Systematic use of humour in HR training concepts – an example of the Diversity Icebreaker

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1. Introduction

Humour is a universal psychological phenomenon emerging in many forms across cultures, social contexts, situations and individual differences among people. Already the frequency of its occurrences in every day's life – also professional and work-related – and the apparent urge to experience humour that most of us feel, are reasons enough to presume that it is an important element of the social life worth investigating.

However, humour went largely understudied in both social sciences in general as well as in management and organizational lines of investigation until recently. The reasons could be many but one seems to had been prevailing for many years: humour is not serious enough to be a *serious* subject of investigation.

Fortunately, the situation has begun to change the past two or three decades, which saw an explosion of humour-related papers. A substantial body of research focused on humour is now available, especially within the field of psychology but also – and fast growing – within the organizational and management studies (with research papers focusing on humour appearing in prominent journals, such the Academy of Management Journal, etc.).

A gap still exists, however, in relation to how humour is and can be an integral element of facilitation and development processes employed in organisations. Team-building workshops, leadership development seminars, diversity and cross-cultural trainings, etc. – in all those instances there exists a large amount of anecdotal reports claiming humour to be an important element of such activities. Facilitators and consultants often typically how beneficial for the facilitation process humour is. Few relate to the potential pitfalls and failed humour, but none or little systematic research exists investigating either of these effects.

The present paper outlines an opportunity for systematic investigation of humour in facilitation processes. It does it by connecting the available body of theory and research related to the general effects of humour to the particulars of facilitation processes by the example of a wide-used training and development concept – the Diversity Icebreaker (DI) – which is known for its humour-eliciting qualities (Ekelund, Davcheva, & Iversen, 2009; Human Factors, 2015; Pluta, 2014).

Objectives and organisation of the paper

The general objective of the present paper is to provide guidelines for studying humour in the DI workshops as a variable: its impact on the workshop flow and its significance for the tool's overall effects in the work-related context. Furthermore, the paper aims to outline potential generalizability of future findings on facilitation processes at large.

The consequent, specific objectives of this paper include: a) an attempt to describe different classes of humour instances typical for DI (important from the point of view of operationalizing humour as a variable), b) present relevant body of theory and research about humour-elicitation mechanisms and humour effects in order to c) arrive at possible research questions.

The paper is organised as follows:

Firstly, the definition of humour assumed in this paper is presented followed by a presentation of the Diversity Icebreaker tool, together with a provisional classification of humour present in the workshops

Secondly, a selection of theory and research from the areas of cognitive, social and organizational psychology is presented and related directly to the humour instances and mechanisms observable in DI. Each of the subcategories of that section is accompanied by propositions of research questions.

Lastly, summary of the research questions, limitations of the papers and invitation for collaboration is presented in the discussion.

2. Definition of humour

Before anything else, it is necessary to define the understanding of the humour phenomena applied in this work. I assume the definition proposed by Martin (2007), according to which humour can be defined by its four essential components: 1) a cognitive-perceptual process, 2) an emotional response, 3) the vocal-behavioural expression of laughter, and 4) a social context. I also add the fifth element: 5) humour as an aspect of culture, because of its relevance for the Diversity Icebreaker – which is used globally, often in a cross-cultural context. These elements are described briefly below.

As any other psychological phenomena, humour is related to a series of different cognitive processes. Both, perceiving something to be funny (humour appreciation) and intentional attempts of making others laugh (humour creation) involve processes such as memory, perception and thinking.

These cognitive-perceptual processes inevitably lead to the most characteristic element of the humour phenomenon, a marker indicating that humour has in fact occurred – a pleasant, emotional arousal. This affective arousal can be described as the emotion of mirth (Martin, 2007), meaning: gaiety or jollity, joy, happiness, especially when accompanied by laughter (Dictionary.com, 2012). The emotional component is not only present at the end of the cognitive-perceptual processes leading to the emotion of mirth, but is can be an essential primer of humour, before it even occurs.

The pleasant emotion elicited at the end of the humour appreciation process is often, but not always, manifested in the vocal-behavioural expression of humour – comprised of the vocal element of laughter and the mimic expression of smile (Vettin & Todt, 2004). It primarily serves the function of expressing or communicating to others that one is experiencing the emotion of mirth (Martin, 2007), but it has been also suggested that it may actually induce a similar emotional states in others (Owren & Bachorowski, 2001), or used to control the behaviour of others in the course of a social interaction (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001). Laughter and smiling are universal across cultures (Pinker, 2002) and manifest itself spontaneously in new-borns between the 2nd and 6th month of life (Shultz, 1996).

The three, abovementioned components of humour usually appear together in the context of social interactions and the social component of humour may be also considered as the most important one from the perspective of the present paper. Humour can occur in virtually any kind of social situation and accompany various social interactions (Martin, 2007), which means that the professional and

work-life context – represented in the organizational and management studies of humour – is present is included in this component.

In the present paper, attention will be given to theories and research, as well as research questions, related to the first two elements (cognitive and emotional) combined, and to the lest one: the context of social interactions.

3. The Diversity Icebreaker

The Diversity Icebreaker is a training and development concept consisting of a psychological questionnaire, a workshop formula based upon it and different "knowledge-modules" related to its typical areas of application (Human Factors AS, 20015). This section describes the theoretical model and research behind the tool, the workshop's flow and its typical application areas in organizations.

Red, Blue and Green model and the DI questionnaire

The DI questionnaire is based on a model of cognitive diversity describing different preferences for communication, interactions and problem solving (Ekelund & Pluta, 2015). The model consists of three categories of preferences labelled Red, Blue and Green:

The Blue category is described as a preference for a logic-driven perspective and focus on the structure and tasks. People with strong Blue preference like to work towards solutions in a systematic manner; they measure ideas in terms of usefulness and goal achievement. It is more important for them to fulfil a definite plan and its steps, than be flexible and open to new solutions. They often ask for facts and number and are not particularly concerned with the emotional components and the human relations are not very important for them (Ekelund & Rydningen, 2008).

Relational focus, personal involvement and a strong social perspective characterize the Red preference. People with this preference as the predominant one are described as warm, open, and easy-going; they consider the emotional component to be more important than the action and concrete ideas. Facts and sharp analysis are less important for them than creating a solution through conversation here and now (Ekelund & Rydningen, 2008).

The Green preference is characterized by a focus on change, vision and ideas. People with a strong Green preference are responsive to new ideas and exploit possibilities to do things differently. At the same time, they study a matter or an issue and make connections between its elements on the overall picture level (Ekelund & Rydningen, 2008).

The three preferences for communication and interaction are not mutually exclusive. A person can manifest equally strong preferences for communication and interaction pertaining to two, or three colour-categories at the same time. The dimensions are not orthogonal, which is implied by the theoretical and empirical domains of each colour, and secured by the semi-ipsative response format in the questionnaire (Ekelund & Pluta, 2012).

In that sense, the Diversity Icebreaker's focus on diversity is not on the "surface diversity", i.e. the more traditional paradigm in which the most important sources of diversity are considered to be demographic characteristics; and where race and gender are of primary concern (Jackson, Joshi & Erhardt, 2003; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998; etc.). The tool employs another kind of definition of diversity and focuses on the "deep diversity", referring to individual differences in psychological preferences (Ekelund, Davcheva & Iversen 2009).

The questionnaire measuring the Red, Blue and Green preferences consists of 42 items with a semi-ipsative response scale. It is a self-scoring measure and individuals obtain results on all three

preference-categories (see Appendix 1). Numerous validation studies of the Diversity Icebreaker have been conducted, demonstrating consistent convergent and divergent validity of the model in relation to concepts such as Big Five personality factors, Emotional Intelligence, Cultural Values, Team Performance, Cognitive styles, etc. The questionnaire has also manifested good internal consistency and re-test reliability. Both national and international norms are available (Ekelund, Pluta & Ekelund 2013)[1].

