Confucian values in Korean society emphasize the importance of harmony within a group, and this harmony is believed to be achieved through establishing and maintaining hierarchical and unequal relationships (Deuchler, 1992). In this current study, observations from all three participant companies suggest that the hierarchical and unequal relationships of the organizational members are reinforced through humour. Humour is perceived and used differently according to the relational position of the communicating individuals, to support the hierarchical relationship structure, and thus achieve harmony. This means that humour

performs an important cultural role, reinforces social norms (Bricker, 1980; Duncan, 1985) with regard to hierarchy, and helps to define a Confucian cultural identity.

Consistent with the Confucian values, in the humour used by the participants in all three companies the different roles of the superior and subordinate were often emphasized. Regardless of the contents of the humour shared, most subordinates perceived a superior's use of humour as a signal of care. Furthermore, subordinates were expected to react appropriately to their superior's humour as a signal of respect and politeness. This was managed carefully between the organizational members in order to remain polite within the given relationship. Holmes (2013) defines politeness in everyday practice as an expression of concern for others and a non-imposing distancing behaviour. The Confucian value of 'li' (Yum, 1988) is interpreted in a similar manner to Holmes' (2013) definition of politeness. The Chinese concept of 'li' refers not only to the formal ritual required to display respect towards elders, but also to an inner disposition of the mind and heart for the respect of elders (De Bary, 1995). Under Confucian interpretations, the idea of politeness as a distancing behaviour (Holmes, 2013) is considered necessary and important, as the natural distance created through polite behaviour is consistent with the hierarchical relationship structure which exists between individuals.

Extending the idea of politeness in Confucian relationships, De Bary (1995) explains that the Confucian idea of filial piety is not only concerned with the formalities, but must have inner reverence for parents and elders. This is displayed through various practices, and these include linguistic respect which uses honorific language towards elders, and through exhibiting obedient behaviours by listening to seniors and not talking back (Sung, 2001). This traditional notion of polite and respectful communication means that for those in subordinate positions the use of humour is limited. Such limited use of humour was observed across all three companies in the current study, where humour was generally initiated by the individual in a superior position, rather than by the subordinates. The subordinates were *'careful'* in using humour, as the ambiguous nature of humour meant that it might be interpreted as disobedient or rude behaviour towards the superior. The concern for being polite to superiors is a common idea across all cultural contexts, but is particularly emphasized in Confucian contexts. Sung's (2004) cross-cultural study of politeness behaviour shows that while American adults also practice most of the forms of elder respect similar to those practiced in Confucian contexts, their practice is more limited and minimal

than that in Confucian cultures. This reflects the different cultural orientation towards hierarchical relationships between Western (American) and Confucian contexts.

The importance of individuals in subordinate positions maintaining hierarchical relationships and politeness means that the extent of humour used and accepted differs depending on the hierarchical status of the communicating individuals. Many of the participants across all three researched companies suggested that they needed to use and respond to a superior's humour carefully, because an inappropriate response to a superior's humour also signals impoliteness which can lead to damaging harmony within the workplace. This idea of being highly conscious of politeness relates to the idea of power distance (Hofstede, 2001). High power distance results in workers being more accepting of autocratic bosses, and allows the superiors to exercise coercive behavior (Vega & Comer, 2005). This means that regardless of what kind of humour is performed by the superior, subordinates feel that they must accept it. For example, a female member from Truscene described the jokes used by the CEO as '*a bit perverted*' and an observation of a joke by the vice-CEO of Mintrack was potentially offensive and sexist. This observation example involved the vice-CEO using humour to describe females as '*dogs*' and males as '*owners*', and to suggest that females must meet a good '*owner*' to live a good life. However, both the participants who were the victims of such humour accepted the jokes of their superiors. This suggests that humour helps to show the hierarchical differences and the obedient attitudes that subordinates take in order to maintain the harmony of the group. However, such tolerance is not applied to others of similar (subordinate) positions. Similarly, Seo's (2010) study showed that Korean workers judge the same act differently depending on the perpetrator. If a superior conducts bullying, this superior is not considered as a bully, yet the same actions performed by a colleague would be considered bullying. This suggests that while a superior's humour may be perceived positively, the same humour used by a subordinate may not be accepted. An organizational member of a lower hierarchical position must therefore be careful in using humour, but must respond actively to his/her superior's humour in the workplace. Thus, humour is framed within the idea of respect and politeness, in favour of those in superior positions. This is consistent with Confucian value-based norms, where obedience and respect for seniors are expected in order to maintain harmonious relationship within the group (Doe, 2000).

While humour helps to maintain harmony in Korean workplaces by reinforcing the hierarchical status of the individuals, it also cultivates a harmonious workplace by helping to

avoid direct conflict between organizational members. This is because many Asian countries adopt a non-confrontational communication style as a conflict management practice that assists the maintenance of harmonious relationships (Chen & Chung, 1994). Similarly, all three researched companies showed instances where humour was used to avoid a troublesome situation, and to prevent direct conflict in the workplace. Thus, within the studied Korean workplaces humour may provide a conflict management strategy of avoidance. Lee's (1990) study of Korean managers supports this idea, and suggests that the relative status of employees determines how they handle interpersonal conflict. Lee (1990) suggests that while managers use a variety of communication styles to manage conflicts in the workplace, managers tend to use an *avoiding style* when facing superiors. The *avoidance style* is one of the five approaches to handle interpersonal conflict, where *avoidance style* reflects a passive approach in dealing with conflicts (Rahim, 2010). Subordinates are likely to use an *avoiding style* when communicating with their superiors, as they are likely to withdraw from a conflict situation in order to remain a respectful member of the group (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Diedrick, & Rosenthal, 1964).

Humour does not always result in consensus or achieve harmony (Burawoy, 1979). Different perceptions by each individual may lead to them interpreting the same humour instance differently from each other and often differently from the intention of the joking individual, thus creating a risk of further conflict through humour. Therefore, when individuals use humour in accordance with their hierarchical status, communicators are able to achieve the harmony emphasized by the Confucian values of unequal relationships. This means while the easy-going nature of humour can avoid conflict, humour used with an intention of avoiding direct conflict is often performed by individuals of lower hierarchical status within the interaction. This careful use of humour contrasts with the bolder humour that is used by individuals in superior positions, which emphasizes the status differences between the communicators. Therefore, the differential use of humour suggests that humour helps to maintain harmony by reinforcing the Confucian relationship structure between organizational members, at least on the surface. These findings are new to organizational humour studies, and provide a deeper understanding of humour in diverse cultural contexts.

6.1.2.2 Achieving harmony through *nunchi*

Participants across all three researched companies suggested that the idea of *nunchi* is an important part of maintaining harmony through humour. *Nunchi* is a form of non-verbal communication: individuals use *nunchi* to 'read between the lines' (Samovar et al., 2014) and to identify social cues to understand hidden meanings between communicating individuals (Kim, 1975). This idea was recognized by individuals across all organizational levels, but was particularly emphasized by those in the lower to mid- hierarchical positions, who experienced most difficulties in managing hierarchical relationships in the workplace. For example, a middle-manager at Mintrack stated that when one uses humour in the workplace, *nunchi* helps to minimize the risk of developing bad relationships. This is because the process of *nunchi* helps to assess the situation and the relationship between the communicating individuals, and enables the interaction to stay within the acceptable limits of the communicators. Although the idea of *nunchi* has been discussed in previous Korean studies literature (i.e. Jin & Hyun, 2014; Kim, 2003), it has not been explored in relation to the use of humour within Korean workplaces.

Nunchi plays an important role in the Korean cultural psychology, and does not translate to other cultural concepts (Stoeckle, 2012). *Nunchi* is a process of assumptions rather than a close calculation of the end result (Jin & Hyun, 2014). Rather than an aspect of personality, it is more of a process necessary within the dynamics of relationships. Jin and Hyun (2014) suggest that when an individual uses *nunchi* successfully with an intention of developing interpersonal relationships, this leads to the creation of a positive impression of the person. In this current study, for individuals in a lower hierarchical position this means that using *nunchi* during a humour interaction with a superior is more likely to develop and maintain a positive interpersonal relationship in the workplace. Thus, *nunchi* helps organizational members to use humour effectively in order to avoid conflict and maintain harmony between the communicators. This process of using humour successfully may even diminish the relational distance between the communicating individuals, and help them to go beyond hierarchical relationships, similarly to the relational effect of humour observed in Western organizations which transgress hierarchy in organizational relationships (Cooper, 2008).

However, the difference in these Confucian contexts is that *nunchi* has a more significant role in using humour between organizational members especially for individuals in subordinate roles. This is because humour may create negative impressions for the user (discussed in

section 6.3.1), and may therefore be a particularly risky form of interaction for subordinates. Therefore, *nunchi* helps individuals of lower hierarchical status to share humour safely and effectively. *Nunchi* thus plays a significant role in the humour communication within these Korean workplaces by helping to safely balance and push the workplace boundaries (Plester & Orams, 2008) similarly to those in Western organizations. With sufficient *nunchi*, humour may be used by organizational members of lower hierarchical status to challenge the boundaries of Confucian-based hierarchical relationships (such as initiating a joke towards a superior) but may also help to quickly re-establish hierarchy and harmony if the humour is not accepted by other members.

6.1.3 Chemyon (Saving face)

Chemyon or face is an important concept in Korea, where the constant need to save face is reflected through every action of an individual (Kim, 2003). This means that an individual's particular position or social status prescribes his or her behaviour and communication styles. However, this process is not dependent only on the individual: other members within the group also need to co-operate to maintain this status. This is because *chemyon* or 'face' is a socially constructed and negotiated process (Ting-Toomey, 1994).

