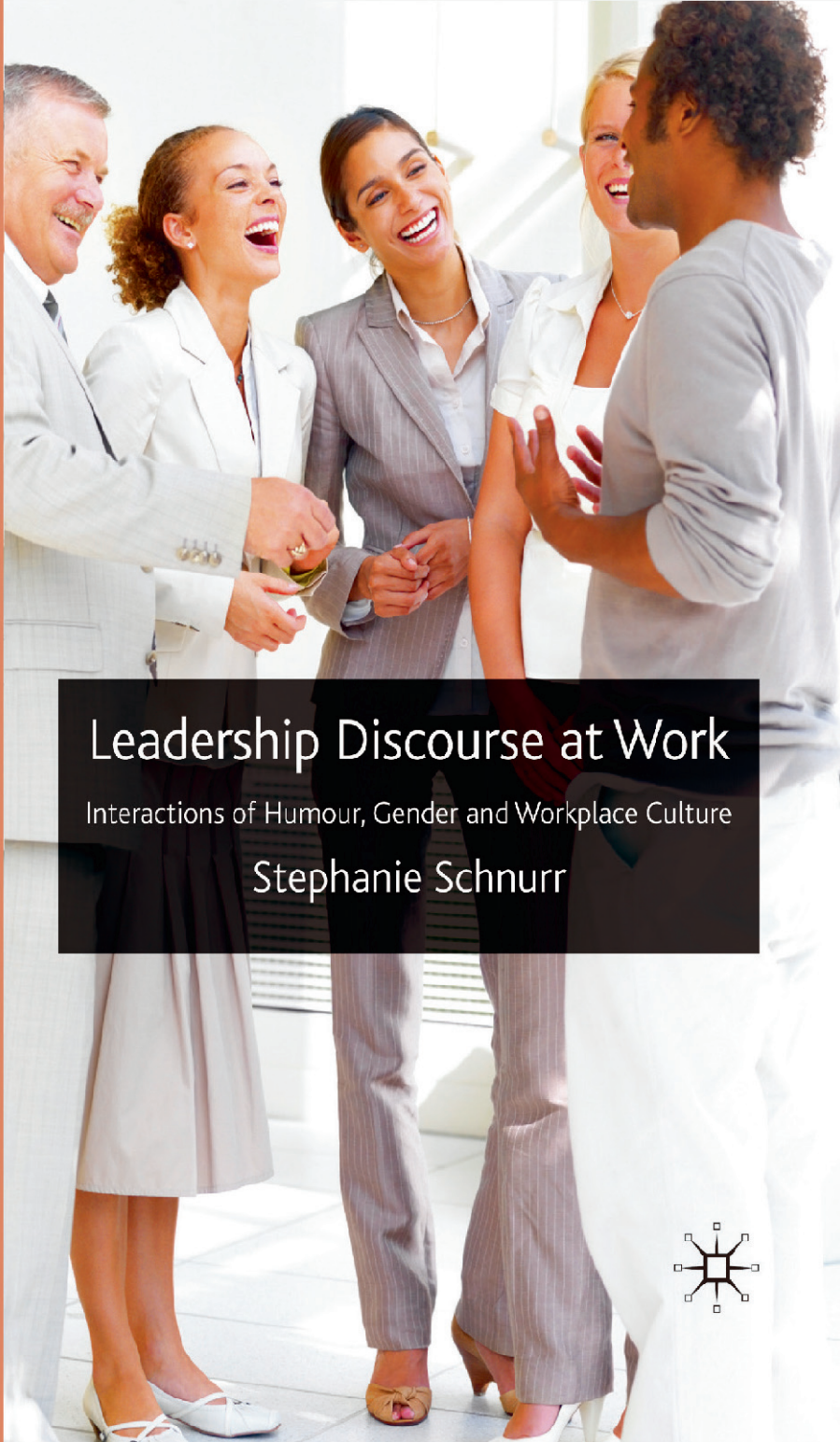

Leadership Discourse at Work

Interactions of Humour, Gender and Workplace Culture

Stephanie Schnurr

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To Andi

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Transcription Conventions

[laughs]	Paralinguistic features in square brackets
+	Pause up to one second
… // ….. \ … … / ….. \\ …	Simultaneous speech
(hello)	Transcriber's best guess at an unclear utterance
?	Rising or question intonation
VERY	Capitals indicate emphatic stress
[…]	Section of transcript omitted
ke-	Incomplete word
[laughs]: yeah	Laughter throughout the utterance of the word in between the colons
( )	Unclear utterance
??	Unidentified speaker
[voc]	clicking of tongue

All names are pseudonyms.

The transcription conventions are adapted from the Language in the Workplace Project. For more information please visit www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/research/lwp.aspx

1
Introduction

An article on forbes.com lists humour as one of the key elements of leadership, which, in addition to courage, judgement and discernment, is described as being indispensable for leaders (Johnson, 2005). This claim is supported by a number of recent surveys which also report that humour is perceived as being a crucial asset for leaders: not only do subordinates prefer leaders who frequently employ humour (see Musbach, 2008) but having a sense of humour is also judged as one of the factors contributing to leaders' success (see McGhee, 1999). It is the aim of this book to explore some of the ways in which leaders in professional workplaces make use of humour in their everyday interactions with the people they work with, and how they use humour in different situations to perform a myriad different activities.

Leadership

Leadership is a complex concept, and academics and practitioners alike have long been captured by its complexity. Not surprisingly, then, researchers across numerous disciplines are constantly trying to gain a better understanding of what constitutes 'effective'[1] leadership and which factors have an impact on leadership performance. Their theoretical and practical approaches to this topic reflect general trends and changes in leadership and organisational research: early assumptions that leaders are born rather than made were subsequently replaced by theories which concentrated on the traits or behaviours displayed by 'effective' leaders. Researchers also began to consider various situational constraints in an assessment of leadership performance. In recent years, however, a new trend has started to emerge, which concentrates on

a particularly important aspect of effective leadership performance, namely, discourse.

Although it has long been recognised that discourse constitutes a crucial aspect of leadership performance (for example, Mintzberg, 1973; Gronn, 1983; Conger 1991; Thayer 1988), only recent studies have explicitly focused on this crucial aspect (for example, Ford, 2006; Berson & Avolio, 2004; Holmes, 2000c). This shortcoming is particularly surprising since a number of researchers have suggested that discourse is more than simply an ancillary aspect of leadership performance – it affects leaders' effectiveness on various levels and it lies at the heart of the leadership process (Case, 1993; Dwyer, 1993; O'Connor, 1997). It has even been noted that '[i]magining leadership outside of language is all but impossible' (Lyons & O'Mealy, 1998: ix; see also Bligh & Hess, 2007). Indeed, it appears that many of the central leadership activities, such as creating and communicating a vision, encouraging, motivating and guiding subordinates, setting a goal and ensuring subordinates' compliance all involve language (for example, Bennis & Thomas, 2002; Dwyer, 1993; Gardner, 1990; Gardner, Callan & Terry, 1996; O'Connor, 1997; Parry, 1998).

However, in spite of this intricate relationship between leadership and language there are surprisingly few studies which look at leadership performance from a linguistic perspective (for example, Wodak, 1997; Holmes, 2000c; see also Mullany, 2007; Kendall, 2003). This book aims to address this issue by illustrating some of the ways through which an analysis of leadership discourse may offer interesting new insights into the complexities of leadership performance.

Defining leadership discourse

Because leadership is a multifaceted concept which often mystifies (Yukl, 1989: 276), there is little agreement among scholars regarding its meaning and definition (Hosking, 1997: 293). In fact, there seem to be almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have attempted to define it (Bass, 1981: 7; see also Decker & Rotondo, 2001). However, most researchers agree that in order to capture the complex and multifunctional nature of this concept, it is useful to view leadership as a process or an activity rather than as a position of authority or as a personal characteristic (Heifertz, 1998: 347; see also Hosking, 1997; Northouse, 1997).

The activities in which leaders typically engage span a wide continuum including achieving transactional objectives and performing relationally oriented behaviours (Dwyer, 1993; Robbins et al., 1998;

Sayers, 1997; Smith & Peterson, 1988). Transactional behaviours describe activities that primarily aim to get things done, solve problems and achieve set goals, while relationally oriented behaviours concentrate on ensuring group harmony and creating a productive working atmosphere. Both activities are integral aspects of the leadership process that cannot always be separated from each other (for example, Ferch & Mitchell, 2001). Instead, leaders often skilfully combine transactional and relational objectives in their discourse.

In order to explore the central role of discourse in the performance of leadership, this study conceptualises *discourse* as having a dual meaning: firstly, discourse refers to 'language above the sentence' (Cameron, 2001: 10), and secondly, on a more abstract level, it is understood in the Foucauldian sense as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). In applying the first meaning of discourse, I follow Cameron (2001: 11) in analysing the 'patterns (structures, organizations) in units which are larger, more extended, than one sentence' – that is, leaders' interactions with the various people they work with. This meaning of discourse, as Baxter (2003: 7) notes, 'almost certainly overlaps and intersects with another conventional linguistic definition of discourse as "language in use"'. This related meaning of discourse refers to the specific ways in which language is used in particular contexts. In other words, it may account for the ways leaders verbally interact with their colleagues and subordinates in the specific context of their workplaces in order to achieve their various leadership objectives.

According to the second, more abstract definition, discourses are 'closely associated with "discursive practices"', that is, 'social practices that are produced by/through discourses' (Baxter, 2003: 7). Discursive practices are thus viewed as an expression of leadership performance, as well as the most important means through which notions of leadership are constantly enacted and created. In other words, through the discursive practices which leaders regularly employ in their everyday interactions, they perform leadership and at the same time construct themselves as particular kinds of leaders.

In this study, then, leaders' discourse is used as the primary indicator of their leadership performance. Thus, when I talk about leadership effectiveness and performance, I refer to the ways in which these aspects are reflected in leaders' discourse. Based on the typical transactional and relational leadership activities described above, and taking into account the central role of language, 'effective' leadership is thus productively understood as a discursive performance, which by influencing others

advances the goals of the organisation (transactional behaviour) while also maintaining harmony within the group (relational behaviour).

This relatively broad and discourse-based definition of leadership has proved useful for a discourse analytical approach to different types of leadership in diverse contexts (for example, Schnurr & Chan, fc; Holmes, 2006b; Marra, Schnurr & Holmes, 2006). It also takes into account that leadership may take different forms depending on a variety of social factors. Clearly, there is no single way of 'doing leadership' that can be described as 'effective' regardless of the context. Instead, a variety of social and contextual factors have an impact on what constitutes appropriate and 'effective' leadership discourse. Among the factors identified in previous leadership literature as crucial for the performance of leadership are the dynamics of leaders' working groups (including the time they have been working together and the expectations they are facing), the culture of leaders' workplace and the ways gender is enacted in leaders' workplace (for example, Dwyer, 1993; Schein, 1992; Hickman, 1998; Ford, 2005). These social factors also have a particularly strong impact on leadership discourse as the analysis in the following chapters will illustrate.

Groups that work together for a long time often develop a shared repertoire of behavioural and linguistic norms on which members regularly draw when interacting with each other. These norms are also reflected in the discourse of the leaders of such groups. Similar observations apply to the role of the culture of leaders' workplaces. Since organisations define notions of what they consider to constitute 'effective' leadership, leaders' discourse needs to be understood against this background. One particularly crucial aspect of workplace culture is the ways in which gender is understood and enacted on a day-to-day basis. Because leadership is not a gender-neutral concept but is already marked by a gender bias, masculine ways of 'doing leadership' are typically viewed as normative (Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995; Martin Rojo & Esteban, 2003; Sinclair, 1998). This male bias is not only reflected in hegemonic discourses of leadership (Ford, 2005) (that is, as conceptualised in the second definition of *discourse* outlined above) but may also impact leaders' everyday discourse (as reflected in the first definition of *discourse*).

The distinctive ways in which each of these factors interacts with leaders' (discursive) performance is the focus of the subsequent chapters. Through a detailed investigation of these social variables, I hope to provide new insights into the complexities of leadership, and thereby highlight some of the advantages of a discourse analytic approach to this multifaceted concept.

Not surprisingly, leaders draw on a wide range of discursive strategies to assist them in achieving their transactional and relational goals while at the same time considering the social factors mentioned above. They frequently display their power in rather subtle ways, for instance, by displaying consultative rather than authoritative behaviours, thus considering their addressees' face needs (Case, 1994; Wodak, 1997; Holmes, 2000c; Kendall, 2003). However, they may also employ more direct strategies to achieve their various goals, such as dominating the amount of talk in meetings (Holmes, 2000c), opening and closing meetings (Holmes, 2000c; Marra et al., 2006), summarising progress (Holmes, 2000c) and controlling the topics to be discussed (Holmes et al., 2007). Leaders often play a crucial role in decision making (Marra et al., 2006) by negotiating consensus among meeting participants (Holmes, 2000c), as well as trying to avoid conflict (Wodak, 1997). However, one of the most interesting discursive strategies used to enhance leadership performance is humour. This rather inconspicuous and under-researched discursive strategy is a particularly versatile tool for performing leadership. And since it may productively be used to perform all of the activities mentioned above, it clearly constitutes an important element of leadership discourse.

Humour

Although humour has long been a topic of interest in leadership and organisational research (for example, Priest & Swain, 2002; Ross, 1992), only a relatively small number of studies have empirically investigated this topic (for example, Avolio, Howell & Sosik, 1999; Decker & Rotondo, 2001). But humour, perhaps more so than many other discursive strategies, appears to be a crucial aspect of leadership discourse. Owing to its inherent ambiguity and its ability to perform a number of functions at the same time, humour enables leaders to achieve their transactional and relational goals, sometimes even simultaneously. It is thus not surprising that humour has been proposed as 'one of the key characteristics of leadership' (Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995: 19).

Humour is not only one of the most interesting discursive strategies on which leaders draw in their everyday performance, it is also one of the most ambiguous ones. And defining humour – like defining leadership – is fraught with difficulties. Thus, although extensive research across various disciplines has been conducted on humour, it remains 'a complex and paradoxical phenomenon', as Linstead (1988: 123) notes. Some of the difficulties are due to substantial problems in providing a

suitable definition of humour, which may account for all the phenomena grouped under this umbrella.

Defining humour

The majority of research on humour has been conducted in psychology, where it is generally understood in terms of psychological conception (Apte, 1985), and where it is typically defined as amusing utterances which make an audience laugh (Duncan & Feisal, 1989: 19). This relatively broad definition has been adopted by researchers from other disciplines and is widely used (for example, Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995; Fatt, 1998; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Smith, Harrington & Neck, 2000). It focuses on the assumption that humour is typically 'pleasant' and aims at creating 'good-tempered amusement' which results in the production of laughter (Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995: 2, 9). However, assuming a close relationship between laughter and humour is problematic, and numerous studies have questioned whether laughter is a useful sole indicator of humour (for example, Berlyne, 1972; Chapman, 1983; Devereux & Ginsburg, 2001; Haakana, 2002; LaFrance, 1983; Provine, 2000). It seems that although humour and laughter may have some features in common, they are not inseparable. Provine (1996), for example, found that most occurrences of laughter do not constitute responses to humour. In fact, less than 20 per cent of the laughter uttered by the participants in his study was a reaction 'to anything resembling a formal effort at humour' (Provine, 1996: 42).

Hence, since not all instances of humour are responded to with laughter and since laughter may also occur without being triggered by humour, this psychologically oriented definition of humour is too narrow to capture the complexities of humour. Furthermore, because humour may also occur without the speaker intending it (Raskin, 1985: 27) and since not all instances of humour are intended to result in amusement (for example, Alberts, 1992; Collinson, 1988; Fahlman, 1997; Morreall, 1997), it appears useful to develop a broader definition of the complex phenomenon of humour.

In this study I will adapt the definition of humour proposed by Mullany (2004: 21). Based on the definition by Holmes (2000b), she defines humour as

> instances where participant(s) signal amusement to one another, based on the analyst's assessment of paralinguistic, prosodic and discoursal clues. These instances can be classified as either successful or unsuccessful according to addressees' reactions. Humour can be

a result of either intentional or unintentional humorous behaviour from participants.

This definition has several advantages; firstly, it acknowledges the range of possible response strategies, which may be in a variety of different forms – the prototypical laughing or smiling, as well as lifting an eyebrow, producing more humour or expressing offence (in the case of failed humour). Secondly, this definition of humour also incorporates less typical occurrences, such as unintended humour as well as failed humour. It may even be read in such a way that it also covers the 'dark' side of humour, that is, those instances of humour which are designed to put down or personally attack the addressee, and which may thus not result in the amusement of *both* interlocutors.

In addition to defining humour, identifying instances of humour, in particular less obvious examples, poses another challenge. This is particularly true since norms of what is perceived as humorous are likely to vary across different groups and may thus be difficult to decipher by non-group members (for example, Coser, 1960; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003b; Pogrebin & Poole, 1988). Thus, in identifying humour in this study, special emphasis is put on a range of paralinguistic, prosodic and discoursal clues (as suggested by Mullany, 2004 and others [for example, see Holmes, 2000b; Holmes & Marra, 2002c]), such as the speaker's tone of voice, and the audience's auditory as well as (where possible) gesticulatory responses.

A brief taxonomy of humour

In order to understand the role of humour in leaders' discourse, and in particular to analyse the multiple ways in which they make use of this discursive strategy when achieving their numerous transactional and relational goals, it is crucial to distinguish between different types of humour. A brief taxonomy is provided here of the types of humour that were most frequently encountered in this study: anecdotal humour, fantasy humour, wordplay, role play, self-denigrating humour, teasing, sarcasm and irony.[2] It is, however, important to note that boundaries between these types of humour are not always clear-cut, and some instances may be classified as belonging to more than one type.

Anecdotal humour is defined as 'a story which the speaker perceives to be amusing' (Hay, 1995: 65). It can consist of succinct comments or episodes which may be elaborately developed by numerous speakers. This type of humour may evolve around various topics, may sometimes contain a moral and is often interwoven with other types of humour.

Anecdotes trigger almost immediate audience reaction in the form of laughter, more humour or verbal replies from the interlocutors (Norrick, 1994: 425). In contrast to anecdotal humour, which typically refers to an incident that actually took place, *fantasy humour* describes the construction of humorous, imaginary scenarios (Hay, 1995: 68). This type of humour may refer to possible or impossible events and is often jointly constructed by several speakers. Like anecdotes, sequences of fantasy humour often incorporate other types of humour.

A third type of humour, *wordplay*, describes humour which emerges due to a speaker's choice of words, in particular their sounds and ambiguous meanings (Chiaro, 1992). A classic example of wordplay humour is the puns in which a speaker uses 'words that are either identical in sound (homonyms) or very similar in sound, but are sharply diverse in meaning' (Abrams, 1993: 172; see also Fatt, 1998; Raskin, 1985). This type of humour is understood rather broadly here, and also incorporates humorous utterances that involve a slip of the tongue. *Role play*, on the other hand, characterises humorous instances in which the speaker imitates the voice or personality of another individual for comic effect (see Hay, 1995: 76).

In contrast to the types of humour outlined so far, another type, *self-denigrating humour*, describes instances in which the speaker rather than the addressee is the butt of the humour (Zajdman, 1995). Directing the humour towards oneself has several advantages for the speaker as it may help him or her to cope with a difficult situation, to protect him or her from 'anticipated deprecation by others' (Hay, 2001: 74), and facilitate admitting one's own mistakes (Zajdman, 1995). Employing this type of humour may thus eventually create a positive self-image and contribute to portraying the speakers as being in control of the situation (Campbell, 2000; Zajdman, 1995).

These types of humour can be classified as what Morreall (1997: 230) has called 'positive humour'. They aim to foster good relationships among interlocutors by creating an open-minded atmosphere. 'Negative humour', by contrast, has the opposite effect as it typically aims to personally attack people and single out victims instead of creating common ground (Morreall, 1997: 230; see also Fahlman, 1997). However, these classificatory terms clearly oversimplify the complexity of any type of humour and are thus misleading. But they indicate that not all humour is necessarily 'good', in that it exclusively performs positive functions (Alberts, 1992; Brown & Keegan, 1999; Morreall, 1997). Quite the contrary: humour is actually an inherently ambiguous strategy (Fatt, 1998; Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995; Yarwood, 1995). And among the most ambiguous types are teasing, sarcasm and irony.

Teasing has been defined as an utterance in which the speaker expresses 'a potentially insulting/aggressive comment but simultaneously provides/relies upon cues that the utterance is to be understood as playful/nonserious' (Alberts, 1992: 155). Teasing humour thus may involve a wide range of activities, such as repeated questioning, mimicry, jesting, exaggeration, lying and role play (Pawluk, 1989: 147, 152). Employing teasing humour enables the speaker to convey a serious and potentially face-threatening message in an ambiguous manner, and the audience is left to resolve this ambiguity by figuring out 'whether the speaker is serious or whether he or she is "only joking"' (Eisenberg, 1986: 186; see also Alberts, 1992). In order to disambiguate a teasing utterance the addressee may rely on several contextualisation cues (Gumperz, 1999), such as singsong intonation, emphatic stress or a provocative tone of voice (see Miller, 1986). Sometimes teasing humour is employed to insult or jocularly abuse the addressee. These insulting and often aggressive remarks aim to put down the addressees or ascribe negative attributes to them (Hay, 1995: 70). However, insults and jocular abuse may also function as markers of solidarity, but because the addressee may experience a significant face loss, 'the abuser must be relatively certain of the relationship' if he or she is to avoid potentially serious consequences for the relationship (Hay, 1994: 37).

In contrast to teasing, which is 'an aggressive verbalisation framed as play', *sarcasm* has been described as 'a non-aggressive verbalisation (e.g. I love your outfit) framed as a hostile act through situational clues' (Alberts, 1992: 155). However, sarcasm is not always realised non-aggressively, but in some instances may also involve an element of aggression and may be used to attack the addressee's face (Barbe, 1995). Hence, according to Morreall's (1997) distinction of positive and negative humour, sarcasm can be classified as the latter because it is 'anger disguised as humor' (Miller, 1995: 19).

Another inherently ambiguous type of humour is *irony*, which has traditionally been defined either as 'a rhetorical device which consists in implying the opposite of what is said literally' or which refers to something else than what has been uttered (Haverkate, 1990: 81; see also Barbe, 1995; Kreuz & Roberts, 1995). However, despite the fact that irony and sarcasm have sometimes been discussed together in the literature (for example, Attardo et al., 2003; Hay, 1995), these two types of humour are not synonymous. Barbe (1995: 28), for instance, distinguishes between sarcasm and irony by claiming that '[i]nstances of sarcasm constitute a face-threatening action, whereas irony is face-saving criticism'. And although her classification may not necessarily

apply to all instances of sarcasm and irony, it provides a useful distinction between these two types of humour. Irony is often accompanied by a range of cues, which facilitate its identification. Among the most common indexes for ironic intent are a slow speaking rate, heavy stress and nasalisation (Kreuz & Roberts, 1995: 21), as well as pauses, syllable lengthening and laughter (Attardo, 2000: 8–9).[3]

However, regardless of the type of humour, any attempt at humour may fail, which may result in a loss of the speaker's face. Several reasons for failed humour have been discussed in the literature. Carrell (1997: 183) claims that humour can 'fail to fire for an audience' because there is not enough shared background knowledge. Further aspects which might have an impact on the success of humour apart from the audience are outlined by Hay (2001). She proposes that misjudging the relationship between interlocutors, trying to revive 'dead' humour and portraying oneself inappropriately, are other factors which may lead humour to fail (Hay, 2001: 71).

Measuring humour

In addition to finding a suitable definition of humour and ways of identifying this inconspicuous discursive strategy, another complicated issue needs to be tackled – namely, the question of how to measure humour quantitatively. Physiological methods of measuring humour quantitatively are fraught with problems and rarely attempted, and include measuring heart rate, or using electrodiagram and galvanic skin response (Godkewitsch, 1976). A more pragmatic approach to measuring humour quantitatively has been suggested by Holmes and Marra (2002a), who counted instances of humour in meetings and calculated an average index per 100 minutes (see also Holmes & Schnurr, 2005). This process is particularly useful for an investigation of the occurrences of humour in similar types of interactions and for a comparison across different situations. However, it presents difficulties when applied to different types of conversations as it neglects the impact of important contextual factors, such as the interlocutors' relationships. Moreover, counting instances of humour is not straightforward. This is particularly apparent in extended sequences of conjoint humour in which numerous interlocutors participate.

In order to avoid this problem it was decided to predominantly pursue a qualitative approach, and particularly focus on analysing the multiple functions of the various types of humour in leadership discourse. However, since it is considered advantageous to take into account the broader context in which the individual instances of humour occurred, quantitative

information in the form of overall estimates will be provided throughout the analysis as background information for interpreting the qualitative data. I hope that this quantitative information may help to identify distinct patterns or norms which characterise the discourse of leaders.

Researching leadership discourse at work

The analysis of leadership discourse in the subsequent chapters is placed within a social constructionist paradigm and primarily draws on analytical concepts developed by interactional sociolinguistics. In particular, it uses a range of 'contextualisation cues' (Gumperz, 1999: 461) as outlined above in order to understand the ways in which leaders' discourse (in particular their use of humour) is perceived by the people they work with, and how it reflects interlocutors' 'taken-for-granted background assumptions that underlie the negotiation of [their] shared interpretations' (Gumperz, 1999: 454). Such an approach thus promises to provide valuable insights into the complexities of leadership discourse while taking into account the crucial role of various contextual factors.

Social constructionism and interactional sociolinguistics put a particular emphasis on the dynamic aspects of social interactions, and are based on the assumption that interlocutors 'use language to provide continual indices of who they are and what they want to communicate' (Schiffrin, 1994: 133). Both approaches are thus particularly useful for theorising about the observation that leaders portray themselves differently in different situations. Moreover, a combination of these two approaches facilitates an investigation of the ways in which leaders' discourse contributes to their performance, and in particular to their portrayal of 'effective' leadership in the specific context of their workplace.

Constructing workplace identities

The central idea of social constructionism is that individuals draw on various linguistic sources to present themselves in different ways and thereby to construct multiple identities (for example, Bergvall, 1996; Bing & Bergvall, 1996; Bucholtz, 1999a; Crawford, 1995; Hall & Bucholtz, 1995; Johnson & Meinhof, 1997). In this paradigm, the construction of identities is treated as an on-going shaping and developing process, in which identities are not treated as static categories based on the attributes attached to individuals but are viewed as dynamic and negotiated constructs (Ellemers et al., 2003: 13; Hall, Sarangi & Slembrouck, 1999; Hall, 2000; Holmes & Marra, 2002b; Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002; Cranny-Francis et al., 2003; see also Holmes, 2000a). Identity is viewed

as 'a discursive construct that emerges in interaction' (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005: 587). Individuals are constantly engaged in the construction of their multiple identities, which may overlap to some extent (Kong, 2001; Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998) or even contradict each other (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002). Not only are different identities salient at different points in time (Hall, 2000; Holmes, 2000c; Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002: 8), but the process of identification is never complete (Hall, 2000).

Workplace settings play a particularly crucial role in the construction and enactment of their members' social identities (for example, Alvesson & Billing, 2002; Hearn, 2001; Thornborrow, 2002). Organisations constitute 'mini cultures' (Aaltio and Mills, 2002: 4) which provide 'sources and sites of identification for individuals' (Jenkins, 1996: 134). In particular, they contribute to the construction of members' identities in (at least) two ways. Firstly, they classify their members into various roles to which they ascribe particular meanings, and secondly, they develop distinct discursive norms on which their members may draw when interacting with each other. Through these processes, organisations 'create', for instance, leaders and subordinates. These intertwined activities may eventually find expression in the everyday practices of organisational members – by drawing on the discursive norms developed in their organisation, individuals constantly negotiate and shape their professional and other social identities when communicating with each other. Leaders, as well as their colleagues and subordinates, make use of particular linguistic registers, thereby positioning themselves in their social environment and at the same time constructing themselves as leaders, subordinates and other organisational members. Through their discourse, these individuals actively construct and negotiate their multiple (and sometimes conflicting) identities in a workplace context.