The DI workshop

Of greater importance for the present paper is how the DI questionnaire is applied in group-work, i.e. in the DI workshops, because it is there where the humour emerges. The workshops consist of four subsequent stages (Ekelund B. Z., User Manual. Facilitating Diversity Icebreaker seminars., 2015):

In the first stage, the participants fill out the questionnaire and score the results by themselves. They obtain results on three dimensions: Red, Blue, and Green. By that time, the preferences and colours have not been explained to them.

In the second stage, the whole group is divided in three smaller groups. The groups are created by assigning one-third of the participants who scored highest in the group on each of the colour categories to a separate group corresponding with that colour. For example, the one third of the participants who scored higher on Green then the rest of the group forms the Green group. It means that some of the individuals thus selected to the Green group, may not have Green as they main preference – nonetheless, they are still the "highest on Green" in comparison to others.

The small groups are then asked in this stage to work together to answer two questions: "What are the good qualities of people with your colour-preference in interaction with others?" and: "What are the qualities of people with the two other colour-preferences?" They are instructed that they can start by looking at the second page of the questionnaire (see Appendix 2) – where the adherence of items to either of the preferences is indicated by colour – in order to get the idea of what Red, Blue and Green signify. They are also told, however, that they should not confine themselves only to the questionnaire and discuss together what they think is right and draw on personal experience.

It is important to note here that by doing so, the tool breaks with the positivistic paradigm of test-psychology, in which the individual results are often compared to norm, interpreted by a professional and presented to the individual as his or her psychological profile. The participants create the meaning of the three categories locally, during the workshop. This social construction of meaning has three sources: the statements in the questionnaire and their paradigmatic foundation in a modernistic, psychology-oriented science; the participants' earlier experiences; and finally, the interactive discussion within the small groups (Ekelund, Davcheva, & Iversen, 2009). Of course, given that they assume the starting point from the questionnaire, the descriptions of the colours across workshops are fairly similar – nonetheless, it is the process of collective meaning creation and local understanding, which are important.

In the third stage, the groups are asked to present the results. How the participants in one group perceive their own colour preference is contrasted with how the other two groups have described it,

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[1] In 2013 the DI questionnaire has been certified by DNV GL as development tool used in workshops. It was recognized that the tool satisfies requirements of the Certification Council for Test Use in Norway (in line with EFPA European standards). Complete documentation of the DI's norms, validity and reliability is available from its distributor's website: http://diversityicebreaker.com/homepage/dnv/seal-of-approval-2

and attention is given to the processes of social construction taking place when the meaning of Red, Blue and Green is negotiated.

The fourth stage is a learning process, which is initiated by asking the participants the following question: "What have you learned from the time you started filling out the questionnaire, until now?"

The plenary discussion that follows is mediated by the facilitator and typical learning points that the participants arrive include, for example:

- **People are different/similar** in terms of their preferences for communication and interaction – a statement that often comes as a revelation in very homogenous groups, suddenly realising that although they are very similar on the surface diversity level, they differ in terms of their psychological preferences. In reverse, heterogeneous groups, e.g. multicultural teams, often recognize that they have more in common in terms of cognitive preferences (deep diversity) than they had realized.
- **We are not either or**. The Red, Blue and Green model is not a typology, but rather a trait model. Although the participants are assigned to one of the colour-groups for the time of the workshop, they quickly realize that each and every single one of them have scored on all three preferences – only to different extent.
- **We need each other and different preferences are important at different stages of the work.** The Red, Blue and Green model is constructed so that the preferences are complementary in a work-setting, e.g. Green is the source for ideas and driver for new projects, Blue provides plans and the attention to detail necessary to deliver results, and Red is smoothening tensions and motivates while the work continues (Ekelund, 2015; Ekelund, Iversen, Davcheva, 2009; Ekelund & Pluta, 2012).

Beyond the explicit, abovementioned learning points that the participants arrive at the end of the workshop, documented Diversity Icebreaker's effects include increase in positive affect, decrease in negative affect, and increase in trust and creativity (Rubel-Lifschitz, Arieli, Elster, Sagiv, & Ekelund, 2014).

Furthermore, in the workshop, the participants create a shared model and language to discuss diversity – important factors reducing the fear of diversity (Heider, 1958) as well as a good starting point for further development and management of diversity.

Tool's application areas
The workshop flow described above takes between 1 to 1,5 hours to conduct. It is delivered as a stand-alone kick-off or – oftentimes – as starting point for more complex development measures involving the Red, Blue and Green model. The Diversity Icebreaker's typical application areas include team and project work, communication trainings, leadership, cross-cultural and diversity trainings, kick-off, and conflict management (Human Factors 2015).

4. Humour in the Diversity Icebreaker
The aim of this section is to introduce humour into the picture – explain the need as well as the possible gains resulting from systematic study of humour in the Diversity Icebreaker. Furthermore, an attempt of provisional classification of humour present in the workshop is made, illustrated with examples, in order to acquaint the reader with the subject matter.

Reasons for investigating humour in the DI

The drive that fuelled a lot of both early and contemporary humour research – the observation that humour is a ubiquitous and important human activity, but it is somehow dramatically understudied (Martin, 2007) – can also be applied to the Diversity Icebreaker. Although it is reported that there is a lot of humour present in the DI workshops (Pluta, 2014), no systematic effort to describe it or study it was ever made.

Users of the tool report humour to be a crucial element of the DI workshops, a success factor, and the distributor of the Diversity Icebreaker makes it a part of the product's unique selling proposition. Therefore, it should be reason alone to learn more about it: determine whether humour instances are only separated events or do they really play a systemic role in the workshop; evaluate the importance of humour influence on the overall workshop's effects and their further organizational impact; notwithstanding, also ask the question about the potential pitfalls related to humour (e.g. danger of disparaging or failed humour) and their effect on the participants.

Another reason to study humour in DI is that not only it is reported that there is a lot of humour in the workshop, but also that it is recurrent and repeatable – that regardless of the group or facilitator, one is always to expect it to emerge in a certain moments and fashion (Pluta, 2014). Future research should first validate this empirically and investigate what other conditions, not pertaining to the Diversity Icebreaker's structure, may influence the emergence of humour. Furthermore, investigating the mechanisms of humour elicitation (e.g. critical workshop moments, instructions, etc.) should have practical relevance for facilitators, trainers and HR consultants using and willing to learn the tool.

Lastly, an important reason to study humour in DI is that the tool is used *en masse* (35-40.000 copies of the questionnaire are being used in workshops annually) and the distributor of the tool – Human Factors AS – operates in an open innovation model (Chessbrough, 2003) and has contributed many of them to research. Therefore, DI can present an interesting research opportunity to study humour on large scale, with big data and in the domain of spontaneous social interactions taking place in the workshop. Potential results of such research could be significant not only for DI workshops but also for our knowledge about the facilitation processes and – even – our general understanding of humour.

Provisional classification of humour in the DI and examples

There are many different humour classifications: taxonomies (Long & Greaser, 1988), functional (Martin, 2003), those based in preferences for humour appreciation (Ruch, 1992), and others. Although it would be interesting to categorize the instances of humour present in the workshop using any of the abovementioned approaches, or perform validation studies correlating either one of them with the preferences for Red, Blue and Green[2], the present provisional classification draws on none of these models.