Chemyon influences how organizational members use humour. In this study, participants in all three companies displayed humour which was used to protect their *chemyon* in the workplace, regardless of their age and social status. This was observed most frequently in Truscene and Mintrack, where humour was used consciously to elevate the user's relative social position. However, this was often achieved at another individual's expense. For example, a middle manager at Mintrack used disparaging humour towards his subordinate, teasing the subordinate about her hairstyle. The use of disparaging humour was a performance that re-emphasized the middle manager's superior position or power to his subordinates and to other organizational members observing the humour performance. As the Mintrack manager was in a middle-level position, and occupied multiple relational positions in the workplace (superior to some members and subordinate to others), it was difficult for him to negotiate his *chemyon*. The use of disparaging humour helped the middle manager to quickly display his high social position by publicly humiliating the subject, who was his subordinate. This incident can be explained by superiority theory, where humour creates a momentary feeling of superiority over another (Billig, 2005). While such humour

does not result in direct conflict, it creates a temporal divide between the communicators (joker and victim) where one person is empowered over the other. The use of disparaging humour by a superior can be considered as a performance or a public statement which affirms their social position within the workplace. Brown and Levinson (1987) also describe the need for positive face - the desire for others' appreciation and approval. However, the difference in this current research is that *chemyon* may be negotiated in humour processes by reinforcing the social order or hierarchy, and in these Korean organizations the superior typically emphasized that s/he is the one in power, which maintained their personal *chemyon*.

Similarly, Bradney's (1957) study of joking relationships within a London department store shows that using humour can help to diminish the emotional damage when correcting workers' mistakes, and thus 'save face'. Bradney's (1957) notion of saving face is similar to that of *chemyon*, where humour helps to protect the public image of the individual and the relationship between the communicators. The current study shows that humour used within the studied Korean workplaces protects not only the *chemyon* of superiors but also that of subordinates. This links to face-negotiation theory, and humour is a part of the face-negotiation process (Ting-toomey & Kurogi, 1998) rather than being a single instance of protecting face. However, if humour fails, or if an individual in a superior position becomes the subject of humour, *chemyon* may be lost.

Losing *chemyon* results in a feeling of shame (Oh, 1991). However, humour can also divert this feeling of shame. This is consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1978) claim that humour is a strategy used to minimize the threat to one's face. In this current study, participants in all three companies used humour to divert from a shameful situation. However, this idea was not raised in the interviews. This is because conversing about one's own shameful moment with another person (in this case, the researcher) may further damage their *chemyon,* as it recalls and admits the individual's mistake. For example, an entry-level staff member at Mintrack announced that she had a superior skill in sharpening a pencil, but then failed to sharpen her superior's pencil properly. She then used humour ('*oh my gosh, I better practice my pencil sharpening skills to seduce your hearts')* to cover up the feeling of shame caused by her inability. Although she laughed at her own joke, none of her superiors who were sitting around her laughed. This situation was shameful because she contradicted her own words, and displayed herself as an incompetent person, thus damaging her *chemyon*. By using humour, the tension created from the feeling of shame in this situation could be released, and her own laughter served as a means of safely relieving stress (Berger, 1987).

Therefore, humour helps organizational members to maintain their *chemyon* and their social status in the workplace. This effect of humour is common across all cultural contexts, as exemplified in Bradney's (1957) study. However, this current study highlights the relationship between humour and *chemyon*, and shows that humour helps individuals to maintain the hierarchical relationships and harmony which are important in Korean workplaces, thus providing different and novel interpretations.

6.2 Changing values and interpersonal relationships

This section discusses the changing cultural values and interpersonal relationships in the studied Korean workplaces. The findings suggest that while the traditional Confucian family-based relationships are still promoted between organizational members through humour, some relationship developments are more work-specific. The use of humour also helps individuals to gain an independent identity, which is an emerging development of individuals seeking to break away from the Confucian, collective perspective. Furthermore, humour also illustrates a divide in hierarchy, age groups, and gender by highlighting the different perceptions of humour between these groups. Therefore, this section discusses how humour illustrates the changing values of organizational members and how this change is creating a divide within the studied Korean workplaces.

6.2.1 Interpersonal relationships

Humour used in the studied Korean workplaces helps to develop interpersonal relationships between organizational members. This is similar to what is observed in Western contexts, as humour is understood as a social process which may help to develop interpersonal relationships between organizational members (Cooper, 2008). However, the findings in this current study suggest that the nature of these 'interpersonal relationships' developed differs, where some organizational members perceived that humour helps to develop family-like intimate relationships and others consider that humour helps to develop workplace-specific relationships.

6.2.1.1 Familial relationships

Under Confucianism, family is the most important construct in life (Yao, 2000). In order to be a good person an individual is expected to serve his or her family and perform filial piety (Duncan, 2002). Thus a family-like relationship is perhaps the closest form of interpersonal relationship an individual may develop, and is also the type of relationship pursued and emphasized by these Korean participants at work. The traditional family ideology serves as a constitutional principle for the organization, so that the workers identify themselves with the organization and remain loyal in a familial way (Choi, 1974). Therefore, an organization is viewed as a big family where the management plays the role of the father and employees accept their role as children (Choi, 2004). Some of the participants in this study described their superiors as family, when they shared humour in the workplace ('*that makes him feel like a brother, or an uncle').* This is related to the use of specific language such as honorifics or titles towards individuals of different ages or hierarchical status (Hwang, 1991). The hierarchy between individuals of different ages was reinforced through such use of language, and even through humour, but these were not 'levelled' as if the participants were communicating with those of the same age or status. Participants did not use humour to go beyond these familial titles (such as jokingly calling a superior by his or her name). For example, a young entry-level member in Truscene explained that the use of humour made his superior feel like a '*brother, or an uncle'* rather than a 'friend'. This is because the word 'friend' is only used towards those of same age, unlike the broader meaning the word 'friend' has in Western contexts. Therefore, humour helped to blur the hierarchical difference between organizational members and to facilitate relationships similar to Confucian family-based relationships, but did not succeed in creating momentary equality as shown in Western humour research (refer to Cooper, 2008).

6.2.1.2 Workplace-specific relationships

In contrast, some of the younger participants (aged 34 and below) from the three participant companies suggested that humour helped to develop a different type of interpersonal relationship than that typically expected in the Korean context. In this current study, the use of humour helped organizational members to develop a form of relationship different to the traditional superior-subordinate or familial relationships, but more workplace-specific and perhaps similar to the collegial relationships in Western-based organizations. Participants

described the basis of these collegial relationships to be '*political*', where humour is intentionally used in attempt to develop relationships with those in power within the organization to gain some form of benefit. While the intentional development of organizational relationships may not be new to Korean workplaces, the idea of achieving such collegial relationship through humour conflicts with the Confucian relationship structure which ascribes family-like relationships within groups. Therefore, this process illustrates the changing nature of organizational relationships within these Korean workplaces.

Humour can help to develop useful workplace relationships and foster social interactions within workplace communities (Rosner, Halcrow, & Lavin, 2003). Workplace politics occur as organizational members attempt either directly or indirectly to influence other members through various informal methods to attain specific objectives (Witt, 2003). From an organizational perspective, involvement in workplace politics can be perceived as rather deviant, as individuals attempt to achieve their personal desires in an underhand way, rather than through formal organizational structures (Batten & Schwab, 1965). Under Batten and Schwab's (1965) interpretation of workplace politics, the use of humour can be a form of deviant behaviour that creates political relationships in the workplace. In this current study, (especially younger) organizational members used humour to develop workplace relationships that help them to avoid being a part of the familial relationship structure (and thus the relational role as a subordinate within the group). The fact that these responses are from younger people suggests that the nature of organizational relationships within Korean workplaces is changing, perhaps in response to the increasing Western influences. The next section discusses how this change in organizational relationships also helps to construct independence for organizational members.

6.2.2 Breaking away and constructing independence

The majority of the participants in this study perceived that humour helps to create a form of identity for the individual that is distinct from the collective group identity. While this idea of independence is commonly accepted in Western contexts, Confucian contexts such as those of these Korean organizations focus on collective identity rather than individual, thus it is unusual to identify a person as an individual rather than as one of the members of a wider group (Cho & Yoon, 2001). Because the feeling of belongingness is important in Confucian contexts, expressing 'self' or independent identity conflicts with the desire to blend in as a

part of a collective group (Kalton, 1979). Nevertheless there are strong expectations in Eastern cultures for the individual self to accommodate to the social reality (Chiu & Hong, 1999). Hong, Ip, Chiu, Morris, and Menon (2001) explain that in such cultures, people are highly aware of their collective duties, which include conducting the expected behaviours according to their relative hierarchical roles within a group.

Due to these expected duties or roles in the hierarchical relationship structures, many of the participants in this study described the act of using humour as a form of '*courage*' in their Korean workplaces. While the word '*courage*' may have multiple meanings, the initial perception of going against the commonly accepted cultural norms of hierarchy and associated communication styles has rather negative connotations. This is because there is an emphasis on cohesion, solidarity, and unity in Korean society (Shim et al., 2008). People who are perceived to be similar in Korea are favoured, while those perceived dissimilar are likely to be treated negatively (Yoon & Choi, 1994). In this study, some participants perceived that humour creates a unique sense of identity for the individual by developing their individual impression and confidence, and as a result gaining the attention (either in a good or bad way) of others. Thus, humour highlights the presence of the individual. This means that this heightened presence gives the 'joker' a special status within the workplace, different to that of an ordinary member of the group. This includes certain roles or privileges, as this new identity provides a degree of immunity from the repercussions of using humour (Douglas, 2002).

Plester and Orams (2008) state that the key functions of jokers are to challenge management, push organizational boundaries, develop culture, and provide relief to other organizational members. In this current study, each of the three companies had a specific joker who most frequently engaged in humour. These individuals were identified as the workplace joker or the '*official office clown*' by other organizational members as well as themselves. However, rather than fulfilling the functions outlined by Plester and Oram (2008), the observed jokers in both Truscene (IT company) and Wisepath (manufacturing company) predominantly served to provide relief and to be '*an energizer*' to other organizational members. Management in both Truescene and Wisepath were keen to restrict the use of humour in the workplace, especially by those in subordinate positions, therefore the jokers were very conservative in their humour and carefully selected those they felt they could engage in a humour interaction.

