

# The Evolution of Humorous Leadership: Mapping Intellectual Structures and Research Frontiers

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## Abstract

Humour in leadership has emerged as a significant factor influencing employee well-being and organisational success. Despite growing interest among scholars and practitioners, research in this field has remained fragmented. To advance systematic understanding, this study conducted a bibliometric analysis of 134 publications on humour in leadership from 2014 to 2024 using VOSviewer. The analysis highlights leading authors, institutions, highly cited works, and publishing nations. Results indicate that humour in leadership is a growing yet still nascent area of inquiry, with four major research clusters identified: Workplace Dynamics and Employee Well-being, Ethical and Behavioural Dimensions, Psychological and Risk Management Aspects, and Practical Management and Organisational Wellness. The findings provide a structured overview of emerging trends and thematic developments, offering valuable insights for future research and practical applications in leadership studies.

**Key Words:** Bibliometric Analysis, Employee Well-being, Humour in Leadership, Organisational Success

## Introduction

Humor in leadership may be identified as a special ability of a leader at work, and it involves a situation in which a leader becomes amusing to his or her followers to achieve relevant work or official objectives. This ability reflects emotional intelligence, making the leader more relatable and fostering an engaging, resilient, and cooperative work atmosphere. Humour in leadership does not mean always telling jokes, using sarcasm or put-downs, or becoming a full-time comedian; instead, it means using lightness and a good outlook to connect with people, build strong bonds, and handle problems better.

A significant corpus of literature in the fields of organisational psychology, corporate management, and leadership has emerged since Malone (1980) outlined the arguments for and against humour in the workplace (Decker and Rotondo, 1999; Scheel and Gockel, 2017). In fields such as linguistics and the social sciences, humour studies are well-established (Robert and Yan, 2007; Wijewardena et al, 2017). Leadership is a popular organisational Behaviour and General Management topic, is regarded as a primary interpersonal competence, and can be defined as a function of influencing a group of people, individually and collectively, by a particular person toward the achievement of specific goals (Opatha, 2015). There is widespread consensus that leadership is an influence process. According to Yukl (2009), making people "understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it" is the aim.

According to Malone (1980), humour was also considered "a virtually undeveloped resource that can contribute to enhancing the satisfaction and productivity of human beings at work." Early writings on humour in leadership outlined its advantages and offered advice for managers. The fundamental premise appeared to be that using Humour appropriately may foster the development of a cohesive, highly motivated workforce and ultimately boost output (Crawford, 1994). Enhancing quality of work life, health and safety, and happiness, which are society-related matters from the perspective of Sustainable Human Resource Management (HRM), in particular Social HRM (Opatha, 2019), is necessary. It is possible to argue that humour in leadership can play a significant positive role in enhancing those matters.

Humour is a powerful tool that leaders use to motivate followers to develop original, creative solutions to challenging issues (Dixon, 1980). People with higher status are better able to use Humour to resolve conflicts, and Humour can help introduce and exchange new ideas in a low-risk way, experiment with potentially dangerous new behaviors, and engage in constructive conflicts (Barsoux, 1996; Romero and Pescosolido, 2008). Laughing it off during a fight helps a group bond and become more open to playing together, thereby improving problem-solving in the long run (Consalvo, 1989).

Consequently, there is considerable potential to increase or decrease one's leadership effectiveness across the range of Humour functions. Constructive Humour provides better leadership results than destructive humour. However, there is no "one size fits all" method for incorporating comedy into leadership conduct, and there is no assurance that Humour will have the desired effect. Managers who want to create comedy can inadvertently stifle it and inadvertently provoke it (Collinson, 2002).

On the other hand, humour's dualistic properties are frequently discussed (Wang et al, 2017), and this may be particularly true of its leadership-related aspects. Positive Humour used by a leader has been linked to increased workgroup cohesion, reduced subordinate work withdrawal, and improved subordinate job performance (Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, and Viswesvaran, 2012). In addition, Humour can reduce stress, build confidence, lift spirits, help leaders improve their relationships with coworkers, create a happy work environment, and boost productivity (Smith, 2013). Examining the connection between Humour and leadership may help pinpoint its benefits and the circumstances in which Humour might undermine a leader's ability to lead (Rosenberg et al, 2021). In contrast, aggressive Humour has been linked to employees' physical and psychological stress (Evans and Steptoe-Warren, 2015) and negatively related to their psychological well-being (Kim et al, 2016). Admittedly, a leader's use of self-enhancing and affiliative Humour styles is positively related to subordinates' psychological well-being (Kim, Lee, and Wong, 2016). It is argued that humour in leadership increases employees' happiness and, in turn, their productivity. Contented or happy employees are integral to achieving high productivity for the organisation.

Since Humour in leadership is crucial to both organisational efficiency and corporate success, there has been a surge in empirical research on the topic in recent years (Cooper et al, 2018; Kong et al, 2019). The social and commercial significance of leadership has led to extensive research on leader traits, competencies, and styles. This research has improved our understanding of what makes an effective leader and, at its core, a good leader (Goswami et al, 2016). Anecdotally, Humour has long been acknowledged as an effective, underutilised leadership tool and a desirable attribute for leaders (Vecchio et al, 2009). The difficulty in studying Humour in leadership stems from the fact that Humour is hard to define and evaluate.