The present classification intends to encapsulate differences related to timing, source and direction of various humour instances present in the workshops. Three classes of humour are proposed here:

The first one is the *humour initiated by the facilitator*, which is when the person facilitating the workshop – consultant or trainer – says or does something that the participants find funny or humorous and experience humour. Facilitator's utterance or action that elicits humour can be either

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[2] There is an on-going correlation study investigating possible relationships between the preferences for Red, Blue and Green and four humour styles of the Humour Styles Questionnaire (Martin et al, 2003). Contact the author of this paper to learn more.

premediated or improvised, but the important facet here is that it is a one-way interaction – the humour interaction is directed from the facilitator to the participants. In these terms, it is similar to a stand-up comedy context – with the facilitator being the source of humour and the participants a responsive, but uninvolved audience.

The way the facilitator introduces the Diversity Icebreaker questionnaire in the beginning of the workshop, in an illustration of this class of humour. The train-the-trainer materials advise that the questionnaire be introduced lightly, with emphasis on it being a very safe test to take and share the results with others later on (Ekelund B. Z., User Manual. Facilitating Diversity Icebreaker seminars., 2015). One way of doing so often employed by the facilitators using DI is to say that "there are no difficult or sensitive questions in this test – meaning that you will *not* get results on your levels of *neuroticism, narcissism*, etc." (Human Factors AS, 2008). This comparison of a benign test results with complex and negatively-loaded terms from psychology often produces laughter.

Another example is when the participants are self-scoring the questionnaire (by adding the points they have assigned to different statements by colour – see Appendix 2) and the facilitators says: "Those of you who answered 0 on the statement 'I liked maths better than languages at school' may ask neighbour for help to score the questionnaire…" (Human Factors AS, 2008).

The second class is the *in-group humour*, which is improvised and emerges spontaneously between the participants working in the small, one-colour groups. This humour most typically describes the characteristics of one's colour and of the other colours. It involves metaphors, exaggeration and unusual contextualisation (Long i Greaser, 1988).

A recurrent example of using humour to emphasize own colour's positive qualities is when the participants in the Green group point to their flipchart full of different words, drawings and arrows, and say "we're so creative, connective and big-picture oriented that we couldn't have produced anything else than that"; or, when the Blue groups are ready before others and have not produced more than 5 or 6 adjectives, which are very to the point and presented in form of bullet-points, often say "we're effective, focused and deliver *quantitative* results – not like the Greens!" An example of a metaphor that is recurring in the Diversity Icebreaker workshops and is often twisted to create humour is one where the Blue participants see only trees (reflecting their attention to detail), the Green see the forest (reflecting their holistic orientation). The funny twister, that often follows, is that the Red do not care whether they see the forest or the trees as long as they get to hug them (relating to their emotional and pro-social orientation).

The third class is the o*ut-group humour*, which is spontaneous humour taking place in interactions between the small, one-colour workshop groups, and which is directed from one group to the other. Often, it includes mild put-down humour – a friendly teasing – and often involves taking the jokes produced spontaneously first in the small groups (like the abovementioned examples) to the plenum. When successful, this humour is appreciated (i.e. found funny) by all groups, which is effectively the measure of its benignity.

The humour classification described above draws on interviews with the tool's experienced users, feedback from clients and author's experience in conducting the Diversity Icebreaker workshops, but also dictated by how different theories and research on humour functions are categorized and presented later in this paper. It is also supported by the dramatical punctuation of the workshop: stage one, the intro stage, with one-way humour interaction and the facilitator as its source; stage two, the small group work stage, with the *in-group humour*; and stage three, sharing between the groups, with *out-group humour* dominating (Iversen, Davcheva, & Ekelund 2009).

However, it is not based in empirical data or structured observation. One should thus approach it with caution and regard it as one of aids in structuring the remainder of this paper as well as a potential research question in itself. Should such systematic differences between humour instances actually prove to exist in the workshop, this provisional categorization could be used to delimit empirical domains for observing humour in DI.

In any case, the different humour classes described above have a transgressional character, in the sense that, for example, the one-way humour that dominates in the first stage of the workshop and is initiated by the facilitator, is not only reserved for the trainer. Oftentimes a participant creates humour in a similar fashion, e.g. during a presentation stage when he or she is handed the microphone and makes the whole group laugh by making a humorous remark.

5. Applicable theory and research

This section gives an overview of the theory and research that could form a foundation and a starting point for investigating and understanding humour in the Diversity Icebreaker from many, different angles and in relation to various roles humour may play in relation to the workshop flow and its general effects.

The section is divided into two sub-sections encompassing on one hand cognitive and on the other social (and organizational) theories and research, which can be related to humour in the Diversity Icebreaker workshops. Possible research avenues and questions are proposed in each of the subsections.

The cognitive theories and research

This section describes different theories and research related to the mental mechanisms underlying humour appreciation processes: cognition and emotional processes. It will begin with explaining the term of incongruity – an event, utterance or other stimulus that is in some sense odd, surprising and out of ordinary, which is fundamental for all kinds of humour (Martin, 2007) – and then proceed to the chosen psychological theories describing the necessary conditions for incongruity to elicit humour. Following, mechanism of humour elicitation in relation to selected facets of the workshop (the role of facilitator, workshop's flow and setup, and spontaneous interactions between the participants) will be explained.

Why including the cognitive approach?

The present paper's main goal is to investigate the influence of humour on workshop dynamics and the Diversity Icebreaker's overall effects, which in essence pertain rather to the social psychology studies of humour. Thus, analysing the cognitive and emotional mechanisms of the phenomenon may be considered as a fragmented approach to the paper's general research problems.

However, it may help to understand the fundamental processes underlying humour elicitation in workshops and allow for tracing sources of its abundance. This, in turn, may have practical implications for how the facilitators conduct the workshops: construct setting and situations, which cognitively enhance the probability of humour occurrence.

It may also have simple implications for future research by laying ground for operationalization and observation of humour in the workshops beyond the so-called "successful humour" (indicated clearly by laughter, for example). Looking for humour in the workshops from the cognitive perspective – i.e. identifying events or utterances that have the typical features of humour, e.g. incongruity – could allow better identifying also the intended but "failed humour".

Finally, adding the cognitive perspective can form an important element of the overall integrative model of humour role for learning, reflection and reinforcement of positive practice in DI.

Incongruity – the cornerstone of humour

Most of the psychologists interested in humour, despite their different opinions on exactly which and how and which of the cognitive processes take part in the humour appreciation, are unanimous when it comes to the essential role of incongruity for every instance of humour elicitation. Incongruity can be defined as an idea, image, text, or event that is in some sense incongruous, odd, unusual, unexpected, surprising, or out of the ordinary (Martin, 2007).

It is recognized, however, that incongruity alone is not enough to elicit humour – it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition in itself. What kind of incongruities and under which conditions have the potential to elicit humour?

To begin with, the incongruous stimuli cannot be perceived as threatening or repulsive, rather positive or neutral, and occur in a non-threatening context (Rothbart, 1996). However, also some neutral or positive incongruities, a surprise birthday party, for instance, can be looked upon as joyful but not experienced typically as funny.

Michael J. Apter proposed a comprehensive model of humour appreciation within his general Reversal Theory of personality and motivation (1982). It had a good explanatory power in that it considered both cognitive and motivational factors, and could be applied to many different forms of humour. It delimited precisely both the necessary and sufficient conditions for humour (Wyer & Collins, 1992).

Apter named three conditions necessary to elicit humour. The first two dealt with the cognitive processes employed when an incongruity is encountered:

1. *Non-replacement:* The incongruity has to force a reinterpretation of a situation or context but it cannot entirely replace the original interpretation. In other words, the new interpretation of the reality cannot change nor force out the previous interpretation entirely, and both have to be simultaneously activated and processed.

2. *Diminishment:* Furthermore, the new interpretation has to diminish the importance, status or significance of a given utterance or situation in comparison to the original one.

Both of these conditions are met in this joke, describing a short telephone conversation:

Mother:	"Doctor, come at once! Our baby swallowed a pen!"
Doctor:	"I'll be right over. What are you doing in the meantime?"
Mother:	"Using a pencil."

