Laughing it off: How does leader humor alleviate employees' compassion fatigue in service failure?☆

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ABSTRACT

Compassion fatigue, which results from empathy, is associated with many negative consequences. However, limited attention has been devoted to the compassion fatigue of employees in the tourism and hospitality sector, particularly within the context of service failures. To mitigate the potential negative impact of compassion fatigue on employees, this research reveals how leader humor alleviates employees' compassion fatigue via three scenario-based experiments. Findings show that leader humor affects employees' compassion fatigue through the mediating effect of perceived organizational support. Additionally, this research uncovers the moderating roles of leader hypocrisy and power distance beliefs. Results expand the literature on compassion fatigue and leader humor. This study also offers suggestions to guide tourism and hospitality organizations in using leader humor wisely to minimize employees' compassion fatigue, particularly among staff with low power distance beliefs and in cases of low leader hypocrisy.

1. Introduction

Compassion fatigue, referring to a reduced capability to empathize with others' negative emotions (Adams et al., 2008), often arises from workplace demands for empathy (Figley, 2002). Past researchers have studied compassion fatigue in professionals such as nurses (Zhang et al., 2018), psychological counselors (Zhang et al., 2023), teachers (Fute et al., 2022), and social workers (Adams et al., 2008), yet relatively little research has focused on tourism and hospitality employees' compassion fatigue. In the hospitality and tourism industry, employees are often required to put themselves in customers' shoes (Gorry & Westbrook, 2011) to emphasize customer feelings (Wei et al., 2020) during service failure and recovery. Empathy is a common service recovery method (Lv et al., 2022) that can alleviate customers' anger (Chen et al., 2021). Prior studies have identified the benefits of employees' empathy for customers and companies (Wieseke et al., 2012). Empathizing with patrons' frustration can help companies avoid poor reviews (Pera et al., 2019), achieve reconciliation (Radu et al., 2019), strengthen customers' positive emotions (Xu et al., 2019), and raise customers' satisfaction (Ngo et al., 2020) and forgiveness (Wang, Chih, & Honora, 2023). Even

though employees' empathy can aid customers and boost overall service quality, it often comes with negative consequences (i.e., compassion fatigue) for service employees. The Royal Society for Public Health had indicated that 84% of hospitality workers felt stressed due to their jobs (Angels of Medical Care, 2023). Such high job-related stress may increase employees' likelihood of experiencing compassion fatigue (Zhang et al., 2018), and compassion fatigue is particularly prevalent among frontline service employees (Kennedy, 2020). Yet, little attention has been paid to employees' compassion fatigue in tourism and hospitality, an industry that demands empathy.

Empathizing with others under challenging circumstances has elicited adverse emotional experiences in empathizers (Stone & Potton, 2014), with physiological effects such as greater heart rate variability and a lower respiratory rate (Chen et al., 2022). However, the potential negative impact of required empathy has been overlooked on the employee side. Compassion fatigue has been connected to psychological illnesses like social withdrawal and trauma (Sinclair et al., 2017). It adversely affects employees' well-being and influences their inclination to remain in the profession (Coetzee & Laschinger, 2018; Fute et al., 2022). Therefore, identifying strategies that alleviate tourism and

hospitality workers' compassion fatigue is crucial to minimizing the risk of empathizers suffering from compassion fatigue.

Research in organizational behavior has hinted that conservation of resources theory provides a foundation to understand how employees cope with situations like compassion fatigue (Halbesleben et al., 2014). This theory implies that the threat of resource loss causes people stress; they deploy resources to limit such losses or to gain assets (Hobfoll & Wells, 1998). Leaders are one of employees' most critical resources within the organization (Zhou et al., 2018). Leader humor, which can foster positive attitudes among staff (Cheng et al., 2023), may represent a valuable resource: employees can leverage it to assuage compassion fatigue following exhaustion from service failure. Although the literature on leader humor has suggested its strength in allaying such fatigue, our research is one of the earliest attempts to examine this supposition directly.

Meanwhile, leaders' conduct is thought to be representative of organizational behavior (Wang, Wen, et al., 2023). Social support is pivotal in preventing compassion fatigue (Pergol-Metko et al., 2023). Conservation of resources theory indicates that individuals use different resources to cope with stress (Hobfoll, 2001). In this research context, employees could acquire support from leaders. Moreover, when leaders display humor after intense customer-employee interaction during service failure, this reaction enhances employees' perceived organizational support (Cooper et al., 2018). Hence, this research presumes that leader humor may manifest as perceived organizational support, potentially minimizing compassion fatigue.

We additionally hypothesize that leader humor might not influence employees' compassion fatigue consistently. Conservation of resources theory argues that the value one ascribes to received resources greatly influences how one responds to these assets (Halbesleben et al., 2014). As a key individual-level cultural variable (Winterich & Zhang, 2014), power distance beliefs pertain to an individual's acceptance of unequal power distribution (Hofstede, 1980). Individuals with high power distance beliefs view the unequal distribution of social power as inescapable (Esch et al., 2023) and see leader humor as a breach of social norms (Cheng et al., 2023; Yam et al., 2018). Conversely, individuals who embrace low power distance beliefs advocate for the equitable distribution of social power (Winterich & Zhang, 2014). As employees, these individuals are also inclined to perceive leader humor as self-complementary (Cheng et al., 2023). We seek to verify whether power distance beliefs influence leader humor effects on perceived organizational support and compassion fatigue. Furthermore, staff may interpret leader humor in varied ways. From a leader's point of view, we contend that employees might appraise leader humor as either authentic or hypocritical. One example is leader hypocrisy, wherein a leader's words and actions are misaligned (Greenbaum et al., 2015). This hypocrisy substantially affects employees' attitudes and behavior (Effron et al., 2018). To clarify whether leader humor impacts differ from employees' personal cultural values and leader characteristics, we take power distance belief and leader hypocrisy as moderators.

Given the preceding discussion, our research aims to provide insights into how and why leader humor can alleviate employees' compassion fatigue. A moderated mediation model is proposed to address two questions based on conservation of resources theory: 1) can leader humor alleviate employees' compassion fatigue following service failure? and 2) what are the potential mechanisms and boundaries of the mitigating effects of leader humor on compassion fatigue? We performed three studies to assess how leader humor affects employees' compassion fatigue. Perceived organizational support acted as a mediator, while leader hypocrisy and power distance belief played moderating roles as per conservation of resources theory.

Our effort supplements the extant literature. First, scholars have primarily concentrated on the positive impact of empathy from customers' perspectives. We outline employee-side consequences to shed light on the often-overlooked problem of compassion fatigue in tourism and hospitality. Second, although studies have explored leader humor's overall influence in the workplace, our research takes an initial step to explore this phenomenon's effect on employees' compassion fatigue in the service failure context. Third, we identify a mediating mechanism of perceived organizational support and thus enrich knowledge of how leader humor can mitigate employees' compassion fatigue. Fourth, we expand the application of conservation of resources theory by delineating a complicated matter—employees' compassion fatigue—in the tourism and hospitality industry. Finally, our research thoroughly analyzes leader humor's alleviating effects by testing boundary conditions (i.e., leader hypocrisy and power distance belief).

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Compassion fatigue

Adams et al. (2008) described compassion fatigue as "the formal caregiver's reduced capacity or interest in being empathic or bearing the suffering of clients and is the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced or suffered by a person." Although this conceptualization alludes to both a behavior and an emotional state, researchers have lately viewed compassion fatigue more as an emotion (Cho & Lee, 2023; Zhang et al., 2018). Appendix A presents a summary of studies on the definition of compassion fatigue. Scholars have also applied emotional contagion theory to explain its causes (Zeidner et al., 2013). Following this school of thought, we frame compassion fatigue as an emotional state.