Mintrack had the most observed humour instances along with the clearest boundary-breaking role for the joker. For example, the observation of Diamond jokingly insulting his superior (Iolite) during a social gathering shows how he temporarily broke away from his subordinate position through humour, in order to challenge the hierarchy and authority of his superior (refer to section 5.6.2). This is similar to Plester's (2016) study on the role of jokers in the workplace, where the an employee in a joker's role shows a mocking resistance to the general manager's work instructions through the use of humour. While Plester (2016) shows the joker's challenge to the organizational authority of his general manager, the humour example in Mintrack is different because it shows a challenge to both the organizational and the societal hierarchy/authority of his superior. The example of Diamond using humour to demean Iolite shows a humour interaction between a subordinate (joker) and his superior, where in this case, the joker was positioned lower in the organizational hierarchy, and also lower in age. This is usually inappropriate in Korean contexts and shows how the use of humour temporarily breaks the hierarchical roles prescribed under Confucian assumptions (and the Five Relations, Deuchler, 1992), and also implies a mock challenge towards the Confucian relationship structure.

Cooper (2008) suggests that humour blurs the psychological gap between individuals, and as a result, social constructs such as organizational hierarchy are diminished. Within a Western organizational setting, this allows individuals to challenge management (Critchley, 2007) but also gain a powerful status within the group (Hay, 2000) through humour. Individuals who are not in a position of power (i.e. in a subordinate role) may relate to a sense of freedom from hierarchical roles, and gain some form of independence from the hierarchical relationships within the social group. Thus, the joker is able to diverge from the traditional hierarchical relationship structure supported by other members, and gain a form of uniqueness. This provides a different perspective to previous studies such as that of Kim and Markus (1999), where in their comparative study between Koreans and Americans, Koreans prefer conformity over uniqueness, and emphasize the value of harmony. Although such challenging use of humour cannot be generalized to all members within Korean workplaces, using humour to break the traditional hierarchical structure as exemplified in the Mintrack example suggests that the Confucian value of conformity may be under challenge.

Therefore, from this current study, humour represents a form of uniqueness and attempts to break the hierarchical boundaries prescribed by the Confucian value of unity and construct a sense of independence for the individual, highlighting the changing attitudes to, and even

resistance against, the Confucian values and relationships in Korean workplaces. The next section will discuss how this construction of independence, especially by those of lower hierarchical status, creates conflicts (although not always open nor in direct forms of conflicts) between those who value Confucian traditions of hierarchical relationships more strongly, versus those who value them less.

6.2.3 Hierarchy and age

While humour interactions are interpreted differently by each individual, the concept of humour seems to be approached especially differently for individuals of different hierarchical positions and in age. In this current study, most organizational members of higher status (above the age of 35 and the organizational position of deputy section chief) were observed to use humour towards their peers and subordinates, but did not encourage (and sometimes actually limited) their subordinates in the use of humour. This meant that humour in these Korean workplaces might have been perceived as a privilege only for those of superior status, especially for individuals who deeply valued Confucian traditions and hierarchical relationship structure, where the superior has the decision-making power within the group, and subordinates are expected to follow silently (Hwang, 2001). Thus, some of the participants in this study may have perceived humour as one of the privileges of a superior, and subordinates' humour as a challenge to this privilege. However, individuals in subordinate positions in this current study did use humour their workplaces, but were often careful in selecting those they communicated with.

The different attitudes to using humour and the humour enactment process seemed to display a form of generational identity, which is an individual's knowledge, emotion, and value held towards a generational group/role and its membership (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Joshi, Dencker, Franz, and Martocchio (2010) suggest that there are multiple facets of generational identity, which are cohort-based identity, age-based identity, and incumbency-based identity. The conflicting responses of the research participants in this study suggested that these different generational identities influenced their workplace interactions. Thus, humour may have reflected the intergenerational dynamics in the workplace. In particular, the different attitudes towards humour observed within the three participant companies extend Joshi et al.'s (2010) idea of both age-based identity and cohort-based identity.

The senior members in the workplaces presented the strong influence of Confucian values as a part of their identity, displaying their belief in hierarchical relationships through humour. Firstly, senior members often performed disparaging humour which was expected to be accepted by the targeted subordinates (*'people who feel hurt from humour are the problematic ones, rather than those who do the humour'*). Secondly, by stressing the value of formality and by forbidding their subordinates from using humour in the workplace, the older organizational members expressed their highly Confucian, age-based identity (*'Once I got told off by a passing-by manager for joking around with someone in the company kitchen. He asked who has the longer tenure, and only when I told him that we were only a month apart (in organizational tenure), he backed off'*).

In contrast, the younger organizational members expressed a more relaxed approach to who uses humour, while being conscious of how they shared humour in the workplace. For example, one of the middle managers in her early 30's at Mintrack explained '*I laugh along to the jokes that the younger ones make. They're young, and cute. So I play along and pretty much accept most of the humour they try to share […] but I have to be careful when the CEO's around.*' Therefore, the use of humour, and attitudes to humour, in the workplace expressed the generational identity of an individual, and created a division between generational groups by emphasizing this difference.

Such different attitudes to organizational humour suggest emerging change in the studied Korean workplaces. Rather than rejecting the idea of humour which is traditionally considered to damage the formality and hierarchical relationships in the workplaces, the younger research participants suggested a different and changing attitude towards humour, and these attitudes accept and welcome the use of humour in the workplace. This is consistent with Ingelhart's (1997) study showing that Korea has the greatest generational gap in cultural values. Attitudes to humour reflect this generational gap and the changes which may be occurring in Korean workplaces, which are perhaps moving away from the traditional Confucian ideals towards more Western-influenced casual workplace dynamics that permit everyday humour.

In this study, all three companies showed that there is some form of hierarchical division between organizational members in using humour. This divided perception was most distinct at Truscene. An observation example at Truscene involved Carnelian's (a young, entry-level staff member) sharing of humour in the company kitchen with her colleague, and an older

manager stopping them to ask who had the longer tenure. This example is significant because it illustrates the different values between the older manager and the younger staff member. The older manager's act of asking 'who has the longer tenure' suggests that he perceived that humour should not be used by an individual of lower hierarchical status. However, Carnelian and her colleague showed a confused reaction to the manager's question, not understanding why he was restricting their use of humour, thus illustrating the generational difference in perceiving the use of organizational humour. However, at Truscene there were mixed perceptions amongst the older managers, where some considered that humour could be used between those of different hierarchical positions, but others did not. This shows that engaging in humour with those of different demographic backgrounds creates a potential for conflict and confusion, thus making demographic similarity (such as age) one of the factors that influence the willingness of individuals to exchange humour in communication.

6.2.4 Gender

Gender is an important issue within most organizations, and gender inequality is an ongoing problem in workplaces regardless of the cultural context. Similarly, gender inequality is a problematic issue in Korean workplaces. In 2015, out of all the OECD countries Korea was found to have the greatest organizational 'glass ceiling' for females (The Economist, 2015). This inequality of gender in Korean workplaces is based on the traditional Confucian values, where one of the Five Relations of Confucius (husband-wife relationship) emphasizes the hierarchical difference between males and females, thus promoting an unequal relationship between these gender groups (Deuchler, 2003). Furthermore, Rowley, Kang, and Lim (2016) highlight the significance of the contextual, male-dominated organizational culture in Korean workplaces which limits the career development of females. However, Kim (1993) suggests that Korean women have become more serious about careers, diverging from the traditional gender role of being good homemakers, suggesting a change of values in terms of gender.

Despite the changing societal values and perceptions of gender roles, all three participant companies were dominated by males and all members at the senior management level were males. Only 19 female workers were identified across the three participant companies, and only four of these female workers were positioned as middle managers (refer to Table 4). These middle managers were hierarchically positioned at deputy section chief and section

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chief levels (refer to Table 5). Other female organizational members were all positioned at lower hierarchical levels (bottom four levels).

It is suggested that through humour, individuals express the Confucian-based gender roles, and the hierarchical relationships expected between males and females (Deuchler, 2003). In the current study, participants in all three companies suggested that the use of humour creates a divide amongst the gender groups. Humour used by the male members of the participant organizations often reflected these Confucian perspectives on gender roles. For example, the observed humour instance involving the vice-CEO of Mintrack joking about females as dogs and males as owners shows an extreme example of humour that reinforces the Confucian-based gender roles and the unequal relationship between males and females. According to Plester (2015), humour may be used to perform masculinity in the workplace. Similarly, the Vice-CEO's jokes might have been a part of displaying his superior social position and masculinity in the studied Korean workplace, and reflecting the traditional culture and the Confucian value of gender inequality (Deuchler, 2003). This view is also similar to that suggested by Holmes' (2006) study of humour and gender in New Zealand workplaces, which found that organizational members used humour that reinforced gender stereotypes. However, Holmes (2006) also found that females in these companies were prepared to challenge and contest more extreme, gendered humour which may potentially disadvantage them. This contrasts with the current study, where the female participants were not prepared to challenge gendered humour used by male members, especially by their superiors ('*his humour seems a bit perverted and stuff [...]I need to just get over it, react in an appropriate way*'). Although these female members coped with the gendered humour and seemingly accepted it, interview responses suggested that they did not necessarily enjoy, or agree with, the gender stereotypes embedded in the humour interactions. This suggests that the female organizational members had a different perception of the traditional hierarchical relationships prescribed in a husband and wife relationship within the Doctrine of Five Relations of Confucius (Deuchler, 2003), and could signal the emergence of changing values within these Korean workplaces.

This is related to Stowell's (2003) study, where the change of Confucian values in Korea, Japan, and China was examined. Stowell (2003) stated that the young adults in the studied countries rejected the Confucian-based idea that men and women should be treated differently. The humour observed in this current study provides a lens into this change of cultural values, especially of the young Koreans, and focuses on individuals who value the

traditional gender roles more than others. This divide is exemplified in the current study by the example of Mintrack's Vice-CEO in his 60s using gendered humour towards a young female member in her early 20s. This victimized female member did not find the Vice-CEO's joke funny, which reflects a divide between organizational members through both gender and age, thus stratifying relationships within the workplace.