Organisations will undoubtedly gain a great deal from studying and integrating this Humour in leadership that is used for multiple purposes in enterprises. By examining relevant publications, bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method for assessing knowledge structures and the evolution of research topics. Interestingly, despite the obvious benefits of bibliometric-based evaluations, bibliometrics has been employed comparatively often in management (Weinberger et al, 2021). Using an extensive data set for bibliometric analysis, this study fills a significant research gap and provides an overview of comedy in leadership as an area of academic interest.

The objective of the current study was to provide fresh insight into previously unexplored domains of Humour in leadership covered in the Lens journals between 2014 and 2024. It also aimed to present opposing views on the evolution and importance of politics and suggest possible lines of inquiry for further investigation. The current study offers specific suggestions for qualitative developments that will eventually allow for more evidence-based evaluation in the field of Humour in leadership research, which is still in its infancy compared to earlier times due to the complexity of today's workplace and the importance of humour, particularly in leadership, for the success of organisations.

The present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How many publications are in the field of humour in leadership?
2. What is the global distribution and rising tendencies in the field of humour in leadership?
3. What is the humour in leadership clusters?
4. Who are the most cited, prominent researchers in the field of humour in leadership?
5. What are the key phrases that have been used so far and are connected to Humour in the leadership domain?

The rationale for this review is to provide a more comprehensive overview of the research landscape, map the key concepts studied, and the main themes of evidence available on the topic of Humour in workplace leadership, which is currently unavailable in the literature. The current study aims to accomplish the following objectives: to understand author-country collaboration on Humour in leadership, to identify the most cited and notable references, authors, and journals, to examine key terms, and to identify research clusters. This study provides the four contributions outlined above. The first section outlines the goals of the bibliometric analysis, while the second section discusses the study methodology. The results of the significant bibliometric indices are compiled in the third part. Then comes the conclusion.

### **Bibliometric Analysis and Emergence of VOS Viewer**

A quantitative technique for determining the amount and growth trend of literature in a specific new field is called bibliometric analysis. It provides an overview of the published literature from the past that assesses scholarly advancements within a particular topic. It also offers a method for analysing data from papers (Donthu et al, 2021). This method is frequently used to map the scientific subjects covered by a journal, analyse references to scientific publications cited in the journal, and categorise scientific papers by research area (Luckyardi, 2022).

In bibliometric analysis, VOSviewer is frequently utilised, particularly for clustering, theme analysis, and mapping (Yuan et al, 2017; Kokol et al, 2018; Llanos-Herrera and Merigo, 2019). Using bibliometric citation data (1945-2015) taken from the WoS, Olczyk (2016) employed VOSviewer to find growth patterns in the literature on international competitiveness. The findings showed that the notion of global competitiveness is derived from models of competition rather than from neoclassical theories of international trade, and that the primary metric used to quantify competitiveness is trade/export performance. Bibliometric analysis can assist academics in determining the historical context and contemporary relevance of a particular notion. A review of the literature reveals that several authors make substantial use of VOSviewer. Thus, this research leverages its analysis. Researchers can examine a wide variety of bibliometric networks, including publications, authors, journals, organisations, or nations, using VOSviewer (van Eck and Waltman, 2018). Five different bibliometric mapping analysis types can be applied: co-citation, co-authoring, co-occurrence of keywords, citation, and bibliographic coupling. VOSviewer uses text-mining techniques for keyword analysis, allowing it to examine the content of abstracts, titles, and keywords. As a result, researchers discover distinct clusters of closely related objects, which are indicated by the same cluster colour.

According to Perianes Rodriguez et al (2016), an item's popularity and relevance to other objects increase with its size.

## **Methodology**

### **Step 1. Reasoning for the selection of time**

A 10-year timeframe (2014–2024) is used to review the articles; this period was selected given the scope and complexity of the subject under evaluation. Since significant studies on Humour in leadership have been published since 2006, the study's review starts then. The demand for leaders' Humour began to soar in organisations worldwide a decade ago. Furthermore, the latest publications would provide up-to-date, accurate results and trends.

### **Step 2. Justification for the selection of the database**

The articles on Humour in leadership gathered for this review were published by Emerald, Wiley, and Elsevier. The bibliometric review employed the Lens database due to its extensive coverage of papers pertaining to the humour in leadership that were found in several sources. More citation-tracking tools, such as the h-index and citation count, are also available in the Lens database, which aids in calculating more precise citation metrics. In 1998, Patent Lens provided access to patent literature. This led to the creation of the Lens database, a free platform that facilitates the finding of scholarly and patent material. With more than 200 million records, Lens is an openly available internet database. Although basic Lens database access is free, additional options are available with a subscription. When it was first created in 1998 as the Patent Lens database, it has now grown to include academic literature from several sources, including PubMed, CrossRef, and Microsoft Academic Graph. The combination of scholarly and patent content improves the database's usefulness for researchers.

### **Step 3: Justification for choosing paper**

A search for "Humour in Leadership" was conducted in the Lens database from 2014 to 2024. A total of 134 papers were looked at for this inquiry. Wiley, Elsevier, Springer and Emerald publishers are the publishers of the articles.

