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Leadership and self-denigrating humour: An oxymoron?

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Abstract:

This chapter explores some of the functions of self-denigrating humour when used by different types of leaders (well-established, newly promoted, and ad hoc appointed) **in various workplaces in New Zealand, Hong Kong, and the UK. Drawing on over 40 hours of recorded authentic workplace interactions, we illustrate that self-denigrating humour is frequently and skilfully used by leaders in these different socio-cultural contexts to assist them in accomplishing a range of different work objectives, including relational and transactional aspects. They employ self-denigrating humour, for example, to minimise status differences and downplay power asymmetries, to create solidarity with their subordinates, reinforce solidarity with their team, as well as to establish authority and respond to criticism. We argue that this evidence of leaders frequently using self-denigrating humour – an activity that is not typically associated with leadership – provides further evidence to challenge heroic notions of leadership.**

Keywords: self-denigrating humour, leaders, Hong Kong, New Zealand, the UK, humour, workplace interactions, transactional and relational behaviours, minimising status differences, downplaying power asymmetries, creating solidarity, establishing authority, responding to criticism

1. Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss the close link between leadership and self-denigrating humour, and explore some of the diverse functions this relatively inconspicuous type of humour may perform in workplace contexts around the world. The various benefits of humour at work

more broadly, and for leadership in particular, are well established (e.g., Avolio, Howell and Sosik 1999; Baxter 2010; Goleman 2003; Holmes 2007; Holmes and Marra 2006; Hoption, Barling and Turner, 2013; Schnurr 2009). Previous research has identified and described some of the ways in which leaders in a range of different workplaces in different socio-cultural contexts draw on humour to achieve their various objectives – transactional, as well as relational – often simultaneously (e.g., Holmes, Schnurr and Marra 2007, Marra, Schnurr and Holmes 2006; Mullany 2007; Schnurr 2008, 2009; Schnurr and Chan 2009, 2011). Humour is a valuable discursive strategy frequently used by leaders to get things done, mitigate criticism, disagreements, and other potentially face-threatening acts. It may also help leaders to manage and avoid conflict, release tension, and gain compliance from their subordinates. Moreover, humour is an excellent means for bonding, creating and enhancing solidarity, and expressing in-group membership. Due to these multiple functions, it has been argued that humour is 'one of the key characteristics of leadership' (Clouse and Spurgeon 1995: 19). However, in spite of the attention that humour and leadership have recently received from researchers – especially from those taking discourse analytical approaches to workplace communication – self-denigrating humour has perhaps not received the attention that it deserves. Although some studies also mention self-denigrating humour, they do not specifically focus on this type of humour, but discuss it as one among many (e.g., Holmes and Schnurr 2005; Kangasharju and Nikko 2009; Rogerson-Revell 2007; Schnurr 2009; Schnurr and Chan 2009). This paper aims to address this gap by focusing specifically on self-denigrating humour with the aim of discussing how some of the multiple functions this type of humour performs are particularly valuable for the performance of leadership.

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Self-denigrating humour refers to those humorous instances in which the speaker is the butt of the humour (Zajdman 1995). This type of humour may perform several functions,

such as enabling the speaker to cope with a difficult situation (Hay 2001) or to protect themselves from 'anticipated deprecation by others' (Hay 2001: 74). Moreover, using self-denigrating humour may also make it easier for speakers to admit their own mistakes and shortcomings (Zajdman 1995), while at the same time portraying a positive self-image and signalling control over a potentially precarious situation (Campbell 2000). However, like other types of humour, self-denigrating humour is a 'complex and paradoxical phenomenon' (Linstead 1988: 123), and it may perform different functions in different contexts.