Humour seems to be a particularly valuable means for doing this. Since humour is an ambiguous and multi-functional discourse strategy, it may enable individuals to create 'multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory identities' (Holmes & Marr, 2002b: 380). It not only provides an opportunity to construct certain aspects of professional identities, but also enables the speaker to combine and construct (potentially) opposing identities.

A social constructionist approach has also been used by leadership research, in particular for in-depth investigations of leadership case studies (for example, Chen & Meindl, 1991; Meindl, 1995). And since this paradigm views verbal interaction as the central aspect of identity construction, it appears to be particularly useful for an investigation of leadership discourse. In particular, it facilitates an analysis of the

ways in which leaders' discourse enables them to achieve their various leadership objectives while at the same time constructing themselves as 'effective' leaders in the specific context of their workplace.

The impact of working groups

In order to understand the ways in which leaders' discourse is influenced and shaped by the discursive norms that characterise their workplace and various working groups, this study will use a second, related framework: the community of practice. Employing the concept of a community of practice in addition to taking a social constructionist stance promises to provide useful insights into leaders' discourse on a micro-level. In particular, since the various working groups in which the leaders typically interact can be classified as communities of practice, this framework facilitates an investigation of the impact of the group context on leadership discourse. In combination with a social constructionist stance, the community of practice provides a useful framework for investigating a variety of aspects of the ways in which individual leaders 'do leadership' by drawing on humour to achieve their various goals on a micro-level, while also generating valuable insights into leadership discourse in the workplace on a macro-level.

The concept of a community of practice was originally outlined by Lave and Wenger (1991) and further developed by Wenger (1998). Based on this research Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992b: 464) formulated a widely cited definition of a community of practice as

> an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor.

Much subsequent research has adopted this definition of communities of practice put forward by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992b) in their sociolinguistic investigations of language use in small groups, in particular in a workplace setting (for example, Marra, Schnurr & Holmes, 2006; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a; Mullany, 2006). According to this definition, then, the most crucial characteristic that distinguishes communities of practice from related notions, such as speech community and social network, is the assumption that communities of practice generally emerge around certain distinct *practices*. These practices may interact with other 'symbolic systems' (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992a: 91) and evolve around behavioural patterns, such as particular ways of

dressing or holding a cigarette (Meyerhoff, 2001: 535), or they may refer to the choice of specific linguistic strategies and interaction patterns (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). The development of a negotiated linguistic repertoire is perhaps the most crucial aspect of a community of practice from a sociolinguistic point of view.

Over time the discursive behaviours of members in a community of practice may converge, and eventually result in the development of a linguistic repertoire of shared and agreed ways of communicating with each other. This may be reflected in the specific linguistic strategies members draw on, as well as in the interaction patterns they typically display. And humour constitutes one aspect of a group's shared linguistic repertoire. The type of humour members typically use to convey different meanings as well as the style in which they deliver their humorous utterances are both influenced by norms developed among members of communities of practice (for example, Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a; Mullany, 2004). Holmes and Marra (2004), for instance, found that members of working groups (which form communities of practice) across different workplaces developed distinctive ways of using humour in meetings. The teams they researched differed from each other with respect to type of humour, style of delivery and amount of humour that was typically produced by members of the different communities of practice.

In order to investigate how individuals construct themselves as leaders in the context of their workplace and considering the discursive norms developed by members of their communities of practice, a variety of different types of data were collected for the present study. The next section describes the process of collecting these various types of data in some detail. Disclosing the data collection process for this research not only highlights the particular problems of collecting data in a workplace setting, but I hope it will also support the validity and reliability of the observations and findings discussed in subsequent chapters.

Collecting data in the workplace

Collecting data in a workplace setting poses a number of specific challenges. These include gaining access to potential research sites, recruiting participants and dealing with confidentiality issues. The main challenge this research project faced, however, was to collect data that would enable me to address the research aim, that is, to explore the various facets of leadership discourse at work, while at the same time minimising the impact of the research on those who participated in it.[4]

In order to explore leadership discourse, and in particular its interaction with humour, gender and workplace culture, I decided to conduct case studies involving a different types of leaders from different organisations. Since case studies enable the researcher to examine and understand the construction of multiple realities, they are compatible with the social constructionist paradigm (for example, Coates, 1999; Marra, Schnurr & Holmes, 2006). Case study research is typically conducted in qualitative research that 'comprehensively describes and explains the variety of components in a given social situation' (Arneson, 1995: 164), and has proved to be particularly useful for an investigation of 'organizational and managerial processes' (Yin, 1994: 3). Although the majority of leadership research has been conducted within the tradition of quantitative research, more recent investigations of leadership tend to employ a qualitative methodology (Bryman, 1996: 287; Burns, 2002; Grant, Graham & Heberling, 2001; Poulin & Hackman, 2001; Santora & Seaton, 1999). One particular advantage of qualitative research is its ability to enhance an understanding of the complexities and multiple facets of leadership discourse. This is because it allows an in-depth examination of how leadership is actually 'done' discursively while also considering the situational context. Another important strength of case study methodology is its ability to combine multiple sources of data and thus ensure triangulation (Johnstone, 2000; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994), which often results in particularly rich datasets (Morse, 1994).

In order to fully explore the benefits of case study research, it was decided to focus on leaders from similar types of organisations so as to minimise potential influences of this variable on their leadership discourse. Workplaces with a focus on Information Technology (IT) were chosen. This was for two reasons: firstly, IT organisations are typically characterised by strong and distinct cultures (Plester, 2003; Prager, 1999). This facilitated an investigation of the extent to which leaders' discursive performance is influenced by aspects of their workplace culture. Secondly, since the field of IT is considered to be a highly gendered domain (Trauth, 2002), it proved very productive for an examination of how male and female leaders balance the sometimes opposing demands of their professional and gender identities.

Two leaders from each of three organisations (two women and four men) volunteered to take part in this research project and to collect conversational data that was representative of their everyday work life. The participating leaders and their workplaces are described in more detail below. The data collection process consisted of several steps and involved various sources of data. The primary data set consists of more

than 30 hours of naturalistic conversational data collected in one-to-one interactions as well as larger, more formal meetings. It is supplemented by interviews conducted with leaders and the people they work with. Moreover, I carried out participant observation and consulted organisational documents in order to gain a better understanding of the culture of the leaders' workplaces (for the various advantages of this approach see, for example, Adler & Adler, 1994). Employing a multi-method approach involving diverse sources of data facilitates and supports the linguistic analysis of leaders' discursive performance. It provides valuable background information and additional knowledge which substantially advances the interpretation of the linguistic data (for the various advantages of this methodological approach see, for example, Jick, 1979, Hurmerinta-Peltomaeki & Nummela, 2006; Mingers, 2001).

Recording leadership discourse

The main aim of the data collection procedure was to gather data that are as natural as possible, while at the same time minimising intrusion for participants. In order to ensure this, responsibility for recording the authentic discourse data was handed over to the participants. This meant that they decided what kind of interactions were taped, but also allowed them to delete parts of or entire conversations in retrospect. However, in most cases interlocutors were very generous in giving their consent to record interactions even of a confidential nature. Even though giving the participants the choice of choosing the interactions to record might mean losing control over exactly what data would be collected (Stubbe, 1998: 4; see also Holmes & Stubbe, 2003b), the various studies that have adopted this approach show very good results. And allowing the participants to be in control of the data collection has led to a huge amount of representative data including a range of different interaction types.

In order to ensure that the recording would be as unobtrusive as possible, small and relatively discrete equipment was used: the small minidisk recorders and label-microphones carried around by leaders to record a range of one-to-one interactions were small enough to fit into a pocket, and the microphone could easily be attached to the collar of a shirt. Although these measures may have some minor consequences for the focus leaders, as the humorous comment of one leader, Jill, to her colleague Lucy illustrates: '*so I'll have to start wearing clothes that I can have a pocket in [laughs]*', they ensured that the presence of the recording equipment was as invisible and as unobtrusive as possible, which facilitated participants' attempts to ignore its presence.

However, things were slightly more complex with regards to the recording of larger meetings. Since larger formal meetings were typically attended by more than three or four organisational members, it was decided to use video cameras in addition to the minidisk player for recording. Employing video cameras not only facilitated speaker identification but also provided a range of extra information, such as participants' facial gestures and expressions. As with the collection of one-to-one interactions, a crucial motivation for recording larger meetings was to obtain data that were as natural as possible. Although the presence of two video cameras on tripods in the corners of a meeting room might easily be perceived as distracting and perhaps even disturbing, participants generally managed to ignore them, as a comment from one of the leaders (Donald) to his colleague illustrates: '*you soon forget it – you soon forget they're there.*' The fact that participants were generally very cooperative in trying not to alter their normal behaviour is further shown in a short extract from a managers' meeting in one of the organisations:

Example 1.1
Context: A meeting of the senior managers group at Company S. The meeting is attended by five men. Joel is on a phone link.

1	Shaun:	I get you two
2		no nah I get you and Dean mixed up quite often mm
3	Chester:	fuck off Shaun
4	All:	//[laughter]\
5	Chester:	/[laughs]: for the record:\\
6	All:	[laughter]
7	Neil:	Joel we're taping the session
8		so we were trying to keep all four letter words out
9		but that //hasn't really worked\
10	Victor:	/[laughs]\\
	[laughter throughout next turns]	
11	Shaun:	Chester was toning down his normal er
12	Victor:	no they insist on us having //+ the normal meetings\
13	Neil:	/yeah yeah\\ (yeah) yeah
14	Chester:	oh right
15	Neil:	it's two minutes thirty seconds into the
16		discussion + they'll be thinking oh that's a record

With his humorous comment, '*no they insist on us having the normal meetings*' (line 12), Victor humorously challenges Neil's tongue-in-cheek

remonstration about Chester's swearing, '*we were trying to keep all four letter words out*' (line 8). Victor here explicitly refers to our practice of reassuring people that they do not have to change their interactional style because they are being recorded. Neil reinforces this interpretation when he jokes that they had managed to get '*two minutes thirty seconds into the discussion*' (line 15) before a swear word had occurred.

Participant observation, organisational documents and interviews

These primary linguistic data were supplemented by participant observation, consultation of organisational documents and interviews with the leaders and the people they work with. Participant observation was usually carried out during the initial stages of the data collection process, before any interactions were recorded. It has been noted that participant observation is a valuable means for collecting qualitative data on organisational processes since it 'produces a tremendous supply of high-quality data and crucial insight into community dynamics' (Milroy & Gordon, 2003: 71; see also Whyte, 2003). Notes taken during this observation period, in addition to the knowledge and insight gained from consulting (internal and external) organisational documents, such as restructuring reports, value statements and HR strategies, proved to be useful for the subsequent analysis of leaders' discourse, particularly in conjunction with a subsequent discussion with organisational members (see also Stubbe, 2001; Hodder, 1994; Gunnarsson, 2000).

At the end of the data collection period, after various interactions had been recorded, interviews were conducted with leaders and some of the people they work with. Not only did these interviews provide valuable background information for the subsequent interpretation of the spoken data (for example, regarding relationships between participants), but they also contributed to the emergence of a more complete picture of the participants' working environment and their everyday practices. Together with the information retrieved through participant observation, these interviews formed an important means of gaining insights into the cultures of leaders' workplaces by revealing staff members' perceptions (Whyte, 2003). The interviews thus constitute a crucial aspect of triangulation. And for the participants, they provided an opportunity to comment on their data, to ask the researcher some questions and to request the deletion of (parts of) their interactions if necessary.

The different sources of collected data are summarised in Figure 1.1.

Finally, after the data had been collected and processed, participants were presented with feedback in the form of a readable report and offered a short presentation about the findings and potential implications.

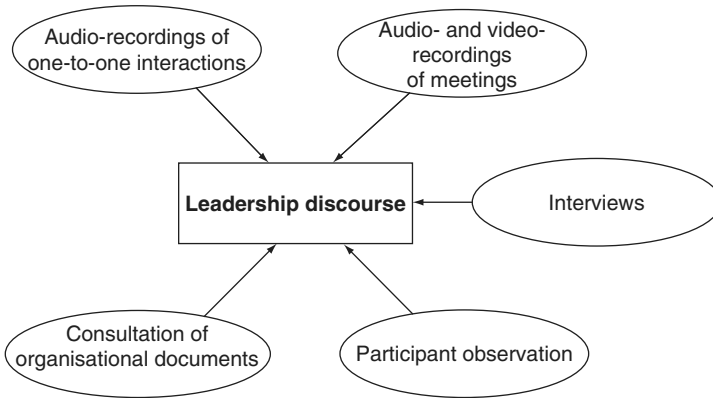

Figure 1.1 Different types of data collected for the analysis of leadership discourse

Providing this kind of feedback is an important part of doing research not only *on*, but also *for*, the participants (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003b; Stubbe, 2001). And as Roberts and Sarangi (1999: 389) have emphasised, giving back 'to practitioners insights which can be applied to their work settings' is part of researchers' responsibility. (For the various advantages of such an approach see, for example, Cameron et al.; Stubbe, 1998; Mullany, 2007).

The next section briefly introduces the leaders who participated in the study and their workplaces.

Introducing the participating leaders and their workplaces

The three workplaces of the leaders who took part in this research received the pseudonyms Sitcom, A&B Resolutionz and Company S. A&B Resolutionz and Company S are entrepreneurial organisations whose main focus is IT. They are profit-oriented and characterised by a strong focus on their clients. Sitcom, on the other hand, is the IT department of a non-commercial organisation.

With more than 200 permanent staff working in four different sites across three countries, Company S is the largest and (as measured in revenue) most successful of the three organisations. It was founded in the early 1990s as a private information system consultancy firm with just over 10 staff members, and has grown rapidly over the last decade to become one of New Zealand's leading IT companies. The organisation's main focus is IT consulting. In 2002, when the data for the research

was collected, the organisation's headquarters in Wellington employed more than 200 individuals. At the time of the data collection the organisation's main aim was to become a world-class company. In spite of its rapid development and the dramatic changes in the organisation's size, Company S has always tried to maintain the philosophy and culture that was implemented by its founders.

This history bears interesting resemblances to the development of A&B Resolutionz. Like Company S, A&B Resolutionz was founded by two couples who were unsatisfied with the way their previous employers operated. Since its launch in the late 1990s, A&B Resolutionz has also grown consistently, and at the time of the data collection it had about 20 permanent staff who dealt with customers world wide. In 2001 A&B Resolutionz received an award for being one of the most rapidly growing organisations in New Zealand.

In contrast to the relatively similar development of Company S and A&B Resolutionz, Sitcom is characterised by a very different history and philosophy. Founded more than 100 years ago, the wider organisation had to undergo major restructuring processes in the late 1990s which affected their administrative as well as organisational structure. These structural changes had a major impact on the development of the IT department's philosophy and cultural values. In contrast to Company S and A&B Resolutionz which deal with external clients, Sitcom focuses predominantly on providing IT support for the company's non-IT staff.

Despite the differences in their historical developments, specialisation and market position, the cultures of the three organisations resemble each other to some degree, which is particularly salient in the distinctive values that characterise their cultures. In particular, Company S, A&B Resolutionz and Sitcom all claim to have a people-oriented culture which is reflected in an appreciation of staff and teamwork, as well as in the general aim of 'having fun'. And all three organisations are characterised by a relatively masculine culture, which is reflected in the gender composition of their workforce as well as in the nature of the organisations' work (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a: 574).[5] However, in spite of these apparent similarities the three organisations differ substantially in the interpretation and actual enactment of these values (this aspect is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).

What is considered to be 'effective' and appropriate leadership varies considerably across workplaces, and it was crucial to ensure that only those leaders who had been identified as 'effective' by the people they work with participated in the study. Moreover, in order to be able to identify general patterns of leadership discourse, I attempted to

include participants with different leadership roles and responsibilities. However, all of the leaders who participated in this study supervise a working group with at least one member who directly reports to them and for whose performance they are responsible. This relatively broad criterion allowed diverse types of leaders to be included in the present study. This diversity regarding leader position, leader tasks and subordinates is reflected in the positions of the participating leaders, which range from CEO to team leader and mentor, as the brief description following illustrates.[6]

Both participating leaders from A&B Resolutionz played a part in founding the organisation and are members of the board. Jill Ferguson[7] has been with the company from the beginning, and was nominated chairperson three years later. Since then she has acted as the Chair of the Board of Directors, which means that the leadership tasks she typically pursues are primarily focused on external issues, in particular on organising funding for projects. Donald Armstrong, the other focus leader from A&B Resolutionz, is the company's Managing Director. Like a CEO, he is responsible for the company's overall performance. However, in contrast to Jill, his work is predominantly internally oriented, which may be one of the reasons why he is perceived as having a particularly strong impact on the organisation's culture. In the interviews, his subordinates commented that '*he defines a lot of our culture*' and that A&B Resolutionz is '*driven by Donald's thinking*'.

The focus leaders from Sitcom differ in their responsibilities and leadership type from Jill and Donald. Tricia Marr, the director of the IT department was appointed five years previously after a major restructuring process. Her primary responsibility was to develop and implement a new culture for the IT department, and to ensure quality IT services for the rest of the organisation's non-IT departments. At the time of the data collection she supervised more than 10 managers and almost 90 staff members. The other participant from Sitcom, Noel Kirwan, became a member of Sitcom one year before the data collection, and acts as a team leader. At the time of the data collection he had one subordinate in his team with whom he had been working for only four weeks. In his job Noel mainly focused on client support: his responsibilities comprised providing IT support as well as managing relationships between IT and non-IT staff at the organisation.

Like Donald and Jill, Victor Neyland, one of the participating leaders from Company S, also played a crucial role in the organisation's foundation. Having been dissatisfied with their previous employer, Victor and one of his former colleagues decided to set up their own company.

Since then, Victor has been with Company S. His role in the organisation has, however, changed significantly: from being one of the company's directors to being one of its managers, to eventually becoming its CEO. The changes in Victor's roles always corresponded to the organisation's development in the way that Company S grew from a family business into one of New Zealand's most successful entrepreneurial organisations. Like Donald, his employees perceive him to have a particularly crucial impact on the organisation's culture. Gerry Preston, the other participant from Company S, is normally employed as one of Company S's software engineers. However, since he has been with the company for six years, he was asked to work as a mentor for a group of graduate students who were coming to Company S as part of the organisation's recruitment programme. His main responsibilities as a mentor comprised inculcating the organisation's culture into the newcomers by giving lectures and supervising his mentees' project work.

As a consequence of the leaders' different positions, responsibilities, tasks and followers, they are typically engaged in different kinds of interactions, which is reflected in the types (and amount) of data they recorded. Table 1.1 summarises the types of authentic workplace discourse collected for each leader.

Differences in leaders' roles, for instance, may account for the fact that in contrast to the other participants, leaders from Company S, Victor and Gerry, recorded relatively few one-to-one interactions. Having acted as a mentor for newcomers during the time of the data collection, most

Table 1.1 Summary of the collected spoken data

Organisation	Leader	One-to-one Interactions	Larger Meetings	Totals	
				Leaders	Org.
Sitcom	Noel	3 hours, 18 mins	3 hours 14 mins[8]	6 hours, 32 mins	9 hours, 38 mins
	Tricia	3 hours, 6 mins		6 hours, 20 mins	
Company S	Victor	19 mins	6 hours 30 mins	6 hours, 49 mins	13 hours, 12 mins
	Gerry	25 mins	6 hours, 8 mins	6 hours, 33 mins	
A&B Resolutionz	Donald	4 hours, 8 mins	5 hours, 50 mins	9 hours, 58 mins	12 hours, 32 mins
	Jill	2 hours, 34 mins		8 hours, 25 mins	

of the conversations Gerry recorded are meetings with his mentees. He collected few one-to-one interactions as they were not representative of his leadership performance during this time. And Victor, the CEO of the same organisation, also recorded mostly larger, more formal meetings. Again, this type of interaction was characteristic for his leadership role during the time of the data collection: shortly before Victor agreed to participate in the research, an external HR consultant joined the company to sort out its HR issues. During the period when Victor recorded his interactions, he was mostly engaged in larger meetings in which he and the other members of the senior management team discussed the company's HR strategies with the external consultant. These differences regarding the type and amount of data gathered for the focus leaders thus constitute a valuable source of additional information as they very well reflect the focus leaders' typical encounters. This criterion regarding typicality is crucial for the present research as it facilitates reliable statements about leaders' discourse reflecting their particular leadership role in their respective workplace.

Outline of the content of the book

The overall aim of this book is to explore the various complexities of leadership discourse by conducting an in-depth analysis of the ways in which six leaders from three IT organisations in New Zealand use humour in the context of their workplace. Each chapter approaches leadership discourse from a different perspective.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide an overview of the multiple functions and uses of humour as a leadership tool. They provide the basis for the more detailed discussion of the impact contextual factors have on leaders' discursive performance in Chapters 4–6. Chapter 2 focuses on transactional leadership discourse. In particular, it illustrates some of the ways leaders use humour in the workplace to achieve their transactional goals, such as getting things done by commenting on subordinates' performance and by criticising them. This chapter focuses on the impact of leaders' roles on their discursive performance by comparing the ways in which leaders at Company S, Victor (the CEO) and Gerry (a mentor), use humour to assist them in giving feedback and providing advice to their subordinates.

Chapter 3 deals with the 'other' side of leadership discourse, namely more relationally oriented behaviours. These equally important aspects of leadership have often been overlooked in traditional theories and approaches to leadership but are increasingly recognised in recent

leadership research. Chapter 3 briefly outlines the main benefits of the relational aspects of leadership, and then explores how leaders make use of humour to assist them in reinforcing solidarity and creating a sense of belonging, as well as in minimising status differences. This chapter also deals with the 'dark' side of humour (that is, negative types of humour, such as sarcasm) and explores how one of the leaders at Sitcom, Noel, makes use of humour in order to de construct (rather than enhance) solidarity and to increase (rather than minimise) status differences in an interaction with his team member.

Although Chapters 2 and 3 indicate that all of the participating leaders use humour to perform transactional and relational behaviours (sometimes even simultaneously), and to achieve similar goals, substantial differences are observed in leaders' choice of particular types of humour as well as their style of delivery. These differences are discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4 explores the impact of leaders' working groups on their use of humour. Findings indicate that leaders' use of humour is closely related to the discursive norms developed in their respective working groups (which form communities of practice). In particular, a detailed comparison of the style in which three leaders, Tricia, Victor and Jill, use teasing humour when interacting with members of their teams indicates substantial differences, which are related to their overall leadership performance and their leadership style. It is argued that these differences reflect, contribute to and reinforce the communication norms that characterise leaders' working groups. And by regularly drawing on them, leaders' discourse not only reflects but also reinforces and constantly shapes these discursive norms.

Chapter 5 extends some of the findings of Chapter 4 to a more abstract and theoretical context: it investigates the influence of the culture of leaders' workplaces on their use of humour. In particular, the chapter explores how leaders' discourse reflects and reinforces aspects of their respective workplace's culture. Two processes are examined in more detail: the first section of the chapter illustrates how leaders explicitly make humorous references to the usually hidden values that characterise the cultures of their workplaces. In doing so, they make these values visible and also ratify them. The second section of the chapter explores how leaders' use of humour manifests and enacts distinct characteristics of the cultures of their workplaces, namely their orientation towards individualism versus collectivism. This is achieved through a comparison of the ways in which three leaders from different organisations, Tricia (Sitcom), Jill (A&B Resolutionz) and Victor (Company S)

participate in relatively long instances of conjoint humour with their subordinates. By discussing these two processes, this chapter provides insights into the complex processes through which leadership discourse and workplace culture are intricately intertwined with each other and how they constantly reinforce each other.

Chapter 6 investigates the complex relationship between leadership (a stereotypically masculine concept) and gender. It illustrates the ways male and female leaders employ humour to combine the sometimes competing demands of 'doing leadership' and 'doing gender'. In particular, this chapter focuses on leaders' use of humour to advance their leadership goals (for example, by considering masculine stereotypes and acknowledging the masculine make-up of their workplaces) while also negotiating and constructing their gender identity. These processes are enacted in the ways leaders regularly draw on gendered speech styles, and by making gender explicitly an issue in their discourse.

The first part of the chapter explores the ways leaders employ discursive practices which are indexed for masculinity and femininity in order to achieve their leadership goals, while also negotiating their gender identities, that is, portraying themselves as men and women in the context of their (predominantly masculine) workplace. The second section of the chapter illustrates how some leaders use humour to bring gender to the forefront and to make it an issue. They use humour to create all-male or all-female groups from which members of the other sex are excluded. And women leaders in particular sometimes use humour to make fun of, and send up, the gendered stereotypes they are confronted with on a day-to-day basis.

The final chapter summarises the findings of the previous chapters and discusses some of the insights into the complexities of leadership gained through an analysis of leadership discourse. In particular, it illustrates the importance of considering discourse in leadership research by arguing that discourse not only plays an important role in the enactment of transactional and relational practices but that it is indeed primarily through leaders' discursive behaviour that they perform and enact leadership. This chapter thus emphasises the benefits of pursuing a discourse-analytical approach to gain further insights into the complexities of leadership and other organisational phenomena.

2
Transactional Aspects of Leadership Discourse: Humour and Getting Things Done

Although humour and work are frequently thought to be mutually exclusive, humour offers numerous benefits for business and should be taken seriously, as the example below illustrates.

Example 2.1
Context: During a board meeting at A&B Resolutionz, Jill, the director of the board, and the other board members are discussing tight timeframes in an upcoming project that involves a lot of programming. Errol is known for not being particularly good at programming.

Jill: (you'd better do) a quick programming course Errol [laughs]

With her humorous comment Jill suggests that Errol bring his programming skills up to scratch for the project. Uttered in a teasing and slightly challenging tone of voice, this witty one-liner assists Jill, the most senior person in the meeting, to effectively communicate her transactional objectives, namely to ensure that everyone in the company is taking over part of the responsibility for delivering the project on time. This brief example demonstrates how humour may be skilfully employed to assist leaders achieve their transactional goals while still maintaining a friendly atmosphere and even reinforcing solidarity with their colleagues and subordinates.

In the previous chapter I have argued that leadership can productively be viewed as a discursive performance which combines transactional and relational behaviours. However, rather than constituting two separate aspects of leadership performance, transactional and relational behaviours are typically interwoven with each other. In other words, effective leadership discourse is characterised by simultaneous attention

to transactional *and* relational aspects. Leaders, for instance, ensure their subordinates know what they are expected to do, while at the same time make sure that they feel valued and included in the team. This versatility is also illustrated in the example above: Jill asks Errol to improve his programming skills thereby ensuring the punctual completion of the project (transactional behaviour) but does this in a way that maintains his quality face needs, that is, the desire to be evaluated positively in terms of personal qualities (Spencer-Oatey, 2000: 14). Using humour she thus reinforces solidarity among interlocutors (relational behaviours) *and* communicates her transactional message.

Example 2.1 is a paradigmatic example of the ways transactional and relational aspects are often considered in leadership discourse, and particularly in leaders' use of humour. This chapter focuses on those instances of humour for which achieving transactional objectives is fore-grounded. A particular emphasis will be on the ways in which leaders employ this discursive strategy in order to get things done by commenting on their subordinates' performance and by criticising them. Humour which primarily performs relational behaviours is dealt with in Chapter 3.

Transactional leadership behaviours

Transactional behaviours are those behaviours most typically associated with leadership since they are often directly linked to organisational outcomes. They comprise a wide range of activities with the aim of advancing the organisation's goals, for instance by making sure subordinates perform well. These transactional objectives may be put in practice through a variety of behaviours, such as organising and directing a group's actions by getting things done, making decisions, solving problems and providing feedback and guidance. And humour constitutes one of the devices leaders may use to assist them in achieving these objectives (for example, Consalvo, 1989; Perret, 1989, Coser, 1960; Brown & Keegan, 1999).