Empathy is an impetus for compassion fatigue (Figley, 2002) and is highly relevant in tourism and hospitality contexts. Empathy refers to "the ability and tendency to share and understand others' internal states" (Cho & Lee, 2023). While empathy affords empathizers positive social experiences, it also serves as a key predictor of productive customer-employee relations (Iglesias et al., 2019)—and this benefit is not without cost (Cho & Lee, 2023). Given the experienced-based characteristics of the tourism and hospitality product (Kim & So, 2024), service professionals often encounter service failure (Yao et al., 2019). Customers may vent negative emotions in these instances (Gelbrich, 2010), and workers typically empathize (Wei et al., 2020). This type of reaction requires an employee to envision themselves in the customer's place (Gorry & Westbrook, 2011) and to sense the customer's annoyance, anger, or other responses. Due to the relative ubiquity of service failures in tourism and hospitality, we adapted Adams et al.'s (2008) definition as follows: compassion fatigue among tourism/hospitality employees reflects their reduced capacity or interest in being empathetic or in shouldering customers' negative emotions. It follows from acknowledging and experiencing service failure.

Compassion fatigue can compromise the bearer's health physically (e.g., insomnia), behaviorally (e.g., absenteeism), and mentally (e.g., ability to feel empathy and diminished career satisfaction) (Sinclair et al., 2017). Multiple interventions have been put forth to relieve it, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (Sinclair et al., 2017), social support (Pergol-Metko et al., 2023), ability-based emotion management (Zeidner et al., 2013), emotion regulation (Cho & Lee, 2023), and education and training (Zhang et al., 2018). Leaders serve as a significant resource for staff (Prayag et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2018). As a result, increasing scholarly attention has been directed towards the impact of leadership style (e.g., authentic leadership and spiritual leadership) (Brewer et al., 2023; Kachie et al., 2023), leadership traits (e.g., emotional intelligence) (Dalavai, 2018), and leadership behaviors (e.g., leader empowerment and employee-oriented leadership behavior) (Jafarian_amiri et al., 2023; Taskiran Eskici et al., 2023) on compassion fatigue. While leader humor is acknowledged as a well-regarded managerial practice (Cooper et al., 2018) and a potent form of organizational interaction (Wu et al., 2020), its role in compassion fatigue among tourism and hospitality employees has yet to be investigated.

2.2. Leader humor

Leader humor has mainly been examined through two lenses: personality traits and behavioral expression. The trait perspective refers to one's tendency to capture, transmit, and create humor (Yam et al., 2018). Humor serves as a behavioral expression in interpersonal and managerial processes (Cooper et al., 2018). Fairly recent scholarly investigations into workplace humor have tended to adopt this stance regarding humor as an emotional resource for the surrounding people (Cheng et al., 2023). Following this stream of work, we also assume the behavioral perspective. Leader humor refers in our case to a communication style through which leaders deliberately amuse employees, such as by sharing entertaining stories and joking (Cooper et al., 2018).

Leadership can utilize humor to motivate their subordinates through interpersonal communication (Cooper et al., 2018). Leaders may harness this viable and unique asset to encourage employees' job embeddedness (Chen & Ayoun, 2019), service performance (Wu et al., 2020), and customer-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (Cheng et al., 2023) in tourism and hospitality. In previous research, the effects of leader humor on general management were detailed. However, it is unclear whether leader humor (as an emotional resource for employees) is pertinent after service failure. Tourism and hospitality organizations cannot fully avoid such failure (Herhausen et al., 2023). Employees often empathize with patrons to induce positive customer emotions (Xu et al., 2019) and greater customer satisfaction (Ngo et al., 2020). While staff empathy may be associated with successful service recovery (Ngo et al., 2020), empathizing carries costs in most circumstances (Figley, 2002); it regularly engenders compassion fatigue among employees themselves. Hence, we examine how leader humor can relieve tourism and hospitality employees' compassion fatigue.

2.3. Conservation of resources theory

Conservation of resources theory underpins our research framework. The theory maintains that "people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and that what is threatening to them is the potential or actual loss of these valued resources" (Hobfoll, 1989). In our context, empathizing with customers during service failure calls for intense psychological resources: employees are normally required to sincerely apologize and engage in genuine service recovery. Once their personal resources are exhausted, workers assume a defensive mode to protect themselves (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Cheng et al. (2023) noted that leader humor can facilitate employees' access to psychological resources, thus fostering positive workplace behavior. Such leader-provided assets could be invaluable for employees afflicted with compassion fatigue.

In addition, conservation of resources theory helps to elucidate the conditional effect of leader humor. This theory proposes that personal standards influence the value people assign to resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Employees' perceptions of a resource (i.e., leader humor) could vary based on leaders' behavior and how workers view their superiors (Wang, Wen, et al., 2023). We consider power distance belief and leader hypocrisy as moderators; the effects of each are discussed later.

2.4. Leader humor and compassion fatigue

According to conservation of resources theory, employees typically obtain resources from the environment to prevent "negative loss spirals" (Hobfoll, 1989). Leader humor is a primary interpersonal resource available to employees (Cheng et al., 2023). It signals friendship to subordinates and gives the impression that one's leaders are kind (Peng et al., 2020). Leaders may elicit pleasant feelings from their subordinates by sharing funny stories or jokes (Wu et al., 2020). Workers see humorous leaders as inclusive and enjoyable to be around (Potipiroon & Ford, 2021). Leader humor can therefore stimulate positive staff feelings (Peng et al., 2020). These emotions could be a potent remedy for work-related stress (Wu et al., 2020). Employees with greater access to

leader humor are more apt to perceive work-related stress in a positive light, resulting in optimism or energy instead of fatigue (Cooper et al., 2018). Thus, this study expects leader humor to alleviate employees' compassion fatigue as an interpersonal and organizational source of emotional support:

H1. Leader humor is negatively related to employees' compassion fatigue.

2.5. Mediating role of perceived organizational support

Perceived organizational support refers to "the extent employees believe that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Considering the significance of evaluating the employee-organizational relationship from a staff perspective, perceived organizational support has garnered substantial interest (Kurtessis et al., 2017). This concept is fundamental to organizational behavior and human resource management: It can promote helping behavior and risk taking (Wang, Wen, et al., 2023) and reduce turnover intention (Li et al., 2019).

As conservation of resources theory indicates, individuals are driven to acquire new resources in response to resource losses (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Leader humor, often recognized as a core interpersonal resource for staff (Cheng et al., 2023), is believed to foster affable relationships through jokes and cheerful interactions (Yang & Zhang, 2022). Leader humor thus serves as resources that convey leaders' care and warmth (Yang & Zhang, 2022), stimulating a sense of support among employees (Cooper et al., 2018). Importantly, leaders' actions often mirror organizations' perspectives, with their behaviors thought to be indicative of organizational standards (Wang, Wen, et al., 2023). Thus, when leaders display humor, employees tend to associate their leaders' caring and support with the organization (Tan et al., 2020). Consequently, the benefits derived from leader humor manifest as valuable resources for employees, and such resources can be converted into other job resources like perceived organizational support. Accordingly, we posit that leader humor enhances employees' socioemotional resources as well as perceived organizational support:

H2a. Leader humor positively affects perceived organizational support.

Moreover, perceived organizational support reflects the organization's efforts to provide resources (Wang et al., 2020) and plays a crucial role in fulfilling employees' socioemotional needs (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Such a notion aligns with the conservation of resource theory, suggesting that individuals who acquire resources are less likely to experience resource depletion or losses in stressful situations, thereby enhancing their ability to tackle stressful problems (Hobfoll, 2001). Hobfoll et al. (2018) observed that perceived organizational support is vital in controlling the resource depletion tied to high emotional demands. Serving as a job-related resource, perceived organizational support offers employees emotional support (Chen & Eyoun, 2021) and fosters positive affect (Wang et al., 2020), thereby alleviating burnout, stress, and strain (Cheng & O-Yang, 2018; Karatepe et al., 2024). Recent evidence suggests that perceived support can also mitigate compassion fatigue (Pergol-Metko et al., 2023). Therefore, we argue that workers consider the organizational support derived from leader humor as a useful resource that assists them in coping with compassion fatigue. Stated formally:

H2b. Perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between leader humor and employees' compassion fatigue.