It has been argued that one of the main functions of self-denigrating humour is to 'redefine [..] the social hierarchy […] in order to create solidarity across group members of differing social status' (Ervin-Tripp and Lampert 1992: 114). Through making themselves the butt of the humour and laughing at their own mistakes and fallacies, leaders make themselves seem 'more human and approachable' (Barsoux 1993: 112). It thus helps them to reinforce solidarity with their team members and to downplay status differences. Although Schnurr (2009) suggests that the frequent use of self-denigrating humour may be particularly prominent among leaders in New Zealand, and Holmes (2007) argues that it may occur particularly often in those workplaces that subscribe to Maori values (see also Holmes, Marra and Vine 2011), there is abundant evidence of leaders around the world using this type of humour in an attempt to minimise status differences and downplay power asymmetries – even if only momentarily (e.g., Baxter 2010; Holmes and Schnurr 2005; Mullany 2007; Perkins 2009; Wisse and Rietzschel 2014).

What is particularly interesting about self-denigrating humour and its relationship with leadership is the observation that the use of self-denigrating humour is not necessarily a behaviour that is typically associated with leadership. On the contrary, according to

traditional views of the leader as 'the solo, all-powerful hero' (Holmes 2017), the combination of leadership and self-denigrating humour seems to be an oxymoron, a contradiction in itself. And although these heroic notions of leadership are said to be a matter of the past, there is some evidence that lay people at least are still holding on to them (Eddy and van der Linden 2006; Jackson and Parry 2001; Wheatley and Frieze 2011). However, recent discourse analytical research has begun to challenge such notions and has questioned underlying stereotypes about leadership (Choi and Schnurr 2014; Clifton 2017; Holmes 2017). As Clifton (2017) argues, these heroic notions of leadership are often unable to capture the actual leadership performances that occur in many of today's organisations that are often characterised by flatter, less-hierarchical structures and more democratic and participatory processes, which increasingly value and encourage teamwork and the sharing of specialised knowledge and expertise (Mehra, Smith, Dixon and Robertson 2006).

In this chapter, we contribute to this emerging research and challenge some of the stereotypes associated with the hero leader by providing further evidence not only that leaders (around the world) frequently use self-denigrating humour in their everyday workplace interactions, but also that this inconspicuous and often overlooked discursive strategy performs a myriad of functions which have the potential to enhance the performance of leadership.

2. Data and methodology

In this chapter, we draw on over 40 hours of natural interactional data that were audio- and video-recorded following the data collection methods devised by the Language in the Workplace Project (Holmes and Stubbe 2015; see also Vine and Marra this volume). Data were recorded in a range of different workplaces in different regions and countries including

New Zealand, Hong Kong, and the UK, involving English and Cantonese interactions, and very different types of leaders and different professional industries. The New Zealand data was collected in an IT organisation, and focuses on the CEO and co-founder of the company. The Hong Kong data comes from a large financial organisation, and analyses the use of self-denigrating humour by the newly appointed leader of a team of administrators. The UK data was recorded in a manufacturing company, and captures the behaviours of an ad-hoc leader, i.e. an otherwise ordinary team member who was asked to temporarily take on leadership responsibilities for a particular meeting. This diversity in socio-cultural context, professional industry, and type of leader is deliberate, as it enables us to point to some of the complex and diverse ways in which self-denigrating humour is used by different kinds of leaders and in different kinds of contexts. And although we do not aim to make any generalisations, this diversity, we hope, illustrates some of the multiple benefits of self-denigrating humour for leadership and does not limit our claims to a particular context or type of leader.

Although identifying humour is not a straightforward undertaking and requires considerable contextual knowledge (Schnurr 2010), identifying self-denigrating humour is perhaps even more complicated because it is not typically responded to with laughter but rather generates a wide range of other responses, including playing along with the humour, expressing sympathy, agreement, laughter, as well as generating no response (Schnurr and Chan 2011). In identifying instances of self-denigrating humour in our data, then, we have looked for contextualisation cues (Gumperz 1999) that may index humour, such as heightened speaker involvement, change in pitch and speed of delivery, and we have relied on our knowledge of the participants and the norms and practices that characterise their workplaces (Holmes and Stubbe 2015).[1]