In a study of humour in a retail and a manufacturing company in the UK, Mullany (2004) found that meeting chairs used humour to assist them in achieving their transactional objectives, in particular to gain the compliance of their subordinates. They employed this discursive strategy for instance to 'disguise less acceptable messages', such as when giving directives to or criticising their subordinates (Mullany, 2004: 24). Similar ways of using humour to 'do power' were observed in a study by Pizzini (1991) on doctor-patient interactions in an obstetrical/gynaecological setting. In her data the more powerful interlocutors (that is, the doctors) frequently

used humour in consultations as a means to exercise and reinforce their power by controlling their patients' discourse, for instance by shifting topics or preventing patients from 'rambling on' (Pizzini, 1991: 477).

These case studies indicate that humour is indeed a valuable strategy used by those in more powerful positions to achieve a variety of transactional goals. However, while achieving transactional objectives is clearly an important aspect of leadership, especially since leaders' effectiveness is eventually measured in organisational outcomes, leaders in the data I collected, typically achieved this in ways that also signalled consideration for their subordinates, as the examples below illustrate.

Getting things done

One of the most transactional aspects of leadership performance is the achievement of organisational goals (for example, Hede, 2001; Northouse, 1997). This may be performed in myriad ways, such as telling the subordinates 'what to do, how to do it, when it is to be done, and how their work fits with the work of others' (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 1998: 152). Examples 2.2 and 2.3 which are both taken from the same interaction are typical examples of the ways leaders may use humour to get things done by ensuring their subordinates' compliance and providing advice and guidance.

Example 2.2
Context: Interaction between Donald, CEO of A&B Resolutionz, and Ann, a junior project manager. After interviewing Beverley, a job applicant, Donald and Ann decide to offer her a job.

1	Donald:	yep+okay alright
2		do you wanna write do up a letter of offer
3	Ann:	no //[laughs]\
4	Donald:	/[laughs]\\
5		(are) you the project manager
6		//[laughs]\
7	Ann:	/how do I\\ do that
8	Donald:	eh? [laughs]
9		there's standard templates
10	Ann:	for letters of offers?
11	Donald:	yep
12	Ann:	oh hell
13	Donald:	so but what you're gonna have to do is work out

14 what you're asking her to do and what the
15 what the position is +
16 cos we don't have a position for (her) + [laughs]
17 Ann: okay so what's that then

This extract illustrates how Donald employs humour to patiently talk his junior project manager through the process of writing a letter of offer to the successful candidate and thereby help her overcome her initial reluctance. Interestingly, Donald uses humour at various strategic points throughout the interaction with the effect of negotiating and eventually ensuring his subordinate's compliance.

On finding Ann reluctant to write a letter of offer to Beverley (line 3), Donald, instead of forcing her to do it, teases her '*(are) you the project manager*' (line 5) thereby reminding her of her duties. The laughter accompanying his question considerably mitigates the illocutionary force of the negatively affective speech act, which seems to make it easier for Ann to tell Donald what her problem is: in line 7 she admits that she does not know how to write a letter of offer. Donald then gives her some advice and guidance '*there's standard templates*' (line 9). And after Ann has overtly signalled her reluctance again, '*oh hell*' (line 12), Donald skilfully convinces her to take on the task by giving her more guidance and producing some more humour (lines 15–16).

Donald's last humorous remark, '*cos we don't have a position for (her)*' (line 16) could be interpreted as fulfilling various functions: it signals (in a friendly and face-saving way) that he still expects Ann to write the letter of offer, and at the same time brings another issue to her attention, that is, the need to find an appropriate title for the position Beverley is to occupy. His amusing comment also lightens the situation, reinforces solidarity with Ann and thus enables her to accept Donald's guidance and perform the task. Employing humour in this way and using the inclusive pronoun '*we*', Donald skilfully manages to save the face of both interlocutors. And Ann's final comment, '*okay so what's that then*' (line 17) signals that she is going to write the letter of offer as Donald has intended.

Example 2.2 thus illustrates how the two aspects of leadership – the achievement of transactional objectives and the consideration of relational aspects – are often intertwined. By convincing Ann to write the letter of offer Donald achieves his transactional objectives; and by using the negatively affective speech acts of giving advice and expressing a request as non-threatening as possible, he also takes account of relational aspects.

The next data example occurred shortly after example 2.2. Once Ann has agreed to write the letter of offer to Beverley, she raises another problem: she indicates that she is not sure about the title for the job they are offering to the new employee.

Example 2.3

1	Donald:	so I would think you'd write as you know [voc]
2		project assistant or something or +++
3		technical assistant +++
4		I think I'm sorry I'm not very good at euphemisms for roles
5		[laughs]
6	Ann:	[laughs]
7	Donald:	chief coffee //maker\
8	Ann:	/[laughs]\\
9	Donald:	we didn't ask her how well she makes coffee [laughs]

As in the previous example, Donald's use of humour in this extract seems to primarily help him to achieve his transactional objectives, but it also enables him to consider relational aspects: it lightens the (rather tense) situation and thus appears to considerably facilitate Ann's acceptance of his further advice and guidance. After having made serious suggestions for possible job titles (lines 2 and 3), Donald makes fun of the whole situation by admitting that he is not good at finding '*euphemisms for roles*' (line 4). He thereby takes over some of the responsibility for finding a proper job title – a task which by right is Ann's responsibility since Beverley is to join her team. Donald's comment appears to cheer up Ann and thus also functions as a means of reinforcing solidarity among interlocutors as the subsequent joint laughter indicates (Devereux & Ginsburg, 2001; Fine, 1983). In lines 7 and 9 Donald continues with his humorous explanation which develops into a short sequence of fantasy humour: '*chief coffee maker we didn't ask her how well she makes coffee*'. Particularly by using the inclusive pronoun '*we*', Donald once more takes over part of the responsibility of finding a suitable job title.

In the two examples above, Donald portrays himself as a leader who is concerned about his subordinates and who takes their feelings into account. Instead of simply telling Ann to write a letter of offer and referring her to the guidelines, Donald encourages her and builds her confidence so that she eventually agrees to perform this task. He allows Ann to express her concern and frustration but nevertheless insists on her compliance. He leaves no doubt about the fact that he is 'the one

in charge' but still manages to portray himself as an other-oriented and supportive leader.

A similar, albeit less obvious, example of how leaders may use humour to get things done is illustrated in the next data extract, which occurred in the beginning stages of a meeting between Noel, a team leader from Sitcom, and his colleagues Isabelle and Patrick, who are on the same hierarchical level. Before they begin discussing the items on the agenda, Noel, who is responsible for the outcome of the meeting, makes sure the participants are aware of their roles: due to his expert status, Patrick is expected to contribute considerably to the outcome of the meeting.

Example 2.4
Context: In a small meeting at Sitcom between Noel (who chairs this meeting) and his colleagues Isabelle and Patrick.

1	Noel:	you're clearly the most important person
2	Isabelle:	oh definitely
3	Patrick:	cool do I get veto rights
4	Noel:	[voc] well yes but you get to do all the work
5		as [laughs]: well:
6	Patrick:	oh (great what a move up) +

By introducing humour into the discussion of who has to perform what duties in an upcoming project, Noel highlights Patrick's special role in the meeting, '*you're clearly the most important person*' (line 1), and at the same time seems to remind him of his responsibilities: '*but you get to do all the work as well*' (lines 4 and 5). The humour thus helps Noel to achieve his transactional objectives, namely to make sure participants know who is responsible for the meeting outcome. In particular, the use of the pronoun '*you*' (lines 1 and 4) shifts the responsibility regarding the progress and outcome of the meeting to his colleague. Moreover, Noel's initial ironic quip, '*you're clearly the most important person*'(line 1), which is extended into a small sequence of conjoint humour in which everyone participates, also performs a variety of relational functions as it may be used to express and reinforce collegiality among interlocutors (for example, Holmes, 2000b; Holmes & Marra, 2002b; Norrick, 1994). Patrick's final humorous response, '*great what a move up*' (line 6), brings the humour to an end, and could be interpreted as signalling that he will comply with Noel's labour division.

Although the main emphasis of Noel's humorous utterance is on the achievement of transactional objectives (that is, on getting things

done by making sure Patrick is aware that he is to take on a big part of the meeting's responsibility), the humour in this example enables Noel to integrate transactional and relational leadership behaviours: he manages to portray himself as an equal to his colleagues Isabelle and Patrick while also communicating his expectations to them. The humour thus allows him to balance the opposing demands of being Isabelle and Patrick's colleague and of acting as a leader in this situation by being responsible for the outcome of the meeting.

The humorous instances in the examples above rather explicitly assist leaders in getting things done, but in the majority of the humorous examples leaders pursue their transactional objectives more subtly. Often they do this by commenting on their subordinates' performance and criticising them. By performing these leadership activities leaders ensure their subordinates' compliance and thus eventually advance their own transactional goals.

In addition to providing advice and giving encouraging feedback, humour is also a useful tool for communicating negatively affective speech acts, such as criticisms, as it may considerably mitigate the impact of the illocutionary force on the speaker and the addressee (Cox, Read & Auken, 1990; Holmes, Marra & Burns, 2001; Morreall, 1991). In this context, humour provides a 'powerful ally in getting your message across', as Perret (1989: 17) notes (see also Holmes & Marra, 2002c). This positive function appears to be particularly useful for leaders who may productively utilise it to 'make orders or reprimands more palatable', thereby minimising the illocutionary force of their utterance (Yarwood, 1995: 85).

Example 2.5 occurred in a board meeting of A&B Resolutionz, in which all attendees were members of the company's board. The previous day Donald had disseminated some emails with important information. Samuel, who is on holiday in Australia and who participates via telephone at the meeting, has not read the emails.

Example 2.5

1	Donald:	so do you not have access to any of that Samuel
2	Samuel:	not not at the moment Donald no
3	Donald:	what have you done to your computer
4	Samuel:	[laughs] it's been it's been
5		m- more (is it ac- as-) aspect (er) access
6		(that's been) the problem
7	Donald:	aha aha [laughs]
8	Samuel:	[laughs]

This example demonstrates yet another way in which leaders may use humour to provide feedback to their subordinates on their performance and thereby ensure that eventually things get done. Imitating a reproachful voice, Donald mocks Samuel for not having read the emails (line 3). Instead of anticipating that Samuel might not have had access to his emails since he is on vacation, Donald humorously accuses him of having caused problems with his computer. His teasing rhetorical question, '*what have you done to your computer*', appears to criticise Samuel for not being well-prepared and also prompts him to humorously justify himself and thereby sustains the humour. Samuel's reply, especially his repair work (four restarts in line 5) suggests that he wants to play along with the humour but perhaps has some problems producing a witty comment. His justification (lines 4–6) is humorously answered by Donald's ironic minimal responses '*aha aha*' (line 7), who once more makes fun of his colleague by indicating that he does not believe him.

With this brief intermezzo Donald manages to criticise Samuel while still maintaining harmony and reinforcing their good collegial relationship, which is further intensified by their shared laughter (Devereux & Ginsburg, 2001; Fine, 1983). This example nicely illustrates how humour may be used to make reprimands 'more palatable' (Yarwood, 1995: 85). It enables Donald to portray himself as the 'one in charge', while at the same time taking into account Samuel's face needs and expressing in-group solidarity.

Although leaders regularly use humour to assist themselves in achieving their various transactional objectives, they differ in the particular ways in which they employ this socio-pragmatic device. Some of these differences seem to be related to distinct expectations associated with leaders' roles and their standing in the wider organisational context (Robbins et al., 1998).

The impact of leadership roles: Humour and giving feedback

Leadership may take different forms, and depending on their role, leaders differ from each other in their transactional objectives as well as in the specific ways in which they aim to achieve them. These differences are particularly salient when comparing the two leaders from Company S, Gerry, a mentor, and Victor, the organisation's CEO. Acting as a mentor to the graduates who have recently joined the organisation, Gerry's main responsibility is to convey the organisation's culture to the newcomers (and to teach them 'how things are done' at Company S) by

giving lectures and supervising their project work. Thus, one of the leadership tasks typically performed by Gerry when interacting with the graduates is providing feedback on their performance. Giving feedback is central to mentoring, as it not only facilitates the transfer of knowledge but also has 'the ability to encourage others to reach beyond previously assumed limits of understanding, perspective, and will' (Mitchell, 1998: 48). This particular behaviour is thus an important motivational technique used to support subordinates' efforts and to assist their professional growth (Kotter, 2001: 93), as the following examples illustrate.

Example 2.6
Context: The graduates and Gerry, the mentor at Company S, are discussing problems they have experienced while working on their first project. There are still some issues which they have not been able to resolve. Gerry's following comment interrupts the graduates in their long and tiring discussion about possible solutions for their (technical) problem (which consisted of them having to write the code for an electronic check game).

1	Magnus:	well checker that could be one (you actually) move a
2		piece (off cue)
3		the king is taken off the board
4		because the game has just finished (sometime)
5	Yoon:	yeah that could be (another um checkmate) +
6	Magnus:	yep
7	Hank:	I suppose so
8	Gerry:	there's a really easy answer to this
9		and I'm not going to tell you what it is
10	Hank:	oh you [laughs]
11	Magnus:	[laughs]

While the mentees lead a detailed discussion in which they repeatedly complain about how to solve a particular problem concerning the task they are supposed to perform, Gerry keeps himself in the background. He does not contribute a single utterance. However, when he finally does contribute humour to the discussion with a teasing quip, '*there's a really easy answer to this and I'm not going to tell you what it is*' (lines 8 and 9), he appears to cheer up the graduates and thus prevents them from becoming deadlocked.[1] The laughter which his comment generates (lines 10 and 11) seems to provide a welcome opportunity for the graduates to release some of the tension that has been built up during the previous debate (Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995; Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Pizzini, 1991).

In addition to performing these relationally oriented aspects of leadership, Gerry's humorous remark could also be interpreted as signalling to the mentees that there is actually an answer to their problem and that he believes they are capable of finding it. More specifically, the humour enables him to 'turn a negative situation into a positive one' (Caudron, 1992: 67) and to cheer up the graduates and encourage them not to give up. Gerry thereby successfully combines the two leadership aims of achieving transactional objectives and performing relationally oriented behaviours. This challenging yet supportive behaviour is typical for Gerry's interaction with his mentees. At an earlier stage during the same meeting, for instance, when the graduates are complaining about the amount of coding that is involved in completing their assigned task, Gerry responds, '*makes it a challenge doesn't it*'. This ironic quip not only brings an end to his mentees' complaining but at the same time also seems to be aimed at encouraging them to try harder to find a solution. At this stage in the meeting Gerry's focus is not on talking the graduates through the process of how to solve their task (as Donald does with Ann in examples 2.2 and 2.3) but is rather on giving them enough confidence and signalling trust in their abilities to master the problems without his help. He thus supports and guides his subordinates in their struggle to find the right answer by indicating that they should see the enormous task as a challenge rather than as a burden.

In these instances Gerry overtly (but humorously) displays his status and knowledge thereby portraying himself as the mentees' superior. In example 2.6 he tells them that he knows the correct answer but is not yet going to give it away. However, his teasing tone of voice minimises the seriousness of his display of power and makes it appear more like he is 'showing-off' among friends. He thus skilfully manages to portray himself as both an equal and as their superior. The next example (Example 2.7) further illustrates Gerry's rather challenging style of providing feedback.

Example 2.7
Context: After having done a role play in which the graduates assumed the roles of professionals and Gerry impersonated a client, Gerry evaluates their performance.

1	Gerry:	I'm being serious here
2		how hard do you negotiate this is
3		this is what will happen to you
4		you'll go to a customer and you say um it's like

5		you can't be wishy washy
6		you can't give in
7		you've got to push a little bit and
8		they'll push back a little bit
9		[… more advice on how to deal with clients]
10		and then you go back and say
11		well I don't understand this aspect
12		go backwards and forwards
13		if you just give up after saying
14		[in a mocking voice imitating the graduates] : Gerry
15		can you tell us how much to write :
16		I don't know how much you've got to write //[laughs]\
17		I'm the customer
18		(it's really) vague so (yo-) come back and ask
19	??:	[laughs]

At the end of a rather long sequence of providing feedback to the graduates, Gerry uses a mocking voice to humorously imitate the graduates in their earlier attempts to get some help from him in performing their assigned task. But instead of helping them directly, he makes fun of them by jokingly explaining that '*I don't know how much you've got to write I'm the customer*' (lines 16 and 17), referring to his assigned role in the role play. Thus, similar to the examples discussed above, in addition to providing explicit help and constructive feedback (see for example, lines 1–13) Gerry challenges his mentees and makes it clear that they have to learn to take initiatives rather than relying on somebody to tell them what to do. This is further supported in a comment Gerry makes a few utterances later when asked about the lesson of this exercise: '*it's a lesson to teach you that you're not in university anymore*'.

The ways in which Gerry gives feedback to his mentees and encourages or criticises them in the examples above reflect important aspects of his leadership role. Acting as a mentor, enhancing the mentees' performance by assigning them challenging tasks and by giving corrective feedback are important aspects of what Kram (1988: 24) calls 'career functions' of mentoring. Career functions are behaviours which advance the mentees' skills and eventually enhance their advancement in the organisation. And by drawing on relatively challenging humour when performing these functions Gerry at the same time introduces the graduates to important aspects of 'the ways things are done' at Company S, which also includes the use of appropriate discursive styles, for instance when giving feedback or criticising subordinates.[2]

A different and perhaps even more challenging way of using humour when providing feedback to subordinates is typically employed by Victor, the CEO of Company S. In contrast to Gerry whose subordinates work on hypothetical projects and do role plays, Victor interacts with senior staff whose performance has actual consequences on the organisation.

Example 2.8
Context: The senior managers and Neil, the external HR consultant, discuss ways of dealing with staff turnover, one of Neil's responsibilities. In the process of the discussion Neil, who has joined the organisation recently, suggests it would be useful to distinguish between two types of staff turnover.

1	Neil:	so what I've got in here for top talent
2		is retention of top talent
3		and reduction and regrettable turnover
4		i.e., redundancies
5	Shaun:	regrettable turn- //[laughs]\
6	Victor:	/[laughs]\
7	Neil:	/regrettable turn I mean re- I mean re-\\
8	Victor:	do we regret this person leaving
9	no no	//(get rid of them)\
10	Shaun:	/[laughs]\\ //[laughs]\
11	Neil:	/[laughs]\\
12	Victor:	it's not very sensitive is it
13	All:	[laugh]

Victor's use of humour in this example assists him in giving critical feedback to his subordinate Neil. However, unlike Gerry in the two examples discussed above, Victor utilises this discursive strategy to strengthen the illocutionary force of his criticism of Neil: he makes fun of the distinction between the types of staff turnover introduced by his subordinate by picking up Shaun's mockery (line 7) and performing a little role play: '*do we regret this person leaving no no get rid of them*' (lines 8 and 9). Like Shaun, Victor also seems to laugh *at* rather than laugh *with* Neil (see Glenn, 1989, 1995; Provine, 1996): instead of creating 'bonding and affiliation', it seems that Victor and Shaun 'promote distancing, disparagement or feelings of superiority' by laughing *at* Neil (Glenn, 1995: 43).

Neil's attempts to justify himself, '*regrettable turn I mean re- I mean re-*' (line 7), which is characterised by two restarts and the pragmatic

particle '*I mean*' remains unfinished, and eventually he appears to give in and join Shaun and Victor's laughter (lines 11 and 13). Participating in their laughter, Neil seems to signal that he understands their criticism and that he can deal with this kind of challenging and face-threatening humour; it may also be an attempt to signal group membership and initiate bonding between interlocutors.

In this particular humorous instance, then, Victor portrays himself as a powerful and authoritarian leader: he overtly rebukes Neil in a rather challenging way, and he has the last word, '*it's not very sensitive is it*' (line 12), in which he once more expresses his criticism by challenging Neil. Similar to Gerry in the examples above, Victor leaves little doubt about the fact that he is the most powerful person in the interaction. But unlike Gerry, he utilises the humour in this sequence to display and reinforce his powerful status in the group instead of mitigating the illocutionary force of the negatively affective speech act and attending to Neil's face. Holmes and Stubbe (2003b: 117) note that humour in the workplace is 'coopted as a strategy for mediating between competing discourses – those of politeness and power'. And in example 2.8, it seems that the discourse of power is more dominant. Nevertheless, politeness considerations are not entirely overruled as Victor's use of humour, albeit being confronting, makes it easier for Neil to accept the criticism. Thus, although the humour in this instance clearly challenges Neil and threatens his face needs, wrapping the whole criticism in humour rather than uttering it in a serious tone mitigates its negative impact on the HR consultant and minimises the seriousness of the situation.

It has been noted that humour may enable people to convey their messages more directly as they may always revoke them: '[b]ecause it is indirect and allusive, the humor mode protects the joker from consequences that his or her statement would have if conveyed directly in the serious mode' (Crawford, 1995: 134; see also Hay, 2001). Taking this observation into consideration, the humour in example 2.8, even though relatively challenging and confrontational, may nevertheless facilitate Neil's acceptance of the criticism and help him deal with the disagreement. And the joint laughter at the end of the sequence, in which everyone participates, supports this assumption: it unites the interlocutors and signals agreement and shared ground (Devereux & Ginsburg, 2001; Fine, 1983).

A slightly less challenging and direct way to comment on subordinates' performance is displayed in the next example (Example 2.9), which occurred during another meeting of the senior managers at Company S.

Example 2.9
Context: In a meeting of the senior management team, participants discuss the organisation's plan for assessing their staff's performance in a so-called 'talent management' programme. This topic has been intensely discussed throughout their previous meetings.

1	Shaun:	could you give me some background Neil after this meeting
2		on what is talent manage//ment and
3		where is (and what it plans to do)\
4	Neil:	/yeah sure sure yeah yeah absolutely\\ yeah absolutely
5	Chester:	he was there
6	Victor:	you were in that meeting
7	Shaun:	//( )\
8	Chester:	/[laughs]\\: oh yes you were:
9	Shaun:	oo
10	All:	[laugh]
11	Victor:	I think you were doing a pretty good impersonation (there)
12	All:	[laugh]
13	Neil:	maybe maybe just your body was there
14	All:	[laugh]

[The humour continues for a while until Shaun humorously admits that he might have been at the meeting]

Victor's comment '*I think you were doing a pretty good impersonation (there)*' (line 11) albeit being humorous has clearly a critical edge to it. It occurs in the middle of a longer sequence of conjoint humour in which interlocutors make fun of Shaun for not remembering what they have discussed in a previous meeting. The humour starts with Chester's challenging comment, '*he was there*' (line 5) with which he responds to Shaun's request for more information on talent management (lines 1–3). Although Neil appears happy to provide this information (line 4), Chester challenges Shaun by insisting that Shaun was present at the meeting and should thus remember what they have talked about. Interestingly, this criticism seems to be directed at Victor rather than at Shaun, as the use of the third person singular plural indicates. Victor then picks up Chester's criticism (line 6), which eventually turns into a longer sequence of conjoint humour: Victor makes fun of Shaun by humorously suggesting that even if Shaun cannot remember having attended that particular meeting, he was at least '*doing a pretty good impersonation*' of himself there (line 11). With this challenging comment Victor not only repeats his previous disagreement with Shaun (see line 6) but also

criticises him for obviously not having paid attention to what they have discussed during that meeting. This perhaps tongue-in-cheek criticism is responded to by joint laughter (line 12) and is further developed by Neil who humorously picks up Victor's suggestion, '*maybe maybe just your body was there*' (line 13). The humour then continues for several turns until Shaun seems to give in and accept that he has indeed attended that particular meeting.

The overall tone of this humorous sequence is more friendly and less challenging than in the previous example, and contributes to the creation of team spirit among participants. And by using humour to repeat his criticism of his subordinate, Victor manages to maintain the harmonious atmosphere of the meeting while at the same time expressing his discontent and rebuking Shaun.

Examples 2.6–2.9 have thus illustrated different ways in which the focus leaders from the same organisation employ humour when giving feedback. Interestingly, both leaders use similar types of humour in order to achieve their leadership goals: both Gerry and Victor employ challenging and teasing humour to comment on and to guide their subordinates' performances.[3] However, in spite of the fact that both leaders use these types of humour to display and reinforce their power when giving feedback, they differ in the ways in which they achieve this transactional goal: unlike Victor, Gerry allows the graduates to express their problems; he listens to their concerns and, instead of dismissing them by making fun of them, he appears to show confidence in their ability to resolve the difficulties themselves. Victor, on the other hand, attempts to show up Neil and Shaun, using their (in Victor's view) inappropriate explanations for comical effect.

These differences in the ways leaders from the same organisation employ humour to achieve similar leadership objectives may be accounted for by the different demands and aims of their leadership roles. Gerry's use of humour may be less challenging and face-threatening than Victor's due to the fact that one of his prime goals in being a mentor consists of encouraging and supporting the graduates who are new to the organisation. Since the projects his mentees were working on at the time of the recordings were hypothetical rather than actual orders assigned to the company by clients, it might be more important for Gerry to prepare and introduce the newcomers to the organisation's culture and to facilitate their entrance and integration rather than to ensure the standards of their performance. In contrast, Victor deals with staff whose performance has far-reaching consequences for the entire organisation. Being the CEO of Company S, Victor may be more interested in ensuring

the organisation meets its goals by focusing on more transactional leadership behaviours in this situation, while Gerry, being a mentor, may put more emphasis on the relational aspects of leadership when giving feedback and encouraging his subordinates.

Summary: Humour and transactionally oriented leadership discourse

This chapter has illustrated some of the ways leaders in the workplace may use humour in speech acts that primarily achieve transactional objectives. They skilfully draw on a variety of different types of humour in order to get things done, in particular when ensuring their subordinates' compliance, providing encouraging or critical feedback and giving advice and guidance. However, while predominantly focusing on the performance of these transactionally oriented behaviours, leaders also consider their interlocutors' needs and aims to maintain harmony within their team, thus skilfully combining both transactional and relational leadership objectives. And due to humour's ability to perform these two functions simultaneously, it appears that humour is a particularly useful tool on which leaders regularly draw when interacting with their colleagues and subordinates, thereby constructing and highlighting particular aspects of their professional identities.

However, the specific ways in which leaders utilise humour also reflect their different leadership roles. Gerry's leadership discourse contained many mentoring elements, while Victor's reflected his powerful position and standing in the organisation. This is particularly evident in the ways these leaders employed humour to give (encouraging and critical) feedback.

The next chapter provides further insights into the ways in which humour is actually used by leaders in the workplace. In particular, it describes how leaders employ this socio-pragmatic device in speech acts which primarily aim to achieve relational objectives. It also deals with the 'dark' side of humour by looking at what can go wrong if humour fails or is used to disrupt rather than to maintain harmony within the team.

3

The 'Other' Side of Leadership Discourse: Humour and the Performance of Relational Leadership Activities

Example 3.1
Context: Tricia, the Director of Sitcom, and Isabelle, one of her managers, meet in the corridor.

1	Isabelle:	hello
2	Tricia:	hi how are you
3	Isabelle:	all right + you?
4	Tricia:	good
5	Isabelle:	that's good
6	Tricia:	getting there
7	Isabelle:	how can we change that
8	Both:	[laugh]
9	Tricia:	another week like this one's how we can change that
10	[laughs]	

[small talk continues]

The humour employed by Tricia and her subordinate in this example primarily focuses on establishing and reinforcing the good collegial relationship that these women share. This humorous exchange which is embedded in a longer sequence of small talk could, strictly speaking, be regarded as dispensable and irrelevant since it does not appear to advance any transactional objectives. Tricia's humorous reply '*another week like this one's how we can change that*' (line 9) does not portray her as a prototypical leader who is in control of what is going on at work but rather emphasises more social or human aspects of her persona.

Drawing on humour to achieve these more relationally oriented aspects constitutes the 'other' – less typical but equally important – aspect of

leadership discourse. The leaders in the data set frequently employ humour in this bonding or solidarity-building function.