The first interpretation of the situation described in the joke's setup is of an accident requiring an urgent medical attention. The second, new interpretation following the joke's punch-line ("Using a pencil.") is of a situation where the lack of pen requires using a pencil.

Nonetheless, the new interpretation does not replace the old one: the mother whose infant baby swallowed a large object calls a doctor, presumably baby's podiatrist. Both interpretations are processed simultaneously (the first condition). Furthermore, the new view of the situation diminishes its importance by shifting focus from the baby's serious problem to the rather trivial fact that there is no pen to write with anymore (the second condition).

The third condition introduced by Apter is related to the receiver's current motivational state and information-processing objectives:

3. *Para-telic motivational state:* Humour is experienced in the *para-telic* motivation mode, in which one does not have any serious objectives and is oriented on play. When a person is in the telic motivational mode, which implies more specific and important information-processing goals, it is less likely to experience humour.

In other words, in order to experience humour, one has to either already be or be able to change his motivation mode to the para-telic one – characterized by a playful state of mind and experience of psychological safety. For example, if the abovementioned joke was a prank call made to a real doctor, he or she would be instantly triggered into the telic motivational mode (oriented towards helping the child in need). Consequently, the doctor would probably not be ready to understand the punch-line in the abovementioned story in a way that it is understood when it is told as a joke.

Wyer and Collin's comprehension-elaboration theory of humour (1992) further extended the applicability of Apter's theory to a wide range of different humour instances by describing the humour appreciation process in relation to the theory of the cognitive schemata.

The theory postulates that once the initial stimulus event is recognized, it is interpreted in terms of concepts and schemata, which permit to understand it. These schemata then guide our expectations as to what will happen next, as well as to what other schemata could be applicable to understand it. When an event occurs that cannot be interpreted within these already activated schemata, i.e. when an incongruous stimulus is introduced, one has to look for other sets of knowledge – new schemata – that will serve to reinterpret the initial stimulus event together with the new development.

If these new schemata can be found, the events are reinterpreted in terms of them. In addition, if the three abovementioned conditions (non-replacement, diminishment, paratelic motivational state; (Apter, 1982) are met, humour emerges.

Humour in the Diversity Icebreaker from the cognitive perspective

Of course, and as is the case with all universal psychological theories, the humour phenomenon is bound to fell victim of simplification also within the theories and models cited above. This is especially the case when the real-life, conversational and spontaneous humour is being analysed; and it is without doubt this kind of humour that prevails in the Diversity Icebreaker workshop.

Nonetheless, assuming this cognitive perspective – without the ambition of understanding all the humour nuances that occur in the workshops – will be helpful to trace recurrent and universal traits in the sources of humour in DI.

Two chosen facets of the workshop will be scrutinized from this perspective: 1) the facilitator's role and behaviour and 2) the workshop's set-up and flow sequence.

The facilitator's role and behaviour

Although humour created or introduced by the facilitator is not limited to pre-meditated jokes only, and can to large extent consist of spontaneous and improvised humour, this section will focus only on the recurrent and observed instances of humour (Pluta, 2014; Human Factors AS, 2008).

The first stage of the workshop is about setting the scene and it is often done by the facilitator introducing the goals and focus of the workshop, e.g. by saying: "We are gathered here to promote a better cooperation. The basic premise for good communication is that we need to understand ourselves, the other, and how the other perceives us (…)". He or she also is the one who introduces

the Diversity Icebreaker questionnaire to the set of the workshop. The participants thus develop expectations about receiving new insights about themselves and others through the lens of objective personality testing (Ekelund, Davcheva, & Iversen, 2009).

However, when giving the instruction for filling out the DI questionnaire, the facilitators often resort to humour to soften the fear often related to being tested. He or she may say, "The DI questionnaire is designed so that it does not include any sensitive questions, i.e. no questions related to your levels of neuroticism, narcissism, and other kinds of psychopathologies"; an utterance that often produces laughter (Human Factors AS, 2008).

Furthermore, he or she may say – while giving instructions on self-scoring the questionnaire, involving adding up points assigned to different statements in the questionnaire – that "those who scored 0 on the statement 'I liked maths better than languages at school.' can ask neighbour for help in scoring the test" (Human Factors AS, 2008).

Another instance that elicits laughter recurrently in the DI workshops is when the facilitator is about to divide the whole group into three smaller groups representing each of the colours of the model, based in their results on the questionnaire (stage 2 of the workshop). He or she does it in an arbitrary way, for example starting by asking "who among the participants scored 25 or higher on Green" and counting those who did. Should the number of participants be greater than the desired one-third, the facilitator says "that's too many, I need fewer; who scored 28 or more then". This continues until one third of the participants is assigned to the Green group (Ekelund B. Z., User Manual. Facilitating Diversity Icebreaker seminars., 2015; Human Factors AS, 2008).

All these instances are examples of introducing elements by the facilitator, which break with the participants expectations about psychological testing (Ekelund, Davcheva, & Iversen, 2009) and make them search for new cognitive schemata in order to reinterpret the situation (Wyer & Collins, 1992). The new reinterpretation fulfils the condition for an incongruity to induce humour (Apter, 1982): it reduces the status and importance of the questionnaire (diminishment) but it does not entirely replaces the original interpretation – the DI questionnaire remains a certified and reliable psychological test (non-replacement). Furthermore, the content of these jokes reduces the fear related to psychological testing and allows the participants to switch to the para-telic motivational state.

The abovementioned, recurring examples take place usually during the first 10-15 minutes of the workshop (stage 1 and the beginning of stage 2). What effects, as seen from the cognitive and motivational perspective, this may have on the rest of the workshop in terms of humour?

By making the participant laugh in the first moments of the workshop, even although it is only the kind of one-way humour interaction, the facilitator can trigger perceptual readiness (Bruner, 1957) for creating, recognizing and appreciating spontaneous humour later on. Priming accessibility of schemata that are used to create and understand humour (Wyer & Collins, 1992), is taking place among the participants and can make them recognize incongruities with potential for humour and exploit them easily.

Introducing humour by the facilitator may also contribute to both changing participants' expectations and motivational modus. If someone had been expecting a rather serious developmental workshop, he or she was probably prepared to remain in the *telic* motivational state – this person would have to re-evaluate his or her expectations and allow for the para-telic motivational state. On the other hand, facilitator may also confirm participants' expectations of a light and even funny experience, having already his or her para-telic motivational state reinforced, by using humour. In either case, the

facilitator's humour may contribute to inducing the right emotional/motivational state, which allows participants experiencing and creating humour more readily later on.

Probably, however, it is an interaction the abovementioned, purely cognitive and emotional effects with the role-model effect (Merton, 1936) – to some point and some of the participants, at least, will want to follow facilitator's example and be attempt to be funny or allow for humour.

A major caveat of this interpretation is that it does not take the facilitator's individual traits (e.g. personality, presentation style, etc.) into account. Although the training material and courses for the Diversity Icebreaker users instruct facilitators to introduce the questionnaire lightly and give examples of "safe jokes" that may be used to do so (Ekelund B. Z., User Manual. Facilitating Diversity Icebreaker seminars., 2015; Human Factors AS, 2008), the individual traits of the person conducting the workshop have to play an important role here.

Workshop set-up and the flow sequence
In the light of this fact, it is worthwhile to look at the elements that are invariable and less dependent on the facilitator from the cognitive perspective: the workshop's set-up and the flow sequence (stages).

The fact that the workshop is set up so that the participants have to stand up, leave their seats and move around (during the group work and presentations, stage 2 and 3) breaks with what is often expected of professional workshops or lectures and can be regarded as incongruous. It also allows the participants to have more interactions between themselves, which is crucial for the social, spontaneous humour later on.