2.6. Moderating role of leader hypocrisy

Leader hypocrisy occurs when a leader's words and deeds are not aligned (Greenbaum et al., 2015). This hypocrisy can relate to employees' anger, disappointment, discomfort, and stress (Greenbaum

et al., 2015; Prottas, 2008). It carries consequences such as distrust (Effron et al., 2018) and is associated with diminished perceptions of interpersonal justice (Simons et al., 2007). Conservation of resources theory indicates that employees are highly concerned about available assets (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Staff who experience leader hypocrisy may question the motivation behind a leader's humor (Cha & Edmondson, 2006). This doubt can affect workers' perceived authenticity of a leader's supportive resources. Thus, leader hypocrisy may weaken the effectiveness of leader humor in easing compassion fatigue.

When leader humor is an altruistic means of expressing care, it can help employees cope with stressful situations (Prottas, 2008). Put simply, when workers perceive low leader hypocrisy, they can easily recognize the good intentions behind a leader's humor. Staff then become more inclined to see humor as an opportunity to acquire resources. On the contrary, high leader hypocrisy could cause disenchantment towards leaders (Cha & Edmondson, 2006). If leader humor is found to be hypocritical or incongruent with a leader's actions (e.g., when employees make impression management attributions to leaders' behavior) (Bharanitharan et al., 2021), staff may question how sincerely leaders care (Wang, Tian, et al., 2023). Leader humor will subsequently be deemed less supportive under stressful conditions (Greenbaum et al., 2015). Its positive impact will diminish as a result:

H3. Leader hypocrisy moderates the effects of leader humor on perceived organizational support (H_{3a}) and employees' compassion fatigue (H_{3b}). Specifically, when low leader hypocrisy is perceived, leader humor (vs. rationality) elicits higher perceived organizational support and lower compassion fatigue.

2.7. Moderating role of power distance belief

Consistent with conservation of resources theory, Hobfoll et al. (2018) emphasized the need to examine resources' impacts in a cultural light. Cultural norms heavily mold people's opinions of workplace roles and employee-leader relations (Yang et al., 2017). As an individual-level cultural variable (Winterich & Zhang, 2014), power distance belief is "the degree of power disparity that people in a culture expect and accept" (Zhang et al., 2010). People possessing high power distance beliefs perceive social power hierarchies as normal and justifiable and consider an unequal distribution of social power to be inevitable (Cheng et al., 2023; Esch et al., 2023). Conversely, individuals with low power distance beliefs hold that social power ought to be equitably distributed (Winterich & Zhang, 2014). Power distance beliefs also significantly influence leadership's effectiveness, such as empowering leadership (Peng et al., 2023) and leaders' apologies (Wang, Wen, et al., 2023).

When employees have high power distance beliefs in their organizations, they are more accepting of an unequal power distribution (Peng et al., 2023). They prefer leaders with authority, believe that workers' primary role is to obey superiors' orders, and show respect to leaders (Kirkman et al., 2009). Staff members with high power distance beliefs are less prone to cultivate personal relationships with their leaders and to adhere to social exchange principles (Daniels & Greguras, 2014). Consequently, they see leader humor as a breach of social norms (Yam et al., 2018) instead of a way to access valuable resources (Cheng et al., 2023), leading to lower perceived organizational support. Employees with low power distance beliefs favor equal communication with leaders along with an open and free work environment (Botero & Dyne, 2009). These workers are inclined to perceive leader humor as a way to complement themselves (Cheng et al., 2023) and acquire greater perceived organizational support. We thus hypothesize the following:

H4. Power distance belief moderates the effect of leader humor on perceived organizational support (H_{4a}) and employees' compassion fatigue (H_{4b}). Specifically, among employees with low power distance beliefs, leader humor (vs. rationality) elicits higher perceived organizational support and lower compassion fatigue; these effects disappear for employees with high power distance beliefs.

Fig. 1 depicts our proposed moderated mediation model.

3. Overview of studies

We investigated the hypothesized relationships via a trio of experimental studies (see Fig. 2). Study 1 examined the impact of leader humor on employees' compassion fatigue (H_1) and the mediating role of perceived organizational support (H_{2a} and H_{2b}). The moderating roles of leader hypocrisy (H_3) and power distance belief (H_4) were assessed in Studies 2 and 3, respectively. To ensure the generalizability and rigor of our research, the experiments included multiple scenarios covering different tourism and hospitality sectors: hotel receptionists (Study 1), restaurant attendants (Study 2), and hotel room attendants (Study 3). Appendix B summarizes participants' demographics for all experimental studies; Fig. 2 illustrates our research framework and a flowchart of our experimental procedures.

In all three studies, compassion fatigue was evaluated using a two-step approach. Participants first reported their compassion fatigue after reading the service failure scenario materials; this measure represented their baseline compassion fatigue. After reviewing the experimental stimuli on leader humor, participants were asked to rate their compassion fatigue again. Compassion fatigue change intensity (i.e., post-humor − pre-humor) served as the dependent variable.

4. Study 1

The aim in Study 1 was to investigate whether leader humor could reduce employees' compassion fatigue and whether perceived organizational support would mediate the effect.

4.1. Pretest

The preliminary test involved 77 participants (64.9% female; $M_{age} = 27.66$). Two experimental scenarios were created to manipulate leader humor (see Appendix D). Participants were randomly shown information relating to either humor or rational response. Three items were employed to verify the manipulation of leader humor (e.g., "My leader expressed humor with me at work") on a 7-point scale (see Appendix C). A one-way ANOVA showed that leader humor's manipulation [$F(1, 75) = 60.46, p < 0.001$] was successful. As expected, participants rated the leader's response to the humor scenario ($M = 5.79$) as more humorous than that of the rational scenario ($M = 3.82$).

4.2. Samples, procedure and measures

From March 11 to 13, 2023, we recruited 148 participants from Credamo panels of tourism and hospitality professionals (66.2% female, $M_{age} = 30.05$). To manipulate leader humor, we implemented a single factor between-subjects design. The participants were asked to imagine themselves as hotel front desk receptionists in a famous tourism destination. After reviewing the same service failure scenario, participants were requested to report their baseline compassion fatigue using the thirteen-item 7-point scale adapted from Adams et al. (2008) (see
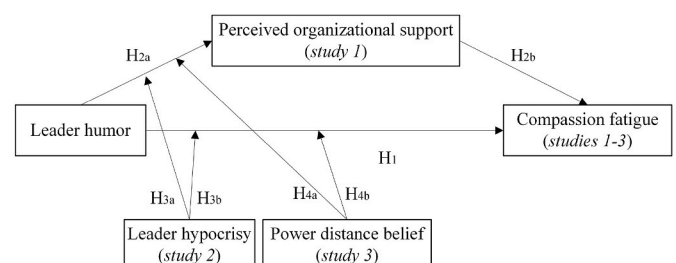

Fig. 1. Research framework.