Relational aspects of leadership discourse

This 'other' side of leadership, namely more relationally oriented behaviours, has often been overlooked in traditional theories and approaches to leadership but is increasingly recognised in recent leadership research (for example, Ferch & Mitchell, 2001). Relational leadership behaviours are as complex as transactional behaviours and may include enhancing solidarity, expressing group membership and creating a sense of belonging (Bass, 1981; Gardner, 1990; Kotter, 2001). Ultimately, most of these aspects have positive effects for advancing transactional aims. And humour is one of the discursive strategies on which leaders frequently draw in order to achieve both their relational as well as transactional aims. Humour may, for instance, motivate and support subordinates and thus enhance their job satisfaction. It may also be used to enhance a sense of belonging and create team spirit among group members, which may have a positive effect on employees' job satisfaction, productivity and overall performance (Barsoux, 1993; Caudron, 1992).

These benefits of humour are particularly apparent in workplaces characterised by high levels of stress. The potential of humour to release tension and thus facilitate dealing with difficult situations and pressure, for example, was claimed to be of particular value in medical settings, and especially in hospitals (for example, White & Howse, 1993). In a study of paramedics in an emergency room Rosenberg (1998: 201) found that staff highly valued and regularly employed humour as 'a coping device and defense mechanism' thereby gaining distance and objectivity towards their immediate situation (Rosenberg, 1998: 200). For these paramedics, humour constituted a means of coping with the challenges of their everyday workplace reality (see also Coser, 1960; Pizzini, 1991). Similar results were found in a study on police officers conducted by Pogrebin and Poole (1988), and by Brown & Keegan (1999) who examined the use of humour in a hotel kitchen. In both workplaces staff regularly utilised humour as a means of bonding and creating an in-group, from which clients or superiors were excluded, as well as to release stress and tension which ultimately helped them to deal with the demands of their jobs and effectively manage their workload.

Many of these functions of humour concur with crucial leadership objectives, such as providing a climate in which subordinates get things

done in a productive and effective way. These predominantly relational aspects of leadership discourse are performed, for instance, by reinforcing solidarity and creating a sense of belonging as well as minimising status differences. However, humour may not only be used in these bonding functions but may also assist leaders to deliberately de construct (rather than enhance) solidarity and increase (rather than minimise) status differences among interlocutors. This 'dark' side of humour is briefly discussed at the end of this chapter.

Reinforcing solidarity and creating a sense of belonging

Humour is a valuable tool for a myriad of interpersonal functions because most instances of humour appear to more or less directly contribute to creating and maintaining solidarity and a sense of belonging to a particular group (Holmes, 2000b: 159). This ability of humour to achieve 'social bonding' (Ehrenberg, 1995: 360) is perhaps the most basic function which all instances of humour accomplish to some extent (Hay, 1995; Holmes & Schnurr, 2006). Leaders frequently make use of this bonding function, for instance when they create a sense of belonging by distinguishing an in-group versus an out-group and by expressing in-group solidarity.

Example 3.2[1]
Context: A meeting between Noel, his colleague Isabelle and their boss Tricia. They are discussing the impact of the IT services their department is providing on the performance of other staff at the company.

1	Noel:	but then don't forget that you work in
2		an entirely different way than + lots of people
3		I mean I was talking +
4		I know many non IT staff who don't check their email
5		at home for example //+\
6	Isabelle:	/mm\\
7	Noel:	now I know we all do +
8		cos we're we just can't resist it [laughs]

This short extract illustrates how Noel reinforces solidarity and creates a sense of belonging among interlocutors by making fun of staff from other non-IT departments in the organisation. With his humorous remark '*we just can't resist it*' (line 8) he describes IT staff as a group of people displaying similar behaviours. He thus 'draws the circle around'

the present members of the IT department and makes them feel included while at the same time distancing this group of people from the rest of the organisation (Morreall, 1997: 240; see also Boxer, 2002; Tajfel, 1974, 1982a, 1982b). Moreover, Noel's frequent use of the inclusive pronoun '*we*' (lines 7 and 8) emphasises the participants' shared characteristics and thus considerably contributes to the positive teambuilding function of this humorous instance. He thereby successfully portrays himself as 'one of them', as a colleague and friend. And the fact that it is acceptable for Noel to make fun of the in-group by humorously portraying them as addicted to email, portrays him as a well-integrated member of the group (Weisfeld, 1993).

Similar functions are performed by Donald's humour in the following example, which is taken from an interaction with Ann, who experienced some difficulties concerning a project that she is supervising for clients in South Africa. Donald and Ann are discussing the most appropriate method of implementing an infrastructure system for these clients.

Example 3.3

1	Ann:	why do we have to do T Vs (when I won't)
2	Donald:	it's not TVs it's NOT T Vs [laughs]
3	Ann:	I won't get- worry myself about that
4	Donald:	yeah I mean the South Africans don't wanna see cricket
5		on the (pumps)
6		//especially not\ when they're LOSing
7	Ann:	/hell no\\
8	Donald:	//[laughs]\
9	Ann:	/[laughs]\\

Donald's humour considerably mitigates his previous, rather direct and threatening, response (line 2): by using fantasy humour to make fun of the absent clients – '*the South Africans don't wanna see cricket on the (pumps) especially not when they're losing*' (lines 4–6) – he emphasises common grounds and creates a sense of solidarity and belonging between Ann and himself. And Ann's reaction – especially her understanding and humorous response '*hell no*' (line 7) as well as the joint laughter among interlocutors – indicates that Donald's attempt to reinforce solidarity and create team spirit was successful.

Consistent with the behaviour displayed in examples 2.2 and 2.3 (discussed in Chapter 2), Donald portrays himself as an other-oriented and supportive leader who takes into account his subordinates' feelings and at the

same time insists on her compliance and cooperation. Using humour thus enables him to skilfully combine the performance of relational behaviours (that is, reinforcing solidarity) as well as transactional behaviours (that is, ensuring Ann's compliance) in his leadership discourse.

Using humour by making fun of an absent out-group also constitutes a relatively 'safe' way of creating solidarity among interlocutors who do not share a close relationship. Example 3.4 is taken from an interaction between Noel and his subordinate Barbara. At the time of the recording they had only worked together for a few weeks, and in the interviews both commented that they did not get along with each other particularly well.

Example 3.4
Context: Noel and Barbara are discussing her responsibilities while he is on leave.

1	Noel:	now I had this email from Roger Smith
2		which is why I was ringing Jeffrey +
3		cos I'd sent an email + I'd actually rung him up
4		and then sent an email about temporary accommodation
5		he's having a meeting this week and blah blah blah
6		and he sent +
7		they're very cryptic over in facilities management
8		it tends to be a //+\ a a trait that they share + um
9	Barbara:	/[laughs]\\
10	Noel:	he sent me an email in reply to my email about the
11		accommodation + saying currently arranged with [name]
12	Barbara:	oh

This is a good example of how Noel utilises humour to reinforce solidarity with his subordinate while still maintaining the social distance between them. With his amusing comments '*they're very cryptic*' and '*it tends to be a trait they share*' (lines 7 and 8) he makes fun of a particular group in the organisation while constructing Barbara and himself as belonging to an in-group. Moreover, his frequent use of the exclusive pronoun '*they*' (lines 7 and 8) and his description of staff in a separate building, further distances him and Barbara from the employees '*over in facilities management*' (line 7). In contrast to other types of humour which require a relatively stable and intimate relationship among interlocutors (such as teasing), the way in which Noel employs anecdotal humour in this example appears to assist him in achieving his relational objectives while not claiming too much common ground. These observations

become particularly apparent if Noel's behaviour in this extract is compared to his performance in example 3.2. In example 3.2 he makes fun of absent others while also highlighting shared attributes among those present, for example by using the inclusive pronoun '*we*' and by humorously describing them as a bunch of email addicts. In example 3.4 none of these bonding features are present.

However, leaders reinforce solidarity among the members of their working team not only by targeting their humour at absent others but also by making fun of their own group.

Example 3.5
Context: A Board meeting at A&B Resolutionz, in which all participants are members of the company's board. Towards the end of a long and difficult discussion.

1	Errol:	well if we could do that sort of (kick off) at at one
2		or something //and er\ keep going until we're finished
3	Jill:	/okay\\
4		okay
5	Errol:	oh sorry what about //you\
6	Tessa:	/no\\ no that's al//right um well\ (let's that's)
7	Errol:	/what about your kindies[2] (you teach)\\
8	Samuel:	ke- keep going until there's only one person standing
9	Jill:	[laughs]
10		oh you've been to our board meetings before [laughs]

Jill's teasing and perhaps a little challenging remark '*oh you've been to our board meetings before*' (line 10) provides a witty reply to Samuel's criticism of the fact that the Board meetings always last a very long time (line 8) – usually between three and five hours. Producing laughter and more humour to Samuel's critique, Jill signals agreement, and by making fun of the group as a whole (she uses the inclusive pronoun '*our*' when referring to the meetings), she also expresses in-group solidarity by enhancing a sense of belonging among the participants of the meeting. This is, however, achieved by making the entire group the butt of her humour rather than making fun of an out-group.

Similar behaviours are displayed in the next example, which occurred during a senior managers meeting at Company S. Outlining his suggestions for improving the company's HR strategy, Neil tells the other participants that they have to be careful not to neglect their management team in their plans to restructure some HR aspects.

Example 3.6

1	Neil:	organisations are are usually not very good at this
2		but they tend to
3		neglect the people in this room
4		quite often they think about
5		people at the next level
6		and I think something that
7		that you guys need to do at some stage
8		a- and probably you might already have it
9		I don't know but um
10		is what you guys actually need
11	Chester:	no we're thoroughly neglected
12	??:	mm
13	Neil:	[laughs]
14	Victor:	but at least we know we're thoroughly //neg\lected
15	Neil:	/yes\\
16	Chester:	//[laughs]\
17	Neil:	/well I mean it's good to have the consistency\\
18		and and consensus around the table
19	Victor:	/you mean consistently ne- neglected is okay\\
20	Neil:	um //[laughs]\ [laughs]: yeah:

In contrast to example 3.5 the humour in this data extract is constructed conjointly involving most participants of the meeting, who make fun of themselves as a group. Thereby they strengthen the group's ties and reinforce a sense of belonging among them. In particular, Victor's witty reply to Chester's teasing (line 11) '*but at least we know we're thoroughly neglected*' (line 14) performs a variety of relational functions: it teases both Chester and Neil for their previous comments, and by using the inclusive pronoun '*we*' it also explicitly includes all participants in the group. This last aspect is particularly interesting as in previous meetings Victor and the other members of the senior management group had frequently excluded Neil by signalling that he is not yet a member of the group (see examples 2.8, 3.12 and 4.2). In response, Neil made attempts to justify and defend himself. However, by constructing humour with the members of the senior management group (lines 17 and 18), he appears to be learning how to enact aspects of the linguistic repertoire that characterises this particular group.[3] His humorous contribution is then ratified by Victor who teasingly makes fun of Neil's witty justification (line 19). By including Neil in the humour and by ratifying his humorous contributions, Victor facilitates Neil's attempts to become

a member of this group, and indicates that although Neil is not yet a fully accepted member, his status within the group increases.

Drawing on humour to perform multiple interpersonal functions assists Victor to achieve a number of relational leadership objectives. He portrays himself as an equal to his team members, and his subordinates contribute to this identity construction by cooperating in constructing the humorous incident. Another strategy for performing relational aspects of leadership discourse is minimising status differences.

Minimising status differences

While minimising status differences may not be stereotypical leadership behaviour, it nevertheless has several positive effects. Yukl (1989: 256) notes that one trait of 'effective' leaders is to exert 'power in a subtle, easy fashion that minimizes status differentials and avoids threats to the self-esteem of subordinates.' These claims have also been supported by a study on bank managers conducted by Beck (1999). She found that the managers in her data employed a number of discursive strategies in order 'to emphasise collaboration, to minimise status differences as well as to foster egalitarian relationships with their staff' (Beck, 1999: 201). Minimising status differences is thus another important relational leadership behaviour.

It is also possible that minimising status differences is particularly characteristic for the discourse of New Zealand leaders. It seems that especially in New Zealand, people in management positions often 'have a tendency to "downplay" their authority, effectiveness and achievements' (Olsson, 1996: 366). This behaviour may be explained by the 'tall poppy syndrome' which is deeply embedded in New Zealand culture and which describes the cutting down of 'conspicuously successful person[s]' (Oxford Dictionary of New Zealand English as quoted in Mouly & Sankaran, 2002: 36) to prevent any individual from standing out (Acheson, 2002). Hence, in order not to be perceived as a 'tall poppy', leaders may downplay their own expertise, and portray themselves as equals to their subordinates. However, since the notion of leadership, as well as behaviours typically associated with it, varies across cultures (Clyne, 1994; Thomas, 2001), leaders in other countries may not put the same emphasis on portraying themselves as equals to their subordinates by minimising status differences.[4]

All of the leaders who participated in this study displayed this relational leadership behaviour to some extent. Interestingly, however, leaders differed from each other in the ways they performed this

particular relational leadership behaviour, which is also reflected in their use of humour. The type of humour that was most frequently used by leaders to minimise status differences is self-denigrating humour.

Self-denigrating humour performs numerous functions which have been thoroughly discussed elsewhere (for example, Barsoux, 1993; Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992; Hay, 1995; Morreall, 1997). Researchers have generally agreed that one of the most important functions of this type of humour is 'redefining the social hierarchy […] in order to create solidarity across group members of differing social status' (Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992: 114). This seems to be particularly valuable for leaders: laughing at themselves and being willing to admit their own weaknesses and failures makes them seem more human and approachable (Barsoux, 1993: 112). Hence, minimising status differences by employing self-denigrating humour constitutes a valuable means for performing particularly relationally oriented aspects of leadership.

Example 3.7
Context: Jill returns to the office she shares with Lucy after she has asked Douglas, a software engineer, for help.

1	Jill:	[comes back]
2		he just laughed at me
3	Lucy:	[laughs]: oh no:
4	Jill:	he's definitely going to come to my aid
5		but ( ) he just sort of laughed at me
6	Lucy:	[laughs]
7	Jill:	(and then) I've got this appalling reputation
8		of being such a technical klutz and //( )\ sometimes
9	Lucy:	/[laughs]\\
10	Jill:	look it's not ME + I work with what I've got + //( )\
11	Lucy:	/I know\\ it's the tools you've been prov//ided\
12	Jill:	/that's\\ right +++

In this exchange Jill draws laughing attention to her reputation as technically ignorant and incompetent – a '*technical klutz*' (line 8). Although she laughingly refutes this to some extent by blaming her tools (line 10), this comment is clearly tongue-in-cheek since there is abundant evidence from her recordings to suggest that Jill regularly adapts this identity milking it for humour and emphasising her role as helpless ignoramus. Indeed, in this interaction Jill goes on to entertain

Lucy further with this computer illiterate persona by reporting that her husband says, referring to her, '*the biggest bug I have problems with is the one between the keyboard and the chair*'.

It has been noted that self-denigrating humour is often employed as a means of '[p]rotecting the self by identifying weakness before anyone else does' and of coping with them (Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992: 114 in reference to Ziv, 1984). But it seems that in this case Jill's account of her own 'weakness' is not to be taken seriously – after all, she is the most powerful person in the organisation, and is clearly anything but a '*technical klutz*'. Rather than revealing a real weakness, her use of self-denigrating humour is quite obviously tongue-in-cheek and meant to be ironic. Employing irony in this context, Jill manages to be slightly self-denigrating while at the same time portraying herself as in control and able to deal with the circumstances (see Barbe, 1995: 543). And by using self-denigrating humour and describing herself with the derogatory term '*technical klutz*' she plays down her own experience and knowledge, and constructs herself as being dependent on her staff. She thereby simultaneously highlights how much she values them and appreciates their work.

These positive equalising and supportive functions of self-denigrating humour are also employed by Gerry, who utilises this type of humour when teaching the graduates. The next example is taken from one of the regular meetings between Gerry and his mentees. The participants are outlining and discussing the next steps in the mentees' project work and Gerry gives them some advice.

Example 3.8

1	Gerry:	there's all these decisions you're gonna make
2		try and find ones that won't change
3		so maybe you because you drew a sequence diagram um
4		//with so\
5	Hank:	/they scare\\ me [laughs]
6	Gerry:	they scare me too but you've //got (to)\
7	Grads:	/[laugh]\\
8	Gerry:	if you you've got some of these abstractions here
9	Hank:	yeah I was trying yeah
10		I guess what I was saying before about how things work
11		(I was talking) through a sequence diagram
12		which probably isn't very hard to conceptualise […]

With his remark '*they scare me*' (line 5) Hank humorously signals to Gerry that he feels a little overtaxed by all the decisions the graduates

need to make by themselves. Gerry, however, instead of telling him directly how to proceed, uses self-denigrating humour to show Hank that he does not have the answer to everything and that the graduates should figure it out by themselves: '*they scare me too*' (line 6). Gerry's behaviour in this extract is in line with his relatively challenging behaviour discussed in the previous chapter where he overtly displays his knowledge in a way that portrays him both as the graduates' teacher *and* their equal and perhaps even friend (see example 2.6). This ambiguity is also reflected in the example above: in spite of Gerry's initial attempt to minimise status differences and to portray himself as someone who does not know everything, he then gives Hank concrete advice on how to go about solving the problem (line 8). Gerry thereby skilfully balances two aspects of his leadership identity: he manages to portray himself as 'one of them' by minimising status differences among interlocutors but he also displays teacher traits by giving some advice to the graduates. In particular, combining humour and giving advice in such a way seems to serve Gerry's teaching goals: he encourages the students to develop and trust their own creative thinking and decision making instead of relying on him to provide the answers and solutions to their problems (see Ulloth, 2003). Hank's response to Gerry's subsequent advice (lines 9–12), in which he starts to think about a possible solution himself, suggests that the mentees have understood Gerry's intentions and they appear to have learnt their lesson.

Interestingly, the relational leadership aspect of minimising status differences may not only be achieved by leaders' use of self-denigrating humour, but sometimes subordinates may play a more active role in this process. Instead of just replying with laughter or an expression of empathy to their bosses' use of humour (as displayed in the examples above), subordinates may also actively contribute to the portrayal of their superiors as particular kinds of leaders.

Example 3.9
Context: During a job interview at A&B Resolutionz. Donald and Ann are interviewing Michael, a potential new employee

1	Donald:	things are looking like this year will probably be
2		our best year ever
3		um but it does come on the back of you know
4		fairly tight fairly lean times
5		we're just now
6		there's four main shareholders um so it's you know

7		it's however deep our pockets are and
8		you can see the quality of my suit //[laughs]\
9	Michael:	/[laughs]\\
10	Ann:	he's got shoes on so he must be having //a good day\
11	Donald:	/[laughs]\\ oh yes we try and run a relaxed atmosphere
12		[laughs]

This example illustrates how Donald and Ann jointly minimise status differences by constructing Donald as an approachable leader. Not only Donald's self-deprecating comment, '*you can see the quality of my suit*' (line 8), performs this interpersonal function. By making fun of his outfit instead of displaying his power and status being the CEO of a successful company, Donald portrays himself as an equal or perhaps even of lower status than those present. This bonding function of the humour is further intensified by Ann's subsequent teasing remark '*he's got shoes on so he must be having a good day*' (line 10), which even further minimises status differences. Donald's subsequent laughter as well as his supporting utterance, '*oh yes we try and run a relaxed atmosphere*' (line 11), suggest that he does not mind being the butt of the humour. Morreall (1997) views this behaviour as typical for 'effective' leaders. He argues that by using self-denigrating humour, 'leaders make people feel like members of the team by being accessible to them' (Morreall, 1997: 207). This clearly applies to Donald, who then takes up Ann's comment and skilfully renders it into a positive remark about the '*relaxed atmosphere*' of the workplace. Apart from minimising status differences, this example, thus, also illustrates the impact Donald has on the culture of A&B Resoloutionz: a CEO who wears casual clothes and no shoes in the office clearly creates and actively reinforces a '*relaxed atmosphere*'.[5]

Interestingly, among the leaders who participated in this research, Victor is the only one who does not employ self-denigrating humour to minimise status differences. He does, however, draw on a range of other discursive strategies to achieve similar results. For example, he often plays along with the humour initiated by his subordinates thereby also portraying himself as an equal (see example 5.5 discussed in Chapter 5). And like Donald in the previous example, Victor does not mind being the butt of the humour, signalling to his subordinates and colleagues that he 'can take it'.

Example 3.10
Context: At the end of a meeting of the senior managers at Company S with Neil and Jacqueline (the marketing expert), who have joined the

team recently. After having decided to invite the entire staff (almost 300 employees) to a presentation about the new HR strategies, the meeting participants discuss the details of informing staff about this event.

1	Shaun:	(yeah so) you've got four weeks of build up
2		(so Jacq) can start doing some clever things
3		to start building them up to that date
4		making sure they're booking it in their diaries
5		and //( ) yeah\
6	Jacqueline:	/do you know where we're going [laughs]\\
7		//[laughs]: come\ along and find out:
8	Neil:	/yeah\\
9	Chester:	the search for The Holy Grail
10	Jacqueline:	[laughs]
11	Chester:	Harrison Ford Vic's Harrison Ford
12		[general laughter]

Although Victor does not verbally participate in this conjoint humour, it clearly functions to minimise status differences between him and his subordinates. In particular, by jocularly portraying Victor as '*Harrison Ford*' who is searching for '*The Holy Grail*' in his famous role as Indiana Jones, Chester makes fun of his boss by suggestion that he is facing an impossible task (finding '*The Holy Grail*'), and implies he needs to be a real man (like Harrison Ford) to meet the challenge. The general laughter (including Victor's) following Chester's remark indicates that it is acceptable for him to tease Victor in this way. The fact that it appears to be acceptable for Chester to tease and jocularly abuse his boss in such a way also reflects their relatively close relationship (Hay, 1994). However, among members of the senior management team, Victor is only seldom the butt of the others' teasing or jocular abuse. This observation is in contrast to the results of Hay's study of friends (1994: 52), in which she found that the most integrated members were the most frequent targets of the jocular abuse. However, the fact that Victor is typically not the butt of the teasing or jocular abuse is consistent with other aspects of his behaviour, for example the fact that he is the only leader who does not employ self-denigrating humour to minimise status differences, contributing to his portrayal as being in a 'class of his own' and being 'above it all'. It thus seems that among the leaders who participated in this study, Victor puts the least effort into minimising status differences and portraying himself as an equal to his subordinates.

There are obviously numerous ways in which leaders may employ humour in order to perform more relationally oriented aspects of leadership including reinforcing solidarity and minimising status differences. These interpersonal behaviours are crucial aspects of 'effective' leadership discourse and should thus not be underestimated. However, although the vast majority of humorous instances in this data set can be described as 'positive' humour (Morreall, 1997: 229), that is, humour that primarily aims at achieving a range of bonding functions among interlocutors as illustrated in the examples above, the data also contains some instances of humour used to de construct (rather than reinforce) solidarity and to increase (rather than minimise) status differences among interlocutors.

The 'dark' side of humour

Most of the research on humour concentrates on the various positive functions this socio-pragmatic device may perform, and only little research has dealt with the 'dark' side of humour (for example, Collinson, 1988). Morreall (1997: 229), who is one of the few who have addressed this issue, notes that negative humour 'involves a negative attitude toward people and has a negative effect on them.' However, few studies have empirically investigated this phenomenon in a workplace context.

In their study on humour in business meetings Holmes and Marra (2002c: 83) found that the humour used by the meeting participants also had 'a darker side' as it provided a means for criticising each other in socially acceptable ways and to subvert or challenge existing norms and practices. More serious consequences of making use of the 'dark' side of humour were found by Collinson (1988) who observed the behaviour of workers in a lorry factory. He found that the workers not only used humour to achieve 'a shared sense of group solidarity' (Collinson, 1988: 185) but also as a means to test and often personally attack co-workers (particularly new apprentices). As a result of this highly challenging and aggressive humour (involving jocular abuse, banter and practical jokes) work relationships among colleagues frequently broke down and ultimately those who could not take it had to leave.

The data I collected contains only a handful of instances of negative humour. And interestingly, all of these examples occurred in an interaction between Noel and his subordinate Barbara.

Example 3.11
Context: In a team meeting between Noel and Barbara, who tells her boss how she dealt with a particular problem that arose the week before.

She has received numerous electronic requests which she was supposed to process.

1	Barbara:	so I diverted diverted it into a folder
2		forgot all about it and then like a week later thought
3		oh haven't heard a thing
4		there was four hundred and //seventy emails\ in there you know
5	Noel:	/yeah yeah\\
6		so you didn't bother of course +
7		//yes no\ I wish + it was all as easy but er + anyhow [tut] +
8	Barbara:	/(um)\\

Instead of providing support and showing empathy to the no-doubt exaggerated account of Barbara's email disaster, Noel, does the exact opposite. His sarcastic remark (the sarcasm is very clear from his tone of voice) '*so you didn't bother*' (line 6) challenges her, and the ascertaining pragmatic particle '*of course*' at the end of his comment renders his comment threatening, overtly displaying his disapproval.

Sarcasm is one of the most ambiguous types of humour. Morreall (1997: 240), for instance, describes sarcasm as 'negative humour' which may have devastating consequences, particularly in a workplace setting, because it hurts personal feelings, and because '[e]nthusiasm, morale, and productivity depend on how people feel about themselves and their work, and having the boss humiliate them is one of the surest ways to make them feel lousy about both'. Kotthoff (2006: 11), on the other hand, views this type of humour less negatively as 'a means of avoiding open confrontation and securing cooperation in cases of conflicting interpretation and interaction expectations.' In the example above, however, Noel seems to employ this type of humour to express his powerful status rather overtly which eventually silences his subordinate (note that Barbara does not dare to interrupt him in spite of the three pauses in his utterance in lines 6 and 7).

However, the sarcasm in this example may not only function as a potential face attack and critique of Barbara but can also be seen as a relatively face-saving way of conveying Noel's disapproval of his subordinate's behaviour: instead of overtly telling Barbara that he considers her behaviour to be inappropriate and disappointing, he wraps this sensitive message in humour. As a consequence, he increases the social distance to her (Seckman & Couch, 1989: 328). But in contrast to Miller (1995: 19; see also Fahlman, 1997) who claims that '[s]arcasm is anger

disguised as humor and has no positive intent or redeeming qualities', I tend to agree with Kotthoff (2006) and would argue that the use of sarcasm, albeit challenging to some degree, may still be more face-saving than an on-record criticism that is not mitigated by humour. Hence, by using sarcasm to communicate a negatively affective speech act, Noel finds a channel through which he manages to display his disapproval, maintaining distance between interlocutors. He constructs himself as a rather authoritarian leader, displaying his power and status overtly, while nonetheless also indicating some concern for his subordinate's face needs.

Interestingly, this behaviour is in sharp contrast to the way Noel interacts with his other subordinates (see examples 4.5 and 5.4 discussed in the next two chapters), where he is very supportive and encouraging towards attempts at humour. These contradictory behaviours provide a good illustration of the point made earlier that leadership is a dynamic activity: depending on various contextual factors, leaders draw on different humour strategies to construct different leader identities. One possible explanation for Noel's preference of sarcasm over a less threatening and challenging type of humour may be that he and Barbara do not get along particularly well, which they both commented on in the interviews.

Another way of increasing status differences and de constructing solidarity is to withhold an adequate response to humorous instances, which may then result in the failure of the humour. In some cases this may have severe consequences for the relationship between interlocutors as it can result in 'misunderstanding, disruption of involvement and loss of rapport' (Norrick, 1994: 411). She proposes that in addition to insufficient contextualisation, misjudging the relationship between interlocutors, trying to revive 'dead' humour and portraying oneself inappropriately are some of the factors which may lead humour to fail (Hay, 2001: 71). However, most of the humour that occurs in a workplace context seems to be successful, and the data collected for this research contained only three instances of failed humour, two of which are discussed here.