The dividing participants into smaller work-groups (beginning of stage 2), although performed by the facilitator, is an activity embedded in the workshop. Since the method used achieves it in a seemingly arbitral and *ad-hoc* way, it may be considered in itself as a further diminishment of the significance of the psychological testing (the *diminishment* condition).

Another facet is that the work in small groups is organized so that the participants in the Red, Blue and Green groups – representing their dominant psychological preferences. Due to the content of the three categories, certain oppositions and contrasts are created between the groups. For example, the Blues are detail-focused, while the Greens are big picture-oriented; the Reds are very emotional, while the Blues are not; the Reds are collectivistic, while the Greens are individualistic, etc.

It provides content and semantic potential for making jokes easily by applying metaphors or exaggerations. For example, "if Red, Blue, and Green would be the MS Office – the Blues would be 'exciting' as Excel, the Greens would be as 'flashy' as PowerPoint, and the Reds as 'elaborate' as Word". Or, Blues about the Greens "You're so focused on the forest, that you don't see the wolves behind the trees, ready to bite you", etc.

Also the fact that the participants work in the groups of 'like-minded', similar to each other in relation to their psychological preferences for processing information, allows to assume that they have similar outlook on the world and, to some extent, share similar cognitive schemata. It may result in that it is relatively easy for them to find and activate the same schemata in order to appreciate the same kind of incongruities and humour (i.e. to *get* similar jokes).

Also in the third stage, when the participants share the results of their work in plenum, humour is very much present and often amplified. A fair part of humour instances that take place during the group presentations in this stage, are the jokes and humorous descriptions created in the confines of

the 'like-minded', one-colour groups in the previous stage. The fact that they are appreciated and laughed at by all the participants has two sources. Firstly, by then all the participants are ready to enter the *para-telic* motivational state. Secondly, the humour here refers to the Red, Blue and Green, a model and language, which everybody by that point understands very well, and which had primed everybody in relation to similar pool of cognitive schemata (Ekelund & Matoba, 2015).

This is also the stage when the participants shift positions from being spectators (in the first stage) to being involved in the workshop as actors – or, as Boal would have described it, they become "Spect-Actors", a synthesis of spectator and actors (Ekelund, Davcheva, & Iversen, 2009). This shift of perspective may also have an effect on which new cognitive schemata become accessible (e.g. those related being on stage or with a big group of friends, on a party) which can facilitate further, spontaneous humour-creation in this stage.

Possible influence of humour on the workshop effects – seen from the cognitive perspective

Following Apter's (1982) suggestion that humour is dominant for the domain of para-telic motivation, whereas focus and serious work towards goal is limited to the telic motivation; and assuming that humour is capable of inducing emotional and motivation states (Shiota, Campos, Keltner, & Hertenstein, 2004), it is reasonable to think that humour plays an important role in triggering the latter, playful motivational state. Humour would then be an important tool for the facilitator, used to punctuate the workshop with alternating periods when the participants are goal-oriented and seriously focused on learning, and more playful, relaxed periods of social play, allowing maintaining participant's interest and high energy level.

These shifts from *telic* to para-telic focus are important to release the tension that accumulates at different stages of the workshop (e.g. when the participants are apprehensive before answering the psychological questionnaire, or when they are about to share the results of their work in plenum (Ekelund, Davcheva, & Iversen, 2009)[3].

One other effect can be resulting from the fact that humour, by being related to positive emotions, fun and mirth, is a natural attractor in many contexts (e.g. Goodwin & Tang, 1991). The participants are more susceptible to knowledge created and learning points achieved in workshops characterized by positive emotions (Oppliger, 2003). It can make humour an important factor for retention of knowledge created during the Diversity Icebreaker as well as contribute to their willingness to continuing the good practice of interaction after the workshop (Ekelund B. Z., Trust model relevant for DI seminars, 2012).

Research questions – the cognitive perspective

As was the case with the provisional classification of humour, also the empirical base for this analysis is anecdotal, based on authors' personal experience and supported by a DVD recording of the workshop and other, unpublished video footage that has not been content-analysed very rigorously. A proper content analysis would be necessary, especially for *the facilitator* and *spontaneous humour between the participants*, which is – at this point – not available. Hence, the conclusions are limited and this part can be viewed as inspiration for potential research questions. Some of the research directions that can be taken include:

- Determining what is what is not actually humour in the workshop, along with the accompanying emotion of mirth and cognitive structure involving incongruity as determinants. Although it may seem obvious, and such categorizations certainly are limiting, it could be necessary should a quantitative study of humour in DI ever take place. A well distinguished and operationalized variables related to different categories of humour

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[3] Humour as a tension-reduction mechanism in DI is described later on in this paper.

interactions in the workshop would be the foundation of investigating to what extent the positive effects induced by the workshop (e.g. enhanced positive affect and decreased negative affect (Rubel-Lifschitz, Arieli, Elster, Sagiv, & Ekelund, 2014; Ekelund, Pluta, & Ekelund, 2013) are due to humour. This issue is underlying all the research questions arrived at in the latter part of this paper, too. The cognitive perspective could be helpful here, e.g. by identifying incongruities deliberately included in participant's utterances and thus also keeping track of failed humour.

- Another research question could be whether humour is really the key regulator, or the cognitive cue, for the constant shifting between serious and playful motivational states of the participants in the workshop.

- Would randomly selected groups (participants divided randomly to the three groups, not based in their real results, as it is typically done in the DI workshops) produce an equal amount of humour? One of the studies performed on DI in Israel demonstrated that in such circumstances the increase of the positive affect was equally high, as in case of a regular workshop, but the subjective perception of fit to the group, was much lower (in Ekelund, Pluta, & Ekelund, 2013). Is the subjective, psychological similarity not as crucial for humour as it is claimed above or is humour only a fragment of the positive effect increase seen in these studies?

The social theories and research

The cognitive processes related to the humour phenomenon are usually constructed on, or involve, representations derived from the social context and thus the incongruity essential to humour elicitation can be denoted as "non-serious social incongruity" (Gervais & Wilson, 2005). It is also the social interaction that is in the centre of the Diversity Icebreaker workshop. This section will focus on relating the possible social mechanisms and effects of humour described in literature to DI.

The division of different research and theories below is based on analysis of the available body of academic articles, and inspired by how the research is often presented (Martin 2007).

Closeness and liking

Humour is attractive and we like to be with people with "good sense of humour", which really translates to "similar to our own" sense of humour. We also like people generally similar to ourselves more (Burke, Petterson, & Nix 1995; Callcott & Philips, 1996), as well as feel closer with them if we can share a laugh together (Fraley and Aron, 2004).

An experiment by Fraley and Aron (2004) sheds light on why a shared humorous experience may enhance the feeling of closeness between people. In the experiment, randomly paired strangers interacted with each other in a conditions controlled by the experimentators. The interactions were structured either to create a humorous and overall pleasant experience or just an overall pleasant experience.

The strangers who participated in humorous conditions reported higher degrees of subjective closeness than those who participated in just positive, but not humorous experience.

The effect was explained by the mediating variables measured in the study:

- Humour had significant and strong effect reducing the feeling of discomfort and uneasiness felt when strangers meet. Humour can provide comfort by helping to free the mind (Bateson, 1969) and by giving one a sense of control (Morreall, 1989).

- The overall effect in the study was also mediated by the self-expansion mechanism. A shared humorous experience may be self-expanding (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron, & Norman 2001) in that it provides a new perspective to a given situation. Sharing and appreciating humour is self-expanding both because it enlarges one's perspective and because the process involves including other in the self. If one has this experience with somebody, this somebody is linked with this positive experience and contact with this person is sought after (Burke, Petterson, & Nix 1995; Callcott & Philips, 1996).