Studies	Study 1 (H1-H2)	Study 2 (H3)	Study 3 (H4)
Purpose	To test the main and mediating effects	To test the moderating effect (leader hypocrisy)	To test the moderating effect (power distance belief)
Experiment design	Leader humor (rational vs. humor)	Leader humor (rational vs. humor) × leader hypocrisy (high vs. low)	Leader humor (rational vs. humor) × power distance belief (high vs. low)
Scenarios	Hotel receptionist	Restaurant attendant	Hotel room attendant
Experiment procedures	Pretest ❖ Reading scenarios ❖ Manipulation check of leader humor Experiment 1 ❖ Reading scenarios ❖ The measure of compassion fatigue ❖ Manipulation check (leader humor) ❖ Control checks (the familiarity with and realism of the scenario) ❖ The measures of perceived organizational support and compassion fatigue ❖ Demographics	Pretest ❖ Reading scenarios ❖ Manipulation checks of leader humor and leader hypocrisy Experiment 2 ❖ Reading scenarios ❖ The measure of compassion fatigue ❖ Manipulation checks (leader humor and leader hypocrisy) ❖ Control checks (the familiarity with and realism of the scenario) ❖ The measures of organizational support and compassion fatigue ❖ Demographics	Pretest ❖ Reading scenarios ❖ Manipulation checks of leader humor and power distance belief Experiment 3 ❖ Reading scenarios ❖ The measure of compassion fatigue ❖ Manipulation checks (leader humor and power distance belief) ❖ Control checks (the familiarity with and realism of the scenario) ❖ The measures of perceived organizational support and compassion fatigue ❖ Demographics
Methods	ANOVA PROCESS Model 4	ANOVA PROCESS Model 1 PROCESS Model 8	ANOVA PROCESS Model 1 PROCESS Model 8

Fig. 2. Research framework and flowchart of experimental procedures.

Appendix C). We carefully modified the compassion fatigue measurements to ensure their relevance to the context of tourism and hospitality service failures. Afterward, participants reviewed either the humor or rational (without leader humor) leader responses scenario (see Appendix D) and reported their compassion fatigue based on the scenario again.

Based on the scenario, participants were instructed to evaluate leader humor using a three-item 7-point scale (Cooper et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2023) and assess perceived organizational support using a six-item 7-point scale (Eisenberger et al., 2001). To ensure the authenticity of the experiment, the familiarity with ("To what extent are you familiar with the situations in the above textual description?") and realism of the scenario ("To what extent could you imagine yourself as employee in the scenario?") were measured respectively (Du et al., 2014). A 7-point scale was used for all items (see Appendix C).

4.3. Results

4.3.1. Manipulation and control checks

A one-way ANOVA was used to manipulate leader humor, and a significant difference between the two groups [$M_{humor} = 5.86$, $M_{rational} = 3.68$, $F (1,146) = 141.21$, $p < 0.001$] indicates successful manipulation. The difference between groups in baseline compassion fatigue was insignificant [$M_{humor} = 4.26$, $M_{rational} = 4.08$, $F (1,146) = 0.91$, $p > 0.05$]. According to the one-sample t-test results, both scenario familiarity [$M = 5.41$, $SD = 0.94$, $t (147) = 70.05$, $p < 0.001$] and perceived realism [$M = 5.91$, $SD = 0.90$, $t (147) = 79.65$, $p < 0.001$] were confirmed.

4.3.2. Hypothesis test

We verified the reliability and validity of the constructs (Table 1). The paired-sample t-tests revealed that compassion fatigue after the leader expresses humor response ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.14$) was significantly lower than the one before receiving the leader's humorous expression ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.19$; post-humor vs. pre-humor = −1.05, $p < 0.001$). Compassion fatigue change intensity as the dependent variable was analyzed. As hypothesized, the main effect of leader humor demonstrated statistical significance [$F (1, 146) = 23.73$, $p < 0.001$]. There was more relief of compassion fatigue among those exposed to the humor responses scenario ($M_{humor} = -1.05$) compared to those exposed to the rational response scenario ($M_{rational} = -0.19$), suggesting that exposure to humor responses can relieve employees' compassion fatigue

Table 1
Reliability and validity results in Study 1.

	CR	AVE	Perceived organizational support	Compassion fatigue
Perceived organizational support	0.88	0.56	**0.75**	
Compassion fatigue	0.93	0.54	−0.34	**0.73**

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; Bolding on the diagonal indicates the square roots of AVE.

(H$_1$).

Participants exposed to humor responses perceived a higher level of organizational support than those exposed to rational responses [M_{humor} = 5.62, $M_{rational}$ = 4.96, F (1,146) = 24.19, $p < 0.001$], thus supporting H$_{2a}$. Additionally, this study employed PROCESS, Model 4, with 5000 samples to assess the mediating role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between leader humor and employees' compassion fatigue. It was confirmed that perceived organizational support played a mediating role (Effect = −0.17, 95% CI [−0.30, −0.05]). Hence, H$_{2b}$ was supported (Fig. 3).

An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with gender, age, educational level, and monthly income as covariates. Results showed that these covariates did not influence the outcomes of the hypothesis tests mentioned earlier [effect on compassion fatigue: F (1, 142) = 23.29, $p < 0.001$; effect on perceived organizational support: F (1, 142) = 22.58, $p < 0.001$]. Therefore, potential interferences from demographic variables have been effectively eliminated.

5. Study 2

We examined the potential moderating effect of leader hypocrisy (high vs. low). Our hypothesis suggests that under low leader hypocrisy, leader humor (vs. rationality) elicits higher perceived organizational support and lower compassion fatigue.

5.1. Pretest

The preliminary test involved 92 participants (58.7% female; M_{age} = 29.79). Four experimental situations were conducted to manipulate leader humor and leader hypocrisy (see Appendix E). An analysis of one-way ANOVA revealed that leader humor manipulation [M_{humor} = 5.65, $M_{rational}$ = 3.40, F (1, 90) = 95.22, $p < 0.001$] was significant. It was also confirmed that the manipulation of leader hypocrisy [M_{high} = 5.46, M_{low} = 2.91, F (1, 90) = 123.08, $p < 0.001$] was successfully.

5.2. Samples, procedure and measures

Study 2 employed a 2 (leader humor: rational vs. humor) × 2 (leader hypocrisy: high vs. low) between-subject experiment (see Appendix E). Participants in four groups were instructed to imagine that they were restaurant attendants. The experimental stimuli and procedure replicated those used in Study 1, with the exception of two alterations. First, participants were assigned to review scenarios of leader hypocrisy (high or low) and leader humor (rational or humor) randomly after rating their baseline level of compassion fatigue. Second, we added a four-item 7-point scale to evaluate participants' perceptions of leader hypocrisy (Dineen et al., 2006; Greenbaum et al., 2015) (see Appendix C). From April 2 to 5, 2023, a total of 188 tourism and hospitality professionals participated in this study (68.1% female, M_{age} = 29.74).

5.3. Results

5.3.1. Manipulation and control checks

Participants in the humorous (vs. rationality) leader responses scenario reported a higher perception of leader humor [M_{humor} = 5.38,

$M_{rational}$ = 3.52, F (1, 186) = 107.94, $p < 0.001$]. Participants in the high hypocrisy scenario exhibited a higher level of perceived leader hypocrisy compared to those in the low hypocrisy scenario [M_{high} = 5.62, M_{low} = 3.49, F (1, 186) = 226.55, $p < 0.001$]. The disparity in baseline compassion fatigue between groups was insignificant [M_{humor} = 4.14, $M_{rational}$ = 4.05, F (1, 186) = 0.30, $p > 0.05$]. A one-sample t-test validated the scenario's familiarity [M = 5.45, SD = 1.07, $t_{(187)}$ = 70.12, $p < 0.001$] and perceived realism [M = 5.87, SD = 1.11, $t_{(187)}$ = 72.59, $p < 0.001$].

5.3.2. Hypothesis test

We verified the reliability and validity of the constructs (Table 2). The paired-sample t-tests unveiled a statistically significant decrease in compassion fatigue at the post-humor stage (M = 3.43, SD = 1.10) compared to the pre-humor stage (M = 4.14, SD = 1.04; post-humor vs. pre-humor = −0.71, $p < 0.001$). A two-way ANOVA on compassion fatigue indicated that leader humor and leader hypocrisy had a statistically significant interactive effect [F (1, 184) = 12.45, $p = 0.001$]. The moderated role of leader hypocrisy was verified, thus supporting H$_{3b}$. The moderation analysis, conducted with 5000 samples using PROCESS Model 1 revealed that when employees perceived low leader hypocrisy, leader humor negatively affects employees' compassion fatigue (effect = −0.63, 95% CI = [−1.05, −0.22]). When high leader hypocrisy was perceived, this effect was reversed (effect = 0.45, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.90]) (see Fig. 4).