3. Analysis

While there is ample evidence of self-denigrating humour in the data that we have collected, due to the word limits of this chapter, we can only analyse and discuss three examples here, which involve three different types of leaders (well-established, newly promoted, and ad hoc appointed) and illustrate some of the variety – in form, function, and response – that self-denigrating humour may display (see also Schnurr 2009, and Schnurr and Chan 2009, 2011 for more examples). The first example that we analyse here is taken from our New Zealand dataset, and it occurred just before one of the regular management meetings at an IT company. We have highlighted the self-denigrating humour in bold in all examples for ease of reading.

Example 1

Context: Just before the official start of the meeting, only two of the meeting participants are present in the meeting room: Donald, the CEO, co-founder and owner of the company, and Lucy, one of the project managers. Prior to this example, Donald and Lucy have discussed some issues with a disbursement request submitted by Lucy. It turns out that Lucy has made some mistakes as she was not familiar with the processes for submitting such documentation.

1	Donald:	you- you (normally) should have known but I'm not sure
2		I've been through most of this sort of thing with with the guys but
3		(.) there's lots of gaps still (1.2) and I haven't (1.2) yeah it needs to
4		be better written up
5	Lucy:	Mm
6		(5.7)
7	Lucy:	I don't know how the guys are feeling

8		but sometimes you feel like you're getting
9		a bit bogged down with different processes and stuff. (0.5)
10		it would be nice if they had one process with
11		all sort of (1.2) //checklist\ of tasks

| 12 | Donald: | /well\\\\ |

13	Donald:	**that's what I started doing just tried to**
14		**write that up the other day (0.9) terrible**
15		**I just ( ) get a mental block and**

| 16 | Lucy: | [exclaims] but you just need like bullet points |

| 17 | Donald: | **Yes (1.0) /yeah\\\\no it's not hard is it** |

| 18 | Lucy: | **//(you-)** |

| 19 | Lucy: | No |

At the beginning of this extract Donald admits that there are '*gaps*' and that the current process '*needs to be better written up*' (lines 3-4). After producing a minimal acknowledgement in response to these explanations (line 5), Lucy takes this opportunity to vent some of her frustration about having to deal with different processes (lines 7-9). This, together with an expression of her desire for a '*checklist of tasks'* (line 11), supports Donald's

previous point about the need for formally writing up the processes (Stivers 2008). Lucy's utterances are responded to with a humorous admission of guilt by Donald, who confesses that he did start writing up these processes, but found it '*terrible*' (line 14) and '*g[o]t a mental block*' (line 15). This confession and self-denigrating remark is interrupted by Lucy (line 16) who 'exclaims' in a humorously accusing and perhaps slightly teasing tone of voice '*but you just need like bullet points*'. Thus, rather than expressing sympathy for or understanding of Donald's difficulties, Lucy plays along with Donald's humorous comments, but points out that the task at hand is actually rather small and very doable (c.f. her lexical choices '*just*', '*like*', and '*bullet points*'). Distancing herself from her boss' (humorous) search for approval (and possibly forgiveness), Lucy's remarks are clearly tongue-in-cheek and are used to tease him – as is also reflected in her tone of voice. This teasing is then picked up by Donald and used for further self-denigrating humour. By agreeing that the task is actually '*not hard*' (line 20), he further downplays his (technical) expertise and his status at the top of the organisational hierarchy by portraying himself as not very skilled in these matters. Lucy's behaviours here could also be interpreted as displaying leadership, as several of the activities that she performs (such as encouraging and motivating others, as well as telling them what to do) are indexed for leadership.