Another, not included in that study but often mentioned in the literature mechanism, has to do with the increased subjective similarity that is perceived between people who share a laugh (Martin, 2007). Humour can be looked upon as a "shortcut" to learning if a person shares similar knowledge (allowing them to understand one another's humour) and values (often allowing sharing a laugh at the expense of the same thing and in the same situation (Zajdman, 1995). In turn, an enhanced perception of similarity in terms of attitudes, cultural background, knowledge and behaviour transcribes onto increased linking – we like the people who are similar to ourselves (Lydon, Jamieson, & Zanna 1988; Byrne 1971; etc.).

In light of the abovementioned research, the humour experienced together by the participants in the Diversity Icebreaker workshop – first on the in-group level, in the small, one-colour groups; and later on the out-group level, when they share their work and discuss it in plenum – could be an important moderator of some of the workshops suggested and documented effects (Rubel-Lifschitz, Arieli, Elster, Sagiv, & Ekelund, 2014; Ekelund, Pluta, & Ekelund, 2013).

For example, one of the workshop's documented effect is that it increases trust and there is research demonstrating a positive relationship between the feeling of similarity and trust (DeBruine, 2002). It is possible that humour plays an important role as one of the key mediating variables here, by increasing the subjective feeling of similarity, leading to an elevated feeling of trust between the participants following the workshop.

Furthermore, kick-offs of big organizational projects, where the co-workers do not know each other well, are advertised as one of the tool's main application areas (Human Factors 2015). One of the objectives here is to get the participants to know each other in a positive and relaxed way – generate feelings of closeness and liking in their midst. It is reasonable to think that humour works via similar mechanisms in this context during the DI workshops, as it did in the experiment by Fraley and Aron (2004).

In terms of possible research questions, one that comes to mind is whether there actually would be a significant and positive relationship between the degree of experienced humour and participants liking of each other and feeling of closeness following the workshop.

Interpersonal attraction

There has also been conducted a lot of research focusing on humour as a trait sought for in mate and friend selection (e.g. Sprecher & Regan, 2002) and a trait promising a less problematic relationship with another person (e.g. Cook & Rice, 2003). These focused primarily on situations where people seek to build potentially a more long-lasting interaction – a relationship with a partner or a friendship, for example.

Applicability of this research to the workshop process itself and social interaction within, which is – after all – often only temporary and limited to the time spent during the workshop, is limited. However, since the tool's distributor reports that the areas of its application include teambuilding, leadership development, conflict management, etc. (Human Factors AS, 20015), one can assume that

in many contexts the workshop participants work in the same team or are members of the same organization, and will continue interacting with each other – or form relationships – also after the workshop. In this case, the shared humour experience provided by DI could perhaps also have influence on the quality of participant's interaction and relationship after the workshop.

Whether an intense, positive and shared humorous experience – but nonetheless of a singular nature – could really have long lasting effects on individuals' relationships and quality of interaction, i.e. whether it would enhance their "joking relationships" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952) is a valid research question. The workshop is an event that allows many people to both experience and create humour together; perhaps it is a unique opportunity to show others one's "humorous traits" and increase his or her attractiveness for the group.

The experiment by Fraley and Aron (2004), due to its natural limitations, did not created a situation where the participants would interact with each other on longer periods of time or forge relationships. The researchers have not followed up the individuals taking part in the research in this regard. Could the Diversity Icebreaker offer a possibility to explore this research avenue – would a strong, but isolated shared humorous experience increase the chance that individuals form long-lasting relationships?

Cohesion and identity building

Cohesion is an important factor when it comes to successful team and teamwork (Hackman 1983; Chansler, Swamidass, & Cammannn, 2004). Team cohesion can be described as a dynamic process, which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998)

Shared humour in the form of friendly teasing, "inside jokes" and funny nicknames, but also group's specific patterns of using humour or "joking relationships" (Robinson and Smith-Lovin, 2001; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952), can be both a sign of highly cohesive group and a mean of achieving one. Humour can be one of the means for the group's members to construct a shared meaning and understanding of the reality, and thus contribute to their sense of identity. Humour may become an important element of culture of well-established groups with long shared experience (Vinton, 1989), as well as of a more temporary groups created for a specific, time- and domain-limited task or purpose (Terrion & Ashforth, 2002).

If we narrow the focus only to the Diversity Icebreaker workshop itself, we can look at the participants in the small, one-colour groups in stages 2 and 3 as such temporary groups created for a limited period of time for in order to solve a specific task. It had been explained in the previous section what could be the reasons for why humour emerges in these groups so readily (the features of the Red, Blue and Green model itself, as a source for contrast and oppositions easily exploited for humour; and the psychological similarity of the participants), but what function does humour have here?

Analysis of the anecdotal material of the content of humour that is often produced in these small groups and related to the characteristics of the colours in relation to each other (e.g. examples given in previous sections), suggests that humour here is often used to emphasize the differences between the groups. Not seldom, the Red, Blue and Green groups use funny comments or metaphors to describe each other's qualities – often to emphasize their own superiority and put-down the remaining colours (Ekelund, Davcheva, & Iversen, 2009).

However, an important quality of this put-down humour in DI is that it is relatively benign – the groups are cautious not to offend others, wary of the implicit rules and often balance it with self-ironic comments. A study by Terrion and Ashforth (2002) demonstrated that a mild-negative humour – a well-used put-down humour – may contribute to the feeling of inclusion and cohesion.

Another interesting facet of this mild put-down humour that emerges in DI is that all the groups engage in it and seem to be positive to it. There may be several mechanisms that come to play here:

This may be partly due to the egalitarian and complementary character of the Red, Blue and Green model (although the colour-preferences have different characteristics, they are all equally important in team and professional work).

However, it may be that it is also due the flow-structure of the stage 3 of the workshop, the presentation stage: it is always one colour that starts with presentation of themselves, e.g. the Blue group discusses the Blue characteristics, which is followed by the descriptions of that colour by the other two, e.g. the Red and Green group discusses the Blue. There is usually some mild, benign deprecating humour directed towards the first group from the other two and it is clear for all of the participants already after the first round that they all have included some deprecating, humorous comments about each other; that nobody seems to be offended and they are all welcomed.

Furthermore, the fact that this put-down humour is perceived as inoffensive may be due to two other factors. Firstly, the content of humour here focuses on colours and their characteristic and not particular people – it is not personal. Secondly, it is not directed at one person – even anonymous and designated only by the colour – but at a group of participants standing and sharing the label together.

There are couple of interesting research question that can be related to the cohesion building effects of humour in the Diversity Icebreaker and put-down humour in particular:

An interesting thing about the put-down humour is that it is usually to be observed in groups and teams that have been working with each other for a longer time (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001) – it would be interesting to investigate in particular due to which mechanisms it happens so quickly (1-1,5 hours) in the DI workshops.

Another research direction would be to see whether the humour related to Red, Blue and Green – the "insider" jokes about the colours characteristics that the workshop participants become privy to – survives after the short workshop concludes. There are anecdotal reports suggesting that this is the case (Ekelund & Langvik, 2008; (Brannen & Ekelund, 2012), but a systematic study, for example in relation to a more general measures of group cohesion would be interesting.

Last research question is related to the potential, negative effects of humour in the Diversity Icebreaker in relation to group cohesion. The question is whether and to what extent all the participants experience humour during the workshop as inoffensive and benign; and whether the potential variation significantly affects the overall workshop effects.

Self-exposure and social probing

Communicating our intentions, motives and our system of values (self-disclosure), as well as obtaining information about intentions, motives and values shared by other (social-probing) straightforwardly bears a certain risk. Our motives can be misunderstood, we can be perceived as intruders in to other's privacy, or our interlocutor or we can be embarrassed by how much our opinions differ (Martin, 2007).