### **Step 4: Examine and evaluate with VOSviewer**

An extensive examination of citation and co-citation was conducted on 134 articles that were obtained from the Lens database. In addition to the wording analysis for conceptual clarification, a fundamental review was conducted of categories such as the number of publications, journals, nations, authors, and the types of research instruments utilised. Excel was used to generate the tables. Afterwards, the data were transferred to VOSviewer Software version 1.6.18, where figures were created to assess correlations among the data. Using VOSviewer, distance-based maps were created, in which the separation between two nodes represents the strength of their association (van Eck and Waltman, 2022).

## **Data Analysis**

The evolution pattern of publications is given in Figure 1.

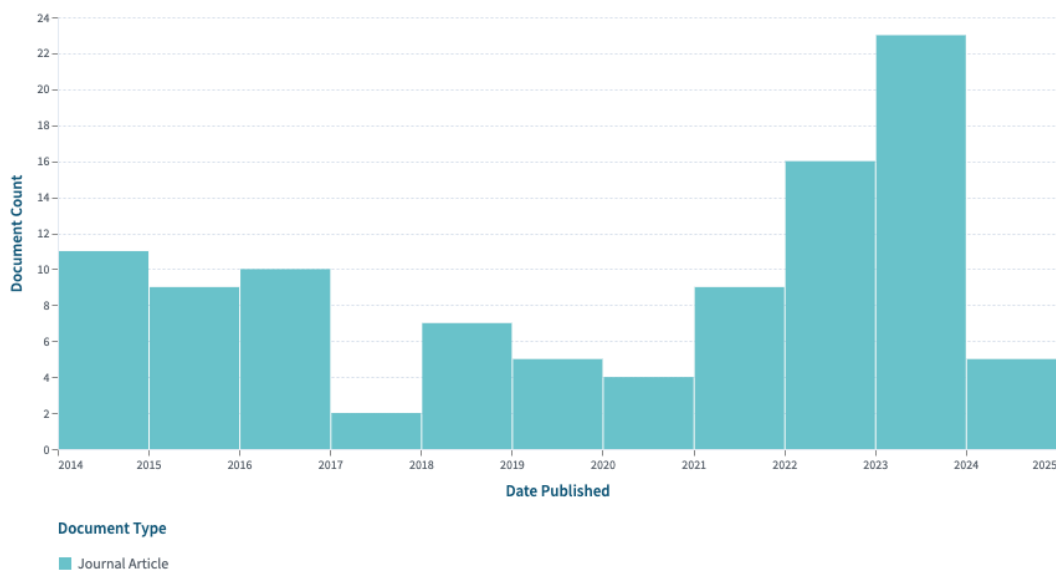
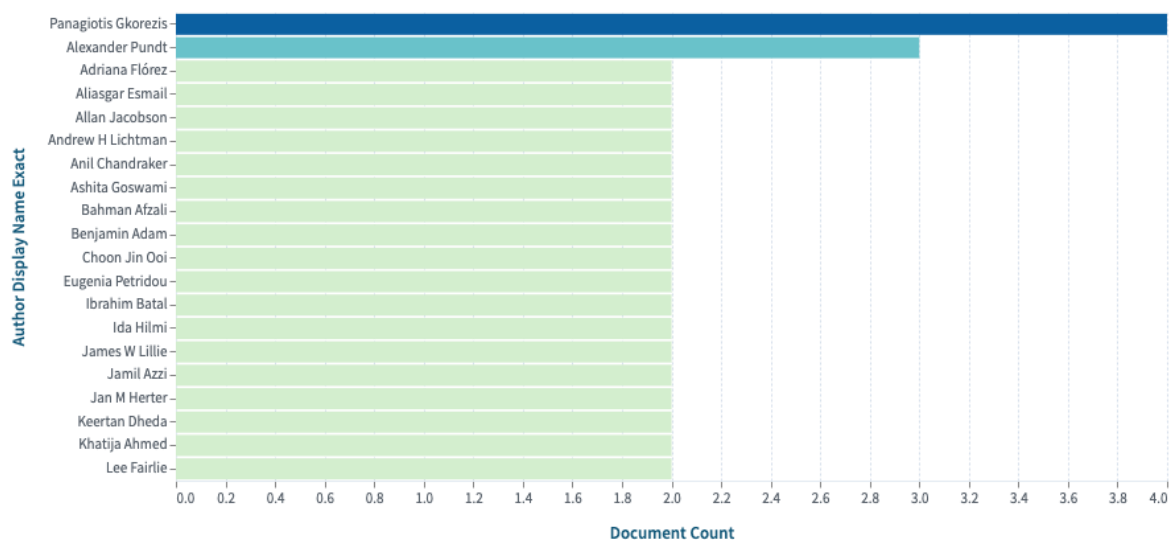
**Figure 1. Academic Documents Published in Honour in Leadership**

Figure 1's annual publications provided insight into the field's evolution. The 134 articles in honour in leadership that were published by Wiley, Elsevier, Springer, and Emerald publishers are displayed in the above table. Since 2014, the number of publications on the subject has increased exponentially annually, reaching a peak of 23 in 2023. It was also crucial to identify the most influential sources, nations, connections, and keywords for each of the 134 papers considered in this study to understand the pattern. Elsevier (52) had the most published articles on Humour in Leadership, followed by Wiley (47), Springer (34), and Emerald (16).