The use of gendered humour in the studied workplaces did not help to negotiate the gender roles between the organizational members, but instead was perceived as something that differentiated and promoted some conflict between the gender groups, and internal conflict for some participants. Therefore, within the researched companies, organizational members perceived that there is a need to '*take care*' in using humour between different gender groups. This perception was more common amongst organizational members of 34 years and younger, where both male and female participants seemed highly conscious that the ambiguous nature of humour could potentially offend another person. However, observations show that male senior members, especially those above the age of 40, used humour that might be interpreted as '*perverted*' by others and much of their humour was both gendered and sexual. This means that the use of gendered humour in the studied Korean workplaces may signal the changing cultural values in terms of the gender roles and stereotypes, dividing the organizational members according to this perception towards gender, between the younger and older members.

6.3 Experiencing the change, ambiguity, and uncertainty

This current study discusses a Confucian perspective on organizational humour, and provides an additional dimension to the ambiguity of humour in the workplace. However, the findings also suggest that the impact of humour in these Korean workplaces conflicted with traditional Confucian values, and that this also affected the quality of interpersonal relationships between organizational members. Therefore, humour provides a lens for understanding the changes in values and relationships in these workplaces. This section discusses the darker impact of humour there: in particular, it suggests that the changing perceptions and values relating to using humour in the workplace create uncertainty and emotional distress unique to the Korean context. However, in this current study, these negative impacts and the resultant

conflict and ambiguity were mostly experienced and recognized by those of lower hierarchical status, who also tended to be the younger organizational members.

6.3.1 Changing impressions

In this study, most of the participants across all three companies suggested that the use of humour changes the impressions that others form of the user, and that humour can create a '*good image*' for the user in a socializing situation, and can lead to a feeling that the communicators '*can get along well*'. This is similar to findings in existing humour studies such as that of Cooper (2008), who suggests that sharing an enjoyable moment (of humour) creates a feeling of affection, and develops the interpersonal relationships between the individuals. However, in this current study, participants who perceived that humour creates a positive impression of the user were mostly in entry-level and manager positions, and under 34 years old. Participants also suggested that this favourable perception of humour is inconsistent among organizational members, particularly among those of higher status. Since most Korean organizations follow a seniority system, those in higher organizational positions tend to be older. This suggests a generational difference in the cultural (Confucian) values followed by individuals, where the older generation hold a stronger emphasis on the Confucian value of formality, thus perceiving those using humour unfavourably. This difference in perceptions is consistent with a study by Ingelhart (1997), who found that out of the 43 societies studied, Korea had one of the greatest generational difference in cultural values. This means while humour may help to develop a good impression of the user by younger organizational members, it may have adverse effects in Korean workplaces when used towards superiors who are older and more senior, due to their emphasis on the Confucian value of formality. Thus the impression held concerning the user may change depending on the hierarchical position and age of the observer.

Western- based organizational studies such as Napier and Gershenfeld (1973) suggest that humour-oriented candidates are favoured in the hiring process. This is because individuals who use humour effectively have higher mental health (Morreall, 2008) and job satisfaction (Avtgis & Taber, 2006), and therefore promote a healthy organization (Abramis, 1992), encouraging individuals to stay with the organization longer. Furthermore, humour is also recognized as a characteristic of likeable leaders (Rizzo, Wanzer, & Booth-Butterfield, 1999) and effective leaders (Decker & Rotondo, 2001), and is frequently related to effective

leadership styles (Avolio et al., 1999). This suggests that in Western organizations a humorous person may be perceived favourably for all hierarchical positions. However, more recent cross-cultural studies such as those by Yang et al. (2015) and Yue et al. (2016) suggest that humour is not a favourable characteristic for all organizational members, and highlights that in Western cultures favour humour as a personal characteristic more than those in Eastern cultures. Findings from this current research suggest a deeper understanding of this cultural difference, and that the Confucian values of formality and unequal relationships are challenged through the use of humour in the workplace (see Section 6.1). In Korean workplaces, humour may create an unfavourable impression, especially for those of lower hierarchical status, and may even create unintended outcomes for the user. Examining humour in Confucian organizational contexts provide an in depth understanding of the cultural differences, which contrasts with the general Western perception of the use of humour in the workplace.

One of the unintended impressions created by humour may be that of unprofessionalism. The majority of participants in the participating companies in this study suggested that the use of humour in a work-based situation creates an unprofessional image, that of an individual who does not '*take work seriously*'. This is again related to the Confucian-based perception of the Korean workers, where the workplace is considered to be a place of formality (Kee, 2008). This means that the workplace needs to be a place of serious manner, where humour conflicts with the Confucian desire to be strict and formal. Furthermore, humour may create a situation where individuals may be tempted to not follow the prescribed social rituals needed between organizational members at different hierarchical levels. The risk of using humour is that colleagues may perceive the person using humour to be unprofessional. There is ambiguity about who holds strong Confucian values and who does not. For an individual who strongly believes in the Confucian values of formality and hierarchy, any use of humour by a colleague will create a bad impression of the user.

The sociocultural study of Koreans and Korean Americans by Hyun (2001) suggests that Koreans who are younger, and in greater contact with Western ideas, regardless of the geographic location in which they live, hold less traditional (including Confucian) values than those who are older. This means that the age and the level of exposure to non-traditional cultural ideas can influence an individual's cultural values. In this current study, humour provides a lens into these changing cultural values between organizational members of different ages and hierarchical status. Many senior managers in this study suggested that

humour creates a negative impression due to conflict with the aforementioned Confucian values. This perception may be due to age or (organizational) positional differences, but since all three participant companies used a seniority system, it is difficult to identify whether it is age or organizational position that influences such perceptions more. However, this Confucian-based perception was more dominant in Wisepath, where the average age of the senior managers was the highest of the three participant companies in this study. This suggests that the older senior managers may hold stronger Confucian values that influence how they perceive the use of humour in the workplace, resulting in an unfavourable impression of those using humour. Therefore, participants who are younger and are more exposed to non-traditional cultural ideas may perceive the use of humour favourably, leading to a positive impression of humour users in the studied Korean workplaces, whereas the older participants that are more accustomed to the Confucian traditions perceive the use of humour unfavourably, thus changing the impression that an individual develops within the workplace.

6.3.2 Heightened uncertainty

Plester (2009) suggests that humour boundaries are constructed through social processes, thus the boundaries of humour can change, depending on the context in which humour is enacted. Similarly, in this study the idea of changing humour boundaries was suggested and observed in all three participant companies, but with a strong focus on the boundary created by individuals of superior status within the interactions. This boundary creation was described as ambiguous, and '*changes depending on the situation*', and going over the boundary as '*dangerous*'. The acceptable boundaries of humour change in every situation, and organizational members seem to be conscious of not going *'over this line'*. Rather than using humour as a means to test and extend these social boundaries, organizational members often identified the newly set boundaries using other social cues (such as *nunchi*) first. For example, participants suggested that a new set of boundaries were put in place for after-work drinking sessions. While these involved socializing outside the organizational contexts, it was still described as '*dangerous*' to use humour in such occasions. This is because even outside the working hours, Confucian hierarchical relationships still influence the interactions between organizational members, and that even in situations where individuals step out of their organizational positions, they must adhere to societal standards and etiquette under the

Confucian standards of interpersonal relationships (such as those structured by age and gender) (Hwang, 2001).

Participants in Truscene and Wisepath particularly stressed that even within a socializing context the humour boundary is created by individuals of superior status,\. This suggests a different interpretation of humour boundaries, according to the individual's hierarchical status. For example, while a senior manager in Truscene suggested that humour used in after-work drinking sessions is '*changed*' and people can '*lash out more*' in terms of humour, those in subordinate positions did not agree. This means that in the studied Korean workplaces humour seemed, from the superior's perspective, to be able to transgress acceptable workplace boundaries while for those in subordinate positions it was more restricted. This may be due to a complex mixture of organizational and societal norms in Korean workplaces which blur organizational and personal relationships (Chen & Chung, 1994). This extends Plester's (2009a) study of organizational humour boundaries, and provides a contextualized, Confucian interpretation of the relationship between culture and humour. While Plester (2009a) suggests that humour boundaries are influenced by the culture of the organization, particularly the level of formality of the workplace, the current study suggests that in Korean workplaces the Confucian value of formality creates a narrow boundary for humour, especially for individuals of lower hierarchical status. This means that the use of humour by individuals in subordinate positions in these workplaces involves high uncertainty and risk, especially in non-routine situations such as after-work drinking with superiors.

However, individuals of lower hierarchical status my also contribute to setting the boundaries of humour. In this current study, observations from Mintrack suggest that organizational members may establish humour boundaries towards their superiors passively. This is exemplified in the 'stupid Ivory' background image prank (see Chapter Five). In this situation, a mid-level manager changed Ivory's (a young, entry-level staff member) computer background image with the phrase 'stupid Ivory' while she was out of the office. However, upon her return, Ivory did not play along with the joke and simply continued with her work. This instance demonstrates a changing boundary of humour, since Ivory usually responded actively to a superior's humour. Unlaughter is a 'display of not laughing when laughter might be otherwise expected, hoped for or demanded' (Billig, 2005, p. 192). Unlaughter is a purposeful action that conflicts with the social norm (of laughing at the joke), and this non-response implies discontent, and may also criticize the joke and the joker (Butler, 2015). In

the example of 'stupid Ivory' background image prank, unlaughter appeared to be the only method for an individual in a subordinate position within the Confucian organizational context to show her personal boundary for the humour enacted upon her. Unlaughter still maintains the Confucian virtue of silence (Lim, 1999), which creates a low risk for the individual, while simultaneously expressing discontent towards the joke. This is because unlaughter is 'itself a rhetorical presence, speaking volumes of criticism' (Billig, 2005, p.193), and that unlaughter is in itself a significant reaction to the humour instance, which redefines the boundaries of the group (Smith, 2009). However, an individual may become the target of a joke through unlaughter (Butler, 2015) and may also be unnoticed by the joker or the communicating group (Plester, 2016). Not responding to a superior's humour is a risky behaviour which may damage the relationship between the communicators, as it conflicts with her obligation as a subordinate to be obedient to her superior. This suggests that the changing perceptions of humour boundaries create uncertainty.