Donald's self-denigrating humour is formulated in a typical story structure (Goodwin 1984) which contains the background, a sentence summarizing his feeling ('*terrible*') and the climax ('*I just (   ) get a mental block*'). Using self-denigrating humour here enables Donald not only to vent his frustration about the issue (which he seems to share with Lucy), but it also performs a range of interpersonal functions, such as creating solidarity among interlocutors, downplaying Donald's status and expertise thereby minimising status differences. It also provides an explanation and perhaps even apology for not yet having

processed Lucy's disbursement request. This instance is thus a nice example of what Rogerson-Revell (2007: 6) describes as downplaying competence and using self-denigrating humour to 'defuse the pressure when they [the leaders] know they haven't acted as they should have'.

The observation that Donald's use of self-denigrating humour is responded to with teasing and more humour is noteworthy as these are perhaps not exactly the prototypical response strategies that we might have expected given that this is an interaction between a boss and his subordinate. However, based on our knowledge of the company, the relationship between Donald and Lucy, and normative ways in which company members typically interact with each other, we argue that this kind of behaviour is in line with acceptable, normal behaviour that members of this company regularly display. First of all, there is ample evidence in the data that we collected at this workplace, that organisational members – at all levels of the hierarchy – regularly use self-denigrating humour. We have collected numerous examples where Donald and another leader, Jill, who also participated in our study, humorously put themselves down – even in relatively high stakes encounters, such as a job interview (see Holmes and Schnurr 2005; Schnurr 2008, 2009 for more examples). A good example of this is Jill's tongue-in-cheek description of herself as a '*technical clutz*' when she is unable to sort out a problem with her computer. Just like Donald in the example above, she uses self-denigrating humour here to downplay her own expertise and status in the company (as Director of the company and co-owner) by questioning her (technical) abilities.

The next example is taken from a very different context, namely the regular meeting of a team of administrators at a large financial company in Hong Kong. It shows how Cheryl, the newly promoted leader of the team, makes use of self-denigrating humour. However, it is

noteworthy that in contrast to the data that we collected in Donald's workplace, we found only relatively few instances of self-denigrating humour in the data that we recorded in Cheryl's team – which may, of course, be related to the fact that at the time of recording she was relatively new in her role, and thus perhaps less confident (as became clear during the post-data collection interview) than Donald, who – being the CEO and one of the founders – enjoys a very different, much more established, standing and status within his organisation.

Example 2

Context: During a regular staff meeting of administrators who provide clerical and administrative support to training courses within the company. For every course, the attendance is first recorded on paper and then manually entered into the company's database. Julia, who is responsible for the task, has complained about the inconsistency in the use of symbols and highlighting colours on the attendance sheets. She designed a new form, which was discussed at great length in the previous turns. This excerpt occurs at the end of this discussion. The meeting was originally conducted in Cantonese, the native language of participants.

1 Julia: 即 mark 清楚最緊要.

2   如果唔係我成日問你究竟點啊點啊

            'I mean the most important thing is to mark the symbols clearly

            otherwise I have to ask you about them all the time.'

3 Cheryl: 即- 淨係- 通常都係 technical 嘅 (content) 嘅樣

4   'that- only- is it usually that the technical (contents) are like that?'

5	Julia:	多人囉所以就亂囉
6		//係啊\
		'When there are many people so it gets chaotic
		//yes\'
7	Cheryl:	/mm\\
8	Julia:	嗰啲就(.)嘅其他嗰啲都係一版嘅差唔多
		'Those (.) for the other courses there is about one page'
9		(1.3)
10	Cheryl:	嗷：嗷你都冇辦法嘞. 都要[laughing voice]:繼續
11		//問㗎嘞. 係啊: [laughs]\
		'Then: then you have no choice. You have to [laughing voice]:
		continue to //ask me. yeah: [laughs]\'
12	Julia &	/[laugh]\\
	some:	
13	Cheryl:	睇吓我哋(.) 會唔會好啲喇如果 consistent 咗//嘅話\
		'Let's see if we (.) would be better when we are consistent //PRT\'
14	Julia:	/係啊\\ 即一致啲 [2]
		'/yes\\ that is more consistent'
15	Cheryl:	係啊
		'yes'
16		(1.5)
17	Cheryl:	um 好. 嗷跟住就
		'um okay. And next is'