### Most significant authors

Refer to Figure 2. It provides the most significant authors in the literature of humour in leadership.

**Figure 2. Most Significant Authors**

### Influential authors

Refer to Figure 3. It provides the word cloud of the most significant authors.

**Figure 3. Influential Authors**



According to the above Figure 2 and 3, Panagiotis Gkorezis is one of the most influential authors with four (04) research articles in Humour in Leadership which consist of several citations and published on Emerald publishers from 2014 to 2024 and Alexander Pundt is another influential author with three (03) publications published in Wiley (2017), Emerald (2015) and Elsevier (2023) which are highly cited in several articles while many of others have each two articles.

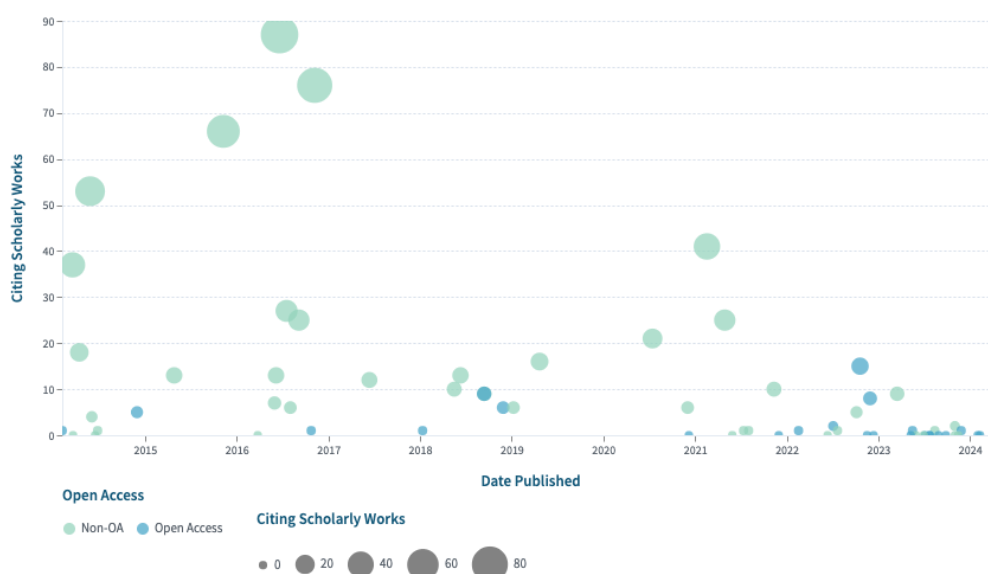
Gkorezis et al (2014) investigated the relationship between a leader's positive Humour and the employees' perceptions of organisational cynicism, with Leader-member exchange serving as a mediator. The results indicate a mediating effect of LMX. This study turned out to be one of the most cited articles with more than half a century of citations. Next, Gkorezis and Bellou (2016) examined the relationship between a leader's positive Humour and employees' perceptions of organisational cynicism, with LMX serving as a mediator. And the results also stated that findings consistently show that a leader's use of self-deprecating Humour enhances followers' perceptions of their efficacy, and that this link is somewhat mediated by followers' trust in the leader. This research also considered one of the most-cited articles of the decade. In another study, Gkorezis et al (2016) focused on closing this gap on the relationship between supervisor Humour and newcomers' adjustment by investigating how supervisory positive Humour affects the adjustment process of newcomers. This is the first study to show how supervisor Humour can improve the relationship identification and adjustment of newcomers. In addition, his recent study examined the importance of workplace resources as contextual factors in productively managing stress-related symptoms at work. It emphasises that when workplace resources are combined, the overall result is better than what would have been predicted if these job resources had only performed as individuals, and this was authored by Zampetakis and Gkorezis (2023).

According to Pundt and Venz (2017), there is a positive relationship between Humour in leadership and organisational behaviour variables. Their research focused on investigating

the relationship between Humour in leadership and follower commitment and burnout in more detail, using leader-member exchange. This study predicted the indirect effect of Humour on commitment and disengagement to be stronger for followers low in need for structure.

Another survey of Humour in leadership by Pundt (2015) examined, beyond transformational leadership and leader-member exchange (LMX), the relationship between Humour leadership and innovative behavior, as well as the moderating influences of creative requirement and perceived innovation climate. When workers believed their tasks required creativity and invention, they reported being more innovative when their supervisor utilised humour more frequently. The perceived innovation climate did not moderate the link. Furthermore, by considering employees' work and the perceived innovation climate as moderator variables, this approach advances theoretical development. Establish comedy as a leadership tool that goes beyond concepts like transformational leadership or LMX. In addition, another recent study by Pundt (2023) evaluated prior research on the relationship between leadership Humour and employee voice, inventiveness, and innovation. Using a meta-analytic study of zero-order correlations, he demonstrated a strong association between employees' innovative and creative conduct and their leaders' Humour. The author concluded that Humour in leadership serves as a stand-in for effective leadership and that there is not much of a difference between Humour in leadership and other leadership frameworks. The first two of his articles caught the attention and were cited by many different authors worldwide. The Top-cited scholarly works over time are given in Figure 4.