While the changing perceptions of humour create a challenge to maintaining good relationships between organizational members, another challenge in using humour occurs in interactions outside the physical office. In this current study, participants from all three companies suggested that there is some form of boundary change when communicating outside the workplace. 'Outside' includes boh outside the physical office building and outside working hours. Each participant company had different 'outside the workplace' events. For example, Truscene had various social and educational programmes organized by the company during weekends, while Mintrack had social gatherings in smaller groups of a more personal nature, which frequently involved alcohol after working hours. Wisepath had a mix of company organized events such as yearly overseas trips (a privilege only given to those with a certain level of organizational tenure) and social events such as hiking, which often led also to drinking alcohol. Although each company enjoyed different types of event and outside-the-office gathering, participants in all three companies emphasized the escalated uncertainty of using humour when communicating outside the workplace. Such uncertainty in humour boundaries is consistent with Plester's (2007) findings, in that boundaries of humour and organizational culture can change particularly for off-site events and when drinking alcohol. This means that cultural expectations and boundaries change along with the contextual (physical) change, and can be negotiated (Martin, Frost, & O'Neill, 2006).

It is suggested that Confucian-based cultures such as those in Korea and China involve a definite contrast between the formal and informal domains (after work hours) (Yang et al.,

2015). While these informal environments are more important in interpersonal relationship development, this relaxed atmosphere drives leaders to behave more casually such as voluntarily becoming the target of fun activities (Fang, 2012; Yang, 2014). This means that the change of attitudes by the leader or superior is the key to the change in humour boundaries in informal settings, and this is consistent with the findings of this current study. Therefore, the boundaries of humour change according to the physical context, and also depend on the individuals of superior status within the humour interactions. However, such constant change of humour boundaries and the hierarchical relationship structure between organizational members means that the level of uncertainty in using humour may be heightened in the studied Korean workplaces, especially for those at lower hierarchical levels. The emotional aspects of this process are discussed next.

6.3.3 Emotional impact of humour

The positive emotional effect of humour has been emphasized in many studies (e.g. Samson & Gross, 2012). This emotional impact of humour is important in organizational studies, as the feeling of enjoyment and happiness that humour creates can be used as a communication strategy between organizational members, in order for individuals to fit in and develop workplace relationships (Martin, 2004). Individuals may also use humour to manage their own emotions, by indirectly expressing their minds and releasing stress (Freud, 1960). Similarly, participants in the current study suggested that humour helps to release tension and stress, but also creates adverse emotional effects such as anxiety and hurt feelings. These responses came mainly from research participants in lower hierarchical positions. For example, one of the youngest members in Mintrack expressed her '*worry*' about the humour used by her superiors. This victim showed a complicated mix of emotions, of feeling relieved that she was included within the workplace interaction, but also hurt by being the target of humour and her inability, due to her low hierarchical status, to respond truthfully to others about her feelings.

Smith and Powell's (1988) study suggests that a superior's use of disparaging humour towards subordinates is not perceived as a good method to relieve tension, but is rather disliked by the subordinates. This means that such use of humour by superiors may be considered aggressive (and not '*just humour*') and may damage subordinates' emotions and their relationships with subordinates regardless of the intentions of the superior. As Smith

and Powell's (1988) findings on humour effects are based on the hierarchical (positional) difference between organizational members, this means for cultural contexts (such as Confucian contexts) which have greater underlying hierarchical differences between individuals, the damaging impact of humour may be more dramatic. This emotional impact of humour may be greater on those in subordinate positions due to the social power that superiors have over subordinates in Confucian contexts. Richman, Flaherty, and Rospenda's (1996) study suggests that a supervisor's aggressive humour may cause stress and lead to mental health and behavioural problems among employees. While this phenomenon is not necessarily limited to Confucian contexts, in relationships of imbalanced power such as superior-subordinate relationships, those with less power are dependent on the superior, and this constrains them from aggressively expressing discontent even towards poor treatment by those of more power (Tepper et al., 2009). Thus, when a supervisor communicates aggressive humour towards a subordinate, the subordinate subjected to the humour cannot take revenge because they still depend on the supervisor (Langan-Fox, Cooper, & Klimoski, 2007). Therefore, humour interactions involving aggressive humour by a superior may create only distress rather than enjoyment for the subordinates.

Observations from this study suggest that the emotional damage or stress subordinates receive from humour interactions with a superior depends on the hierarchical difference between the communicating individuals. This means that the potential stress an entry-level member feels from sharing humour with the CEO is different to that felt when interacting with a manager. As many Korean organizations use a seniority system, this also means that the level of stress gained in a humour interaction may be influenced by age differences. For example, a young, entry-level member at Mintrack explained that it is stressful to respond to the CEO's humour, as '*he is the CEO*' and that '*it might be the age difference*'. Although it is not clear whether it is the organizational hierarchy or age difference that influences the level of stress experienced by subordinates, organizational members in this current study perceived humour interactions with those of greater status to be more stressful.

Inglehart and Baker (2000) suggest that regardless of the level of economic development within a society, traditions and cultural heritage such as those of Confucianism still influence the values of the people. In particular, the Confucian value of harmony is still strongly endorsed by the younger members of the Korean society (Zhang et al., 2005). This means while the younger organizational members within the studied Korean workplaces may take a different view towards organizational humour, they still value the importance of maintaining

harmony within the workplace. As the younger workers still value harmony, it may be difficult for these younger individuals to argue their perspective to the superiors, as it may potentially create conflicts with those in higher hierarchical positions. Therefore, organizational members of lower hierarchical status are placed in an ambiguous position where the different cultural values of their superiors create distress for them. The different perceptions of humour and the hierarchical roles in the workplace mean that humour interactions may be a catalyst that shows a divide between the organizational members, and provides an insight to the changing cultural values in Korean workplaces.

6.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a discussion of the key findings using the current study's data. The findings suggest that humour provides an insight to the dilemma experienced by the organizational members within the studied Korean workplaces, as humour interactions created a conflict between traditional Confucianism and Western perspectives. The humour used illustrates the confusion and ambiguity experienced by organizational members, and the findings show the impact of these humour processes for organizational members in different hierarchical positions.

The humour used within the studied workplaces reinforced the Confucian values of formality, harmony, and hierarchy. While humour was perceived to damage the formality required between organizational members, it was still used between the organizational members to maintain harmony and hierarchy, and to protect *chemyon* (face). Humour helped to maintain different Confucian values and hierarchical relationships between organizational members. These traditional values were especially stressed and reinforced by the senior members who held higher hierarchical status.

However, humour also highlighted the changing values within the studied Korean workplaces. Similarly to Western organizational contexts, humour helped to develop interpersonal relationships within the studied Korean workplaces. Most organizational members suggested that humour helps to develop intimate family-like relationships between the communicators, consistent with the familial relationships promoted within Confucian-based groups. In contrast, some organizational members suggested that the intimate relationships developed through sharing humour are more political and workplace-oriented, rather than family-

oriented, and thus suggested a changing perception of the nature of interpersonal relationships.

Humour also helped organizational members to break away from their relational (hierarchical) roles within the collective workplace group, and to develop independent identities. The use of humour also divided the organizational members into different hierarchy and age groups, as their perceptions of humour differed between different groups. While the older and senior members displayed a more patriarchal, Confucian-based approach to humour which limited its use by those with lower hierarchical status, the younger and more junior members were more open to the use of humour in the workplace. Organizational members also used humour to show their perceptions of gender roles, and this also created a divide between the gender groups. The older and more senior male members used gendered humour to present the Confucian perception of (unequal) gender roles, while female members felt discomfort due to the gendered humour. However, female members did not express their discomfort, as that might have been perceived as a challenge to the superiors and to harmony in the workplace.

This chapter concluded by discussing the impact of humour and the changing values of the organizational members within the studied Korean workplaces. Individuals in lower hierarchical positions were most impacted by the different perceptions of humour, and this often created a negative impression for individuals, regardless of their intentions. Furthermore, the different attitudes to using humour created high risks and uncertainty in engaging in humour interactions. This uncertainty was heightened when organizational members interacted outside the physical workplace and also outside working hours. When sharing humour with a superior, organizational members with low hierarchical status experienced distress due to the high level of uncertainty, but also because they were unable to respond actively towards the superior's humour, thus creating discomfort. The hierarchical relationship structure in the Korean workplaces limits how subordinates communicate in a humour interaction, yet humour still allows organizational members to display, to a certain extent, their changing cultural values away from the traditional Confucianism.

The next chapter concludes this thesis by recapping the key findings of this current research. Then the contributions, limitations, and practical implications are discussed, followed by suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Chapter Seven concludes this thesis by providing a summary of the important findings identified in the current research. The key findings which answer the research question, *what is the relationship between Confucianism and humour in organizations, and what might this relationship tell us about, not just South Korean organizations, but the role of organizational humour in a global world?* is discussed, and the specific contributions the research makes to the fields of organizational humour and Korean Confucianism in organizational contexts are also explained. Then the limitations identified in conducting the research are discussed, and the thesis concludes by detailing ideas that could be developed in future research.

7.1 Key findings

Humour is a contextual phenomenon that may influence the quality of interpersonal relationships. This current research illustrates how Confucian values influence the use of humour in Korean organizations. However, the research also shows that the cultural values of the organizational members in the studied Korean workplaces are changing, from traditional Confucianism towards Westernized values and relationships in the workplace, particularly among younger workers.

Traditional Confucian values are considered an important factor in maintaining organizational relationships within the studied workplaces. Humour used by the organizational members reinforces the Confucian values of formality, hierarchy, and harmony (Yao, 2000) within all three participant companies. In particular, the Confucian value of formality creates high levels of ambiguity for organizational members. This is because the value of formality creates a perception that humour is unsuitable within these work contexts. However, this perception is mostly reinforced at lower hierarchical levels, and is dependent on the relational position of the individual. Therefore, humour is still enacted within the workplaces, but is highly dependent on the hierarchical position of the communicators.