18	[2 seconds pause with noise of paper flipping]
19	係嘞 噉跟住我哋嗰個 guidelines
	'yes next is our guidelines'
20	[CL moves on to a new item]

Instead of directly answering Cheryl's question about attendance sheets for technical courses (lines 3-4), Julia points out the fact that technical courses usually involve many attendees and consequently are more problematic (lines 5-6) while the lengths of the attendance sheets of the other courses are usually about one page (line 8). After a noticeable pause (line 9), Cheryl makes a light-hearted comment about the persistent problems with these courses by suggesting that whenever problems or issues occur with regards to these courses, her team members will have to continue referring to her for advice (lines 10-11).

While portraying herself as the ultimate source of information could be interpreted as reinforcing her special status within the group, it is interesting to note that this comment is uttered with a laughing voice (which is a common technique for inviting laughter (Jefferson 1979)). This laughter marks it as humorous, and Cheryl's choice of words 'you have no choice' has a self-denigrating effect. These humorous effects are further intensified by the laughter that follows (line 11), which is picked up by her team members half-way through Cheryl's utterance (line 12). But after this short excursion the humour comes to an end and the laughter ceases. Although , Cheryl's self-denigrating comment and the subsequent laughter are only relatively short, they assist her in achieving two contradictory effects: on the one hand, they help her downplay her position and status (by making fun of a potentially problematic situation), but on the other hand, they at the same time enable her to establish

herself as the ultimate source of knowledge, thereby in fact emphasising her special status and claiming and legitimising her leadership position in the team.

In contrast to Example 1 above, Cheryl's self-denigrating comment is not elaborated and comes to an end after some joint laughter among herself and some of her colleagues (lines 11 and 12). After this short break from the more serious business, Cheryl draws participants' attention back to the newly introduced attendance form (line 13) and returns to a focus on transactional objectives by moving on to the next agenda item (lines 17-19). The observations that this instance of self-denigrating humour is relatively short, and that we only found a few instances of this kind of humour in her data, could be explained by the fact that Cheryl is relatively new to her leadership position, and may thus lack the confidence and experience that some more established leaders may have (as she told us in the interview after data collection). But although self-denigrating humour may not be one of the strategies that Cheryl uses as regularly as Donald and Jill, for example, we wanted to include this example here to show that even relatively 'new' and inexperienced leaders may find it useful to draw on the multiple – sometimes even contradictory – functions of self-denigrating humour.

We discuss one more instance here of how a leader uses self-denigrating humour. As with the previous examples, we discuss the multiple functions this type of humour performs, and also how it is responded to. Example 3 is taken from a meeting at a manufacturing company in the UK.

Example 3 (from Mullany 2007: 160-1; transcription conventions shortened and modified)
Context: This example comes from a meeting of the business control team in a manufacturing company in the UK. All participants are of equal status in the organisational hierarchy, and

David (Chair) is just filling in for the normal Chair who had to send his apologies before the meeting. In line 1 David is detailing how product codes are calculated.

1   David: There are you know thirty forty different (   ) codes

2   depending on whether it's colour (red) or non-colour (red)

3   (charcoal) erm you know whatever it might be //er\

4   Carol: [in a bored tone of voice] :/mm\\:

5   //[laughter from all women managers]\

6   **David:** **/I realise\\ //I'm**

7   Becky: /sorry\\ David we'll all stop //laughing\ [laughs]

8   **David:** **/I realise\\ I'm boring you but the scary**

9   **//there is an important point to all this**

10   **Carol:** **/[laughs] yes yes come on then**

11   **David:** **//there's a\ scary footnote to all of this erm**

12   **Kate:**   **/[laughs]**

13   David: having looked at the //export side of things\

14   [David gets interrupted and challenged by some of the women

                 managers shortly afterwards again – see Mullany (2007: 160-1) for

                 a longer transcript of this exchange]