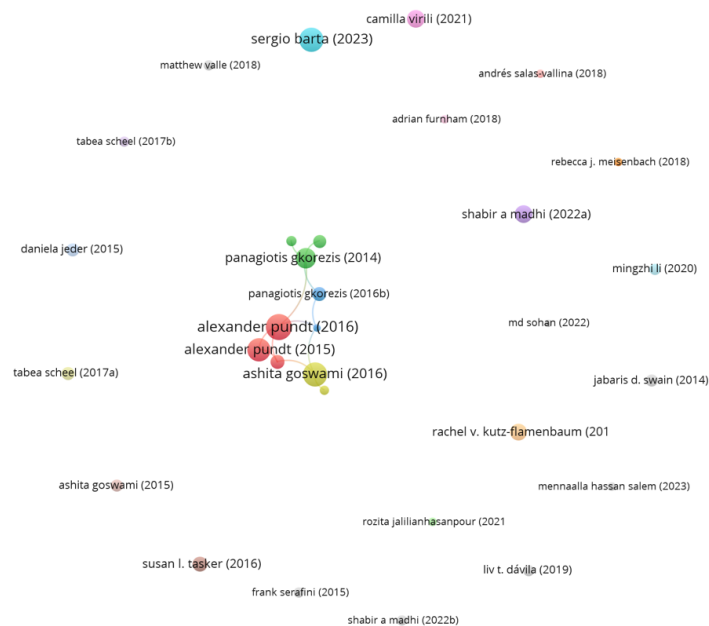
**Figure 4. Top Cited Scholarly Works**





Refer to Figure 5. It provides the Top Cited Publications on humour in leadership.

**Figure 5. Top Cited Publications**



The Highly Cited Papers (HCPs) on humour in leadership over the past ten years of research have 8 articles, with citations ranging from 25 to 87. The top-cited articles are listed in Exhibit 1.

**Exhibit 1. Top Cited Articles**

| Authors  | Title  | Journal Published  | No of Citations |
|--|--|--|-----------------|
| Pundt, A., & Venz, L. (2017).                                  | Personal need for structure as a boundary condition for Humour in leadership.  | Journal of Organization al Behavior                        | 87              |
| Goswami, A., Nair, P., Beehr, T., & Grossenbacher , M. (2016). | The relationship of leaders' Humour and employees' work engagement mediated by positive emotions: Moderating effect of leaders' transformational leadership style. | Leadership & Organization Development Journal              | 76              |
| Barta, S., Belanche, D., Fernández, A., & Flavián, M. (2023).  | Influencer marketing on TikTok: The effectiveness of Humour and followers' hedonic experience.   | Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services                 | 73              |
| Pundt, A. (2015).  | The relationship between humorous leadership and innovative behavior.  | Psychology Journal of Managerial Leadership & Organization | 66              |
| Gkorezis, P., Petridou, E., &                                  | Leader positive Humour and organizational cynicism: LMX as a mediator.   |  | 53              |

|   |   |  |    |
|---|---|--|----|
| Xanthiakos, P.<br>(2014)                    |   | Development<br>Journal,                                |    |
| Kutz, R. (2014)                             | Humour and Social Movements   | Sociology<br>compass                                   | 37 |
| Gkorezis, P., &<br>Bellou, V.<br>(2016).    | The relationship between leader self-<br>deprecating Humour and perceived<br>effectiveness: Trust in leader as a mediator | Leadership &<br>Organization<br>Development<br>Journal | 25 |
| Yang, C., Yang,<br>F., & Ding, C.<br>(2021) | Linking leader Humour to employee creativity:<br>the roles of relational energy and<br>traditionalism                     | Journal of<br>Managerial<br>Psychology                 | 25 |

The article by Pandt and Laura (2016) focused on the boundary condition for Humour in leadership, which has drawn attention to this topic, leading to a higher number of citations than the other articles. This article contributed to the knowledge on Humour in leadership and various organisational behavioural variables through the moderated mediation model. It provided several recommendations to the organisation and policymakers on the importance of humour in the workplace, especially for leaders.

Goswami et al. (2016) stated that Humour and engagement have a positive effect. This article contributed to the existing knowledge that leaders' pleasant Humour was linked to the development of pleasant feelings among subordinates at work and to their engagement at work. Furthermore, there was a larger correlation between positive Humour among leaders and pleasant emotions among people at work when these leaders employed a transformational leadership style. Finally, the Pandt (2015) article, considering employees' tasks and the perceived innovation climate as moderator variables, advances theoretical development.

According to Kurtz (2014), this paper examines how social movement activists and organisations use Humour as a communicative and emotional strategy. It focuses on two types of movement humor: Humour directed outside the group through tactics and frames, known as external humor, and Humour used internally for leadership, collective identity, and emotional labour, known as internal humor. Gkorezis and Bellou (2016) explored how followers' perceptions of a leader's efficacy were affected by the leader's self-deprecating humour. The findings consistently show that a leader's use of self-deprecating humour enhances followers' perceptions of their efficacy, and that this link is somewhat mediated by followers' trust in the leader.

Additionally, Yang, Yang, and Ding (2021) examined the moderating influence of traditionality and the mediating role of relational energy in the effects of leader Humour on employees' creativity. The findings showed that relational energy mediated the favourable relationship between leader humour and staff creativity. Furthermore, through relational energy, traditionality not only diminished the direct association between employee creativity and leader humour, but also moderated the relationship between relational energy and leader humour. This study, which incorporated the notion of conservation of resources, provided compelling evidence that traditionality influences the

extent to which relational energy mediates the relationship between employee creativity and leader humour. It gave the leader a fresh perspective on comedy.