Humour, and especially irony, is often used to do both: communicate and obtain this kind of information indirectly (Long & Greasser, 1988). Every ironic statement referred to a person or situation bears an evaluative component. A person can use irony to communicate his or her attitude towards something. If the receiver appreciates the irony included in other's communication (by laughing at it), it means that he or she usually shares this attitude.

Usually, the irony is accompanied by cues indicating that what is being said is not to be taken entirely serious (e.g. in tone of voice, gestures). Therefore, if the ironic statement is not met with appreciation (laughter) by the receiver, the person expressing opinion indirectly has a way out, by saying that the statement was not to be taken seriously or was misunderstood (Long & Greaser, 1988).

Similarly, the irony gives the receiver an opportunity to disagree with another in an indirect, indulgent ways – he or she does not have to openly express the disagreement, it is enough not to laugh to communicate it.

Increased openness of the participants, "more-than-usual openness" is one of the reported effects of the Diversity Icebreaker (Ekelund B. Z., Trust model relevant for DI seminars, 2012) and the product's important USP (Human Factors AS, 2015). An important research project investigating the DI effects on voicing – the willingness to speak-up and suggest improvements (Nonaka, 1994) – is on-going (Ekelund 2015).

It is reasonable to think that that there is a link between the "more-than-usual openness" achieved in the DI workshops and the ironic comments that the one-colour groups produce about themselves and others, as well as the collective humour about the Red, Blue and Green model and team-work, communication, leadership, etc. A correlation study investigating the amount of ironic comments and messages produced in the workshop and some measures of voicing could be a way of approaching this research question.

Reduction of tension

The history of research on humour and its ability to reduce tension and stress is very long (Martin, 2007). Already Freud viewed humour as one of the few positive, mature defence mechanism helping to deal with psychological stress (1960)[4]. Humour viewed as coping mechanism has been since studied in many contexts as an individual trait or skill (enjoying humour, noticing humorous aspects of the environment and actively using humour as a strategy to cope with stress (Martin, 1984; Martin et al., 2003; Svebak & Martin, 1997).

However, theories and research related to humour as a stress-reducing trait or skill bear little relevance for the presence subject. At the moment, and to the best knowledge of the author, it would be pretentious to make an assumption that a 1,5 hours developmental workshop without a specific focus on humour, although abundant in it, could develop skills and humorous outlook in groups or individuals.

Nonetheless, humour can have a tension-reducing function in a more temporary situations and processes, e.g. task discussions. In both cases, there are probably several mechanisms that come in play: diminishment of the importance of the source of tension and reducing the situational threat (Apter, 1982; Dixon, 1980), the fact that humour induces positive emotions which replace the

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[4] Note that Freud differentiated "jokes" from "humour" – he viewed the former as ill-natured and the latter as positive (1960).

negative ones (Shiota, Campos, Keltner, & Hertenstein, 2004), and that it provides distraction from discomfort (Bateson, 1969).

There are different tension points in the workshop (e.g. anxiety about one's test results in stage 1), but it is the third stage – sharing of what one has written about oneself and about the others, and hearing what others have written about oneself – that constitutes the climax of the whole process from this perspective. It is also when the most frequent and intensive humour emerges.

At the beginning of this stage, the participants become easily aware that descriptions of themselves (their own colour) are mainly positive and characterized by "self-bragging"; while what they have written about the other groups include negative descriptions. The anxiety for how the others will react to their superlative descriptions of themselves and partially deprecating descriptions of the others, as well as the excitement to find out what the others have in store for them, are the clear sources of tension here (Ekelund, Iversen & Davcheva 2008).

It is reasonable to think, that the explosion of humour at this stage, is among other things due to the role humour plays as an important, tension-reduction mechanism at that point of the workshop. The previously described cognitive shift – from serious to playful motivational state – that humour can induce possibly follows the tension reduction effect and replaces mild anxiety with positive emotions of mirth.

A possible research avenue here would be to investigate the amount of humour and of subjective tension/anxiety experienced by the participants in different workshop groups. A significant correlation between the two variables would provide evidence to support the humour's role as the tension-reduction mechanism. A study in this direction would not, however, provide any insights as to the causality of tension (i.e. answer the question whether humour results from tension).

Creativity

The role of humour in creativity processes received a lot of attention in research (not surprisingly, since both humour and creativity are commonly associated with play; e.g. Koestler, 1964; Besemer and Treffinger, 1981; see Murdock and Ganim, 1993 for review).

One recent paper investigating the impact of humour on creativity by Janes and Olson (2015) has a particular relevance for the Diversity Icebreaker workshop. Namely, the study consisted of three experiments looking into the influence of disparagement, put-down humour on different variables, inter alia creativity. It is interesting because the mild, benign disparagement humour is an important element of the workshops and has been discussed at length previously in this paper.

In one of the experiments (Janes et al. 2009), the participants were shown videos presenting either self-deprecating humour, mild deprecating humour or no humour. The participants thought they were watching a lesson on writing poetry given by a specialist. The subject matter content was always the same, but in one video, the specialist was poking fun at himself (self-deprecating humour), in the other, he was poking fun at someone else (other-deprecating humour) and in the control video, he was not attempting to be funny at all (no humour).

After having watched the videos, the participants rated the specialist and completed a creativity task. The subsequent analysis of the results yielded a significant, main effect of humour on creativity. The participants exposed to videos with self-deprecating humour performed better on the creativity task than did those in the mild other-deprecating and no humour video groups. Furthermore, also the participants' perception of the specialist were more positive ("warmer") in the self-ridicule video group than in the two others.

The interesting link between this study and the Diversity Icebreaker workshop can be made in two points. Firstly, both other- and self-deprecating humour is present in the workshop (the one-colour groups make fun of other colours and, occasionally, being self-ironic). Secondly, an effect study performed in Israel (Rubel-Lifschitz, Arieli, Elster, Sagiv, & Ekelund, 2014) showed that the workshop has a significant impact on creativity: the participants that took part in the workshop scored higher on creativity tasks than those from the control groups.

Could it be that the Diversity Icebreaker succeeds in creating a benign, mild-put down humour that does not have the inhibiting effect on creativity, as the deprecating humour had in the study by Janes and Olson (2015)? If it is the case, it could be either due to a balance between other- and self-deprecating humour in the workshop, the egalitarian and complementary character of the Red, Blue and Green model (Ekelund B. Z., Managing diversity in teams, 2015) and/or the general increase of the positive affect the workshop induces in the participants (Rubel-Lifschitz, Arieli, Elster, Sagiv, & Ekelund, 2014). It is a difficult, but interesting research avenue to pursue, which could enrich our understanding of the role of mild put-down humour in creativity processes in the work context.

7. Discussion

Implications and limitations

The present paper has attempted to set humour present in the Diversity Icebreaker workshops in context of the pertinent theories and research on humour. By doing so, it also made an attempt to systematically describe and trace sources of humour in the workshop.

The main ambition of this paper was thus to lay ground, give reference points and framework for future research on the subject. It is the first step, necessary and imperfect, in investigating humour in the Diversity Icebreaker.

Through relating humour, its mechanisms and effects to different cognitive, social and organizational theories and research on humour, the paper encompasses a vast body of knowledge. It is relevant for the specific facilitation processes of the DI workshops, for general facilitation processes in development workshops (many of which share the characteristics of the Diversity Icebreaker, such as the role of facilitator and group-work), as well as our general understanding of humour.

By definition, the present paper was not meant to be a practical guidebook for using humour in the Diversity Icebreaker or a collection of train-the-trainer tips for facilitators. Formulation of practical knowledge that could guide facilitators in using and adjusting humour consciously to the specific workshop objectives, culture and group; would constitute important goal of future research and work. Some facilitators, however, will probably manage to draw some practical tips and considerations resulting from the observations and rationale presented in this paper. Some, newbie users of the concept, would probably benefit from learning the examples of humour presented in this paper.