Harmony is another Confucian value that was constantly reinforced through the use of humour in the studied workplaces. The use of humour helps organizational members to

avoid direct conflict and to maintain peace between individuals, while harmony is also achieved by maintaining the hierarchical relationships between organizational members. By using humour to reinforce the roles of superiors and subordinates, each organizational member performs their relational role within the workplace, in accordance with Confucian traditions and unequal relationship structures. In this process, humour by superiors is considered as a sign of care towards the subordinates, and subordinates are expected to provide adequate reactions to the superior's humour, as a sign of respect and politeness. However, the use of humour does not always cultivate harmony between organizational members, and it is suggested that the concept of *nunchi* is an important non-verbal communication skill that is needed to develop good relationships and harmony in the workplace.

Chemyon (face) is another important aspect of using humour in the studied workplaces. Organizational members use humour to maintain their *chemyon* regardless of their hierarchical positions, but humour is most often employed for this purpose by individuals of higher status. *Chemyon* is maintained through humour in two ways. Organizational members use humour to disparage other members of relationally lower status, and to reinforce their superior positions within the workplace. Humour is also used in situations where *chemyon* is damaged, and helps individuals to divert attention from the embarrassing moment and to 'laugh it off', and thus saving their *chemyon*.

Consistent with Cooper's (2008) relational process model, organizational members in all three companies suggest that humour helps to develop the quality of interpersonal relationships. However, this current research also suggests that the nature of interpersonal relationships within the studied workplaces is changing. It is suggested that the traditional family-like relationship develops through the sharing of humour, as organizational members perceive that humour interactions create a feeling of intimacy close to that of personal friendship (between individuals of same hierarchical status) and family (between individuals of different hierarchical status). In contrast, some organizational members perceive that humour helps to develop work-specific relationships that concern the political aspects of workplace relationships. This response is mainly derived from the younger organizational members, and illustrates a changing perception and development of relationships within the organizations.

Constructing independence and an identity separate from the collective workplace group is another factor emphasized through humour. Key members within the studied workplaces are considered to have a separate identity from the collective group, enabling them to craft a sense of independence and freedom from the group's norms. The use of humour helps individuals to break away temporarily from the hierarchical relationship structures of the studied workplaces, and to create a unique status for the individual rather than as a member of the group.

The use of humour is also different according to the hierarchical status and age of the individual. Most organizational members in senior positions (who are also older in age due to the seniority system) often consider humour to be unsuitable for use within the workplace, especially by those in lower hierarchical positions. However, organizational members in junior positions (who are also younger) perceive the use of humour more favourably, although most are still careful in using humour in the workplace, as they are conscious of their superiors' perceptions. Therefore, perceptions of the use of humour create a divide according to hierarchy.

Organizational members also show changing perceptions of gender roles through the use of humour. The older and senior male managers often suggest a traditional gender role through humour, and the younger and junior members accept such humour. However, the younger members also display discomfort in this use of humour in the workplace, and suggest a different and changing perception of gender roles.

The changing values and perceptions of the organizational members create inconsistent impressions of individuals using humour. While individuals holding strong traditional Confucian perspectives perceive others who use humour unfavourably, individuals with more Western (or less traditional) perspectives perceive those using humour favourably.

The boundaries of humour change according to the context in which the humour is enacted, and these boundaries are highly dependent on the communicator with the most superior status within the interacting group. While superiors are less conscious of the boundaries of humour, subordinates are extremely careful concerning the boundary created by the superior. Subordinates sometimes signal their boundaries of humour to their superior, but less confidently, for example using unlaughter to show their discomfort. This boundary of humour becomes more uncertain when interacting outside the physical workplace. The

ambiguity in interacting with individuals who share work-based relationships within a non-workplace social context escalates the uncertainty of using humour.

Organizational members in all three companies perceive that some humour creates positive emotions and decreases stress for individuals. However, humour also creates emotional distress, especially for those of lower hierarchical status. The uncertainty in using humour creates stress for these organizational members, and the humour used by superiors often escalates this stress. This is because the hierarchical differences between organizational members create an expectation that individuals of higher status can use humour freely, yet those of lower status must accept their superior's humour. However, some organizational members of lower hierarchical status are starting to perceive that it is unjust to be forced to accept their superiors' distressing humour. This suggests a change in cultural values, and a move away from the traditional Confucianism which emphasizes the hierarchical relationships between individuals.

7.2 Contribution

This current research provides important contributions to the areas of organizational humour and Korean Confucianism in organizations. The majority of past qualitative research on organizational humour is based on Western contexts (such as Collinson, 1988, 2002; and Plester, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2015, 2016) and does not offer in-depth cultural perspectives that is the basis of this current research. The current research expands the organizational humour literature, and offers a new contribution to the field by exploring humour from a Confucian perspective, in a Confucian context. This is important because humour is a contextual phenomenon, and investigating the influence of different cultural perspectives on humour in the workplace helps us to further understand the role of humour in diverse workplace settings.

Although within organizational studies there has been an increasing level of interest in examining humour, this current research helps to explicate the important role of humour within Confucian organizational contexts. Previously, Confucianism and humour have been considered incompatible and indeed seen as conflicting. The use of humour has been considered to relate more to Taoism than to Confucianism, especially within East Asian organizational contexts (Yue, 2014). In previous literature, therefore, Confucianism and humour have been portrayed as opposites, and Confucian values such as harmony, respect for

hierarchy, and *chemyon* (saving face) (i.e. Bradney, 1957) within Korean organizations have not been linked with humour. This current study shows that across the spectrum of formal to more Westernized organizations, all of the studied Korean organizations use humour, not just in spite of Confucianism but in fact to protect and honour it. This causes ambiguity to be experienced by the Korean workers, and means that Korean workers must walk a precarious tightrope in humour, given that humour can easily subvert exactly what they want to protect, such as their identity and harmony. Therefore, this thesis brings out the unexpected capacity of humour to both support and challenge traditional (Confucian) and contemporary values and ethics. This role of humour in Confucian organizations contributes to the field of organizational humour, and extends the literature by helping us to understand how humour is used within non-Western organizational contexts. Although past humour studies already explore the diverse roles and risks in sharing humour in the workplace (e.g. Plester, 2016), this current research highlights that humour needs to play two contradictory roles in Korean organizations: to protect Confucian ideals and to create normative individual and organizational dynamics.

In particular, findings from this research provide insights to how humour may help to extend and break down hierarchical barriers within Confucian organizational contexts. This research suggests that humour may help to blur organizational hierarchy between individuals. However, this is only one part of the hierarchical relationship existing between organizational members within Korean workplaces, as Korean organizational relationships are structured similar to that of a Confucian family (Deuchler, 1992) and are subject to two dimensions of hierarchy (societal and organizational). This contributes to the existing humour literature by extending the role of humour in hierarchical relationships (Cooper, 2008) in a multi-dimensional manner.

The findings from this current research also contribute to the humour literature by providing insights about humour as a social process in Korean organizations. To the researcher's knowledge, the idea of *nunchi* (Jin & Hyun, 2014; Kim, 2003; Rijn et al., 2006) has not been investigated in organizational humour studies. This current research highlights *nunchi* as an important part of enacting humour in these workplaces, where the non-verbal communication skill of *nunchi* is considered as a crucial part of sharing humour successfully. In the studied Korean workplaces, *nunchi* is suggested to be a catalyst to the successful use of humour and reduction of the the risk of humour damaging the relationships between communicators. This study therefore introduces the idea of *nunchi* to the field of organizational humour studies.

In comparison with other Confucian-based contexts such as China and Japan (e.g. Yue et al., 2016), studies based on Korean workplaces are limited. This current study provides insights into the social processes within Korean organizations, and the emerging changes in the cultural values of Korean organizational members. Broadly, this is consistent with Ingelhart's (1997) findings, but provides further understanding of how Korean people are changing through the humour used by individuals of different age groups in the workplace. This research suggests that organizational members may be slowly moving away from traditional Confucian ideals, and this process is creating a divide between individuals of different organizational hierarchical levels and age groups. This contributes to understanding organizational behaviour in Korean workplace contexts, which has implications for understanding organizational humour in a global context. Such understandings may increase harmony and the quality of interpersonal relationships at work.

Lastly, findings from this research help to understand the complex cultural dimensions of Asian contexts which are influenced by Confucianism. Although different contexts may have developed diverse interpretations towards the Confucian philosophy, cultures which value hierarchy and therefore use different communication processes based on a hierarchical relationship structure (such as Korea, Japan and China) may be understood further based on the findings from this research.

7.3 Practical implications

Practical implications from this current research include the development of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in a multicultural context. The findings from the research may help to develop HRM practices which inform and accommodate organizational members from Confucian-based cultural backgrounds. Understanding different cultural perspectives and humour will help organizational members to communicate and interact with other members appropriately. Training programmes may be developed from such knowledge to enhance teamwork within culturally diverse groups, particularly when working in geographically distant locations.

Cross-cultural management practices may also be developed from the findings of this research. The findings may help larger multi-national organizations to understand the potential problems that they may experience when entering Confucian-based cultures. New

organizational practices and protocols may be developed in order to accommodate the hierarchical relationship structure and communication styles of Confucian-based cultures. In particular, the communication-related issues within hierarchical relationships which may be unfamiliar to organizational members of Western-based workplaces may be identified and avoided through this process. Similarly, cross-cultural knowledge and training may be developed especially for expatriates. This may be useful as in Western cultural contexts humour is commonly perceived as a good communication medium which helps to manage organizational members (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006) and to develop interpersonal relationships effectively (Cooper, 2008). This research may help expatriates attempting to blend in with the locals, which may create unexpected (negative) consequences, to take care in using humour in Confucian-based contexts.