As you can see in Figures 4 and 5 of the top-cited scholarly work, the period between 2015 and 2017 has the highest number of citations. And the recent articles are gaining popularity and grabbing considerable citations as well. In addition, the recent Barta et al. (2023) article has considerable citations, with 73 in the short span since its publication, reflecting its importance across various disciplines. The latter two most-cited articles were from medical and social psychology.

It needs to provide the top field of study on humour in leadership. Figure 6 gives the provision.

**Figure 6. Top Fields of Study**



Humour in leadership is widely studied in psychology, with nearly 50 papers; medicine comes second with 37 papers, and social psychology and political science with 31 and 22 papers, respectively. The most cited article in psychology is "Personal needs, expectations, and Humour in leadership" by Pundt and Venz (2017), which also holds the highest number of citations. In medicine, a paper published in the Journal of Pediatric Nursing by Tasker and Stonebridge (2016) explored the needs of adolescent siblings.

Figure 6 delineates the disciplinary distribution of scholarly outputs on humour in leadership, revealing the epistemic foundations and methodological orientations that currently shape this research domain. The predominance of psychology as the leading field underscores that humour in leadership has been principally theorised through micro-level behavioural and cognitive frameworks. Studies situated in psychology predominantly examine humour as an antecedent, mediator, or moderator of variables such as positive affect, relational energy, employee creativity, leader-member exchange, and individual well-being. This concentration indicates a strong reliance on affect-based, cognitive-behavioural, and motivational theories, reinforcing humour's conceptualisation as an interpersonal regulatory mechanism within leadership processes.

The substantial representation of medicine points to an interdisciplinary expansion, in which humour is investigated in clinical, therapeutic, and care-related leadership contexts. Research within medical and nursing sciences frequently explores humour as a communicative strategy for mitigating stress, enhancing resilience, and supporting patient-facing leadership roles. This suggests that humour in leadership is increasingly recognised as a relevant construct in high-stakes, emotionally demanding environments, thereby broadening the field beyond traditional organisational behaviour.

Contributions from social psychology provide additional theoretical depth by examining humour's role in group-level phenomena, including social identity formation, collective emotional regulation, team cohesion, and conflict negotiation. This reflects a shift toward meso-level theorisation, bridging individual behaviour, group dynamics, and social contextual factors.

The presence of political science highlights the utility of humour in public leadership, political rhetoric, symbolic communication, and persuasion. Here, humour is often conceptualised as a strategic discourse tool employed by political leaders to shape public perception, mobilise support, or diffuse tension. This indicates growing recognition of humour as a macro-level leadership mechanism with societal implications.

Collectively, the disciplinary pattern illustrated in Figure 6 demonstrates that humour in leadership is a multidimensional construct embedded across psychological, social, and institutional systems. The clustering of studies within behavioural sciences, alongside emerging contributions from applied and political domains, suggests that future theoretical advancements will require cross-disciplinary integration, moving beyond isolated constructs toward holistic models that capture humour's complex functional, relational, and contextual properties in leadership settings.

The Influential countries in the field of humour in leadership can be provided and they are in Figure 7.

**Figure 7. Most Influential Countries**



Figure 7 depicts the global distribution of scholarly influence in humour in leadership research. The citation network shows that the United States, Germany, Greece, and Canada hold the highest levels of influence, reflected by larger node sizes and stronger

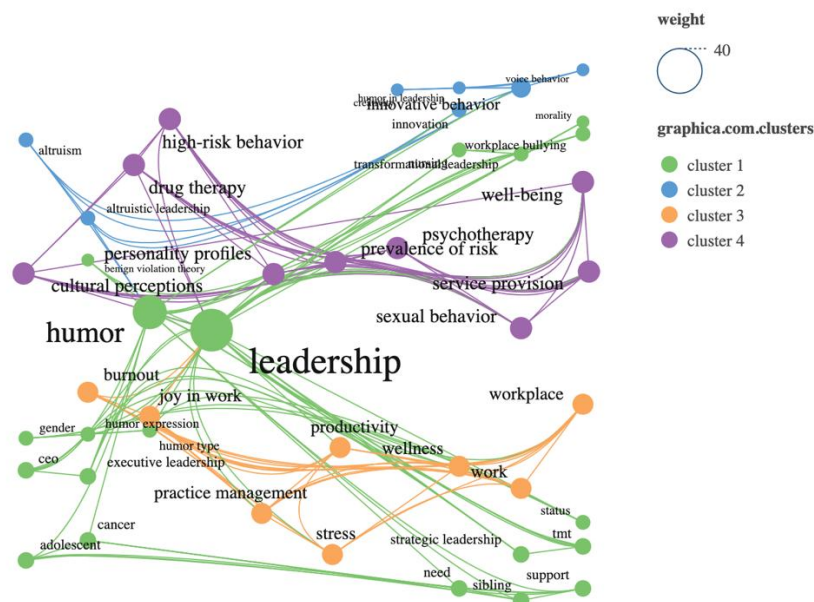
linkages. These countries contribute the most high-impact publications, indicating well-established research activity and visibility in this domain.