A two-way ANOVA on perceived organizational support indicated that leader humor and leader hypocrisy had a statistically significant interactive effect [F (1, 184) = 14.86, $p < 0.001$]. Hence, leader hypocrisy was confirmed to play a moderate role, which supported H3a. The moderation analysis, conducted with 5000 samples using PROCESS Model 1, revealed that under low leader hypocrisy, leader humor positively affected perceived organizational support (effect = 0.54, 95% CI = [0.16, 0.93]); this effect was reversed under high leader hypocrisy (effect = −0.55, 95% CI = [-0.97, −0.14]) (see Fig. 5).

To rule out potential noise of demographic variables, an ANCOVA was carried out, incorporating gender, age, educational level, and monthly income as covariates. The observed results remain consistent [interaction effect on compassion fatigue: [F (1, 180) = 10.43, $p = 0.001$]; interaction effect on perceived organizational support: F (1, 180) = 14.26, $p < 0.001$].

A moderated mediation analysis (Model 8, 5000 bootstrapped samples) with 'leader humor' as the independent variable, 'compassion fatigue' as the dependent variable, 'perceived organizational support' as a mediated variable, and 'leader hypocrisy' as the moderator was performed. The index of moderated mediation (MMI) demonstrated a significant relationship (MMI = 0.31, SE = 0.10, 95% CI = [0.13, 0.52]). Specifically, under low leader hypocrisy, leader humor (vs. rationality) significantly contributed to reducing compassion fatigue, facilitated by the mediating role of perceived organizational support (effect = −0.15, SE = 0.06, 95% CI = [−0.27, −0.05]). Under high leader hypocrisy, these effects reverse (effect = 0.16, SE = 0.08, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.32]).
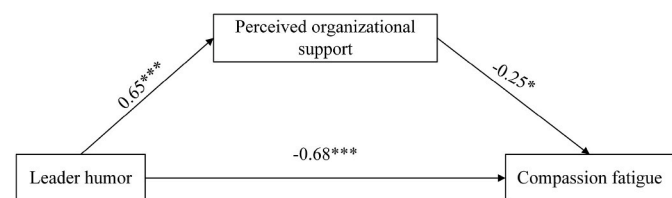
Fig. 3. Study 1 results.
Note: *$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.001$.

Table 2
Reliability and validity results in Study 2.

	CR	AVE	Perceived organizational support	Compassion fatigue
Perceived organizational support	0.90	0.60	**0.77**	
Compassion fatigue	0.93	0.52	−0.51	**0.72**

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; Bolding on the diagonal indicates the square roots of AVE.
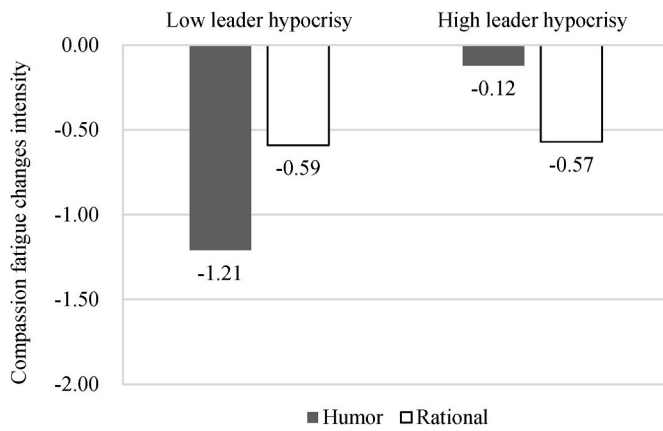
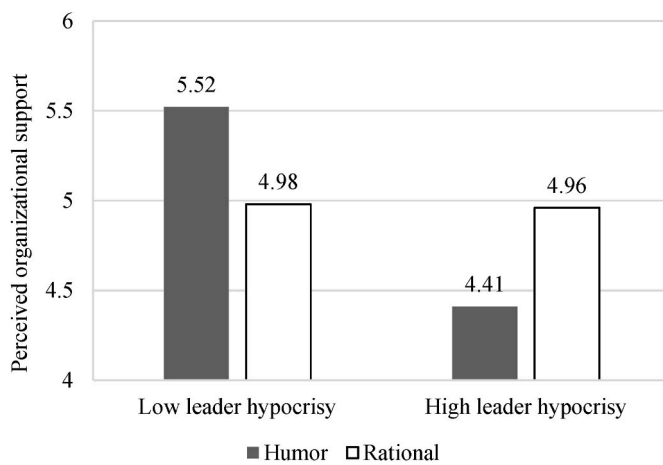**Fig. 4.** Interaction effect on compassion fatigue change intensity.

Fig. 5. Interaction effect on perceived organizational support.

6. Study 3

The moderated effect of power distance belief was tested using a 2 (leader humor: rational vs. humor) × 2 (power distance belief: high vs. low) between-subject experiment.

6.1. Pretest

A total of 126 participants (59.5% female; $M_{age} = 28.41$) were involved in examining the manipulations of leader humor and power distance belief (see Appendix F). Power distance belief was temporarily accessible through a sentence-completion task (Zhang et al., 2010). Based on the one-way ANOVA analysis, leader humor manipulation was significant [$M_{humor} = 5.50$, $M_{rational} = 3.04$, $F (1, 124) = 136.11$, $p < 0.001$]. The power distance belief manipulation [$M_{high} = 5.93$, $M_{low} = 3.30$, $F (1, 124) = 126.68$, $p < 0.001$] was also confirmed.

6.2. Samples, procedure and measures

From April 11 to 14, 2023, a total of 214 participating hospitality professionals (66.4% female, $M_{age} = 28.65$) were instructed to imagine that they were hotel room attendants (see Appendix F). After displaying the same hotel room service failure scenario, participants were requested to report their baseline compassion fatigue. Subsequently, each of the four experimental scenarios was randomly assigned to participants, and participants reported their compassion fatigue again. We added a three-item 7-point Likert scale to measure participants' power distance belief (Xu et al., 2021) (see Appendix C).

6.3. Results

6.3.1. Manipulation and control checks

A one-way ANOVA was used to examine the manipulation effectiveness of leader humor and power distance belief. Compared to the leader's rational responses, participants in the leader humor scenario indicated a higher score [$M_{humor} = 5.48$, $M_{rational} = 3.08$, $F (1, 212) = 223.81$, $p < 0.001$]. Further, one-way ANOVA results showed that high power distance belief had a higher score than low power distance belief, and the two groups had a significant difference [$M_{high} = 5.74$, $M_{low} = 3.31$, $F (1, 212) = 179.11$, $p < 0.001$]. The difference between groups in baseline compassion fatigue was insignificant [$M_{humor} = 4.22$, $M_{rational} = 4.20$, $F (1, 212) = 0.01$, $p > 0.05$]. Thus, the manipulations of leader humor and power distance belief were effective. According to the one-sample *t*-test results, both scenario familiarity [$M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.09$, $t_{(213)} = 72.91$, $p < 0.001$] and perceived realism [$M = 5.81$, $SD = 1.02$, $t_{(213)} = 83.02$, $p < 0.001$] were confirmed.

6.3.2. Hypothesis test

We verified the reliability and validity of the constructs (Table 3). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of compassion fatigue is slightly below the threshold value of 0.5, which suggests acceptable convergent validity (Liu et al., 2022; Suess et al., 2024). The paired-sample *t*-tests showed a significant decrease in compassion fatigue at the post-humor stage ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.15$) compared to the pre-humor stage ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.98$; post-humor vs. pre-humor $= -0.63$, $p < 0.001$). Two-way ANOVA test results indicated that leader humor and power distance belief had a statistically significant interaction effect on compassion fatigue [$F (1, 210) = 10.59$, $p = 0.001$]. In the outcomes of the moderation analysis (PROCESS, Model 1, 5000 samples), under the low power distance belief, the leader humor had significantly lower compassion fatigue than the condition of rational responses (effect $= -0.59$, 95% CI = [−0.93, −0.24]). In the high power distance belief condition, this effect was insignificant (effect $= 0.23$, 95% CI = [−0.12, 0.58]) (see Fig. 6). Hence, H4b was supported.