Example 3.11 (cont.)
Context: Noel rings his colleague Jeffrey, a facilities manager, but only reaches his answering machine

1 Barbara: (I um think you should have left him a deep and)
2 cryptic message //[laughs]\
3 Noel: /[exhales]: oh:\\ I could have
4 Barbara: [laughs] never get an answer would we +
5 Noel: [coughs] now

Barbara's attempt at humour (line 1 and 2) refers back to a humorous comment Noel had uttered a few minutes before when he made fun of the company's staff in facilities management by describing them as '*very cryptic*' and '*it tends to be a a trait that they share*' (see example 3.4 above). Although Barbara takes up and dwells on Noel's humorous remark here, her attempt clearly fails as Noel's unsupportive response (especially the exhaling and the slow and bored tone of voice in which his subsequent comment is uttered '*oh I could have*' [line 3]) indicate. Even Barbara's repeated attempt at reviving the humour by more explicitly linking her initial comment to Noel's earlier humour about the staff at facilities management (line 4), does not get a supportive response: Noel's coughing and short answer make it clear that he is not interested in reviving the humour nor in positively responding to her attempt to reinforce solidarity. Instead, he initiates a topic change by uttering '*now*' (line 5) (Schiffrin, 1987) thereby also displaying his higher status and reinforcing his authority: he is the one to decide how long they will spend dealing with each topic and whether Barbara's humour attempts are to be successful; and, judged by his response, her humour fails.

A similarly unsupportive behaviour is displayed in the next example which occurred a little earlier in the same interaction. Noel and Barbara are talking about the particulars of implementing a new programme.

Example 3.12

1 Noel: okay um I'm happy to to give it a go
2 it looks like it might be + similar things that we want
3 Barbara: mm well it's free //+\ [laughs]
4 Noel: /[clears throat]\\ it's already paid for
5 Barbara: yes
6 Noel: it's not free
7 it probably takes up some of Tricia's time + a little bit

[Barbara continues to justify her formulation until Noel eventually agrees and they start a new topic]

Instead of agreeing with Barbara's attempt to reinforce solidarity (line 3), Noel once more expresses his disinterest relatively directly: rather than supporting his subordinate's humorous comment '*well it's free*' (line 3), he clears his throat and even challenges her: his contestive comment '*it's already paid for*' (line 4) and its subsequent elaboration (lines 6 and 7) indicate that he is not willing to agree with her. As a result Barbara's humour fails yet again.

By not supportively responding to Barbara's humour in both examples, Noel ridicules her attempt to reinforce solidarity and to establish her position within this dyad (see Hay, 1995). Instead, Noel displays and reinforces his own powerful position in this encounter (see Austin, 1990). And by undermining Barbara's attempt to reinforce solidarity he seems to actively de construct their not well-established relationship. His missing support for Barbara's humour attempt may further reflect (and reinforce) the fact that they do not get along very well with each other. Similar to Noel's behaviour in example 3.11 his inadequate response here provides a means to express his discontent with her.

Summary: Relational aspects of leadership discourse

This chapter has focused on the 'other' but equally important aspect of leadership performance, namely relational behaviours. The analysis of several examples has illustrated an array of ways in which humour may be used to perform leaders' relationally oriented objectives. A particular focus was on the ways in which leaders employed this socio-pragmatic device as a means to reinforce solidarity and create a sense of belonging, as well as to minimise status differences. Advancing primarily relational aims ultimately also has positive effects on more transactional goals. In fact, as some of the examples discussed in this chapter have illustrated, transactional and relational leadership behaviours cannot always be separated from each other.

However, humour may also be used to achieve the opposite effects, namely to deconstruct solidarity and to increase status differences. Although this 'dark' side of humour was considerably less often utilised by leaders in this study, it is nevertheless an interesting aspect of leadership discourse, which may be more relevant for the discourse of other kinds of leaders in different (non-white collar) workplaces (such as perhaps in the lorry factory studied by Collinson [1988]).

Through the discussion in this and the previous chapter, it has become clear that leadership is a dynamic performance – something people *do* – rather than a static attribute. Instead of simply 'being a leader', leaders skilfully display different aspects of their professional identities in the various situations. For example, they carefully balance portraying themselves as an equal to their subordinates by downplaying experience and status, with displaying power and knowledge thereby constructing themselves as superior and teacher/guide. In the various situations, different aspects of their professional identities are presented as most salient or foregrounded.

One important aspect of developing and displaying leader identities seems to be membership in particular groups. Portraying themselves as members of certain in-groups, specifically by signalling non-membership in other groups and by drawing boundaries between the various groups, leaders construct their own standing and place in the wider organisational context. Chapter 4 investigates this observation in more detail and takes a closer look at the ways in which leaders' linguistic performance is related to norms developed in their respective working groups. It is argued that most of the teams in which leaders act form communities of practice, which have developed a set of discursive and behavioural norms for their members. Due to the fact that the different communities of practice may vary greatly in their perception of acceptable and normative behaviour, it is essential to take these differences into account in order to understand leaders' discursive performance.

4
Doing Leadership in Context: The Impact of Working Groups

The examples discussed in the previous chapters indicated that leadership discourse, in particular leaders' use of humour, is dependent on the context in which it occurs. And one of the most crucial factors that have an impact on leadership discourse is the discursive norms developed in the various working groups in which leaders participate on a day-to-day basis. This chapter investigates this observation in more detail and takes a closer look at the ways in which leaders' linguistic performance is related to norms developed in their respective working groups.

Since leaders regularly interact with the various members of their working groups – whether in larger formal meetings or in less formal and often more spontaneous one-to-one interactions – over time they develop a repertoire of discursive strategies of what they consider to be appropriate and normative ways of interacting with each other. This applies in particular to working groups which can be classified as communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

Communities of practice are the sites where members construct and negotiate their identities by drawing on the norms of acceptable and expected communicative behaviours developed within groups (for example, Bergvall, 1996, 1999; Bucholtz, 1999b; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1995). Through regular mutual engagement around a negotiated enterprise, members 'develop certain expectations about how to interact, how people treat each other, and how to work together' (Wenger, 1998: 152). Due to their special status, leaders play an important role in the development and negotiation of their community of practice's linguistic repertoire: through their performance in interactions with other group members they constantly reinforce and shape the norms of acceptable and expected behaviours. This also applies to appropriate ways of using and participating in humour.[1]

Humour is particularly sensitive to the discursive norms developed in a community of practice (Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Holmes & Marra, 2004; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a): members of these groups not only agree on what kinds of humour are acceptable in what context, but they also influence the appropriate style of its delivery (Holmes, 2006a; Holmes & Schnurr, 2005).

In a study of humour at a lorry factory, for instance, Collinson (1988: 186) found that members of the various departments differed from each other with regard to the type of humour they typically employed: staff working in the components division predominately used 'uncompromising banter [...] which was permeated by uninhibited swearing, mutual ridicule, display of sexuality and "pranks"'. This rather challenging and often contestive humour was in stark contrast to the 'exaggerated and elevated above the middle class politeness, cleanliness and more restrained demeanour' displayed by the factory's administrative personnel (Collinson, 1988: 186). In this workplace, then, the types of humour that are perceived as appropriate for performing particular functions, as well as the frequency with which they are employed varied significantly across groups (or communities of practice). By regularly drawing on these distinct ways of using humour, group members signal their membership and negotiate their status within these groups.

However, members of communities of practice not only constantly express their belonging to a particular group through their use of humour but also make use of this socio-pragmatic device to reinforce some of their group's behavioural norms and expectations. In their study of police officers, Pogrebin and Poole (1988: 202) found that humour, particularly in the form of amusing anecdotes, was employed to 'help to define the working ideology of patrol officers providing examples of informal standards and expectations for behavior.' Similar functions were performed by some of the humour instances produced by the hotel kitchen staff researched by Brown and Keegan (1999: 58) which 'provided for the education of newcomers and established members' by signalling which behaviours are considered appropriate in this working group.

This chapter focuses on the ways in which leaders' discourse, that is, their use of humour, is related to the discursive repertoire of their communities of practice. In particular, it investigates the complex relation between leaders' use of teasing and the discursive norms that characterise their communities of practice. A comparison of the ways three leaders make use of teasing humour reveals interesting differences with regard to their styles of delivery. These differences reflect, contribute to and

reinforce distinct aspects of the discursive repertoire that characterises leaders' working groups. The chapter also discusses leaders' role in reinforcing some of their group's expectations about 'effective' leadership.

The impact of working groups: Different teasing styles

Teasing humour is a particularly valuable tool for leaders in the workplace as it can assist them to achieve their various leadership objectives while at the same time displaying their power in a non-threatening way. A teasing utterance expresses a potentially face-threatening comment but simultaneously indicates that it is to be understood as non-threatening (Alberts, 1992: 155; Eisenberg, 1986; Hay, 2001). Sometimes teasing humour is employed to insult or jocularly abuse the addressee. Although these insulting and often aggressive remarks appear to be aimed at putting down the addressees or ascribing negative attributes to them (Hay, 1995: 70), they may also function as expressions of solidarity.

In the data collected for this research, leaders employ teasing humour to assist them to get things done, criticise subordinates, and reinforce solidarity. However, the particular ways in which they make use of this type of humour to achieve these objectives vary substantially across different working groups.

By employing teasing humour in ways consistent with the negotiated repertoire of their working groups or communities of practice, leaders 'do leadership' while at the same time indicating their membership of a particular group (whose norms of 'doing humour' they employ). An investigation of teasing humour thus promises to provide interesting insights into the ways leaders construct and negotiate their professional identities, while at the same time taking into consideration aspects of the linguistic repertoire negotiated in their communities of practice.

A teasing continuum

In order to capture differences in the delivery of teasing humour, the analysis draws on a continuum of teasing described by Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997). They argue that the various functions of teasing range from 'bonding to nipping to biting' (1997: 276). 'Biting' refers to rather aggressive and challenging teasing remarks which are primarily designed to put down the addressee. 'Bonding' teasing has the opposite function: rather than challenging or dividing interlocutors it emphasises common ground and reinforces solidarity. 'Nipping' is the most ambiguous term: positioned in the middle of the continuum, it combines elements of 'biting' as well as 'bonding'.

Given the non-discrete functions of humour, assuming a teasing continuum has obvious advantages; '[b]ecause of this continuum, these constructs are not mutually exclusive and the boundaries are not always clear' (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997: 279).[2] Boxer and Cortés-Conde identify a number of criteria on the basis of which they classify the instances of teasing in their data. The most crucial clue in interpreting teasing humour is the context in which it appears and the 'metamessage' it conveys (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997: 279). In analysing context and metamessage, a range of contextualisation cues are important for a distinction between biting, nipping and bonding teasing, such as intonation, laughter and other non-verbal features (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997: 279, 280). In order to identify teasing humour in my data set, it was most useful to focus primarily on two contextualisation cues: the speaker's tone of voice (see for example, Miller, 1986: 203) and the addressee's reaction (which typically attempts to disambiguate the teasing comment). Five representative examples are chosen to illustrate differences in leaders' use of teasing humour as a means to portray themselves as 'effective' and competent in the context of their respective working groups.

Constructing leader identities through a 'biting' teasing style

The first two examples of teasing are from a meeting of the senior management team of Company S, a large IT organisation. Members of this working group have known each other for a long time (with the exception of Neil, an external HR consultant, who has joined the organisation recently), and some of the members were even acquainted with each other prior to becoming working colleagues. During the time of the data collection, the senior managers were jointly engaged in revising the organisation's HR system. Over time the senior management team of Company S has developed a set of shared discursive and behavioural norms, which include, in particular, knowledge of what counts as acceptable and appropriate humour within the group.

Example 4.1[3]

Context: During a regular meeting of the senior management group at Company S with Neil, the external HR consultant. The fact that Neil is relatively new to the organisation and has not yet been officially introduced to all staff is of some concern to Shaun, the senior HR manager.

Towards the end of this meeting, they decide to at least put a picture of Neil on the intranet to give staff an opportunity to see him there.

1	Shaun:	people do need to know
2		who that guy with bad tie taste is around the office
3	Neil:	[laughs]
4	Victor:	that's VERY rich coming from you
5		(speaking of eccentricity) [laughs]
6	Neil:	I have act//ually been
7		I have actually been consulting\ a fashion critic
8	Shaun:	/stripes and checks excellent\\
9		[laughs] you didn't like my advice
10	Neil:	[laughs]:yeah:
11	??:	oh dear
12	Chester:	as opposed to a fashion victim
13	Neil:	yeah [laughs]

This sequence of anecdotal humour is initiated by Shaun who teasingly attacks Neil for not having been introduced to staff yet: '*people do need to know who that guy with bad tie taste is around the office*' (lines 1 and 2). Uttered in a teasing and challenging tone of voice, Shaun puts more emphasis on his criticism by jocularly abusing Neil. However, his contestive remark and particularly the jocular abuse perform ambiguous functions: on the one hand they express in-group solidarity, while on the other hand they also emphasise in-group/out-group divisions within the team (Hay, 1994: 42). After all, Neil is not yet a fully accepted member of the group and the organisation, a point to which Shaun makes frequent reference. The fact that Neil does not reply verbally but responds only with laughter (line 3) also suggests that he may not be sure about how to respond appropriately.

Victor, the chair of the meeting and CEO of the company, joins the humorous sequence by teasing Shaun. With his teasing comment (lines 4 and 5) Victor overtly criticises, and could even be regarded as attacking, Shaun, thereby protecting Neil. Like Shaun, Victor chooses teasing as a means to express his rebuke in a direct and face-threatening way (Zajdman, 1995). His critical comment is intensified by the emphasis on '*very*' (line 4), but at the same time mitigated by his utterance-final laughter. Producing more teasing, Victor prolongs the humour. He thus plays a rather ambiguous role in this situation: he protects Neil against Shaun's attack but also plays along and maintains the humorous key. This extract thus demonstrates how humour is a 'double-edged

sword' (Brown & Keegan, 1999: 59), which may assist individuals in accomplishing apparently contradictory functions. And with his behaviour Victor clearly reinforces the discursive norms of the group regarding the use of challenging and 'biting' humour as a means to reinforce solidarity and enhance their sense of belonging to the group.

Everyone present participates in the production of this instance of teasing humour: in line 7 Neil comes back to Shaun's initial point humorously justifying himself: '*I have actually been consulting a fashion critic*'. This contribution suggests that Neil is gradually acquiring the discursive group norms regarding the participation in humour as he skilfully plays along with the established members. Shaun's subsequent abusive and challenging answer, as well as Chester's final teasing remark, round off the humorous sequence.

This rather competitive way of engaging in humour, characterized by a frequent challenge of previous speakers, with attempts to outwit each other and the use of strengthening devices, illustrates the ways in which members of this community of practice typically use teasing and other types of humour. These qualitative observations are further supported by a quantitative analysis which indicates that in this community of practice, teasing constitutes the most prominent type of humour members typically employ when reinforcing solidarity: the majority of all instances of humour performing this relational function are accomplished by teasing, and more than half of the teasing instances are delivered in a challenging and face-threatening style as displayed in examples 4.1 and 4.2.

Example 4.2

Context: In another meeting of the senior managers' group Neil reports on the interviews that he has conducted as part of the organisation's restructuring process. He has talked to a number of key personnel in order to understand their concerns and to assess their commitment to the company.

1	Neil:	um I think in the end I interviewed about twenty-three
2		or twenty-four people and I'd have to say that
3		with all those people with the exception of one
4		th- there was a constant theme coming through
5		in terms of being very entrepreneurial er committed
6		um a- a- and people with a great desire and purpose
7	Victor:	should we try and guess the one
8	Both:	[laugh]

9	Neil:	it was just he he that one sort of just stood out you know
10		[…] and what that really I suppose said to me in in a way
11		was that um a lot of the stuff that we're proposing
12		in here //is ( ) um +\
13	Chester:	/check who hasn't been taking their pills\\
14	All:	//[laugh]\
15	Neil:	/[laughs]: yeah:\\ um what it really said to me was that […]

As in example 4.1, Victor's teasing question '*should we try and guess the one*' (line 7) is uttered without rising intonation. Its function is ambiguous: it may be understood as an indirect accusation of Neil for not revealing the name of the employee in question. However, Victor's remark may also be a response to Neil's implicit compliment about staff being generally very happy at Company S. Using humour in this context, then, would allow Victor (and his colleagues) to accept the compliment without losing face. (These two interpretations once more highlight the ambiguity inherent in teasing humour.) After some laughter from Neil and Victor (line 8), Neil continues with his non-humorous account of outlining the outcomes of his interviews (lines 9–12). He is then interrupted by Chester who picks up Victor's teasing and produces some more humour in a slightly challenging tone of voice: '*check who hasn't been taking their pills*' (line 13). With this teasing remark Chester suggests that staff at Company S are happy with their job only because they are being supplied with drugs by the company, and that the individual who has commented negatively on Company S in the interviews has done so because he '*hasn't been taking their pills*' (line 13).

Although this example is shorter and does not contain such an elaborate instance of teasing humour as example 4.1, it nevertheless illustrates some of the aspects of this group's negotiated repertoire as discussed above: Victor's teasing is particularly challenging (for example, his question without rising intonation in line 7), and Chester's relatively late but still successful attempt to revive the humour (line 13) can be interpreted as an attempt to outwit Victor.

Both examples indicate that the teasing contributions made by the various members of this community of practice are typically competitive and contestive in their delivery style as well as in their content. Using Boxer and Cortés-Conde's (1997) continuum, this way of using teasing humour could thus be characterised as 'biting': interlocutors challenge the previous speaker's utterances and employ a range of devices to intensify their remarks. Moreover, even though they produce some laughter,

they do not always jointly engage in this activity. However, although interlocutors' contributions are face-threatening and challenging in content and style, they nonetheless appear to contribute to a sense of belonging by expressing and reinforcing in-group solidarity between team members. And Victor's teasing behaviour in these examples clearly reflects these distinctive elements that characterize the teasing behaviour of this particular working group. This aspect is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Constructing leader identities through a 'nipping' teasing style

A rather different and less challenging way of employing teasing humour is shown in examples 4.3 and 4.4. These examples occurred during two conversations between Jill, Donald and Lucy at A&B Resolutionz. They illustrate how Jill, the Director of the board of a smaller IT organisation, delivers teasing humour in a style which is typical of this community of practice.

Unlike the stable working team of the senior managers at Company S, this group of colleagues is a less typical instance of a community of practice. Jill, Donald and Lucy work together on the same projects, and while they do not have regular formal meetings, they nevertheless come together frequently to discuss a joint enterprise (such as a particular project), in the course of which they may develop a shared repertoire of discursive strategies. Thus they form a community of practice in the wider sense, which is further reflected in the discursive repertoire that typically characterises their interactions. In almost two thirds of their attempts to reinforce solidarity through using humour, members of this community of practice employ teasing, most of which is delivered in the 'nipping' style described below.

Example 4.3

Context: Donald, the company's CEO, installs something on Jill's computer using the equipment of another employee (Will). Lucy, a project manager, wonders where Donald got the equipment from.

1 Lucy: (whose did you get Will's)
2 Donald: (there you are)
3 just there's no need to ask those sorts of questions
4 Lucy: //[laughs]\
5 Jill: /oh\\

6	Donald:	it's like most things if you're not looking
7	Jill:	[laughs]
8		so lead by example also covers [laughs]: pilfering:
9		[laughs]
10		[laughs]: important in one's leadership skills:
11	Lucy:	[laughs] no it's been showing initiative and acquiring
12		new technolo//gy\
13	Jill:	/[drawls]: mm:\\
14	Donald:	it's acquiring the resources to do the job //[laughs]\
15	Jill:	/you're a master aren't you\\
16		(I coul-) that's market ( ) [laughs]
17		acquiring tech- acquiring new technology
18		I just nicked it [laughs]
19	Lucy:	[laughs throughout Jill's turn]
20		well as long as the back of the bus isn't mentioned
21		at all [laughs]

Donald's humorous reply to Lucy's question '*there's no need to ask those sorts of questions*' (line 3) reinforces solidarity among interlocutors; and with her subsequent laughter, the humour could have come to an end, but Jill's exclamation '*oh*' (line 5) in a tone of voice that signals disbelief and mockery drives the humour forward. Donald replies by directing the humour towards her: '*it's like most things if you're not looking*' (line 6). This humorous remark is then picked up and further developed by Jill who teasingly makes fun of Donald's leadership qualities: '*so lead by example also covers pilfering*' (line 8). Her teasing comment which is spoken faster and a little louder than her previous remarks is also a little contestive as it could be interpreted as challenging, and perhaps even as a subtle criticism conveying perhaps a veiled protest (Holmes, 2000b). However, the laughter accompanying her challenging humour mitigates its negative impact and emphasises the positive functions of the humour.

Interestingly, it is not Donald but Lucy who responds to Jill's teasing in a soft and reconciling voice: she humorously protects Donald from Jill's apparent criticism: '*no it's been showing initiative and acquiring new technology*' (lines 11 and 12); and Donald supports her argument by humorously defending himself: '*it's acquiring the resources to do the job*' (line 14). Replying to Donald, Jill once more teasingly challenges him for his behaviour as well as for his humorous explanation (lines 15–18). The challenging tag question at the end of her humorous remark, '*you're a master, aren't you*' (line 15) conveys a contestive tone (Cameron et al., 1988).

She then attempts to build up more humour – but not very successfully, as the repair and restart in her subsequent utterances indicate (lines 16 and 17). In her last comment Jill again makes fun of Donald's behaviour by imitating him: *'I just nicked it'* (line 18). Her final contribution to the conjoint humour once more seems to be a little contestive: she returns to her previous criticism (lines 8–10) and by repeating it, strengthens its force. Eventually, Lucy has the last word, again protecting Donald from Jill's challenging humour. Her witty reply, '*well as long as the back of the bus isn't mentioned at all*' (lines 20 and 21) appears to be an attempt at reconciling Jill and Donald by indicating that it does not really matter where Jill got her mouse from – they could just treat the matter as something that has 'fallen of the back of a bus', a recognisable, though slightly inaccurate, reference to a widely accepted euphemism for goods acquired by dubious means (that is, '*fallen off the back of a truck*').

As in the previous two examples of teasing among members of the senior management group at Company S, Jill's teasing of Donald can be interpreted as performing a variety of positive functions: it signals and reinforces their close relationship, and it also creates a sense of belonging among interlocutors. However, in contrast to the members of Company S, Jill's teasing, albeit a little contestive, seems less challenging and face-threatening, as Donald's friendly responses indicate – he does not appear to mind being the butt of Jill's teasing. Moreover, Lucy's protection of Donald, in spite of the fact that he is her superior, is particularly interesting as it suggests that at A&B Resolutionz status differences are not always salient (this observation is further supported by participants' comments in the interviews). Her supportive and protective behaviour as well as the joint laughter support the claim that Jill's teasing of Donald has primarily affective functions. The overall tone is friendly and even her criticism seems to be well meant.

A similar style of teasing is displayed in the next example which occurred during another interaction between Jill and Donald.

Example 4.4

Context: Donald is looking for a powerpack, which he needs to install some technical equipment.

1	Jill:	um pow- is it the same powerpack
2		same sort of powerpack as this //or\
3	Donald:	/yep\\ yep
5	Jill:	cos I've //got one of\

6	Donald:	/it's all the same\\
7	Jill:	these at at home as //well\
8	Donald:	/[drawls]: ah:\\ is that where the other went to
9		I thought I was being ( ) cos I had two for a while
10	Jill:	yeah
11	Donald:	so I wasn't carrying (it in a) powerpack
12		//( ) all the time [laughs]\
13	Jill:	/yep yep yep so I've I've\\
14	Donald:	but then Tessa cleaned up and I lost it [laughs]: somehow:
15		//[laughs]\
16	Jill:	/oh it must have come back\\ and I've snaffled it so um
17		yeah it (worked) really well
18	Donald:	[laughs]: okay:
19	Jill:	at least now you can stop looking
20	Donald:	yes well I was wondering
21	Jill:	[laughs] well actually it was Fergus' suggestion
		[humour continues for a while]

This relatively long instance of humour is initiated by Donald who teasingly makes fun of Jill by uttering, '*is that where the other went to*' (line 8). Drawling on his exclamation '*ah*' as if he had just solved a mystery, he humorously accuses Jill of having accidentally taken his powerpack home. This good-humoured suggestion is then taken up by Jill who admits that she has '*snaffled it*' and that '*it (worked) really well*' (lines 16 and 17). The fact that Jill readily plays along with Donald's humour illustrates that she is not offended by his teasing. Jill then turns the humour against Donald by teasingly saying, '*at least now you can stop looking*' (line 19) in a slightly contestive tone of voice. This teasing is replied to by Donald with more teasing (line 20) and eventually turns into a long sequence of conjoint humour between the two shifting the blame for the missing powerpack onto Fergus, one of their colleagues, and Jill's husband.

The teasing enacted by members of this community of practice in this example also contains some of the elements identified in the previous example: although the humour in which the teasing is embedded is quite contestive, the content of the teasing itself is not particularly aggressive. Nevertheless, Jill's remark, '*at least now you can stop looking*' (line 19), uttered in a slightly contestive tone of voice clearly challenges Donald by indicating that he does not need to waste anymore of his time by looking for the missing powerpack. Jill's teasing comment also appears to encourage Donald to continue with the teasing. But instead

of apologizing to him, Jill humorously shifts the blame onto Fergus. However, the frequent overlaps (lines 7–8, 12–13 and 15–16) and Jill's overall use of a friendly and smiling voice together with her laughter (line 21) mitigate the negative impact of her challenging behaviour and make it clear that she is not serious.

Using Boxer and Cortés-Conde's categorisation, the style in which Jill teases Donald and Lucy in examples 4.3 and 4.4 could be described as 'nipping'. The teasing displayed by group members appears to be both contestive as well as collaborative in content and style (Holmes, 2006a, Holmes & Marra, 2002a): in some utterances, the speakers construct the humour together (as reflected in the frequent overlaps in both examples), while at other times the teasing comments are characterised by relatively brief witty one-liners which have a rather contestive content.

By employing teasing humour Jill also constructs herself as a leader. Like Victor in examples 4.1 and 4.2, she enacts ambiguous aspects of her leader identity when teasing her subordinates: she reinforces solidarity thus portraying herself as an equal while also partially displaying her power by criticising Donald's behaviour (in example 4.3) and so constructing herself as his superior.

The ways in which leaders' use of particular teasing styles advances their leadership performance and the construction of their professional identities are discussed in more detail in the last section of this chapter. However, before these aspects are discussed in more detail, one more example is analysed, which illustrates a third teasing style.

Constructing leader identities through a 'bonding' teasing style

Yet another way of employing teasing to express in-group solidarity is illustrated in example 4.5 which shows how Noel, a team leader at Sitcom, and two subordinates, Evelyn and Melanie, engage in teasing characterised by a predominantly 'bonding' style. I do not want to claim that this style of teasing is typical for interactions among members of this group, since the recorded data contains only one instance of this type of humour used in interactions among Noel and his colleagues. Teasing does not seem to be the preferred type of humour employed by members of this working group to achieve their various objectives. Rather, Noel and his colleagues appear to favour less challenging and face-threatening types of humour, such as self-denigrating humour. However, it appears justified to include example 4.5 here

because it illustrates a third teasing style which assists another leader in his performance, and by drawing on his group's normative ways of interacting, Noel portrays himself as an 'effective' leader in the context of his working group.

Noel, Evelyn and Melanie do not form a community of practice in its most typical sense. However, being members of the same department within the larger organisation, they frequently interact with each other – not necessarily in formal meetings but in shorter, less formal day-to-day encounters, in which they negotiate joint enterprises such as the various IT-related projects on which they work together. As a result of their frequent interactions these individuals have developed a shared repertoire of discursive strategies and, in particular, ways of employing humour.

Example 4.5

Context: Interaction between Noel, a team leader, and his subordinates Evelyn and Melanie. Noel is in the women's office to arrange a time to meet with their boss, Tricia. On the office wall a chart is displayed indicating staff members' monthly performances.

