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Leader Humour and High-Quality Relationships in Organisations: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Understanding how leaders shape the quality of workplace relationships is a central concern in organisational research, with humour increasingly recognised as a potent interpersonal tool. This systematic literature review investigates the impact of leader humour on relationship quality within organisational settings, drawing on recent empirical advances in the field. Guided by the PRISMA framework, we systematically searched Scopus and Web of Science for peer reviewed empirical studies published from 2016 to 2025. Through a multi stage filtering process, 23 articles were identified as addressing the intersection of leader humour and relationship quality. The review maps how different humour styles shape trust, leader-member exchange, and interpersonal relationships at work. The analysis shows that constructive humour by leaders fosters trust and stronger relational bonds, whereas inappropriate or ill-timed humour tends to undermine these outcomes, obstruct open communication, and can have adverse impact on relationships. In addition, the review catalogues methodological approaches, measurement instruments, and organisational contexts that characterise the existing research. Significant gaps persist, particularly regarding cross-cultural differences and virtual team environments. The findings offer a research agenda for advancing understanding and practical guidance for leaders aiming to cultivate high-quality relationships through effective use of humour.

Keywords: High-quality Relationships; Leader Humour; Systematic Literature Review; Humour Styles; Leader-Member Exchange