Two-way ANOVA results revealed a significant interaction between leader humor and power distance belief on perceived organizational support [$F (1, 210) = 12.66$, $p < 0.001$]. Based on moderation analysis (PROCESS, Model 1, 5000 samples), leader humor had a significantly positive effect on perceived organizational support under low power distance belief (effect $= 0.87$, 95% CI = [0.46, 1.27]) (see Fig. 7). However, if power distance belief was high, the nonsignificant difference in perceived organizational support (effect $= -0.17$, 95% CI = [−0.58, 0.24]) was found. Thus, H4a was supported.

Furthermore, an ANCOVA was performed with gender, age, educational level, and monthly income as covariates. The observed results are consistent when considering these covariates [interaction effect on compassion fatigue: [$F (1, 206) = 10.21$, $p < 0.01$]; interaction effect on perceived organizational support: $F (1, 206) = 12.11$, $p = 0.001$]. Thus, the potential confounding effects of demographic variables are minimized.

To test H4, a moderated mediation analysis (PROCESS, Model 8, 5000 samples) was performed with leader humor as the independent variable, compassion fatigue as the dependent variable, perceived

Table 3
Reliability and validity results in Study 3.

	CR	AVE	Perceived organizational support	Compassion fatigue
Perceived organizational support	0.90	0.61	**0.78**	
Compassion fatigue	0.92	0.48	−0.45	**0.69**

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; Bolding on the diagonal indicates the square roots of AVE.
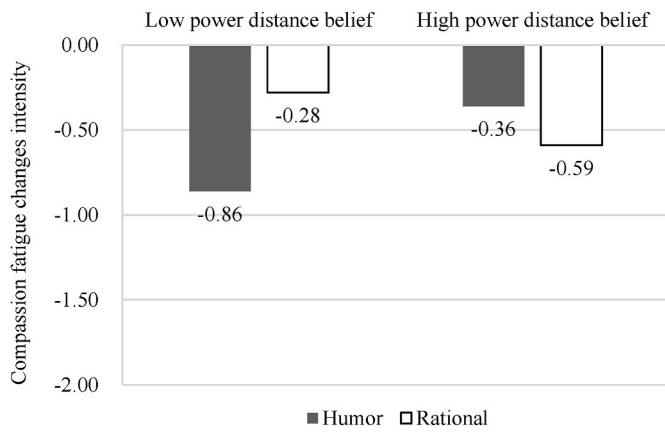
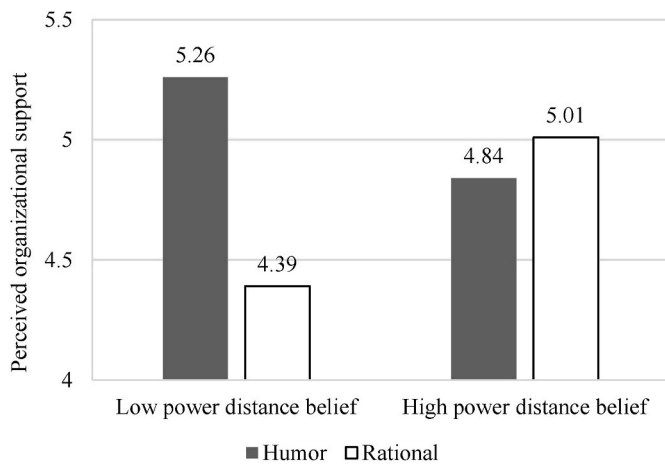**Fig. 6.** Interaction effect on compassion fatigue change intensity.

Fig. 7. Interaction effect on perceived organizational support.

organizational support as a mediated variable, and power distance belief as the moderator. It exhibited a positive and statistically significant relationship (MMI = 0.28, SE = 0.10, 95% CI = [0.11, 0.50]). Under low power distance belief, leader humor (vs. rationality) significantly contributed to reducing compassion fatigue, mediated by perceived organizational support (effect = −0.23, SE = 0.07, 95% CI = [−0.39, −0.11]). Under high power distance belief, these effects were nonsignificant (effect = 0.05, SE = 0.06, 95% CI = [−0.06, 0.18]). The results thus supported H$_4$.

7. Conclusion and implications

7.1. Conclusions

This research infatuates employees' compassion fatigue and investigate the potential of leader humor as a strategic intervention to mitigate such fatigue among tourism and hospitality employees. Three experimental studies showed that leader humor can reduce compassion fatigue, with perceived organizational support mediating this effect. We also identified significant moderating roles of leader hypocrisy and power distance belief. More precisely, leader humor elicits higher perceived organizational support and lower compassion fatigue among workers with low power distance beliefs and in situations of low leader hypocrisy.

We examined the role of leader humor in mitigating compassion fatigue among employees in service failure contexts. Our findings demonstrate its significant impact on employees' coping with compassion fatigue, highlighting its effectiveness in alleviating compassion

fatigue. This result echoes prior work concerning leader humor's positive impacts on hotel employees' work performance (Chen & Ayoun, 2019; Cheng et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2020). Staff members may adjust their emotions to sustain a positive psychological state with the facilitating role of leader humor (Peng et al., 2020).

We also discovered that perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between leader humor and employees' compassion fatigue. This significant mediation accords with previous findings that leader humor fortifies staff perceptions of leader support (Cooper et al., 2018). It also conveys that leaders' behavior exemplifies organizational behavior (Wang, Wen, et al., 2023). As per conservation of resources theory, high organizational support equips employees with valuable personal resources (Chen & Eyoun, 2021), which are associated with positive psychological outcomes such as lower compassion fatigue (Pergol-Metko et al., 2023). Furthermore, Wang et al. (2020) contended that perceived organizational support enriches employees' centrally valued internal resources in service failure contexts. Our research expands on this area by confirming that perceived organizational support is integral to cases of service failure in tourism and hospitality.

Study 2 indicated that leader humor is more likely to alleviate employees' compassion fatigue for leaders exhibiting low (vs. high) hypocrisy. This finding resonates with studies demonstrating that highly hypocritical leaders often contribute to poor employee outcomes (Bharanitharan et al., 2021), disrupted interpersonal relationships (Effron et al., 2018), and negative emotions (Greenbaum et al., 2015).

Study 3 unveiled power distance beliefs as a significant moderator. Employees holding low power distance beliefs prefer equitable communication with leaders (Botero & Dyne, 2009) and view leader humor as self-complementary (Cheng et al., 2023). Conversely, workers with high power distance beliefs have a propensity to see leader humor as a breach of social norms (Yam et al., 2018), rather than viewing it as a mechanism for accessing resources (Cheng et al., 2023). Study 3 provided empirical support for this pattern within the context of service failure: power distance beliefs indeed moderated the impacts of leader humor on perceived organizational support and employees' compassion fatigue. In particular, we found leader humor (vs. rationality) to elicit more perceived organizational support and less compassion fatigue in workers with low power distance beliefs.

7.2. Theoretical contributions

To start, it is one of the first attempts to investigate employees' compassion fatigue in relation to service failure. Although scholars have explored this type of fatigue in multiple domains (Adams et al., 2008; Fute et al., 2022), its role in service failure within tourism and hospitality remains unclear. Additionally, most prior work revolved around the positive effects of empathy at the customer level while neglecting adverse staff-level impacts (Ngo et al., 2020; Pera et al., 2019; Radu et al., 2019). Thus, this research advances knowledge of empathy by highlighting employees' cost of caring (i.e., compassion fatigue).