The United States emerges as the central hub, followed by notable contributions from Greece and Germany, where influential authors (e.g., Gkorezis and Pundt) significantly elevate national citation strength. Canada also demonstrates a strong presence, particularly in applied organisational research.

In contrast, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East show minimal representation, suggesting a geographically concentrated knowledge base. This uneven distribution highlights the need for broader cross-cultural engagement and diversification of research contexts.

Refer to Figure 8 to observe the provision of the Cluster Analysis of humour in leadership.

**Figure 8. Cluster Analysis**



#### Cluster 1 (Green): Workplace Dynamics and Employee Well-being

This cluster emphasises how Humour integrates into leadership to influence workplace dynamics and employee well-being. Central keywords such as leadership and Humour are pivotal, connecting to cultural perceptions and workplace-related aspects like burnout, joy in work, productivity, stress, and well-being. This indicates that Humour can enhance job satisfaction, reduce stress, and improve overall workplace morale.

#### Cluster 2 (Blue): Ethical and Behavioral Dimensions

Focusing on positive leadership behaviours, this cluster includes keywords like altruism, voice behaviour, innovative behaviour, and morality. Humour is linked to promoting ethical behavior and innovation within leadership. Additionally, connections to high-risk behavior

and drug therapy suggest exploring humor's role in managing stressful or high-risk situations and therapeutic contexts.

#### Cluster 3 (Purple): Psychological and Risk Management Aspects

This cluster delves into the psychological facets of leadership, with keywords such as personality profiles, prevalence of risk, psychotherapy, service provision, and sexual behavior. The focus here is on how Humour interacts with psychological traits and risk management, indicating its potential use in therapeutic settings and its influence on leadership styles.

#### Cluster 4 (Orange): Practical Management and Organisational Wellness

Practical aspects of leadership and workplace management are highlighted in this cluster, with keywords like practice management, work, wellness, and workplace. Humor's impact on reducing stress and enhancing productivity is noted, suggesting its value in effective management practices and promoting a healthy work environment.

### Discussion

This bibliometric analysis provides a structured overview of the evolving scholarship on humour in leadership from 2014 to 2024. While the results indicate an expanding and increasingly diversified field, several conceptual, methodological, and contextual tensions warrant critical reflection.

First, the analysis reveals significant conceptual fragmentation. Although humour is widely examined in relation to leader–member exchange, employee well-being, innovation, and creative behaviours, the constructs employed—such as positive humour, affiliative humour, self-deprecating humour, and aggressive humour—remain inconsistently defined. This lack of theoretical convergence limits the development of cumulative knowledge and risks reducing humour to an ambiguous form of leadership behaviour, simultaneously framed as a trait, a relational mechanism, and an outcome.

Second, the findings demonstrate a marked Western-centric bias in the existing evidence base. Research output is concentrated in the United States, Greece, Canada, and Germany, with limited contributions from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Given that humour is culturally embedded and interpreted through social norms, this imbalance constrains the generalisability of current models. The underrepresentation of non-Western contexts restricts understanding of how humour functions within high-power-distance societies, collectivist cultures, or linguistically diverse workplaces.

Methodologically, the field remains dominated by cross-sectional quantitative designs, with limited longitudinal, experimental, or mixed-method studies. Bibliometric indicators capture research visibility rather than substantive impact, and the exclusion of books, dissertations, and practice-oriented literature narrows the representativeness of the scholarly landscape. This methodological narrowness restricts the capacity to identify causal pathways and behavioural contingencies associated with humour in leadership.

The results also highlight the dualistic and ethically ambiguous nature of humour. While positive humour is associated with enhanced engagement, creativity, and psychological

well-being, misapplied or aggressive humour can exacerbate stress, erode trust, and reinforce inequities. Despite this duality, much of the literature tends toward an optimistic portrayal of humour as inherently beneficial. Insufficient critical attention has been directed toward humour as a form of subtle influence, identity regulation, or emotional labour within hierarchical organisational settings.

Finally, the clusters identified—spanning workplace well-being, ethical behaviours, psychological mechanisms, and organisational wellness—underscore both the humour's multifaceted relevance and its practical complexity. Although organisations increasingly recognise humour as a leadership tool, its effectiveness is highly context-dependent. The literature provides limited guidance on boundary conditions, situational appropriateness, or the interaction between humour and organisational culture.

Taken together, these limitations suggest several avenues for future inquiry: the integration of theoretical perspectives across psychology and organisational behaviour; cross-cultural comparative studies; longitudinal and experimental designs to test causal mechanisms; and expanded ethical and contextual analyses of humour as a leadership practice. Addressing these gaps will support the development of a more coherent, globally relevant, and critically informed understanding of humour in leadership.

### **Implications for Theory**

This study offers several theoretical contributions to the field of humour in leadership. First, by mapping four distinct research clusters—workplace well-being, ethical and behavioural dynamics, psychological mechanisms, and organisational wellness—the findings clarify the multidimensional nature of humour as a leadership construct. This supports the need for a consolidated theoretical framework that integrates emotional, cognitive, relational, and contextual mechanisms rather than treating humour as a singular behavioural category.