1	Noel:	[drawls]: oh: Evelyn [drawls]: Evelyn:
2	Evelyn:	I know bloody Kate did all right
3		she's not sure how she did it though
		[…]
4	Noel:	oh well (ups and downs) maybe [drawls]: she's: +
5		undergoing a lot of stress or something at the moment
6		or running up and down lots of hills or something
7	Evelyn:	yeah whatever she's doing it's working
8		//must have a chat\ to her [laughs]
9	Noel:	/it's a bummer that isn't it\\
10		send the boys round to see her
11	Evelyn:	[drawls]: yeah: exactly //(okay)\
12	Noel:	/never mind\\ so you seem to be stabilising at a new
13		level I have to I'm //I'm sorry\ to say
14	Evelyn:	/[laughs]\\
15	Noel:	//[laughs]: um Evelyn: [laughs]\
16	Evelyn:	/I know I know\\ my aim though is to get above the line
17		//[laughs] and above\ zero again [inhales]
18	Noel:	/[laughs]\\
19	Melanie:	again //did you\ make it above zero
20	Noel:	/and Patrick\\
21		you never made it //above zero + you made it to zero\

22	Melanie:	[laughs throughout Noel's turn]
23	Evelyn:	/oh no oh yeah to make it sorry\\
24		to make it over m- //yeah\ and to (lost lost areas)
25	Noel:	/oh okay\\ actually
26		Patrick seems to be stabilising at a new level up there too
27		that's a bit scary
		[humour continues]

Noel's teasing of his subordinate Evelyn is embedded in a longer sequence of conjointly constructed humorous anecdotes. In the beginning of the extract, Noel makes fun of Evelyn for her rather poor performance (as displayed on the chart in her office), using a sympathetic tone and drawling on her name (line 1). She replies to his humour by directing it towards her colleague Kate, who seems to have performed exceptionally well. This humorous exploration of the various reasons for Kate's success (for example, lines 4–6) and Noel's amusing suggestion to '*send the boys round to see her*' (line 10) and thus in a mafia-like intervention prevent her from out-performing Evelyn, reinforce solidarity among interlocutors and minimise status differences.

After this humorous exchange, Noel skilfully steers the talk back to the initial rather face-threatening topic of Evelyn's low performance. In lines 12 and 13 he teases Evelyn for not doing particularly well, '*so you seem to be stabilising at a new level*'. Albeit communicating a potentially face-threatening message, the overall tone of his humour is, however, friendly and sympathetic: Noel even humorously, if ritualistically, apologises for showing up Evelyn: '*I have to I'm I'm sorry to say*' (line 13). Moreover, the frequently occurring laughter among interlocutors (lines 14 and 15) indicates that both seem to engage in a friendly exchange of words and that status differences are minimised, at least during the humour (Coser, 1960: 81). In line 16, Evelyn expresses agreement with Noel's amusing criticism of her performance by laughingly telling him about her plan to improve her performance and to '*get above the line*'. She supports his teasing rather than challenging him, and with her self-denigrating utterance, and particularly the inhaling (at the end of it), she portrays herself as a pitiable person. The joint laughter of both interlocutors, however, suggests that her comment is not meant seriously (lines 17 and 18).

In line 19 Melanie, who shares an office with Evelyn, joins the conversation for the first time: picking up Evelyn's last word ('*again*') she teases her and makes fun of her generally rather low performance in a friendly yet a little challenging tone of voice: '*did you make it above zero*'. Noel then attempts to shift the focus of attention to another employee,

Patrick, (line 20) but seems to change his mind and joins Melanie in making fun of Evelyn (line 21). He picks up her suggestion that Evelyn '*never made it above zero*' and dwells on it. His humorous account is ratified by Melanie's laughter (line 22) and Evelyn's self-denigrating humour (lines 23 and 24). Making fun of herself by picking up Noel's and Melanie's comments, Evelyn reinforces solidarity among them. The teasing comes to an end when Noel introduces another topic by making fun of Patrick's particularly good performance, '*actually Patrick seems to be stabilising at a new level up there too that's a bit scary*' (lines 26 and 27).

This long sequence of humour illustrates a number of aspects of Noel's leadership performance. His willingness to participate in a very long sequence of small talk and affective humour with his subordinates indicates that he puts considerable effort into performing relational aspects of leadership, particularly expressing in-group solidarity and making his subordinates feel valued and included. Moreover, the example also shows how Noel constructs himself as an approachable equal, rather than as a superior. And the fact that he teases Evelyn for her low performance together with her friendly and humorous replies, reveals that they have a close relationship despite the status differences.

In contrast to the teasing displayed by members of the senior management team of Company S (examples 4.1 and 4.2) and the members of A&B Resolutionz (examples 4.3 and 4.4), the teasing among Noel and his subordinates Evelyn and Melanie is characterised by a more collaborative and less challenging style. This instance of teasing is embedded in a long sequence of conjoint humour – only after Noel has established a good relationship with Evelyn does he start to tease her (lines 12 and 13). Moreover, the frequent joint laughter among participants (lines 14, 15 and 17, 18), and Noel's humorous apology for teasing Evelyn (line 13) characterise this 'bonding' style of teasing.

The analysis of five representative examples has illustrated some of the ways in which Noel and the other leaders' use of particular teasing styles reflects distinct aspects of their working groups' negotiated linguistic repertoire. The next section discusses in more detail how leaders thereby advance their leadership performance and further the construction of their professional identities.

Doing leadership differently: Teasing styles and discursive repertoires

The different teasing styles 'biting', 'nipping' and 'bonding' characterise teasing by members of the different communities of practice at Company S, A&B Resolutionz and Sitcom. These styles are thus an integral part of

the discursive repertoires developed and agreed upon by group members and also reflect aspects of the group's expectations of 'effective' leadership. The analysis of five representative examples has illustrated that leaders' performance precisely reflects aspects of these norms. Victor's challenging and 'biting' performance is embedded in the contestive and competitive contributions which typically characterise the discourse of the senior managers at Company S. Similarly, Noel's supportive and 'bonding' comments fit well with the overall collaborative and friendly style displayed by members of this particular community of practice. And Jill's partly contestive and partly supportive 'nipping' style of teasing is in accordance with the (discursive) behaviour of members of her working group, who have commented in interviews that even when things are more serious '*it never gets mean around here*'.

These three distinct teasing styles can be placed along a continuum (based on Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997). Using various pragmatic criteria, such as the presence or absence of joint laughter, whether contributions challenge or support the previous speakers and whether the teasing was embedded in the previous discourse, they can be assigned to the different poles of the continuum as displayed in Figure 4.1.

The style of teasing displayed by the senior management team at Company S is most appropriately positioned at the 'biting' end of the continuum. It is characterised by challenging and competitive contributions and by the absence of joint laughter. This style is contrasted by the teasing style of Noel and his subordinates: their supportive comments, joint laughter and generally friendly tone are appropriately located at the 'bonding' end of the teasing continuum. Jill's teasing of Donald, delivered in a somewhat contestive but overall friendly tone contains

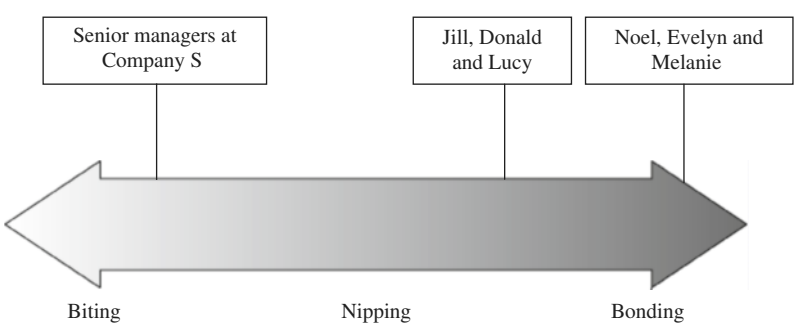

Figure 4.1 Continuum of teasing styles displayed by members of three working groups

challenging as well as supportive elements and is situated in the middle, the 'nipping' area, of the continuum – possibly a little nearer to the 'bonding' pole as Lucy's protection of her boss Donald (in example 4.3) considerably mitigates the impact of Jill's teasing.

These substantial differences in leaders' styles of delivery indicate that in order to understand and appropriately assess leaders' performance, it is vital to consider the context in which this process takes place. And it seems that leaders' working groups or communities of practice not only have a substantial impact on expectations of 'effective' leadership performance, but that these groups are also sites where leaders (and other group members) enact and negotiate their professional identities on a day-to-day basis.

By drawing on aspects of these distinctive repertoires, these professionals constructively portray themselves as 'effective' leaders in the particular contexts in which they interact. At the same time, the substantial differences in the discursive repertoires developed by the various working groups clearly demonstrate that behaviour that is considered appropriate and 'effective' for the performance of leadership varies significantly across different groups/communities of practice. This is particularly apparent with regards to the ways in which leaders more or less overtly display their power, and the ways in which they position themselves as equals or as the ones in charge in their respective communities of practice.

Moreover, because individuals are members of numerous communities of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992b, 1995, 2003; Meyerhoff, 2001; A. Mills, 2002), they have to negotiate and establish their standing and integration in each of these groups. This also applies to leaders, who may portray themselves very differently in their various working groups providing further support for the claim that leadership is a dynamic activity. Tricia, for example, displays contradictory leadership styles in the management meetings as compared to the one-to-one interactions with members from other departments of the organisation. In contrast to the very democratic and perhaps even laissez-faire behaviour that characterises her performance in the meetings (see example 4.4), she is much more decisive and authoritarian in the one-to-one interactions, which is not only reflected in her role in the production of humour but also in the ways in which she gets things done. In the interactions with her PA Evelyn, for instance, Tricia is clear and decisive. She displays her power and higher status much more overtly, makes the decisions and directs most of the conversations (see also example 6.4 for an illustration of Tricia's more decisive and more authoritarian leadership style in a different community of practice). These differences

provide further support for the assumption that leaders' performance is substantially influenced by the various working groups or communities of practice in which they interact.[4]

The role of specific communities of practice also aids understanding Noel's leadership performance in interactions with his subordinate Barbara as discussed at the end of Chapter 3. In contrast to his behaviour displayed in other interactions, when communicating with Barbara, Noel makes use of the 'dark' side of humour (Collinson, 1988; Holmes & Marra, 2002c) and reveals very different aspects of his leadership performance: employing sarcasm and not responding adequately to Barbara's humour he increases status differences and 'de-constructs' rather than reinforces solidarity, clearly portraying himself as her superior. Noel's behaviour in this community of practice, in particular some of the discrepancies regarding the use of humour between him and Barbara, may also be explained by the fact that they had only been working together for four weeks at the time of the recording, and hence have not yet developed norms of appropriate humour behaviour (see Brown & Keegan, 1999).

However, these examples clearly illustrate that ways of discursively interacting with subordinates (as well as the various leader identities that are constructed through these processes) differ considerably across communities of practice. It is thus crucial to pay particular attention to the communicative norms and expectations that are considered appropriate and unmarked in the immediate context in which individuals interact. It is through these processes that individuals construct and negotiate their various identities.

Differences in the ways leaders from the three organisations employ humour to achieve similar objectives are further discussed in the next chapter, which introduces another crucial factor impacting on leadership performance: namely, workplace culture. Chapter 5 argues that leaders' discursive behaviours are not only related to norms developed in their numerous working groups, but that these communities of practice and leaders' performances in particular, are embedded in the larger organisational context, and are specifically influenced by the cultures of their workplaces.

5
Leadership, Humour and Workplace Culture

Example 5.1[1]
Context: During a meeting of the senior managers at Company S. Neil, the external HR consultant, criticises one of the company's intranet sites for not being user-friendly as he found it difficult to work with.

1	Neil:	[laughs] well the one I had a look at
2		had a I mean
3		my first impression was
4		god this is so um + so difficult to
5		a- and not user friendly I suppose in //that\
6	Victor:	/this\\ is like how Company S //works\ +
7	Shaun:	/it is too\\
8		//[laughs]\
9	Neil:	/yeah\\

This brief example quite nicely illustrates that organisations typically develop distinctive ways of doing things. By making a negative comment about the intranet site of Company S, Neil identifies himself (and is branded by the others) as an outsider, as someone who has not yet understood and adopted to '*how Company S works*', as Victor challengingly replies (line 6).

While Chapter 4 illustrated how leaders construct their identities on a micro-level in their individual working groups (which often constitute communities of practice), this chapter explores how leaders' discourse is further influenced by a larger entity, namely the culture of their workplaces. Organisations seem to provide a framework of values, rules and procedures of 'the ways we do things around here'

(Miller, 1999: 104) which is then adapted and incorporated by the various communities of practice into their own distinctive practices. The relationship between communities of practice and the workplace in which they emerge is complex: organisations 'provide a repertoire of procedures, contracts, rules, processes, and policies', which are then incorporated by the various communities of practice 'into their own practices in order to decide in specific situations what they mean in practice, when to comply with them and when to ignore them' (Wenger, 1998: 245). In addition to procedures and rules, these various institutional artefacts are further reflected in the discourse patterns displayed by members (Mumby & Clair, 1997; Hatch, 1997; Miller, 1999; Schein, 1992). Hence, the discursive behaviour of leaders and other organisational members is not only in accordance with the linguistic repertoire developed by the communities of practice in which they interact, but is also influenced and shaped by the norms and values of their workplace culture.

This chapter looks in detail at some of the complex ways workplace culture impacts on leaders' discourse, and how leaders' discursive behaviour at the same time influences and shapes various aspects of the culture of their workplace.

Defining workplace culture

Much research has been done on workplace culture since this concept was introduced to organisational sciences and management studies in the 1980s (for example, Luthans, 1989; Modaff & DeWine, 2002), and many definitions have emerged since then (for an overview see, for example, Miller, 1999). Most descriptive approaches to workplace culture explicitly acknowledge the crucial importance of discourse in the process of developing, shaping, maintaining, reinforcing, and enacting the culture of a workplace. Modaff and DeWine (2002: 88), for instance, note that workplace culture is 'a communicative construction' which is 'created and recreated as people interact (communicate) over time'. Based on this definition, I treat the complex concept of workplace culture as a system of shared meanings and values as reflected in the discursive and behavioural norms typically displayed by members, that distinguishes their workplace or organisation from others (see also Robbins et al., 1998: 562; Wright, 1994). In contrast to earlier notions, this definition emphasises the performative and dynamic nature of workplace culture, and acknowledges that it is created and negotiated through organisational members' interaction (Miller, 1999; Riad, 2005).

It should be noted that the assumption that a workplace has only *one* culture is slightly misleading. Instead, organisations (especially larger ones) typically house multiple subcultures which may 'co-exist in harmony, conflict or indifference to each other'[2] (Frost et al., 1991 as quoted in Miller, 1999: 97; see also Schein, 1992; Waddell, Cummings & Worley, 2000). The discourse-based definition of workplace culture developed above acknowledges this heterogeneity and perhaps even fragmentation by accepting that multiple – sometimes even competing – discourses contribute to the construction, shaping and constant enactment of the culture of a workplace.

Workplace culture and leadership

Workplace culture, and the ways in which its characteristics are realised and actually enacted by members, contributes significantly to the establishment of norms and expectations about leadership (Hickman, 1998; Schein, 1992). By defining what competent and 'effective' leadership means in the particular workplace context, the culture of a workplace is likely to have an impact on expected attributes of leaders. Moreover, the culture of a workplace also sets expectations about normative organisational behaviours, which may be reflected in members' activities, and in particular in their communication patterns. As Robbins et al. (1998: 556) note '[c]ulture is the social glue that helps hold the organisation together by providing appropriate standards for what employees should say and do.'

However, the relationship between workplace culture and leadership is multidimensional, and the notion of 'effective' leadership is not only determined by aspects of workplace culture, but leaders in turn also play an important role in the creation, maintenance and change on all levels of workplace culture (Neuhauser, Bender & Stromberg, 2000; Parry & Proctor-Thomson, 2003; Schein, 1992). Rabey (1997: 410), for instance notes that the culture of a workplace is 'often a reflection of the leadership style': not only do leaders play a crucial role in the constant enactment and reinforcement of the values and assumptions that characterise their workplace, but their particular way of 'doing leadership' as reflected in the styles on which they draw in the various situations may also shape the culture of their workplace, in particular whether members focus on their task or are people-oriented and whether they are conservative or innovative (Rabey, 1997: 41).

Clearly, the notions of workplace culture and leadership are closely connected with each other. Two aspects of the interrelation between

leaders' discourse and the cultures of their workplaces are examined in more detail here: the first section of the chapter illustrates how leaders may explicitly make humorous references to the usually hidden values that characterise the cultures of their workplaces. In doing so, they make these values visible and also ratify them. The second section of the chapter explores how the ways in which leaders engage in conjoint humour with their subordinates manifests and enacts distinct characteristics of the cultures of their workplaces on a micro-level. By discussing these two processes, this chapter provides insights into the complex processes through which leadership performance and workplace culture are intricately intertwined and constantly reinforce each other.

Bringing aspects of workplace culture to the forefront

One aspect which indicates the close relationship between leadership and workplace culture is reflected in the surfacing of distinct cultural values in leaders' discourse. By explicitly integrating comments on the values that characterise their workplaces into their discourse, leaders not only ratify them but at the same time participate in the ongoing construction of their workplace cultures. Example 5.1, briefly discussed at the beginning of this chapter, provides a paradigmatic example of this process. It is reproduced here for ease of reading.

Example 5.1

1	Neil:	[laughs] well the one I had a look at
2		had a I mean
3		my first impression was
4		god this is so um + so difficult to
5		a- and not user friendly I suppose in //that\
6	Victor:	/this\\ is like how Company S //works\ +
7	Shaun:	/it is too\\
8		//[laughs]\
9	Neil:	/yeah\\

With this witty one-liner '*this is like how Company S works*' (line 6) Victor refers to, and thereby ratifies, one of his company's values, namely the view of staff being an exclusive group of people of which Neil is not (yet) a member. Victor emphasises the organisation's distinctive awareness of itself as an exclusive circle in which not everyone is permitted entry. And his message to Neil is clear: he considers his critique of the intranet site inappropriate.

Using challenging humour to rebuke Neil, Victor enacts his power and high status within the group (Holmes & Marra, 2002b). This particular type of humour which often occurs in asymmetrical relationships has been labelled 'repressive' as it may be used to emphasise existing power relations and to control subordinates' behaviour (see Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995; Holmes, 1998a; 2000b: 175). In using it, Victor draws on the 'corrective potential of humour' (Weisfeld, 1993: 157), and like Noel's use of sarcasm to criticise Barbara displayed in example 3.11 (discussed in Chapter 3), the humour accompanying Victor's criticism seems to attenuate its face-threat and makes it easier for Neil to accept it.

The next example shows how Gerry, the mentor at Company S, employs humour to enact and reinforce another of Company S's core values, namely staff having 'no egos'. Acting as a mentor, one of Gerry's responsibilities is to introduce the company's values to the mentees, to make them get used to organisational practices and to facilitate their integration into their new workplace (Gibson, Tesone & Buchalski, 2000; Zey, 1998). He displays a range of behaviours to achieve this aim: apart from explicitly teaching the graduates about Company S's culture, he also demonstrates the implications of these values to them. Interestingly, the graduates sometimes question or challenge the organisation's values, as in the next extract.

Example 5.2

Context: Regular meeting between Gerry and his mentees. He provides feedback to them regarding a computer programme that they had to develop. Since he is satisfied with their performance, he wants to use their code as an example for subsequent graduates.

1	Gerry:	right + good lesson
2		when you guys will come across and tell you that they
3		have got a better way of doing it
4		they they don't necessarily
5		I mean the way you've come up with would be better
6		than the way I've done it um for various reasons
7		and er you'll come across that a lot as well
8		where people will say don't do it that way
9		cos they basically don't want to admit that you're
10		better than they are +++
11		I'm gonna steal your code now
12	All:	[laugh]

13 Tabitha: copyright
14 Yoon: (yeah)
15 Hank: (yeah //no the\ copyright's)
16 ?? /( )\\
17 All: [laugh]
18 Gerry: //did you\
19 Tabitha: /I'm sure\\ everything we write is owned by
20 Company S anyway isn't it
21 Hank: yeah
22 Grads: [laugh]
23 Gerry: probably your second child ( )
24 Tabitha: [laughs]

This extract shows that the mentees are beginning to learn and internalise the organisation's values, in particular the expectation (or myth?) of staff having 'no egos'. This particular value emphasises the fact that at Company S staff do not form fixed working groups but are assigned to work together with different people on various projects depending on their expertise. As a consequence, the company claims that their staff 'have no egos' but enjoy working together and do whatever it takes to succeed as a team.[3] Tabitha's humorous comment '*I'm sure everything we write is owned by Company S anyway*' (lines 19 and 20), which is perhaps a little contestive, directly alludes to this organisational value. In particular, her interruption of Gerry and the utterance-final tag question (line 20) make it possible to interpret Tabitha's remark as challenging, and as questioning this particular value. Using humour, then, provides a relatively safe means for this junior staff member to express her frustration and dissent. It allows her to challenge and perhaps even resist the dominant workplace culture at Company S. This function of humour as a means to express critical voices of subordinates and less powerful interlocutors has been widely discussed in the literature (for example, Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995; Lynch, 2002; Holmes, 2000b). And while humour used in this way may support subordinates in their attempts to subvert existing power relations, it also assists them in negotiating their standing in the context of their workplace or their working group (see Lynch, 2002).

However, in example 5.2 above, Gerry responds to his subordinate Tabitha by continuing and thus ratifying her humour. With his comment '*probably your second child*' (line 23) he also exaggerates the importance and applicability of this particular value by humorously suggesting that Company S does not only own the outcomes of their work but

they also have to hand over their second-born child. By making fun of this organisational value and by participating in the humour, Gerry expresses in-group solidarity and portrays himself as 'one of the team' while at the same time verifying and reinforcing this particular organisational value. In combining these two transactional and relational behaviours, he performs leadership and mentoring simultaneously.

Examples 5.1 and 5.2 have shown that humour is a valuable tool to make distinct characteristics and values of the culture of a workplace visible (Linstead, 1985; Louis, 1985; Vinton, 1989). It seems that organisational newcomers, like the graduates and Neil, are particularly useful for an investigation of these values as they have not yet internalised all aspects of an organisation and are thus more likely to spell them out or even to question them. Thus, the usually hidden taken-for-granted assumptions that characterise a particular workplace are more likely to be made explicit.

The last example to be discussed here is taken from a one-to-one interaction between Donald and Jill at A&B Resolutionz. The encounter takes place in Jill's office while Donald is trying to help her solve some computer related problems.

Example 5.3[4]

1	Donald:	right ++
2		[quickly]: right right right right right: +++
3		right okay let me
4	Jill:	alright
5	Donald:	sort that out +
6	Jill:	I love it when people say that
7		it's like so proactive

Jill's humorous comment '*I love it when people say that it's like so proactive*' (lines 6 and 7) uttered in a smiling voice directly alludes to the company's value of flexibility and innovation. Staff at A&B Resolutionz are expected to be innovative and flexible by being able to 'take on the job at hand' (as it says in the written version of their organisation's values) and to apply their skills to new problems. Moreover, this short example indicates that working together as a team, supporting and helping each other are highly appreciated at A&B Resolutionz. These assumptions are further supported by the ethnographic data: teamwork and flexibility/innovation are some of the values that are displayed in a framed poster in the organisation's reception area. And in the interviews staff commented

that they consider teamwork to be 'absolutely vital' and that they appreciate the fact that employees support and help each other frequently. This is also reflected in Donald's response which indicates that supporting each other is nothing they need to lose words on: he offers to '*sort that out*' (line 5) of his own accord without Jill having to ask him. Both leaders thus actively enact and thereby reinforce these particular aspects of the culture of their workplaces. In this respect they clearly act as role models for their subordinates and colleagues, which is another crucial leadership activity (Kotter, 2001; Neuhauser Bender & Stromberg, 2000; Schein, 2000).

The examples above have illustrated some ways in which leaders' discourse constitutes one of the prime means through which workplace culture is created and ratified (for example, Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1997; Clegg & Hardy, 1999; Miller, 1999; Sarangi & Roberts, 1999). In particular, by humorously referring to values of their workplace culture and by including them in their discourse, leaders actively contribute to the continuous construction of the culture of their workplaces. The next section focuses on a second process with a similar effect: it outlines how a particular aspect of leaders' workplaces, namely their orientation towards individualism versus collectivism, is reflected in the ways in which leaders contribute to conjoint humour.

Enacting organisational values

In addition to distinct values which characterise individual workplace cultures (such as 'staff having no egos' at Company S or the importance of 'being flexible and innovative' at A&B Resolutionz), workplace cultures can also be described in more general terms. One of the most influential and widely cited frameworks used to measure and compare the cultures of workplaces was developed by Hofstede (1980, 1994, 2001). According to this view, workplace culture is understood as 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one organization from another' (Hofstede, 2001: 391).

In a large-scale study using evaluating survey questionnaires, Hofstede (1980) examined the values of IBM staff in branches across 64 different countries, and identified four dimensions along which he measured and characterised his participants' (national) cultures: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism and masculinity–femininity. In comparison with 63 other nations, New Zealand was rated as above average in individualism and masculinity, moderate on uncertainty avoidance, and relatively low in power distance.

Although these dimensions were originally intended to describe values of national cultures, they have also been used to characterise the cultures of specific workplaces (for example, Chatman et al., 1998; Kirkbride & Chaw, 1987).[5] And even though Hofstede's approach has been criticised, particularly regarding its restricted methodology and the alleged universal applicability of the four dimensions (for example, McSweeney, 2002; see also Sondergaard, 1994), it still can be argued that it provides useful guidelines along which cultures may be assessed and compared (Williamson, 2002).

The individualism versus collectivism dimension and conjoint humour

One cultural dimension which is of particular importance for an understanding of the performance of leadership in the workplace is individualism versus collectivism, which describes the extent to which members identify with their group rather than pursue their individual goals (FitzGerald, 2003: 23; see also Trompenaars, 1993). Examining this aspect in national cultures, Hofstede (1997: 51) notes that

> [i]ndividualism pertains to societies in which ties between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after himself or herself […]. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people […] are integrated into strong cohesive groups.

These criteria can easily be applied to a workplace setting: individualist workplace cultures are those which, through the distribution of tasks and rewarding success, encourage the individual performance of their members, while collectivist workplace cultures emphasise and value group effort and teamwork. These orientations may also have some effect on the performance of leadership as they are likely to influence, for example, the ways leaders orient towards their subordinates, give feedback and reward their performance.

The individualism versus collectivism dimension of a workplace seems to be reflected, as well as reinforced and sometimes challenged in the ways members engage in one particular type of humour, namely conjoint humour. Conjoint humour refers to longer sequences of humour which are typically jointly constructed by various interactants (Holmes Marra & Burns, 2001). This type of humour is characterised by lively engagement and interaction among interlocutors who pick up aspects of the previous speakers' comments and develop them, thereby extending the humour. Since numerous participants engage in this joint (verbal)

activity, conjoint humour is an excellent means to construct and enhance group membership and solidarity among participants (Coser, 1960; Holmes & Marra, 2002b; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a). Due to the fact that conjoint humour is an activity in which various members engage, it seems to be particularly suitable for an investigation of the ways in which organisational members communicate with each other, and in particular whether their verbal engagements are typically characterised by a rather collectivist effort of teamwork or by individual contributions. Hence, perhaps even more than other types of humour, conjoint humour can be regarded as functioning as an indicator of a team's cohesion (Holmes & Marra, 2002b), and thus may be useful for gaining insights into an organisation's working environment.

Three exemplary cases of different ways in which leaders construct conjoint humour with members of their respective working teams are outlined below. The leaders' participation in conjoint humour provides insights into the collectivist versus individualist orientation of their organisation. And by drawing on the discursive norms developed in their respective working groups, leaders, in particular, enact and reinforce this aspect of the culture of their workplaces.