This is a very interesting example of leadership because the person who takes on the

leadership role here, David, is not normally the one in charge of this team or these meetings,

but has been asked at very short notice to fill this position. As a consequence, David is not

particularly enthusiastic about his new (even if temporary) role, and just prior to this except

he has been criticised by his female colleagues for his poor time-management and chairing

skills. Carol's minimal response in line 4 could be interpreted as subversive humour (Mullany

2007: 161), which in turn triggers David's subsequent self-denigrating humour (lines 6, 8-9) as a response to this. David's use of self-denigrating humour here could be interpreted as an attempt to defend himself against his colleagues' criticism, and perhaps also as an attempt to release some tension (Perkins 2009). More specifically, his self-denigrating humour is a response to Carol's expression of boredom and disinterest (line 4), which could be interpreted as a request for David to end the current topic and move on with the agenda.

Carol's minimal response receives a burst of laughter from the other women (line 5), which makes the potential threat of this criticism of David even stronger. David's initial attempts at justifying himself and regaining charge of the chairing (line 6) are interrupted by Becky, who cuts into this on-going utterance to deliver a tongue-in-cheek apology and a light-hearted promise to stop laughing. However, her accompanying laughter signals that she is not being serious, and the women continue to challenge David and his authority and suitability for the leadership role.

In response to his colleagues' challenging comments and subversive laughter, David continues to justify his behaviour by admitting his faults ('*I realise I'm boring*' (line 8)) while at the same time emphasising the relevance of his elaborations ('*there is an important point to all this*' (line 9)). His formulation here resembles a typical 'yes but' structure often found in disagreements (Kotthoff, 1993; Pomerantz, 1984), which is initiated by a self-denigrating comment (line 8) to respond to his colleagues' previous teasing and laughter. He thereby signals that he is a good sport and can take the women's criticism. However, his attempt to regain control over the meeting (and its participants) gets interrupted by Carol who continues teasing David by issuing an imperative directive (line 10) with which she challenges his explanations. In spite of the potentially mitigating laughter that accompanies

this, her use of an imperative formulation and the daring formulation '*come on then*' (line 10), which follows her potentially patronising and impatient '*yes yes*' (line 10), make the directive sound rather direct and challenging. She thereby further criticises David for not getting to the point and hence wasting their time. This teasing and challenging of David continues for a little while, and as the transcript shows, David is not given the opportunity to actually justify himself and explain the '*important point to all this*' (line 9).

So, like in Example 1 above, the leader's self-denigrating humour in this instance is also responded to with teasing from his subordinates. However, in contrast to Example 1, it seems that here, the other participants are actually challenging David's position and claims for a leadership role, while Lucy's teasing of Donald in Example 1 could be interpreted as non-threatening and rather reinforcing solidarity. The women's criticism of David in Example 3 – albeit being wrapped up in the teasing and challenging laughter – is thus more serious and more 'biting' compared to Lucy's rather 'bonding' teasing (Boxter and Cortes-Conde 1997). Given the difficulties of the interactional context in which this exchange between David and his colleagues takes place, it is thus perhaps not surprising that David's use of self-denigrating humour does not aim to downplay his status (unlike Donald in Example 1). He also does not use it to reinstate or strengthen his claims for authority (as Cheryl in Example 2). Rather, he uses the self-denigrating humour to justify his (chairing skills) in an attempt to avoid criticism and eventually gain his colleagues' compliance. Additionally, the humour also supports him in trying to get along with his colleagues and to establish harmony within the team.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In addition to having provided further evidence to illustrate the close relationship between leadership and humour, our analyses of the of self-denigrating humour have shown that different kinds of leaders in different socio-cultural contexts make use of this discursive strategy and exploit its multifunctionality. While the humour in our examples also contributed to creating solidarity (Example 1) and reinforcing (or trying to establish) harmony within the team (Examples 2 and 3), it at the same time also performed a wide range of other functions. The leaders used it to downplay status differences (Example 1), establish authority (Example 2), and respond to criticism (Example 3). Self-denigrating humour, just like other types of humour, is thus a very versatile strategy as it can be used not only to perform multiple functions – sometimes simultaneously – but it can also be used to perform contradictory functions, such as downplaying status differences (Example 1) and establishing authority (Example 2). These observations are in line with previous research – for example, Stewart's (2011: 201) findings that political leaders may use self-denigrating humour as 'a way of attending to egalitarian norms while ascending the dominance hierarchy'. According to this line of argument, (political) leaders can afford to make deprecatory comments about themselves in public domains, because they have high levels of prestige and self-confidence. Similarly, Goleman (2004: 5) argues that for leaders, '[o]ne of the hallmarks of self-awareness is a self-deprecating sense of humor'.