Second, the bibliometric patterns reveal persistent conceptual ambiguity surrounding humour styles and outcomes. The absence of unified definitions across studies underscores the necessity for theory-building efforts that distinguish humour as (a) a leader trait, (b) a relational strategy, and (c) a situational behavioural tool. Such differentiation is critical for strengthening construct validity and advancing predictive models of leader humour.

Third, the dominance of Western-based publications points to an urgent need for cross-cultural theoretical expansion. Humour is culturally encoded, and existing theories lack explanatory power in non-Western or multilingual contexts. Integrating cultural value frameworks into humour-in-leadership theories would enhance global relevance and broaden understanding of contextual moderators such as traditionalism, power distance, and collectivism.

Finally, the findings highlight humour's dualistic potential—as both a positive resource and a possible source of strain. Future theoretical models should explicitly incorporate humour's ethical and power-related dimensions, examining how humour may enforce conformity, regulate identity, or reinforce leader authority. This would move the field



beyond predominantly positive interpretations toward more balanced and critically grounded theorisation.

### **Implications for Practice**

The study also carries meaningful implications for organisational leaders, HR practitioners, and policy designers. First, given the strong associations between positive humour and employee well-being, creativity, and engagement, organisations should consider humour as a strategic relational competence within leadership development programs. Training can help leaders differentiate between constructive humour (affiliative, self-deprecating) and forms more likely to harm psychological safety (aggressive, sarcastic).

Second, the findings caution against a universalistic application of humour in leadership. Because humour's meaning and appropriateness vary across cultural and organisational contexts, leaders must exercise situational awareness. What is perceived as motivating or friendly in one context may be interpreted as disrespectful or inappropriate in another. Organisations should therefore embed cultural sensitivity into leadership guidelines and communication policies.

Third, humour should be recognised as a tool for reducing workplace stress and enhancing social cohesion, especially in high-pressure environments. A critical issue called presenteeism is a consequence of a high-pressure environment involving employees coming to work while being ill or being dysfunctional (Werapitiya, Opatha, and Fernando, 2015), and the use of appropriate, positive leadership humour generally reduces the factors that lead to presenteeism, such as stress and low morale. However, the analysis also highlights the risk that humour can be misused to trivialise concerns, mask conflict, or exert subtle influence. HR professionals must create explicit norms that encourage inclusive and respectful humour while discouraging practices that marginalise or undermine employees.

Finally, organisations should treat humour not as an individual personality trait but as a learnable interpersonal skill. Performance management systems, leadership competency frameworks, and mentoring initiatives can integrate humour-informed communication practices that strengthen trust, relational energy, and team climate.

### **Conclusion**

By offering information on the current state of the art and identifying trends, gaps, and research opportunities through the selection and content analysis of the most recent and pertinent articles published in this Humour in leadership research, the current study adds to the body of existing research. It has demonstrated the centrality of Humour in the workplace thus far and highlighted the significance and function of advantages, primarily positive and negative effects, proving the value of seeking a measure of Humour in leadership. The number of publications that highlight the relationship between Humour in leadership and organizational outcomes has increased recently, providing additional insight into this area of study. One can further enumerate the contributions of the current study. First, the evolution and advancement of terminology within this field of study. These days, when searching for studies on leadership in an organisational setting, the terms "humour" and "Humour in leadership" are most frequently utilised. Given the substantial



increase in publications since 2014, new terminology, such as "workplace dynamics and wellness" and its dimensions, has been added. The growing interest in the study of Humour in the workplace, with an emphasis on employees and its effects on behavior, forms the basis of a second contribution. The number of publications has doubled over the last 10 years, from 12 in 2014 to 23 in 2023, demonstrating a growing trend in this study area. The keyword clusters shown with VOSviewer indicate an annual rise in research about Humour integration in leadership.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

Despite the time and effort invested, this bibliometric study does have certain drawbacks. To begin with, the only publications included in this analysis were those found in the Lens database. Despite being a well-known worldwide database, Lens does not contain every article on Humour in leadership studies. Therefore, Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, and other sources can be used to conduct further studies on Humour in leadership. Hence, a comprehensive overview of the research in this area and a clearer understanding of the key distinctions and ramifications of using different databases can be obtained by employing a multi-source method to compare databases. Second, because the bibliometric analysis is conducted using quantitative methods, it is not possible to assess the caliber or content of the articles. To determine the actual gap in qualitative and quantitative data, it could be preferable to use mixed research methodologies in the future.

Furthermore, the ability of bibliometric analysis to analyze the circumstances and driving forces behind citation behavior is restricted. Furthermore, other works, such as conference papers, book chapters, and dissertations, may provide invaluable insights into future research trends, even if only the best publications were considered. To improve explanatory capability and offer a more in-depth examination of the findings and implications, a bibliometric approach may not include sufficient content analysis, as it is primarily descriptive. It is recommended that future research use all worldwide databases to conduct a thorough content analysis, given the limitations of bibliometric analysis, which include variations in how Humour is conceptualised in leadership. More academic publications from diverse databases should be included in future research to improve the generalizability of the conclusions drawn from the bibliometric study. Thirdly, this research has identified new issues and trends. Lastly, a bibliometric analysis of Humour in leadership was conducted from 2014 to 2024. Since the investigations will be conducted shortly, they can be performed later, and may also consider previous decades. Future researchers can extend the validity of this work by utilising information from other sources, such as the Journal Citation Reports.

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