Nonetheless, the theoretical orientation that prevails in the present paper is its important limitation – given the many Diversity Icebreaker users who would be interested in learning practical tips related to the use of humour in the workshops.

The biggest limitation of this papers is, however, the fact that its conclusions are based primarily on author's experience, unstructured interviews with the tool's users, anecdotal evidence and previous empirical research, which has not investigated humour as an explicit variable. Once some of the research questions presented in this paper – and summarized below – have been pursued and

empirical results have been obtained, the conclusions and assumptions made in the present paper will have to be revisited.

Summary of research questions

Among the reasons to study humour in the Diversity Icebreaker named in the beginning of this paper, was the sheer abundance of humour and its invariant recurrence in the Di workshops. In the light of the abovementioned limitations of this paper, the fact that many conclusions presented were based on anecdotal material and not empirical observation, the first research question should be to actually confirm that fundamental statement: is humour invariably present in the Diversity Icebreaker workshop, almost independently of the facilitator and group?

All other possible research direction and questions of this paper, summarized below, hinge on that assumption:

- Will different classes or types of humour be observable and distinguishable in the Diversity Icebreaker workshops (i.e. the three classes proposed in this paper: *the humour initiated by the facilitator, in-group humour*, and *out-group humour*)?

- To what extent facilitator's role and behaviour is crucial for introduction and emergence of spontaneous humour later on in the workshop? Which mechanism are in play here: cognitive priming and humour-schemata activization, induction of para-telic motivational state, role model effect?

- To what extent the workshop flow (progression of different stages, group-work organization in small, like-minded groups of participants, etc.) is crucial for humour? Which elements are directly related to humour?

- What general cognitive effects of humour influence the overall DI workshop effects?

- Does the Diversity Icebreaker workshop increase the participants liking of each other and the feeling of closeness; and if so, is humour an important moderating variable?

- Does the Diversity Icebreaker succeeds within 1,5 h in eliciting the kind of mild, positive put-down humour characteristic to groups that know each other well?

- How long the humorous language related to Red, Blue and Green does survive after the workshop? Does it have a long-lasting effect on humour-climate in teams and organizations?

- Do all the participants equally contribute in and benefit from humour in the Diversity Icebreaker? What kind of negative humour instances and effects can emerge in the workshops?

- The Diversity Icebreaker is claimed to increase voicing and "more-than-usual" openness. Does humour play an important role in this effect?

- Different points of elevated tension and apprehension mark the progression of stages in the workshop. Is humour the crucial mechanism realising this energy, reducing tension and thus necessary to conduct the workshop?

- There is evidence suggesting that the Diversity Icebreaker has positive influence on creativity, despite the presence of put-down humour in the workshop, which has been related to negative effects on creativity. What could be the reasons for that?

Invitation to collaborate

Pursuing some of the abovementioned research questions would have practical implications for facilitation of DI workshops and general workshop facilitation processes, some would be more relevant for the organizational research and knowledge about humour, and others could enrich our general understanding of humour.

Due to limited resources and business-oriented use of the concept, it would probably never be possible to investigate all of them. Nonetheless, the tool's distributor and the author of this paper invite anyone interested in commencing research on humour in the Diversity Icebreaker, to contact them; and is ready to dedicate resources and expertise to pursue humour research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Diversity Icebreaker®

For Demo Use Only

Human Factors AS
Working Across Differences

This questionnaire is designed to help you to improve self-awareness and understanding of others, and to support communication and collaboration in teams.

Read through the questionnaire and divide six points among the three statements on each horizontal line according to how well they describe you. Don't think too much – just answer in the way which feels right for you. You can divide the points in any way you want, as long as they summarize horizontally to 6. There is an example below.

After you have completed the questionnaire, remove the front page and follow the instructions to find out about your preferences for communication and collaboration.

Ex.	✓ I like sharing ideas with others.	I enjoy my own company.	✓✓ I like working with my hands.

Here are 14 rows. In each row, allocate your 6 points among the three statements:

1	I have both feet on the ground.	I like to do things with other people.	I often have a need for variety.
2	I like to think logically.	I can get so involved in an idea that I overlook practical details.	I enjoy being with people I don't know well.
3	If someone is to influence me, they should present the big ideas and main concepts.	If someone is to influence me, they should present facts, details and examples.	If someone is to influence me, they should be personal and enthusiastic.
4	I want to know what possibilities will open up in the future.	I want to know how ideas can be applied in a useful and practical manner.	I want to know how suggestions affect us as people.
5	I like suggestions that are creative and unusual.	I like suggestions that take people and their feelings into account.	I like suggestions that are direct and practical.
6	I think communication should be oral and personal.	I think communication should give an overview of the context.	I think communication should be concise and to the point.
7	I show my feelings.	I am practically-minded.	I often try new things.
8	I like it best when I have people around.	I like tasks where I can use the skills I have.	I like to philosophize about an issue.
9	I prefer concrete things rather than abstract ideas.	I'm easy to get to know.	I like to work with a few rather than many things.
10	I liked maths better than languages at school.	I set high goals.	I think people's feelings are important.
11	I like to work with numbers.	I am considerate towards others.	I sometimes suggest original solutions.
12	I'm patient with others.	I make decisions based on facts.	I find imaginative solutions.
13	I like to work on practical things.	I tell my thoughts to others.	I see new possibilities quite quickly.
14	I do a good job.	I see quite clearly how things are related.	I like to meet lots of people.

Age: .... Gender: .... Occupation: .... Organisation: .... (For Research)

www.diversityicebreaker.com

UK v.8, mai 2014

Appendix 2

Diversity Icebreaker®

Human Factors AS
Working Across Differences

This questionnaire was designed to help you identify your preferences when communicating and collaborating with others. Now you can see that each of the statements has a colour - Blue, Red and Green - which indicate your preferences when working with others.

Now add up the points for each colour and write the three totals in the boxes on the right marked Blue, Red and Green. The total of the three scores should be 84 points.

	Blue	Red	Green	
Fill out:				= 84

#	Blue	Red	Green
1	I have both feet on the ground.	I like to do things with other people.	I often have a need for variety.
2	I like to think logically.	I can get so involved in an idea that I overlook practical details.	I enjoy being with people I don't know well.
3	If someone is to influence me, they should present the big ideas and main concepts.	If someone is to influence me, they should present facts, details and examples.	If someone is to influence me, they should be personal and enthusiastic.
4	I want to know what possibilities will open up in the future.	I want to know how ideas can be applied in a useful and practical manner.	I want to know how suggestions affect us as people.
5	I like suggestions that are creative and unusual.	I like suggestions that take people and their feelings into account.	I like suggestions that are direct and practical.
6	I think communication should be oral and personal.	I think communication should give an overview of the context.	I think communication should be concise and to the point.
7	I show my feelings.	I am practically-minded.	I often try new things.
8	I like it best when I have people around.	I like tasks where I can use the skills I have.	I like to philosophize about an issue.
9	I prefer concrete things rather than abstract ideas.	I'm easy to get to know.	I like to work with a few rather than many things.
10	I liked maths better than languages at school.	I set high goals.	I think people's feelings are important.
11	I like to work with numbers.	I am considerate towards others.	I sometimes suggest original solutions.
12	I'm patient with others.	I make decisions based on facts.	I find imaginative solutions.
13	I like to work on practical things.	I tell my thoughts to others.	I see new possibilities quite quickly.
14	I do a good job.	I see quite clearly how things are related.	I like to meet lots of people.

Age: .... Gender: .... Occupation: .... Organisation: .... (For research)