Enacting workplace culture at Sitcom

Example 5.4 occurred during a fortnightly meeting of IT managers, chaired by Tricia, the IT department's director. The participants are discussing next year's budget. The style of this example, particularly the collaborative construction of the conjoint humour, is representative of interactions of this working group: more than two-thirds of the conjoint humour developed by members of Sitcom's IT managers' group is characterised by a supportive and collaborative style similar to the one displayed in the extract below.

Example 5.4

1	Tricia:	also your guys are they gonna (need) cameras this year
2	Carol:	er this year I'm getting some cameras
3		out of that money we've got this year
4		//but if\ we need more next year we will //yeah\
5	Tricia:	/okay\\ /mhm\\
6	Noel:	not (even) a DVD player
7	Serena:	I want a web cam on the wetas[6] [laughs]
8		//[laughs]\ [laughs]
9	Noel:	/web cam is operational\\

10 Carol: you can hire //a DVD player\
11 Serena: /is it mm\\
12 Carol: the time that you need it so
13 Carol?: send //an email\ to [email address]
14 Noel: /twenty-four hours\\
15 Tricia: do you have DVD players
16 Carol: a few + //(for selected clients)\
17 Noel: /they have- they have them in\\ meeting rooms
18 you can go and watch movies on the big //screen\
19 Carol: /yeah\\
20 Tricia: okay are there any other things [laughs]
21 Garth: can I get a plasma screen
22 All: [laugh]
23 Carol: sure
24 Tricia: Trev's got a few toys upstairs you'll have to go
25 //talking to him\
26 Garth: [laughs throughout Tricia's turn]
27 Carol: /about\\ about //that width\
28 Garth: /oh no I mean\\ at home permanently
29 All: [laugh]
30 Carol: about that width there and two-thirds the height
31 is only twenty eight thousand for //you\ Sir
32 Garth: /mm\\
33 thank you

This relatively long sequence of conjoint fantasy humour is initiated by Noel who makes fun of the tight budget the IT department is facing this year. By playfully commenting with a disappointed voice '*not even a DVD player*' (line 6) he releases some of the tension that has built up during the previous conversation. Noel's humour is then picked up by his colleague Serena who develops it further by humorously requesting: '*I want a webcam on the wetas*'. What follows is a sequence of conjoint humour in which Noel, Serena and their colleague Carol pass the humour backwards and forwards from one to the other (lines 9–14).

In lines 15 and 20 Tricia, leader and chair of the meeting, intervenes in the humorous sequence. She tries to get the diverging participants back to the agenda – but is unsuccessful. Instead of supporting Tricia's attempts to continue with the meeting, her subordinates continue with the humour, which may be interpreted as being a little contestive as it clearly undermines Tricia's authority.

In line 24, then, Tricia takes on a more active role in the development of the humour. With her humorous comment '*Trev's got a few toys upstairs you'll have to go talking to him*' (lines 24 and 25) she keeps the humour going, thereby expressing in-group solidarity. It seems that she accepts the group's desire to continue with the humorous diversion. She thereby portrays herself as 'one of them' rather than as their superior. And by humorously describing Trev and his '*toys*', Tricia makes fun of an (absent) non-group member thereby further strengthening the ties among the members of this particular working team (see Boxer, 2002; Holmes & Marra, 2002b). And after a few amusing exchanges between Garth and Carol about the plasma screen (lines 27–31) the humour slowly fades away and eventually comes to an end in line 33 with Garth's probably not seriously meant expression of thanks ('*thank you*') to Carol.

This instance of conjoint humour performs a variety of functions on diverse levels. In particular, the fact that it is constructed collaboratively around a shared topic in which all group members participate, makes it a valuable means of constructing in-group solidarity and enhancing a sense of belonging among interlocutors. It is characterised by supportiveness and collaboration among participants, who primarily agree with each others' contributions by elaborating or strengthening the previous speakers' comments. Overall, the turns appear to be tightly interwoven with each other thereby creating a highly integrated floor shared among all interlocutors: the humour is developed around a shared topic, interlocutors frequently engage in joint laughter and often overlap with each other's comments.

These rather collectivist discourse features are also reflected in some aspects of Sitcom's culture. Findings gained through ethnographic data obtained through interviews and participant observation depict Sitcom as a relatively collectivist workplace. This non-commercial organisation puts considerable effort into fostering good relationships among staff and creating an environment in which information sharing and teamwork are highly valued. This is shown, for example, in the fact that entire teams are rewarded for successful performances rather than individuals. And at monthly social events (such as dragon boating and volleyball) staff are encouraged to mingle with members of other teams and departments.

Although Tricia does not play the most crucial role in the construction of this sequence of conjoint humour, her discursive behaviour also reflects and substantially contributes to her organisation's rather collectivist orientation. One rather striking observation is that there is no evidence

that she gets upset about the fact that her attempts to bring the participants back to the agenda (lines 15 and 20) are not successful. She seems very relaxed about the way the interaction develops. Instead of displaying her power and authority more overtly, she allows the others to have their say and to continue with the humour. The fact that this humorous instance occurred after an item on the agenda has been thoroughly discussed may also explain why Tricia allows them to dwell on the humour for so long, and why she does not insist on bringing the diverging participants back to the agenda (cf. Consalvo, 1989; Marra, 2003): at the time when the humour develops, Tricia has already achieved part of her transactional objectives, and she may consider that the other managers need some distraction and an opportunity to release some of the stress and tension built up during the previous discussion. Humour provides a means to achieve all of these objectives (Caudron, 1992; Duncan, Smeltzer & Leap, 1990; Marra, 2003).

This way of constructing humour conjointly contrasts with the following example taken from a meeting of the senior managers at Company S.

Enacting workplace culture at Company S

In contrast to Sitcom, Company S could be characterised as individualist rather than collectivist in its culture. Rather than putting great emphasis on teamwork, Company S values and encourages individual performances, which are assessed by so-called 'talent management', which forms the basis of staff's remuneration. And instead of rewarding entire teams for successful projects, prizes are given to outstanding individuals.

Successful individuals, for example, literally ring a bell to make everyone aware of their success. This orientation of Company S is also reflected in the ways in which members engage in conjoint humour, in particular in the construction of the floor and interlocutors' responses to previous utterances.

Example 5.5 is taken from a senior managers' meeting. Two years prior to this meeting Company S carried out a survey to identify potential areas for improvement, the results of which indicated that HR and marketing were the areas of most concern. The company then decided to concentrate on marketing first and to deal with HR later, which is one of the reasons for hiring Neil, an external HR consultant. This example, particularly the style of delivery of the conjoint humour, is representative of the interactions of this particular group, where members display a competitive style in almost two-thirds of all instances of conjoint humour.

Example 5.5

1	Neil:	I I think there are different ways of skinning the
2		the cat so you're not um growing your your cost line
3		and and there might be different ways of doing that
		[…]
5		so wh- what- whichever way you decide to cut the cat
6		y- y- you need to to you know to say
7		well hey how are we going to do this
8	Shaun?:	//[laughs]\
9	Victor:	/+ you'd identify with that Shaun\\
10	Neil:	[laughs] h- how we're going to do this
11		without increasing the //cost base you know\
12	Victor:	/[laughs]\\
13		(Shaun's //regarding the visibility) yeah\
14	Chester:	/Shaun no Shaun can skin the cake\\ //[laughs]\
15	Neil:	/skin the cake oh yes yes ++\\
16	Victor:	/there'll be no visibility to mix matters with\\
17	Neil:	mm [swallows]
18		well that wasn't a bad one though was it
19		cut the I said skin the
20		skin the cat and cat the cake
21		//um cut the\ cake and cut the cat mm +
22	Victor:	/[coughs]\\
23	Neil:	sorry //[laughs]\
24	Chester:	/[laughs]\\ ++ good attention to detail eh
25	All:	[laugh]
26	Shaun:	that's from the guy that's had the holiday

This humorous sequence is initiated by Victor who teasingly challenges Shaun, '*you'd identify with that Shaun*' (lines 9 and 13), thereby interrupting Neil's report and displaying his powerful position within the group. Victor's humorous comment is then extended by Chester who picks up another aspect of Neil's explanation, '*no Shaun can skin the cake*' (line 14): he teases Shaun for his delight for food.[7] He thereby also makes fun of Neil who has mixed up the idioms 'cut the cake' and 'skin the cat' (line 5). Neil, being new in this group, seems happy to be included in the teasing and his self-denigrating reply '*skin the cake oh yes yes*' (line 15) supports Chester's humour. By joining the group's humour, Neil attempts to be part of it. Interestingly, however, he directs the humour towards himself rather than teasing any of the

other participants. The use of self-denigrating humour in this context is a clever and safe move because it enables Neil to participate in the conjoint humour without violating internal group rules (see Hay, 1995; Seckman & Couch, 1989).

The various topics involved in the humorous sequence (that is, Shaun's visibility and Neil's slip of the tongue) are then developed by individual participants until their shared laughter (line 25) brings them back together again. At this point the humorous sequence could have come to an end, but it seems that Shaun (who has not yet verbally contributed to the humour) also wants to participate: his funny and perhaps little jealous remark, '*that's from the guy that's had the holiday*' (line 26), is directed at Chester who he teases for just having come back from his holidays. In this last sequence Chester and Shaun seem to engage in a competition about who is to have the last word. This behaviour is also evident in other examples, where both use contestive humour to try to surpass each other in 'wittiness' (see example 4.1 discussed in the previous chapter).

In the same vein as example 5.4, this is an instance of conjoint humour used to perform the relational practice of 'creating team'[8] (Fletcher, 1999). However, in contrast to the previous extract, it seems to be rather competitively constructed, and its style could be characterised as individualist rather than collaborative: the participants primarily add short quips and one-liners on three different topics to the humour instead of constructing it jointly around a shared theme: Shaun's visibility (initiated by Victor), Neil's slip of the tongue (discussed by Chester and Neil) and Chester's recent return from his holidays (Shaun's last comment). Moreover, the interlocutors challenge, disagree and undermine each other's contribution for much of the time by employing teasing and contestive humour. These two potentially face-threatening and aggressive types of humour are characteristic of the humour behaviour displayed by members of Company S. In addition to their frequent use of contestive and teasing humour, members of the senior management team do not develop the floor collaboratively. In contrast to the previous extract, members at Company S contribute their own humorous remarks to the discussion and do not continue or finish that of a previous speaker. These distinct ways in which interlocutors engage in conjoint humour nicely reflect the relatively individualist and competitive culture of Company S.

Moreover, in contrast to Tricia (as displayed in the previous example) Victor is more active and decisive, and plays a leading role in the development of the humour. He also overtly displays his power by interrupting

Neil and by continuing with his own topic (that is, Shaun's visibility) rather than joining the others. Victor thus actively reinforces some aspects of his company's individualist orientation in his contributions to the humour. However, by allowing and even encouraging the others to participate in the humour, Victor also achieves transactional objectives: he manages to regain the other participants' attention, and thereby lays the foundation for the subsequent (more serious) discussion.

A third style of engaging in conjoint humour is illustrated in example 5.6 below, which is taken from one of the monthly board meetings at A&B Resolutionz. Although differences regarding the humour construction are less extreme than between Company S and Sitcom, the way members of the board at A&B Resolutionz engage in conjoint humour is also characterised by distinct features, and contains elements of both a collaborative and an individualist style.

Enacting workplace culture at A&B Resolutionz

Example 5.6 occurred during the early stages of one of the monthly board meetings. Participants of the meeting have not yet started discussing the items on the agenda. Jill has just reached Samuel, who will participate via the phone as he is in Australia on vacation. The style of this extract, and in particular the ways in which interlocutors contribute to the construction of conjoint humour, is representative for this group since more than three-quarters of the conjoint humour produced by members during board meetings contain both collaborative/supportive and competitive/contestive elements.

Example 5.6

1	Errol:	are you on holiday in Adelaide
2	Samuel:	yeah
3	Errol:	oh lovely
4	Samuel:	you've just been here haven't you Errol
5	Errol:	yes //I can recommend\ some top wineries
6	Jill:	/it's a top spot\\
7	Samuel:	[laughs]: oh right: we'll exchange notes er later
8	Errol:	//yes yes\
9	Jill:	/[laughs]\\ but you're looking for the herbal tea houses
10		aren't you Sam//uel\
11	Samuel:	/[laughs]\\ [laughs]: absolutely:
12	Jill:	it's not nearly the same thing
		[…]
13	Samuel:	[laughs]

14 Jill: not aware of that //um \
15 Samuel: /[laughs] \\
16 Jill: okay well we'll kick off um

Errol's remark, '*I can recommend some top wineries*' (line 5) initiates this sequence of anecdotal humour. Embedded in small talk, the humour performs maintenance related functions which may be interpreted as aiming at expressing in-group solidarity and a sense of belonging among the members of the board. In particular, the inquiries about Samuel's holidays (lines 1–4) represent ways of making this locally distant member of the team feel included. And due to its bonding function, humour seems to be an excellent means to achieve this, in particular, when it aims to enhance a sense of togetherness and build teamwork (Barsoux, 1993; Ehrenberg, 1995; Morreall, 1991).

The ways in which Jill and the other members of the board engage in this sequence of conjoint humour contain elements of both a collaborative and an individualist style. Jill's probably well-meant teasing of her colleague Samuel, '*but you're looking for the herbal tea houses aren't you Samuel*' (lines 9 and 10), reinforces solidarity among interlocutors. However, the utterance-initial '*but*' and the utterance-final tag question make her comment a little challenging. But Samuel's friendly reply of exaggerated agreement '*absolutely*' (line 11) indicates that he can take this kind of humour. He plays along, thereby reinforcing collegiality and expressing in-group membership. In line 12 Jill once more challenges Samuel by coming back to her initial remark: '*it's not nearly the same thing*'. She thereby keeps the humour alive before it slowly subsides and eventually fades out.

Jill's teasing of Samuel thus bears some similarities with Victor's challenging of Shaun as displayed in example 5.5. However, in contrast to the conjoint humour developed among members of the senior management group at Company S, Jill's teasing in the extract above seems to contain less 'corrective potential' (Weisfeld, 1993: 157) as she does not seem to criticise but rather to make fun of Samuel. Moreover, her challenging use of humour is qualified by the overall supportive contributions which are developed around the shared topic of Samuel's holidays. Like the managers at Sitcom, members of A&B Resolutionz's board also take up and dwell on previous speakers' comments (for instance, Jill's supportive response to Errol in line 6). And their lively involvement in the interaction, which is characterised by the frequent overlaps (rather than interruptions) in addition to their shared laughter, emphasises the collaborative elements in this group's communication.

In spite of the fact that Jill does not instigate this humorous instance, this extract nevertheless illustrates how she utilises humour to perform leadership: it assists her in achieving both transactional objectives and relational aspects simultaneously. Employing this socio-pragmatic device immediately before opening the meeting (line 16) Jill advances her transactional objectives by successfully getting the meeting started while at the same time considering relational aspects. Using humour in this context also helps her to perform the powerful act of opening the meeting and asserting her authority without being too face-threatening and authoritative (Holmes, 2000c). It thus supports Jill in portraying herself as an equal and good colleague while also allowing her to display her power by paying attention to the positive face needs of her colleagues as well as considering the requirements of a friendly and positive work environment (see Holmes, 2000b).

These distinct characteristics of the ways Jill and the other members of the board construct humour conjointly are also in accordance with the culture of A&B Resolutionz. This small IT organisation could probably be described as a combination of individualist *and* collectivist features to similar extents. This is reflected, for instance, in the company's reward system: in addition to the fact that numerous strategies are in place to reward outstanding individuals, such as mentioning their success at the annual end-of-the-year function or paying bonuses to them, A&B Resolutionz also values and rewards successful teamwork, for example, with a spontaneous barbeque on the office balcony. This collectivist aspect is further supported by the high value that staff assign to teamwork, and the fact that employees are typically members of different groups (across divisions) who work together closely and who frequently support and help each other.

Humour as a means to enact aspects of workplace culture

Individualism versus collectivism

The in-depth analysis of the three extended examples of conjoint humour (5.4–5.6) has illustrated differences in the ways leaders' working teams develop the humorous sequences. Although the conjoint humour performs similar functions in all instances, that is, reinforcing solidarity among participants, the three working groups differ considerably in the types of humour they generally use to achieve this and in the ways they construct the floor. These discursive norms reflect aspects of the culture of the respective workplaces (in particular with regard to their orientation towards individualism versus collectivism). And

by regularly drawing on these norms, leaders in particular enact and reinforce their organisation's distinct characteristics.

Although Tricia, Victor and Jill all employ conjoint humour to achieve their transactional and relational leadership objectives in the examples discussed above, the ways in which they participate in the construction of the conjoint humour differs substantially. In accordance with the discursive norms developed in the leaders' respective communities of practice, Tricia, Victor and Jill play different roles in the development of the humour sequence. The observations that in example 5.4 Tricia keeps herself in the background and does not overtly display her power and status, as well as her use of non-threatening humour, reflect the overall collaborative and supportive style characteristic of interactions among members of the managers' group at Sitcom. The same applies to Victor's rather challenging and contestive contributions to the conjoint humour in example 5.5, which are typical for the discursive behaviour of members of the senior management group of Company S. The ways in which Jill's behaviour in example 5.6 is influenced by the culture of her workplace is less obvious than for the other two leaders. However, the fact that she challengingly teases Samuel *and* participates in the joint laughter seems to be consistent with the behaviour displayed by other organisational members (see examples 2.5 and 4.4 discussed in previous chapters). She manages to keep the balance between a contestive and a supportive style.

These observations, in addition to the ethnographic findings regarding the organisations' reward systems and the importance of teamwork as outlined earlier, provide further support for a characterisation of the cultures of leaders' workplaces concerning the individualism versus collectivism dimension. The mostly competitively constructed floor, frequently challenging comments and participants' individual contributions reflect Company S's predominately individualist culture, in which individual performances and tasks are rewarded and are more valued than personal relationships. In contrast to this, the generally collaboratively constructed floor, participants' joint efforts to develop the humour and frequent shared laughter reflect Sitcom's more collectivist culture. In this organisation, teamwork is encouraged and personal relationships are fostered. Jill and the other members of A&B Resolutionz typically combine aspects of both styles, for example, by employing challenging and teasing humour, as well as displaying contestive one-liners while also engaging in conjoint laughter and constructing the floor around a shared topic. Hence, their organisation would probably rank in between the two rather more extreme examples of Sitcom and Company S.

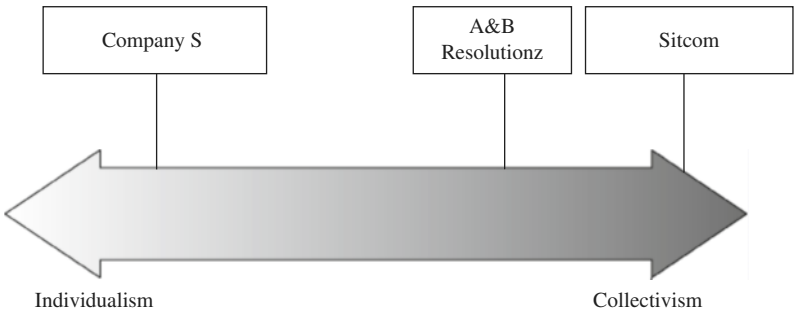

Figure 5.1 Continuum of the cultural dimension: 'individualism vs. collectivism'

If this dimension of workplace culture is viewed as a continuum, Company S and Sitcom could be placed towards the respective poles and A&B Resolutionz in the middle (See Figure 5.1). The placement of the various organisations, however, is dependent on the points of reference, that is, only in comparison to each other can they be assessed on their degree of collectivism and individualism.

Interestingly, the placement of the three organisations along the individualism versus collectivism continuum is similar to the order in which they were placed along the teasing style continuum discussed in the previous chapter. This consistency further highlights the correlation between workplace culture and discursive behavioural norms developed in individual working groups which form communities of practice. In fact, the different teasing styles provide further support for characterising the organisations' degrees of collectivism versus individualism. The primarily challenging and contestive 'biting' teasing style displayed by members of Company S's senior management team reflects the individualist elements of this organisation's culture, whereas the supportive 'bonding' teasing style employed by members of Sitcom indicates a more collectivist culture. And the observation that members of A&B Resolutionz draw on discursive features of both a 'biting' and a 'bonding' style when teasing each other is in accordance with the suggestion that this organisation is less collectivist than Sitcom and less individualist than Company S.

Similarities between the two continua also illustrate that the relationship between workplace culture and the discursive performance of members, particularly leaders, is two-fold: workplace culture is not only reflected and shaped by leaders' (and to a lesser extent also by the other

organisational members') linguistic behaviour, but also impacts on their performance by restricting the discursive choices available to them. This has been shown with regard to leaders' participation in conjoint humour (examples 5.4–5.6) as well as teasing (examples 4.1–4.5 as discussed in the previous chapter). While for Victor the use of 'biting' teasing and challenging humour seems to be the most adequate strategy to reinforce solidarity, it clearly would not have the same positive effect if employed by Tricia or Jill without further support or hedging strategies. And likewise, if Victor and Jill were to use non-threatening humour in a guarded and supportive style as Tricia does, they would probably be jeered at by their colleagues.

These findings regarding the complex relationship between leadership discourse and distinctive dimensions of leaders' workplaces can also be applied to other dimensions of workplace culture. In particular, the ways in which leaders and their subordinates typically engage in the construction of conjoint humour not only reflect their organisations' orientation towards individualism and collectivism but also provides insights into the relative masculinity of their workplaces.

The gender dimension of workplace culture

According to Hofstede (1997), relative masculinity or femininity is another characteristic distinguishing different cultures. Although I do not want to fully explore this issue here, I will briefly mention a few of these gender characteristics as reflected in leaders' use of conjoint humour.

Some researchers have argued that the notion of gender is a crucial aspect of an organisation's culture and is of some importance for its construction and functioning (for example, Alvesson & Billig, 1997; Brewis, 2001; Calás & Smircich, 1999; Gherardi, 1995). It has even been noted that 'it is not possible to make sense of organizations without recourse to the concept of gender' (Grey, 1995 as quoted in Brewis, 2001: 283). The impact of gender on organisational culture is manifested on several levels: not only do organisations possess gender (Berryman-Fink, 1997; Gherardi, 1995; Martin Rojo & Esteban, 2003), but they also influence the gender construction of their members (Aaltio & Mills, 2002; Alvesson & Billig, 1997; Gherardi, 1995).[9] Gender may be viewed as an 'organizational accomplishment' (Alvesson & Billig, 1997: 106), which is created through organisational practices that '"make" gender in that they produce and reproduce social relations and material culture and the artefacts that sustain them' (Gherardi, 1995: 130; see also S. Mills, 2002). The cultures of workplaces thus seem to provide a valuable site for studying gender at work (see also Aaltio & Mills, 2002: 12).

These reflections of gender on the level of workplace culture are put into practice in 'beliefs about self-understanding of men and women, [and about] what is masculine and feminine' (Alvesson & Billig, 1997: 106). These distinct ways in which gender is enacted and manifested in workplace culture have led to the assumption that there exist to different degrees relatively 'masculine' and 'feminine' workplaces. The gender of a workplace is reflected in demographic factors as well as in communicative patterns: the number of male and female employees, the type of their occupations, the nature of the organisation, the degree of hierarchy, the nature of rules, decision-making and conflict solving processes, the exercise of power and the implementation of social activities outside the workplace influence the gender of a workplace in a similar way as the discursive behaviour displayed by its members (Berryman-Fink, 1997; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a).

Feminine workplaces are typically characterised by non-hierarchical structures, 'openness of feelings, supportive social relationships and the integration of private and work life' (Alvesson & Billig, 1997: 116). The discourse employed by members of this type of workplace typically contains 'a marked orientation towards collaborative styles and processes of interaction, together with a high level of attention to the interpersonal dimension' (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a: 587f). Masculine workplaces, on the other hand, are often associated with hierarchical structures, competitiveness and an emphasis on outcomes rather than relationships (Hofstede, 1997: 93). Members typically display a hard direct conversational tone when interacting with each other (Alvesson & Billig, 1997: 116). Their humour is often characterised by rough joking, swearing and jocular abuse (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a: 589). However, theses characteristics describe stereotypes, and the gender of workplaces may be realised in a variety of ways and to different extents. Even within gendered workplaces members may display a range of discursive strategies which may be indexed for the opposite gender (Ochs, 1992) and which may, nevertheless, be perceived as normative and appropriate in this environment.[10] Rather than constituting exclusive attributes of masculine and feminine workplaces, there is considerable overlap between the structures, practices and discourses that characterise the daily activities in which members engage.

According to these definitions, all three workplaces, Company S, A&B Resolutionz and Sitcom, could be characterised as relatively masculine albeit to different degrees: Company S is the most and Sitcom the least masculine.

In interviews, staff at Company S have described the company as a '*boys' club*' and stereotypical masculinity is evident at various levels, such as members' dress and behaviours, as well as in comments which express hegemonic masculine values (see also Schnurr & Holmes, fc). This male dominance is shown, for instance, by the fact that the vast majority of staff are male, and most of the leadership positions are occupied by men. This is particularly true for the senior management team that until recently consisted exclusively of male members. Moreover, Company S's rewarding of successful individuals rather than entire teams reflects the emphasis masculine workplaces put on result-based rewards.

The working environment of A&B Resolutionz, on the other hand, seems to be less masculine. Although only about 20 per cent of its employees are women, the majority of project managers are female and the highest leadership position, the Chair of the Board of Directors, is occupied by a woman (Jill). However, none of the female staff members is employed as a software engineer, which is a traditionally masculine position. The overall working environment at A&B Resolutionz appears less competitive than at Company S – staff seem to have greater influence on decisions, and organisational members also foster relationships outside the workplace. These rather feminine elements of the workplace culture at A&B Resolutionz place the company more towards the feminine end of the gender spectrum compared to Company S.

The least masculine of the three workplaces is Sitcom. Although most employees are men, women are represented relatively equally across different roles. And like A&B Resolutionz, Sitcom is led by a woman. Among the three companies Sitcom is clearly the least focused on organisational outcomes in terms of measurable success and revenue. This aspect is also reflected in the observation that for staff, quality of life and fostering good relationships are more important than winning competitions and achieving excellence. Hence, Sitcom's culture contains more feminine elements than the other two companies.

The relative masculinity of the workplaces also has an impact on what are expected to be normative ways of 'doing leadership', which in turn is reflected in leaders' discourse: Hofstede (1997: 94) maintains that leaders in more masculine cultures are expected to be 'assertive, decisive and "aggressive"' while leaders in more feminine cultures are 'less visible, intuitive rather than decisive, and accustomed to seeking consensus'. Within the realms of the relative masculinity of their workplaces, then, leaders' discourse incorporates discursive behaviours associated with

masculine and feminine ways of interacting, thereby reinforcing and shaping their companies' cultures. The relative masculinity of leaders' workplaces is reflected, for instance, in the ways leaders and their subordinates engage in conjoint humour as well as in their preferred teasing styles. The conjoint humour displayed by members of the senior management team at Company S, with its challenging and competitive contributions and the overall rather contestive and 'biting' style of delivery, adequately reflects the relative masculine nature of Company S's culture. At Sitcom, on the other hand, the predominantly collaboratively constructed humour which is characterised by supportive contributions, an overall friendly tone and a 'bonding' style of delivery, combines a number of discourse elements that are indexed for femininity. And the ways in which members at A&B Resolutionz combine supportive and contestive elements in their humour together with a 'nipping' teasing style indicate that regarding its relative masculinity this workplace is to be placed between Company S and Sitcom.

These discursive features characterising the ways members at these organisations engage in conjoint humour are indexed for gender and are associated with masculine and feminine speech styles, respectively (see Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a). However, this is just one of the ways in which the performance of leadership and gender are intricately interwoven with each other. Chapter 6 explores these issues in more detail.