Second, the research explains the alleviating mechanism of leader humor on compassion fatigue following service failure through the conservation of resource theory. Much of the research on compassion fatigue has been rooted in the transactional theory of stress or emotional contagion theory (Chachula & Ahmad, 2022; Zeidner et al., 2013). The transactional theory of stress focuses on how individuals cope with the stressors through both cognitive and behavioral approaches (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotional contagion theory emphasizes how emotions and feelings may be transmitted among individuals (Hatfield et al., 1993). Although the theories have offered valuable insights into how one may handle compassion fatigue at individual levels (Zeidner et al., 2013), a limitation stems from their primary focus on individual-level processes related to the antecedents or consequences of compassion fatigue (Chachula, 2022; Figley, 1995) rather than encompassing broader organizational-level factors. The present research chooses the angle of conservation resource theory specifically for the context of

resource losses (e.g., service failure). Conservation of resources theory centers on the role of resource gains (e.g., leader humor) (Cooper et al., 2018; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018). This perspective allows the present research to yield rich empirical evidence of leader humor as a prized resource for helping staff cope with compassion fatigue.

Moreover, this research complements the existing literature on leader humor by illustrating the concept's influence on employees' compassion fatigue following service failure. Leader humor is known to boost employees' job performance (Yang & Zhang, 2022). However, limited studies have discussed the benefits of leader humor in hospitality workplaces (Chen & Ayoun, 2019; Cheng et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2020). Our research responds to calls for more attention to how leader humor can affect hotel staff (Cheng et al., 2023). We noted that leader humor (as a key interpersonal resource) can ease employees' compassion fatigue when service failure occurs. This positive effect has not been tested in this context otherwise. Hence, our work offers novel empirical evidence on leader humor.

We also revealed how perceived organizational support mediates the impact of leader humor on employees' compassion fatigue after service failure. Our findings align with literature suggesting that employees seek various resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Social exchange theory has elucidated the functions of perceived organizational support (Wayne et al., 1997). Studies of leader humor typically portray leaders as independent agents who enhance employees' work-related behavior by encouraging positive emotions (Cheng et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2020). Leaders' roles as representatives of their organizations have been largely ignored. Accordingly, we have broadened the body of academic work on perceived organizational support.

Finally, this research provides novel insights into leader humor by introducing leader hypocrisy (a leader factor) and power distance belief (an employee factor) as boundary conditions. We observed that the impact of leader humor varies with the level of leader hypocrisy. This finding also contributes to research on leader-subordinate interaction related to the attribution process (Bharanitharan et al., 2021). The identified moderating role of power distance beliefs further extends humor-based research on employees' differences (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012).

7.3. Practical implications

Our findings have noteworthy managerial implications. First, as compassion fatigue negatively impacts employee well-being in tourism sector, organizations should formulate strategies to mitigate this phenomenon. Management ought to actively engage in initiatives to prevent and manage compassion fatigue among their workforce. Our research suggests that leaders' reasonable use of humor can relieve compassion fatigue at a low cost. Consequently, organizations should prioritize selecting and training humorous leaders—especially in hotel businesses, where employees often experience stress when empathizing with customers during service failure. Furthermore, organizations can implement training programs to enhance leaders' humor, encouraging them to use humor when communicating with subordinates. Humor should also be considered a trait tendency when hiring managers.

Our results regarding perceived organizational support suggest that tourism and hospitality organizations should cultivate a workplace culture that embraces humor. For instance, organizations can promote open communication or training for leaders to develop a positive climate through humor, particularly after service failure. We would also advise organizations to foster an environment conducive to perceived support by emphasizing transparent communication channels, respectful interaction, and a collaborative culture around service failure. Such systems can help leaders practice humor with organizational backing, effectively mitigating compassion fatigue.

Additionally, organizations should be wary of "hypocritical" leaders. Leader humor improves staff members' moods when leaders are perceived as authentic and possessing integrity. Hence, organizations should use comprehensive leadership evaluation criteria that include hard performance indicators (e.g., revenue) as well as soft indicators (e. g., moral integrity).

Finally, leaders should tailor their approach to humor. Our findings indicate that leader humor positively influences staff holding low power distance beliefs. Leaders should therefore consider their subordinates' characteristics when using humor and be cautious in exercising it. For employees with low power distance beliefs, leaders can actively deploy humor to alleviate compassion fatigue during service failure. Conversely, alternative approaches may be more appropriate for employees who hold high power distance beliefs.

7.4. Limitations and future research

This research has several limitations. First, we used scenario-based experiments to discern the conditions for leader humor after service recovery. Future studies could replicate ours by using field tests to improve external validity. Second, we relied on cross-sectional data. Employees' perceptions and relationships with leaders can develop over time. Thus, longitudinal data are recommended in follow-up work to capture variability. Third, we examined the moderating role of power distance beliefs among Chinese employees. Researchers can further explore how leader humor affects employees' compassion fatigue with respect to cultural differences. Fourth, we scrutinized leader humor on an individual level. Employees' compassion fatigue could nonetheless be susceptible to organizational-level factors (e.g., organizational climate and error tolerance) that should be tested in detail. Fifth, this study investigates strategies to mitigate employee compassion fatigue. Future research endeavors could explore other strategies that may facilitate how employees navigating compassion fatigue within the tourism and hospitality industry. Sixth, the current study examines leader humor in general, and future researchers should build on existing research results to describe how different types of humor (e.g., self-deprecating vs. self-enhancing) affect employees perceived organizational support and compassion fatigue in different ways. Finally, the present paper focuses on the aftermath of compassion fatigue after service failures and recoveries. Future research could explore the preventive strategies of compassion fatigue for hospitality employees.

Impact statement

This research contributes to theory and practice since it is the first study that introduces leader humor into the service failure context by investigating how leader humor affects employees' compassion fatigue. Existing literature on service failure and recovery has primarily concentrated on the positive impact of empathy from customers' perspectives. However, compassion fatigue that employees experience as a result of empathy in tourism and hospitality literature has been largely overlooked. This study advances a relatively under-explored area and offers guidance for tourism and hospitality companies on using leader humor to alleviate employee compassion fatigue.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Xing'an Xu: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Najuan Wen:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Ruiying Cai:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Methodology.

Appendices.

Appendix A. Studies on the definition of compassion fatigue

Definition of compassion fatigue	Research Methods	Author
A state of exhaustion and dysfunction – biologically, psychologically, and socially – as a result of prolonged exposure to compassion stress and all that it evokes.	–	Figley (1995)
The formal caregiver's reduced capacity or interest in being empathic or bearing the suffering of clients and is the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced or suffered by a person.	Principal-components analysis and ordinary least-squares (OLS) regressions	Adams et al. (2008)
An acute onset of physical and emotional responses that culminate in a decrease in compassionate feelings towards others because of an individual's occupation.	Meta-narrative approach	Sinclair et al. (2017)
The psycho-emotional distress that originates because of long-term self-sacrifice coupled with prolonged exposure to difficult situations.	Meta–regression analyses	Zhang et al. (2018)
Compassion fatigue is a unique form of other-oriented distress in which the innate tendency to mimic the emotional distress of others causes pain in the empathizer.	Multiple hierarchical regression analyses	Cho and Lee (2023)

Appendix B. Summary of participants' demographics

	Study 1 ($N = 148$; $M_{age} = 30.1$)		Study 2 ($N = 188$; $M_{age} = 29.7$)		Study 3 ($N = 214$; $M_{age} = 28.6$)	
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender						
Male	50	33.8	60	31.9	72	33.6
Female	98	66.2	128	68.1	142	66.4
Educational level						
High school and below	9	6.1	13	6.9	17	8.0
Technical school	23	15.5	28	14.9	27	12.6
University	111	75.0	136	72.3	153	71.5
Master's degree	5	3.4	11	5.9	17	7.9
Monthly income (RMB)						
≤3000	17	11.5	22	11.7	32	15.0
3000-5000	35	23.6	49	26.1	71	33.2
5001-8000	41	27.7	51	27.1	57	26.6
8001-10,000	21	14.2	36	19.1	27	12.6
>10,000	34	23.0	30	16.0	27	12.6

Appendix C. Measurement scales (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

Leader humor (Cooper et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2023).