Findings from this research may also help to manage workers in inter-cultural settings, such as those within Korean workplaces. Cultural training and awareness is also important in contexts experiencing cultural change. Analysis of humour has helped to gain insights into the changing cultural values in Korean organizations, especially between those in different age groups. Providing sufficient information and developing training programmes to understand the changing values and communication processes between workers will help to enhance work processes and relationships, both within and across organizational hierarchy.

7.4 Limitations

This current research has various limitations, and the discussed findings must be considered with regard to these limitations. The limitations relate to the generalizability of these findings, the time spent in each company, the number of companies studied, bias from the researcher, the presence of the researcher, and the lack of ethnic diversity of the participants.

The nature of this qualitative, ethnographic-approach based research means that the findings are not generalizable to all Korean organizations. The findings represent the views of the current research's participants and companies only, which may differ from those in other Korean organizations. The goal of this research is to explore the relationship between humour and Confucianism within Korean workplaces in depth, and to extend the knowledge gained rather than to generalize the findings across other Korean organizations.

A period of one month was spent in each of the participating companies. However, further insights might have been gained through spending more time there. Furthermore, this current research investigates only three companies. As time and other practical issues limit the number of companies studied, researching a larger number of companies might have provided broader understanding of the relationships between humour and Confucianism within Korean workplaces. In contrast, studying one company for a longer period of time (longitudinal study) might have provided more depth in the findings of this current research. However, this idea was carefully considered in the earlier phase of research design, where examining a range of companies and analysing the similarities and differences in humour and Confucian values was considered as the main objective for the research. This research design offered a wide range of ideas to further understand organizational humour and Confucianism.

All of the data for this current research were collected by the researcher, and the characteristics of the researcher influenced the data collected and the results gained from these data. Access to information may have been affected by the demographic characteristics of the researcher, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and education. For example, some of the male humour shared within the participant companies could not be accessed by the researcher, due to her gender (female). Being highly educated also may have affected the data collected as it influenced the way the researcher communicated. Furthermore, the high educational background of the researcher may potentially have damaged the face of some of the participants, for individuals who are strongly influenced by the Confucian value of education and learning (relating to concept of '*chih*') (Deuchler, 1992; Yao, 2000) may feel a sense of shame for being less qualified than the researcher. Although the ethnic background (Korean) of the researcher helped in gaining access to social interactions with other participants, some lack of cultural understanding may have created limitations in the collecting of data. As the researcher is ethnically Korean but was educated in New Zealand for a lengthy period of time, the cultural norms and language used may have been different to those of the local Korean participants. This difference may have impacted the outcomes in conversational settings such as during interviews and other interactions with the participants. Although these cultural and demographic characteristics of the researcher could not be changed, their potential impacts were recognized, and the researcher attempted to avoid these problems by behaving and dressing similarly to the local participants. For example, organizational members in two participant companies were highly sensitive to fashion (especially for female members), and

therefore the researcher accommodated by dressing like other local Koreans who were more 'in trend'.

This current research is a qualitative study, and thus the researcher is the main 'tool' in collecting and analysing data. As the researcher's own beliefs and interpretations are embedded as part of the research process, the findings may be subjective. However, qualitative research was the most appropriate approach to investigating the topic of humour and Confucianism. The researcher made continuous efforts to recognize the subjectivity of the research during data collection, by separating observation notes from personal reflective notes, and by attempting to collect verbatim data wherever possible. At the analysis stage, the research position and the world view of the researcher were clearly stated to position the interpreted data, while the supervisory team also reviewed the analysis process in order to minimize this limitation.

The presence of the researcher may have influenced some of the results, as the researcher actively interacted and participated within each of the researched companies. However, this is recognized as a part of the research methodology, where the researcher is considered as a part of the studied context rather than as an objective outsider (Alvesson, 2010). Furthermore, the researcher attempted to observe quietly during working hours in order to minimize the disruption she created. This helped the participants to display normal everyday behaviour. However, some participants performed humour in the first few days of the observation, as a conscious effort to display humour to the researcher. This is a potential limitation in the research, but such behaviour subsided quite quickly due to their work tasks and responsibilities. Most of the performed humour incidents were remarked by the participants themselves in verbal statements that '*this is to show you our humour*' or invitations to the researcher to record the humour that they were about to share. When situations such as these did arise, the researcher asked other participants whether such behaviour was normal, or was an unusual and staged act.

The last potential limitation of this current research is that almost all of the participants are ethnically Korean. Therefore, there is a lack of diversity in ethnicity of the participants, which may limit the understanding of Confucian influences on using humour in Korean workplaces. Furthermore, as Korean workplaces are increasingly becoming diversified (in terms of ethnicity), the current study may be limited in fully exploring the humour process within Korean workplaces, which may be considered in future research.

7.5 Future research

Diverse cultural influences could be explored in more depth in future research. Since the participants in this current research are ethnically homogenous, future research could investigate Korean organizations with more ethnic diversification. This will also help to reflect the current trend in the wider Korean society where the population is increasingly diversifying, towards a more ethnically heterogeneous society (Kim, 2009; Kwon, 2003).

Age and hierarchical aspects are complicated, and are important influences on the use of humour in the studied Korean workplaces. However, due to the seniority system maintained by all three participant companies, it is difficult to separate the idea of age and organizational hierarchy. Therefore, future research could investigate the influence of age and organizational hierarchy independently, in order to gain further insights into the area of the relationship between the Confucian value of hierarchy, and humour.

Gender emerged as another potential influence on humour and the Confucian values held by organizational members, and future research may focus on the area of gender to deepen the understanding further. Gender is a broad but highly discussed organizational topic, and discussing the relationship between humour, gender, and Confucianism in depth may offer further insights into the field.

The influence of linguistic terms such as honorifics and titles and humour may also offer opportunities for future investigations. The formality and relational title continuum (Figure 5) could be extended in other Korean organizations to examine the influence of different titles and honorifics in humour interactions.

Organizational culture is another area that may be explored further in future research, where in this current research, different artefacts represented the culture (either more traditional or modern-Western) of the organization (Schein, 2010). These may be explored further in order to understand the relationship between the more organizational-specific culture and humour in Korean workplaces.

Investigating different forms of organizations and workforces such as those in self-employment and the gig economy (Mulcahy, 2016) may also be important for future research. This research focussed on full time workers, but the increase of part-time and fixed-term workers may construct different forms of organizational relationships and communication processes, and thus may be an area which requires further research.

7.6 Laughing in harmony

The findings from this current research suggest that humour signals and provides insights into the changing values of organizational members within Korean workplaces. Humour is an important part of work life, and usually provides enjoyment to people at work. However, Confucian-based ideals somewhat restrain the use of humour, particularly for individuals in lower hierarchical positions. These studied companies suggest that Korean workplaces may be changing in response to Western influences. Changes in interactions are seen in younger workers, who are more willing to engage in humorous interactions, although humour is often limited by those in senior positions. A Korean proverb suggests why the process of humour permeating Korean workplaces may be slow and incremental: '*the quality of the downstream waters depends on the quality of the upstream water*' (*윗물이 맑아야 아랫물이 맑다*).

Appendix A. Participant Information Sheet- Organization

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND
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School of Business

THE UNIVERSITY
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The University of Auckland

Private Bag 92019

Auckland, New Zealand

Participant Information Sheet (Chief Executive Officer)

Project title: Laughing in the workplace: Cross-cultural humour and social processes. A multiple case study in New Zealand and South Korea.

The Researchers: Heesun Kim, Dr. Barbara Plester, and Dr. Brigid Carroll

Dear "Participant":

Research Introduction

My name is Heesun Kim, I am a PhD student in the Department of Management and International Business, at the University of Auckland. I am conducting research into how workplace humour is used across different cultures because of the fast globalizing workplaces.

Research description and invitation

The research aims to develop insight into how humour is used in the workplace in relation to the national and organizational culture. This project will also aim to inform practitioners, future researchers and managers about the potential influences of humour on cross-cultural management. Obtaining data from individuals with first-hand experience is therefore particularly important for these purposes. I am inviting all organizational members from (the

participating organization) to participate in a face-to-face interview, and a one month observation of their daily behaviour within the organization, concerning the use of humour, because I believe your organization will be essential in helping to understand the use of workplace humour across different cultures. As the CEO of (the participating organization), could you or a nominated person please invite suitable employees, if not all, to volunteer as observation and interview participants and provide them with the participant information sheet (for individuals) and my contact details?

Research procedures

The observations will take place on (the participating organization) premises during normal business hours and in any after-hours functions that researcher may be invited to, for a duration of 1 month. The interviews will take place on (the participating organization) premises during normal business hours, or at a place and time most convenient to the participants. The participants would need to set aside approximately 30 minutes for the discussion. The interview will cover individual demography, organizational culture, humour use, humour experience and worker relationships.

Data storage/retention/destruction/future use

The interview will be recorded on a digital audio recorder. Observations made will be recorded in a written note form. The interview will be transcribed by the researcher or by a professional transcription service, which has signed a confidentiality agreement. If the interview is conducted in a language other than English, the interview will be translated by the researcher or by a professional translator, which has signed a confidentiality agreement. The recording will be erased after transcription and the transcription itself will be kept in a locked file in The University of Auckland Business School and destroyed after six years. Any hard copy will be sent to a professional confidential document destruction agency. All data will be presented in an aggregate manner to ensure that no individual person can be identified.

Right to withdraw

The participation of your organization is, of course, voluntary. Should any person your organization identifies as being a potential participant decide to decline to participate or decide to withdraw from the research we require your assurance that their employment will be unaffected by such decision. You can withdraw the participation of your organization at any time within the next 14 days after signing the consent form.

Confidentiality

No information will be reported in a way that identifies individuals in your organization, or your organization as a source, and will only be used for academic research purposes.

I very much hope that you will agree to participate in this research project and thank you for your cooperation.

Contact Details for the Researcher, Supervisor, and Head of Department

Researcher

Heesun Kim

PhD Student in Management

Department of Management and International Business

The University of Auckland

Phone: 021 210 7232 (NZ)

      031 781 4726 (Korea) (subject to change)

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Supervisors

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Dr. Brigid Carroll

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Head of Department

Professor Nigel Haworth

Department of Management and International Business

The University of Auckland

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For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact:

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 3737599 ext. 87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz.