Overall, our findings support the claim that leaders – including different kinds of leaders in different professions in different countries – do use self-denigrating humour to perform a variety of functions in their specific workplace contexts. But the specific ways in which the humour was used, the functions it performed in the interaction, the frequency with which it was used, and the ways in which it was responded to, differed across examples. These differences may be linked to the type of leader, the discursive norms of the team, and

relationships among interlocutors. More specifically, whether the leader was well established as in Example 1, newly promoted as in Example 2, or ad-hoc appointed as in Example 3, seemed to have an impact on how they used self-denigrating humour. Similarly, the frequency and (un)markedness of self-denigrating humour is closely linked to the discursive norms that members of the leader's team have established (Example 1) or are in the process of establishing (Example 2). And the responses the self-denigrating humour received in our examples are closely related to the relationship among interlocutors and the interactional context in which the humour occurred.

In spite of these differences, the use of self-denigrating humour by the leaders remains noteworthy – especially since this kind of behaviour is not typically associated with leadership but rather challenges heroic notions of leadership. And although we do not want to make any grand claims or over-generalisations here based on an admittedly rather small sample size of just over forty hours of recorded interactions in three different organisations, our findings seem to indicate that there is some value in self-denigrating humour for leaders. Perhaps, the leaders' use of this type of humour is a reflection that modesty and not-taking-oneself-too-seriously are also important aspects of leadership, but are all too often overlooked – especially in popular conceptualisations of leadership (Hamilton and Knoche 2007; Collins 2007). As Hamilton and Knoche (2007) point out, most research is obsessed with a focus on charismatic leaders, and other leadership styles tend to receive less attention, and are even sometimes not perceived as leadership at all (Fletcher 2001). This chapter has addressed these issues, not only by looking at a range of very different kinds of leaders, but also by exploring a discourse strategy that is not typically associated with leadership. We thereby hope to contribute to the growing body of research that has begun to challenge heroic notions of leadership and that instead focuses on exploring actual behaviours by actual people in

everyday situations (e.g. Clifton 2017c; Holmes 2017). We hope that future research will continue on this trajectory, and will move on from analysing the speeches and other public appearances of 'great men and women', and the by now well-researched aspects of meeting management by CEOs and middle managers, towards exploring other non-mainstream aspects of leadership discourse and analyse alternative, non-hero types of leaders and leadership constellations.

Notes

1. We would like to thank Louise Mullany for allowing us to use Example 3 and for checking our analysis.

2. Julia's 一致啲 'more consistent' in line 14 is actually a Chinese translation of the English word 'consistent' in Cheryl's utterance in line 13.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

[laughs]	Paralinguistic features in square brackets
[laughs]: yeah:	Laughter throughout the utterance of the word in between the colons
... // \...	
.../ \\...	Simultaneous speech
-	Incomplete or cut-off utterance
( )	Unclear utterance
(hello)	Transcriber's best guess at an unclear utterance
(n)	Timed pause where "n" indicates the interval measured in seconds
(.)	Untimed brief pause
PRT	Utterance particle

All names are pseudonyms.