1. My leader expressed humor with me at work.
2. My leader injected humor into the situations when interacting with me.
3. My leader jokes around with me.

Perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

1. My organization takes pride in my accomplishments.
2. My organization really cares about my well-being.
3. My organization values my contributions to its well-being.
4. My organization strongly considers my goals and values.
5. My organization shows little concern for me. (R)
6. My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.

Compassion fatigue (Adams et al., 2008).

1. I have felt trapped by my work.
2. I have thoughts that I am not succeeding in achieving my life goals.
3. I will experience flashbacks connected to customers.
4. I feel that I am a "failure" in my work.
5. I will have troubling dreams similar to customer's.
6. I have felt a sense of hopelessness associated with working with customers.
7. I have felt tired as a result of my work as a service staff.
8. I will experience intrusive thoughts after working with difficult customers.
9. I have felt depressed as a result of my work.
10. I will suddenly recall a frightening experience while working with the customer.
11. I feel I am unsuccessful at separating work from my personal life.

12. I will lose sleep over customer's experience.
13. I have a sense of worthlessness associated with my work.

Leader hypocrisy (Dineen et al., 2006; Greenbaum et al., 2015).

1. I wish my leader would practice what he or she preaches more often.
2. My leader tells us to follow the rules but doesn't follow them himself or herself.
3. My leader asks me to do things he or she wouldn't do himself or herself.
4. My leader can get away with doing things I can't.

Power distance belief (Xu et al., 2021).

1. Hierarchy is necessary for social order.
2. It is important for society to maintain a hierarchical order.
3. Power differences are necessary in society.

Appendix D. Experimental materials of Study 1

Scenarios	Experimental materials
	Imagine that you are a front desk receptionist at Hotel A in a famous tourism destination. At around 9:00 a.m. on a regular morning, you receive a call from a guest.
	Guest: "What's wrong with your hotel? I asked for a wake-up call at 6:30 a.m. But when the time came, you didn't wake me up and I missed my flight ————", and without waiting for your answer, the customer hung up the phone.
	You check the records and found that a wake-up call service was provided for this guest. You take the initiative to contact the guest to apologize and explain.
	You: "This is the front desk. First of all, I understand the trouble caused for your missed flight." Then you explained to the guest what you understood.
	But the guest still said it angrily: "Your hotel is responsible for it. Why didn't you repeatedly call for several times? You should compensate me for the loss!" The guest's tone was tough.
	You put yourself in the customer's shoes and pacify him further.
	You: "Please calm down first. I understand very well your anxious feeling at this time. At this moment, we will not pursue who is responsible for the time being. The most important thing is to find a way to send you to the place you want to go."
Leaders' humorous response	Even if we failed 99 times, let's try one more time to make it a round number. Every day, let's embrace new challenges with full energy!
Leaders' rational response	It's been a hard time; I hope you will continue to work hard in the future. Correct mistakes if you have made any and guard against them if you have not!

Appendix E. Experimental materials of Study 2

Scenarios	Experimental materials
	Imagine that you are a restaurant attendant that works in a destination hotel. On a typical day of work, at 12:30 p.m., a guest finds a fly on his dish.
	Guest: "What's wrong with your restaurant? There is a fly in the dishes."
	You: "I'm sorry to bring you a bad dining experience. I also understand your feelings. I'm bringing you another one."
	At this point, the guest does not pay attention to your explanation, is angry, and say: "Now, this matter has seriously affected my dining experience!"
	You put yourself in the guest's shoes and pacify him further.
	You: "This is our fault, and we will have the kitchen prepare another one for you. As a token of our apology, we are presenting you with a fruit plate. I hope this matter did not affect your dining experience."
	But the guest still said it angrily: "Get your manager over here. You should compensate me for my loss!" The guest's tone is very tough.
	To calm down the guest as soon as possible, you compensate the guest within your authority.
	You: "Please calm down, I am within my authority to apply for 80% discount for you. I'm sorry that the service has made you feel bad. We will be strictly checking in the future. Welcome to supervise our work at any time."
Leaders' humorous response	Keeping too many things in your heart is not good for your "thin" (a homophone used in humorous contexts in China). Don't take pleasant words too seriously, and don't take offensive words to heart. Lie down where you fall, rest up, and then go!
Leaders' rational response	No matter how terrible things happen today, no matter how challenging the work is, keep moving forward. Every step you take is a new beginning, be brave and accept the challenge!

Leader hypocrisy manipulations

High leader hypocrisy	Low leader hypocrisy
Your leader organized training on the company rules and regulations for staff recently, demanding that all staff must comply with regulations. This includes arriving on time, refraining from engaging in personal matters during working hours, and exhibiting a sincere and polite attitude toward guests. However, you have noticed that your leader violates these regulations. Such as not being at his position during working hours, frequently does non-work-related matters, handle guest complaints with a smiley, but abuses the guests behind their back, and so on.	Your leader organized training on company rules and regulations for staff recently, demanding that all staff must comply with regulations. This includes arriving on time, refraining from engaging in personal matters during working hours, and exhibiting a sincere and polite attitude toward guests. You have observed that your leader does comply with the regulations at work. Such as arriving 10 min early to make work arrangements, being polite and generous in handling guest complaints, and taking the initiative to guide or solve guest problems promptly.

Appendix F. Experimental materials of Study 3

Scenarios	Experimental materials
	Imagine that you are a hotel room attendant.
	A guest complains that his room was not cleaned. The front desk informed you to clean the room immediately. You promptly go to the guest room.
	Guest: "What's wrong with your hotel? The room is in a mess, and no one has tidied it up."
	You: "I'm sorry for all the trouble you've caused, if I were in your shoes, I'd be angry too, please take it easy."
	But the guest still said angrily.
	Guest: "Your apology is not meaningful to me. You should resolve this matter immediately."
	You put yourself in the guest's shoes and pacify him further.
	You: "I'm sorry to have caused you so much trouble and put you in a bad mood. I will now clean up as soon as possible so that you can rest, is that okay with you?"
	The guest expressionlessly said: "I had a long day of meetings and I wanted to go back to my room to rest, but I don't have a clean towel."
	You: "I'm sorry for the bad experience you had due to our work error. I can understand your feelings. I will immediately clean your room and match all your belongings."
Leaders' humorous response	Life is still interesting, and every day brings a new blow. Happy is a day, and unhappy is also a day, so two days have passed. Don't hang your head, it will look like you're short!
Leaders' rational response	No matter how bad things are going right now, don't give up so easily. If you want to have a better life, you need to keep working hard and be sure to adjust yourself in time!

Power distance belief manipulations

Power distance belief manipulations

High-power distance belief sentences	Low-power distance belief sentences
(1) social order for is hierarchy our necessary.	(1) social order for is hierarchy our unnecessary.
(2) necessary subordinates to superiors our social order obedience from is for.	(2) not necessary subordinates to superiors our social order obedience from is for.
(3) a defined place have should everyone high or low.	(3) equal everyone created is.
(4) world in this a social hierarchy should be there.	(4) world in this a social hierarchy not should be there.
(5) function to properly subordinates is necessary from obedience for society.	(5) function to properly subordinates is unnecessary from obedience for society.
(6) is important to maintain order in society a hierarchy.	(6) is unimportant to maintain order in society a hierarchy.
(7) to maintain social order it is important even if power is unequal.	(7) equality to it is maintain important.
(8) obey professors students must to function properly for a classroom.	(8) to obey professors students don't need to function properly for a classroom.
(9) an organization has a place in everyone even if high or low.	(9) place in an equal everyone has an Organization.
(10) are necessary differences in power to maintain order.	(10) in necessary society equality is.

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