Appendix B. Consent Form- Organization

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND
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The University of Auckland

Private Bag 92019

Auckland, New Zealand

CONSENT FORM (Chief Executive Officer)

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Project title: Laughing in the workplace: Cross-cultural humour and social processes. A multiple case study in New Zealand and South Korea.

The Researchers: Heesun Kim, Dr. Barbara Plester, and Dr. Brigid Carroll

- As the principal representative/contact for this research within my organization, I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and understand the nature of this research, and why my organization has been selected. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered to my satisfaction.
- I agree to allow access to individuals in my organization, invite suitable candidates to volunteer as observation and interview participants and email the potential research participant the invitation and details of the project.

I understand that:

- All those members of my organization, including myself, who are participating in the research, will be observed and interviewed only after they give formal consent on consent forms.

- I agree that the observation will be held for one month.
- I agree that the employees have the right to have their participation or non-participation kept confidential, and the right to have the content of their participation confidential to themselves and the researcher.
- I guarantee that the employment status of individuals who decline to participate or withdraw from participation will not be affected.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw the participation of my organization at any time, and to withdraw any data traceable to the organization up to 14 days following the 1 month period of observation and interviews.
- All data and information relating to this research will be separately and securely stored on university premises for six years then destroyed.
- I understand that the information provided will be treated confidentially, and no identifiable reference will be made to me, or any of the project participants, in any publication.
- I understand that my organization will not be identified in any publication.
- I agree to keep all of the project participants' names confidential.
- I <u>wish/ do not wish</u> to receive the summary of findings.

Name and Organization _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C. Participant Information Sheet- Individual

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND
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The University of Auckland

Private Bag 92019

Auckland, New Zealand

Participant Information Sheet (Individuals)

Project title: Laughing in the workplace: Cross-cultural humour and social processes. A multiple case study in New Zealand and South Korea.

The Researchers: Heesun Kim, Dr. Barbara Plester, and Dr. Brigid Carroll

Dear "Participant":

Research Introduction

My name is Heesun Kim, I am a PhD student in the Department of Management and International Business, at the University of Auckland. I am conducting research into how workplace humour is used across different cultures because of the fast globalizing workplaces.

Research description and invitation

The research aims to develop insight into how humour is used in the workplace in relation to the national and organizational culture. This project will also aim to inform practitioners, future researchers and managers about the potential influences of humour on cross-cultural management. Obtaining data from individuals with first-hand experience is therefore particularly important for these purposes. I am inviting all organizational members (invited by the CEO or a nominated person) from (the participating organization) to participate in a face-to-face interview, and a one month observation of your daily behaviour within the organization, concerning the use of humour. Your involvement will be essential in helping to understand the use of workplace humour across cultures.

Research procedures

The observations will take place on (the participating organization) premises during normal business hours and in any after-hours functions that researcher may be invited to, for a duration of 1 month. The interviews will take place on (the participating organization) premises during normal business hours, but interviews may be arranged at a place and time most suitable for you. You would need to set aside approximately 30 minutes for the discussion. The interview will cover individual demography, organizational culture, humour use, humour experience and worker relationships.

Data storage/retention/destruction/future use

The interview will be recorded on a digital audio recorder, and you may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time without giving a reason. Observations made will be recorded in a hand-written note form, and due to the nature of observations, you cannot have the observation data related to your specific behaviour to be deleted during your participation or after withdrawing from the study. The interview will be transcribed by the researcher or by a professional transcription service, which has signed a confidentiality agreement. If the interview is conducted in a language other than English, the interview will be translated by the researcher or by a professional translator, which has signed a confidentiality agreement. The recording will be erased after transcription and the transcription itself will be kept in a locked file in The University of Auckland Business School and destroyed after six years. Any hard copy will be sent to a professional confidential document destruction agency. A summary of the results will be provided to you and data will be presented in an aggregate manner to ensure that no individual person can be identified. The confidentiality of data is guaranteed.

Right to withdraw

Your participation is, of course, voluntary. Although the CEO or a nominated person has invited you as a potential participant, should you decide not to participate, or withdraw from the study, the CEO has assured us that this will not affect your employment status. As your participation is voluntary, you may terminate your participation and withdraw your interview data at any time within 14 days after the interview. However, you cannot withdraw your observation data once the observation has been completed.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality is guaranteed. No information will be reported in a way that identifies you as a source, and will only be used for academic research purposes. Although the observations and interviews will be conducted at (the participating organization) during normal business hours, which can potentially lead to other employees knowing who is participating, there will be no reference made to any individual participants within any publication to protect confidentiality.

Incidental findings

It is possible that during the interview incidental findings might emerge. If this occurs I will inform the interview participant about these findings and exclude them from the research results. I will also recommend employment relations consultation services should I require them. Incidental findings will also be kept in complete privacy and confidentiality.

I very much hope that you will agree to participate in this research project and thank you for your cooperation.

Contact Details for the Researcher, Supervisor, and Head of Department

Researcher

Heesun Kim

PhD Student in Management

Department of Management and International Business

The University of Auckland

Phone: 021 210 7232 (NZ)

      031 781 4726 (Korea) (subject to change)

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Supervisors

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For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact:

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Appendix D. Consent Form- Individual

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The University of Auckland

Private Bag 92019

Auckland, New Zealand

CONSENT FORM (Individuals)

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Project title: Laughing in the workplace: Cross-cultural humour and social processes. A multiple case study in New Zealand and South Korea.

The Researchers: Heesun Kim, Dr. Barbara Plester, and Dr. Brigid Carroll

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research.

- I will participate in the observation research, but I am not obliged to answer any particular question. Should I feel uncomfortable during an interaction with the researcher, I can refuse to communicate at any time without giving a reason.

- The observation will take approximately 1 month.

- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time, and to withdraw any data traceable to me up to 14 days following the completion of the 1 month observation.

- I <u>will/ will not</u> participate in a face-to-face interview.

- If I do participate in a face-to-face interview, I am not obliged to answer any particular question. Should I feel uncomfortable during the interview, I can ask for

the recorder to be turned off at any time without giving a reason. Following the interview the recorded interview will then be transcribed and translated (if conducted in a language other than English) by the researcher or by a professional transcription or translation service, which has signed a confidentiality agreement.

- The interview will take approximately 30 minutes

- I understand that my CEO has issued an assurance that should I decline participation or withdraw from the research my employment status will be unaffected.

- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time, and to withdraw any data traceable to me up to 14 days following the interview

- I understand if incidental findings occur during the observation and interview, the researcher will inform me of these findings and exclude them from the research results. The researcher will also recommend employment relations consultation services should I require them. Incidental findings will also be kept in privacy and confidentiality.

- Following transcription and translation, the digital recording will be erased. All other data and information relating to this research will be separately and securely stored on university premises for six years, after which they will be destroyed.

- Information provided will be treated confidentially, and no identifiable reference will be made to me or my organization in any publication.

- I wish/ do not wish to receive the summary of findings.

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

If you would like to receive a summary of findings, please include your email address here:

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ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 16/12/2013 FOR (3) YEARS REFERENCE NUMBER 010881

Appendix E. Transcriber confidentiality agreement

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TRANSCRIBER'S CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Project title: Laughing in the workplace: Cross-cultural humour and social processes. A multiple case study in New Zealand and South Korea.

The Researchers: Heesun Kim, Dr. Barbara Plester, and Dr. Brigid Carroll.

Transcriber: _____

I understand that the information contained on the digital devices which you have given to

me and/or will give to me is confidential.

I agree to transcribe this information for the above research project.

I agree to maintain the confidentiality of this information. I will not disclose it in any fashion

to any person other than to the researchers or persons authorised by the researchers.

Following the completion of the transcription, I will immediately return the digital devices

and the hard copy transcripts to the researchers and I will destroy any copies or versions that I

may have made.

Signed:_____

Name:_____

Date:_____

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Appendix F. Interview schedule

This interview will cover individual demography, humour use, humour experience, worker relationships, organizational culture, and influence of Confucian culture.

Demographics

1. Ethnicity, age, gender, tenure (how long have you worked for? Role? Any other related information?)
2. Which 'national' culture do you consider yourself to identify with?

Humour use

1. How do you feel about using humour in the workplace? (Explain the word humour)
2. What style of humour (positive/negative) do you use? How frequently?
3. How is humour generally shared at work? What's appropriate/ not appropriate?
4. Does the company culture affect the humour used? How?
5. How does humour differ in formal/ informal settings?
6. Any humour shared online between workers? For example, through email, online communities, or SNS? If so, is this limited to specific groups?
7. How is humour shared with individuals of similar/dissimilar demographics as you?
8. Do you think the 'Korean culture' influence these behaviours? Do these ever seem apparent/ feel conscious about it?

Humour experience and worker relationship

1. Do you create humour, or experience humour created by others, or both?
2. When you are sharing humour, how do you feel towards the other communicating person(s)?
3. What sort of experience did sharing humour create? Does the type of humour used affect this experience?
4. Did humour affect your openness with the communicating individual? Why?
5. Did humour affect your perception of hierarchical difference with the communicating individual? Why?

6. How do you joke with the boss? Is it different to how you joke with your peer/work colleagues? How do you feel? Anything to avoid? Example?

Organizational culture

1. Describe the organizational culture. Are there any examples that may represent the company's organizational culture?
2. How would you describe 'fun'? Do you think 'fun' is an important part of work? What is it like in your workplace?
3. Describe any formal/informal groups or teams that you are a part of at work.
4. What do most people around here think about how these groups are arranged?
5. Describe any instances or events that encourage or discourage these groupings
6. Do you think these organizational characteristics are typical in Korean organizations?

Confucian culture

1. Do you think Confucianism is a part of the Korean culture?
2. Do you think Confucianism influence how you interact with other workers?
3. Do you think Confucianism influence how you create and experience humour?
4. Do you think there has been a change in humour use—traditional/ recent?
5. Do you think specific Confucian values impact how humour is used and who it is shared with?

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