Summary: Leadership, humour and workplace culture

This chapter has illustrated some aspects of the complex interrelationship between leadership and workplace culture. It was argued that the culture of a workplace can productively be viewed as a dynamic concept which shapes the notion of leadership, and which in turn is created and modified by the discursive behaviour of its members, and in particular its leaders. Two processes play a particularly crucial role in this context: the more or less explicit reference to individual organisational values in leaders' discourse, and the manifestation and reflection of distinctive organisational values in their discursive behaviour (in particular in the ways in which they engage in conjoint humour with their subordinates).

By developing their own sets of discursive norms, workplace cultures provide their members with a discoursal framework within whose boundaries they may act. This process is particularly evident in leaders' working groups: through regular interaction in these communities of practice, members, in particular leaders, engage in a multidimensional exchange with the culture of their workplace. On this concrete level

of organisational behaviour, the various cultural values are assigned a specific meaning and are enacted in everyday interactions. Depending on the discursive norms developed by their working groups or communities of practice, in addition to characteristics of the cultures of their workplaces, leaders' discursive styles differ markedly.

By putting the distinct and usually hidden values into practice and thereby bringing them to the fore, leaders play a crucial part in the constant enactment, reinforcement and modification of the culture of their workplace. And it appears that a discourse-analytical approach offers numerous advantages for an investigation of these intricate processes. In particular, an analysis of discursive strategies, such as the ways leaders participate in the production of conjoint humour, provides a means to understand and grasp aspects of the culture of a workplace. Even though the focus of this chapter has been on one particularly interesting dimension of workplace culture – individualism versus collectivism – the considerations and processes outlined here may be applied to other aspects of organisational culture thereby providing further insights into the performance of leadership.

6
Balancing Leader and Gender Identities

Example 6.1
Context: During an interaction between Jill, Lucy and Donald in the office which the women share. Donald is setting up Jill's computer.

1	Lucy:	and you're not gonna have a monitor
2	Jill:	I'm not gonna have a monitor
3		I'm not //gonna have\
4	Lucy:	/now you've got\\ room for a pot plant
5	Jill:	( ) perfect//there you go\
6	Donald:	/[laughs]\\
7	Jill:	you can tell the (girly) office can't you
8	Donald:	yes //(yeah)\
9	Lucy:	/[laughs]\\

This example illustrates how Jill exploits humour to explicitly make gender an issue in her discourse. Her apparently self-denigrating remark '*you can tell the girly office can't you*' (line 7) makes fun of Lucy and herself, and also constructs them as a distinct feminine subgroup in a primarily masculine environment (see also Mullany, 2006, 2007). Jill's slightly ironic remark is in no way apologetic: she asserts her femininity with assurance. And by using self-denigrating humour in this context, she concurrently challenges the norms for office 'furniture' in this male-dominated workplace, while also highlighting her gender identity in a predominantly masculine profession. Making fun of the special status she and Lucy share, Jill self-consciously sends up feminine stereotypes. Like the adolescent girls studied by Eder (1993: 27), Jill indicates that she is aware of this traditional view of feminine behaviour but at the same time she also distances herself from it and treats it lightly. And

by sending-up feminine stereotypes, she brings the gender issue to the fore and finds a way of expressing her criticism and perhaps even discontent.

Examples like this one illustrate that gender is an issue which individuals constantly have to deal with in their everyday workplace interactions. Following Holmes (2006b) and Mullany (2007), I argue that gender is always potentially relevant – a latent, omni-present background factor that may move into the foreground at any moment (Hopper & LeBaron, 1998: 63). And humour oftentimes acts as a channel for more explicitly gendered discourse, as the example above nicely illustrates (see also Schnurr & Holmes, fc). In some of these instances, interlocutors' gender identities are explicitly invoked or become the focus of the humorous exchanges, and gender may emerge as an overt topic.

This chapter aims to explore the intricate ways through which leadership and gender are interwoven with each other in leaders' discourse, in particular, in their use of humour. Among the social factors that impact on leadership, gender is perhaps the most pervasive as it impacts on leadership performance more or less directly through a variety of channels: not only is the concept of leadership marked by a masculine bias (for example, Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995; Martin Rojo & Esteban, 2003; Sinclair, 1998), but gender is also reflected in the (predominantly masculine) culture of leaders' workplaces and is constantly enacted and created in the various working groups (or communities of practice) in which leaders regularly participate (S. Mills, 2003). Following a social constructionist stance, then, gender is not viewed as 'a pre-given trait that resides in individuals and that determines the linguistic resources men and women will use to speak' but is understood as 'a complex and fluid social construct located in interaction.' (Speer, 2002: 349)

The analysis below illustrates that the masculine bias and omnipresence of gender in the workplace is reflected, reinforced and sometimes challenged in the leaders' discourse. Two ways in which leaders respond to this hegemonic masculinity[1] in their humorous comments are discussed here: leaders regularly draw on gendered speech styles and display discursive behaviours indexed for masculinity and femininity (Ochs, 1992)[2], and they sometimes make gender an overt topic.

Drawing on gendered speech styles

Discursive strategies stereotypically associated with a masculine speech style, as well as behaviours often ascribed to masculine ways of doing things, are generally viewed as paradigmatic ways of performing

leadership (Kendall & Tannen, 1997; Pauwels, 2000). This male bias persists in spite of the fact that more recent research has emphasised that many behaviours and speech styles associated with 'effective' leadership are actually ascribed to femininity (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Stereotypically, a masculine style of discourse is characterised by direct, often confrontational and aggressive, contributions, which are outcome-oriented rather than relationally oriented (Coates, 1994; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a; Tannen, 1995). This is expressed linguistically, for instance, in one-at-a-time construction of the floor (Coates, 1997), the 'use of competitive and confrontational devices' (Case, 1988: 56) and frequent interruptions (Case, 1988; Zimmerman & West, 1975). A feminine style, on the other hand, is viewed as predominantly taking into account relationally oriented aspects, and is typically associated with indirectness, collaboration and supportive feedback (Coates, 1996; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a; Romaine, 1999; Talbot, 1998; Tannen, 1993). It is reflected, for example, in collaborative construction of the floor (Coates, 1996), through supportive feedback (Holmes, 1998b), and frequent use of negative and positive politeness features (Coates, 1993). Table 6.1 summarises widely cited features associated with feminine and masculine speech styles.

The distinction between feminine and masculine interactional styles clearly neglects the impact of other social factors on language use. In particular, it ignores variation in styles in different contexts depending on the participants' goals. Nevertheless, this distinction is useful since it captures quite well the discursive elements people typically associate with feminine and masculine speech behaviours (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a: 575). And since this formulation of stereotypes often informs judgements about male and female behaviour and impacts on notions

Table 6.1 Widely cited features of feminine and masculine interactional styles

Feminine interactional style	**Masculine interactional style**
Facilitative	Competitive
Supportive feedback	Aggressive interruptions
Conciliatory	Confrontational
Indirect	Direct
Collaborative	Autonomous
Minor contribution (in public)	Dominates (public) talking time
Person/process-oriented	Task/outcome-oriented
Affectively oriented	Referentially oriented

Source: taken from Holmes (2000c)

of what is appropriate (see, for example, Mills, 2003: 184; Philips, 2003), the distinction between feminine and masculine styles seems likely to prove useful for an understanding of how leaders construct and negotiate their professional and gender identities.

Gender stereotypes and humour

Another discursive strategy which is often associated with masculinity is humour (for example, Cox, Read & van Auken, 1990; Duncan, Smeltzer & Leap, 1990; see also Schnurr & Holmes, fc). Stereotypes typically portray women as lacking a sense of humour and maintain that men's humour is more highly valued than women's (see, for example, Crawford, 1995; Ehrenberg, 1995). It has even been argued that the use of humour is understood as intrinsically masculine and as 'perpetuat[ing] male dominance [...] through an attempt to intimidate or humiliate' (Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995: 17).

A considerable amount of research has been done on gender differences in the use of humour. Most of this research, however, has reproduced and reinforced rather than challenged the stereotype of humourless women (Crawford, 1995: 137). Ervin-Tripp & Lampert (1992: 106), for instance, found gender differences in the ways men and women use self-directed humour that coincided with stereotypical views of feminine and masculine behaviours: 'men's self-directed humour is more likely to be characterized as defensive while women's is more likely to be seen as an attempt at sharing and coping.' Results from this and similar studies support and reinforce gendered stereotypes, and are consistent with observed stylistic differences which portray women as being predominantly supportive, encouraging and other-oriented, while men are primarily seen as competitive and dominating (for example, Jenkins, 1985).

More recently research has begun to investigate gender differences concerning the use of humour in the workplace. Findings from various studies differ significantly. Most researchers argue that women not only use fewer instances of humour, but they also appreciate it less than men (Cox, Read & van Auken, 1990; Decker & Rotondo, 2001; Ehrenberg, 1995). However, some studies challenge these stereotypical perceptions. Smith, Harrington & Neck's (2000) investigation of flight attendant's use of humour, for instance, did not show men using more humour than their female colleagues. Moreover, Holmes and associates, who investigated gender differences in the use of humour by analysing spoken interactions rather than by relying on participants' self-perceptions and judgements, found that humour is a significant linguistic tool of

professional women. Their studies show, for example, that in larger meetings women produced more humour than men (Holmes, Marra & Burns, 2001). It can thus be argued that contrary to the stereotype, humour is indeed an important component of women's workplace identity (see also Holmes, 2006a).

These findings are further supported by Mullany (2007) who observed that the men and women managers who participated in her study regularly used humour to perform a variety of functions. She also found that in their workplace discourse, professionals in senior positions typically combine aspects of masculine and feminine styles. Mullany (2007: 167) thus argues that although 'hegemonic discourses of femininity and masculinity dictate which speech styles are deemed as more appropriate for women and men to use […], [i]n reality, there is much evidence of women and men managers using speech styles stereotypically associated with the other gender' (see also Case, 1988; Wodak, 1997; Holmes, 2006b; Mullany & Litosseliti, 2006). In their everyday interactions with their colleagues, leaders regularly 'do masculinity' and 'do femininity' while advancing their leadership aims.

'Doing masculinity'

Gender stereotypes suggest that most transactional leadership behaviours, such as displaying authority and giving directives, are associated with masculinity (Case, 1988, 1994; Kathlene, 1995; Fagenson, 1993). This gender bias is also reflected in the 'think manager, think male discourse' established in the 1980s (Olsson, 1996: 360), according to which a masculine style of behaviour is generally viewed as appropriate for the performance of leadership because it constitutes the normative way of expressing power and authority (Hearn & Parkin, 1988; Geis et al., 1990). As a consequence, masculine notions of leadership have become 'deeply entrenched in thinking and language, so that the language of leadership often equates with the language of masculinity' (Hearn & Parkin, 1988: 21). Features of communication stereotypically ascribed to leadership behaviours, such as assertiveness, competitiveness, task-orientation, and the display of power are also indexed for masculinity (Bass, 1998; Berryman-Fink, 1997; Hearn & Parkin, 1988; Martin, 1993; Still, 1996). Thus, by incorporating these linguistic elements into their performance, leaders not only achieve their (mostly transactional) leadership objectives but also 'do masculinity'.

Three examples have been selected to illustrate some of the ways leaders' discourse incorporates elements of a masculine speech style.

In particular, leaders in this dataset employ humour to display power and exercise control, to be authoritative, and when using expletives.

Exercising control and being authoritative

Example 6.2 occurred towards the end of a meeting of the senior management group at Company S, where participants are discussing the organisation's new talent assessment strategies.

Example 6.2

1	Neil:	and when you start thinking about driving
2		accountability profitability and all these sorts of
3		things then th- these are very subtle signals you're
4		sending to these guys god these yeah
5		these people are actually
6	Victor:	they're not very subtle at all
7		they're quite direct //[laughs]\
8	Neil:	/oh they're quite direct I think of them as subtle
9		but it's how you\\ [laughs]: (go about it): but but
10	Victor:	you're identified as part of the id- talent pool
11		and you're not
12	Neil:	you're not
13	Victor:	that's a pretty direct signal
14	Neil:	yeah it is and and that's why it's
15		it's critical that that the the you guys agree
16		that meritocracy is something that
17		that you want to strive for

By abruptly interrupting Neil's description of the organisation's new talent assessment strategy as consisting of '*very subtle signals*' (line 3), Victor overtly displays his power and authority. With his challenging comment '*they're not very subtle at all they're quite direct*' (lines 6 and 7) he overtly criticises his subordinate and expresses his disagreement. However, Victor's threatening remark is mitigated, to some extent, by his utterance-final laughter (line 7). Neil's response in lines 8 and 9 indicates that he has understood his boss' concern and tries to justify himself. Victor, then, repeats his point once more using role play humour to imitate Neil: '*you're identified as part of the id- talent pool and you're not*' (lines 10 and 11). After repeating his criticism '*that's a pretty direct signal*' (line 13), Neil agrees unconditionally with his boss: '*yeah it is*' (line 14).

In disagreeing with Neil, Victor predominately draws on elements of a masculine speech style, using frequent interruptions (Coates, 1993; Zimmerman & West, 1975), a one-at-a-time construction of the floor (Coates, 1997) and challenging teasing humour. Moreover, an absence of joint laughter in addition to Victor's obvious dominance of the floor make his disagreement and criticism of Neil relatively face-threatening.

Since displaying power and being in control are traditionally associated with masculinity *and* with leadership (Kathlene, 1995; King, 1995), and because masculine ways of communication are often perceived as default expressions of leadership (for example, Case, 1993), Victor manages to combine the two activities of 'doing leadership' and 'doing masculinity' without having to face contradictory demands. But in contrast to Victor, women leaders who employ elements of a masculine speech style when 'doing leadership' may find themselves caught in a double bind between portraying themselves as leaders and as women.

Several studies have illustrated how women adopt components of masculine behaviours and speech styles in an attempt to 'blend in as one of the boys' (Ford 2006: 81; see also Beck 1999; Calás & Smircich 1996; Holmes 2006b). However, these masculine norms of leadership may cause some problems for women leaders, as Decker (1991: 126) has noted: 'while it can be professionally appropriate for females to display a task orientation, some appearance of femininity is sacrificed.' As a consequence, women leaders who display components of masculine speech styles in order to enhance their leadership performance may face the danger of being perceived as unfeminine (Still, 1996; Heilman et al., 1989; Peck, 2000; Mullany, 2007). Therefore, in an attempt to resolve this conflict, women leaders may find it useful to draw on a variety of discourse strategies, hedging their display of masculine behaviours in order to prevent themselves from being judged negatively. And humour – due to its ambiguous functions – seems to be one of the strategies which enables them to employ stereotypically masculine behaviours while also considering feminine aspects.

The next two examples illustrate some of the ways Jill and Tricia manage these contradictory demands by making use of the various transactional and relational functions available through humour. This socio-pragmatic device is a valuable means of attenuating the impact of stereotypically masculine behaviours in such a way that enables leaders to 'do masculinity' by drawing on elements of a masculine speech style without the negative connotations discussed above.

Example 6.3
Context: At a board meeting at A&B Resolutionz. Participants have just discussed the problems they are having with one of their clients.

1	Donald:	um they've stepped out of line once or twice
2		and I've snapped at them
3		and I think they've you know getting you know
4		the [laughs] //the reason we s-\
5	Jill:	/the big white man\\ on his great big white horse
6		charg- [laughs]:(what is that you're saying):
7	Donald:	[laughs throughout Jill's comment]
8	Jill:	[laughs]
9	Donald:	um
10	Jill:	[laughs]: sorry (Donald): (so) //there's a there's a\
11	Sam:	/(the)\\ customer service (is a bit)
12		keep hitting (him) with a stick
13	Jill:	//yeah\
14	Donald:	/that's\\ that's my job
15		Ann's job is to massage them and she's and
16		that's that's where it's working well
17		it's working very //well at Ann's\
18	Jill:	/Donald's perfecting the\\ good cop bad cop
19		um process of managing //customers\
20	Donald:	/[laughs]\\
21	Jill:	but can we move on I've got Dave Bruce coming in
22		at one

Uttered during a board meeting at the end of discussing an item on the agenda, this relatively extended instance of conjoint humour seems to provide a welcome break for the participants. In particular, Jill's humorous description of Donald as '*the big white man on his great big white horse*' (line 5) uttered in a teasing tone of voice, and Samuel's amusing report of Donald's problems with customer services (lines 11 and 12) provide an opportunity for all participants to release some of the tension that has built up during the previous discussion.

This is a good example of how Jill makes use of fantasy humour when displaying stereotypically masculine behaviours while at the same time maintaining her femininity. By initiating the humour and playing along with her colleagues' contributions, she performs a range of important relational functions: she allows her colleagues and

subordinates to take a short break from the serious business and thereby creates a positive working climate, reinforcing solidarity with them. Interestingly, however, it is also Jill who decides when the humour is to end (line 21), and with her final remark '*Donald's perfecting the good cop bad cop um process of managing*' (lines 18 and 19) uttered in a teasing tone of voice, followed by her direct request of getting back to business '*but can we move on*' (line 21) she also skilfully manages to bring people back to the agenda.

Humour appears to be one of the strategies which Jill skilfully draws on in order to manage the conflict between the contradictory demands of adopting masculine norms of leadership while at the same time maintaining her femininity. Like the female police officers researched by McElhinny (1995), Jill adopts and adapts the discursive norms affiliated with leadership performance in her masculine environment. However, interestingly, in contrast to these women officers, Jill uses humour to alleviate the impact of her authoritative behaviour. On the one hand, she displays traditional leadership behaviours typically associated with masculinity, such as displaying power and being task-oriented; but at the same time, she also minimises the impact of these masculine and potentially threatening behaviours by using humour and laughter. In this example, then, the mitigating function of humour assists her to negotiate her gender and her professional identity.

Humour's ability to combine the sometimes competing discourses of leadership and femininity is also shown in a teasing comment Jill uses to rebuke her colleague Errol for his poor computer skills (see example 2.1, which has been discussed in more detail in Chapter 2). When Jill, Errol and the other members of the Board are discussing tight timeframes in an upcoming project that involves a lot of programming, Jill remarks '*you'd better do a quick programming course, Errol*'. Uttered in a teasing and slightly challenging tone of voice this comment has a slightly critical edge to it and highlights the tense situation which the team faces due to the tight timeframe. Interestingly, however, Errol does not respond to Jill's teasing but the discussion continues without any further reference to this interlude.

In this instance, then, Jill makes use of humour to communicate a critical and potentially face-threatening message, namely to rebuke Errol for not being able to help with the upcoming programming. And using humour in form of a teasing comment allows Jill to express her criticism while it also enables her to maintain a good relationship with Errol. Although the teasing remark clearly has an edge to

it, it is certainly less challenging than a criticism uttered without any humour.

These examples thus nicely illustrate how Jill gets her face-threatening message across, exercises power *and* negotiates her gender identity: she displays behaviours typically associated with leadership and masculinity and at the same time employs a range of mitigating strategies in order to minimise the potential negative impact of these utterances on her subordinates. The next extract illustrates yet another way women leaders may employ humour to assist them to perform stereotypically masculine behaviours.

Using expletives

Example 6.4
Context: A small informal meeting between Tricia and her two managers Isabelle and Noel, who have just arrived in Tricia's office and start inundating her with questions and comments.

1	Tricia:	we'll have a little chat chat about it //[sighs]\
2	Isabelle:	/yes\\
3	Tricia:	and see what we can do +
4	Isabelle:	yeah
5	Tricia:	now if you just wait I just gotta send this email off
6		//I've\ got to sort out [software provider] today
7	Noel:	/yeah\\
8	Tricia:	if I don't we're in the poo [laughs]
9	Noel:	so what are you waiting for

In this extract Tricia performs a range of behaviours typically associated with masculinity: she displays her power and silences her subordinates. With her comment '*now if you just wait I just gotta send this email off*' (line 5) she overtly expresses her authority, and with her use of the colloquial expression '*if I don't we're in the poo*' (line 8) she releases stress and tension in a rather masculine way. Both behaviours portray Tricia as an authoritative and decisive leader.

Judged by interlocutors' responses, Tricia's (relatively weak) swearing and her humour do not seem to minimise her display of power and expression of frustration. Instead, they indicate the seriousness of the problem to her subordinates, who do not respond with laughter but rather express agreement and share her concern: Noel's reply in line 9, '*so what are you waiting for*', is uttered in a serious and concerned, but not

challenging, tone of voice, and can thus be interpreted as an expression of understanding. He appears to have understood Tricia's concern and thus seems to encourage her to deal with the particular problem before they start with the meeting, which is being delayed. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that Noel and Isabelle let Tricia finish her email while they discuss a report that Isabelle has written.

Using humour in this context can be interpreted as a means to legitimise components of masculine speech styles and to facilitate behaviours typically associated with masculinity. Like Jill in the previous example, Tricia displays stereotypically masculine behaviours of being authoritative and silencing her subordinates, as well as expressing her frustration. However, although these behaviours are typically ascribed to masculinity, Tricia employs a range of linguistic features indexed for femininity to enact them. In particular, her use of the inclusive pronoun '*we*' throughout the extract and the choice of the relatively weak expletive '*poo*' (rather than more forceful ones, such as '*shit*') can be ascribed to a feminine register. And some aspects of her behaviour, such as her initial offer to consider her subordinates' issues (line 1), illustrate a concern for her subordinates and an attempt to include and empower them, which are behaviours that are normatively associated with feminine ways of doing things. In this example Tricia thus combines masculine and feminine features in her discursive behaviour.

A similarly authoritative and stereotypically masculine behaviour is displayed in an interaction in which Tricia and her colleague Garth are discussing how to deal with a particularly problematic employee. When recounting some of the unacceptable behaviour of that employee, Tricia exclaims, '*now apparently he was very surprised that we took that to be a threat and I said well it was [laughing] bloody obvious it was a threat*'. Like in example 6.4 Tricia here also uses humour and laughter to ratify her stereotypically masculine behaviour. In particular, her swearing ('*bloody obvious*') and her overt display of power and authority (which emerges from portraying herself as a decisive leader in her short anecdote) are indexed for masculinity (Coates, 2003; De Klerk, 1997).

In their dataset, Holmes, Stubbe & Marra (2003: 448) found many examples of women in the workplace who face a 'conflict between the exercising of managerial power and authority on the one hand, and the maintenance of a collegial and egalitarian spirit of teamwork on the other'. The women in their data often introduced humour to the discussion after they had been authoritative in order to reconcile these contradictory demands. This observation also seems to characterise Tricia's and Jill's behaviour in the above examples: both

women make use of humour to combine the traditionally masculine behaviour of displaying power and status with the stereotypically feminine behaviour of considering their addressees' face needs. However, in contrast to the female leaders mentioned in Holmes, Stubbe & Marra (2003), Tricia and Jill produce their humour *before* and *during* instead of *after* their display of power and authority.

Examples 6.3 and 6.4 have illustrated that the opposing demands faced by women leaders regarding the construction of their professional identities and their gender identities may be reconciled by drawing on discursive behaviours and linguistic repertoires associated with masculinity and leadership, as well as on those typically ascribed to femininity (see also Case, 1994; Holmes, 2000b; Mullany & Litosseliti, 2006). By employing humour to combine elements of these two registers, women leaders may be able to find a way out of the catch-22 situation of being 'caught between contradictory ideals of being feminine and being managerial' (Alvesson & Billing, 1997: 150) and of being 'expected to be assertive but condemned as castrating bitches when they are' (Peck, 2000: 223; see also Case, 1994). However, the degree to which elements of masculine and feminine speech styles are perceived as marked and inappropriate for leadership performance and thus need to be mitigated, depends on the discursive norms developed in leaders' working groups (which form communities of practice), as well as the specific characteristics of their workplace culture. These aspects are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In addition to displaying leadership behaviours that are typically associated with a masculine style, leaders also frequently perform leadership behaviours that have traditionally been ascribed to feminine ways of doing things.

'Doing femininity'

Although recent research has started to observe a 'feminization of leadership' (Eagly & Carli, 2003), in most workplaces paradigmatic ways of 'doing leadership' are still associated with masculinity. However, some industries have identified a 'female advantage' (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Fletcher, 2004) acknowledging that ways of 'doing leadership' traditionally associated with femininity offer valuable alternatives (for example, Pauwels, 2000). According to gendered stereotypes, feminine styles of leadership are characterised by an orientation towards relationships rather than tasks (Fletcher, 1999; Holmes & Marra, 2004), by nurturing and caring (Bass, 1998: 72) and by a particular interest in

'the well-being of the collective' (Martin, 1993: 275). Due to these positive facilitative elements, Bass (1998: 79) argues that '[a]lthough traditional hierarchical organizations of the past may have required "masculine" leader behavior, today's flatter organizations may call for a more "feminine" approach' (see also Ferrario, 1994; Olsson, 1996; Parry & Proctor, 2000). Two behaviours characterising this more feminine approach are discussed here, namely employing relational practices and mediating between subordinates.

Relational practices

Among the various types of stereotypically feminine leadership behaviours, relational practices are of particular interest. These behaviours are often perceived as 'off-line, backstage, or collaborative work' (Fletcher, 1999: ix), which tend to '"get disappeared" – not because they are ineffective but because they get associated with the feminine, relational, or so-called softer side of organizational practice' (Fletcher, 1999: 3). However, although they are frequently overlooked, all four types of relational practice identified by Fletcher (1999) – 'preserving', 'mutual empowering', 'self-achieving' and 'creating team' – describe behaviours which are crucial for 'effective' leadership performance. In contrast to most of the behaviours associated with masculinity, these rather feminine ways of doing things constitute 'leadership of a different sort' (Fletcher, 1999: 74) and the idea that these other-oriented 'backstage' behaviours are desirable for leadership is typically not part of the traditional masculine concept of leadership.

One particularly interesting type of relational practice is 'preserving', which according to Fletcher (1999: 85) describes the stereotypically feminine behaviour of '[s]houldering responsibility for the whole in order to preserve the life and well-being of the project', for example, by '[a]nticipating and taking action to prevent problems'. Among the multiple ways of enacting 'preserving' are doing what needs to be done in order to advance a project's aims, minimising status and power differences between interlocutors and various ways of connecting people and resources to ensure progress. In contrast to other types of relational practices, 'preserving' strongly focuses on 'protection, nurturing, and connecting' (Fletcher, 1999: 53) – which are behaviours typically ascribed to femininity.

'Preserving' is thus a subtle but very 'effective' leadership behaviour that facilitates the achievement of transactional and relational goals. And the use of humour in this context provides an excellent means of combining these aspects of leadership as it both develops

workplace solidarity and achieves leadership objectives, as example 6.5 illustrates.

Example 6.5
Context: An interaction between Tricia and the senior caretaker Daniel, who is not a member of the IT department. During a meeting in Tricia's office they discuss how the new programming that Tricia's team has developed will affect staff's access to particular buildings (which is Daniel's responsibility).

1	Daniel:	this programming worries me a wee bit
2		but I'm sure o- //it's worrying others more
3		[laughs]: so:[laughs] so\
4	Tricia:	/[laughs] [laughs]: that's right: [laughs]\\
5		[laughs] oh no it should be fine
6		Serena said that we're going to be the guinea pigs so
7		//+ um and our lot\ will find holes in anything
8	Daniel:	/yes yeah yeah mm\\

After Daniel has uttered his concerns about a particular programme that Tricia's staff have developed, '*this programming worries me a wee bit*' (lines 1-3), Tricia puts some effort into reassuring him, '*oh no it should be fine*' (line 5) and expresses confidence in his feelings by shouldering part of the responsibility: '*Serena said that we're going to be the guinea pigs so um and our lot will find holes in anything*' (lines 6 and 7). The fact that Tricia employs fantasy humour to convey this message, seems to play an important role in achieving her leadership aims: humorously describing her own team with the derogatory term '*our lot*' (line 7), she downplays her staff's expertise and thereby minimises status differences between herself and IT staff on the one hand, and Daniel on the other hand. Moreover, the humour is a valuable means to help Daniel to distance himself from the problem and to see the situation more objectively.

This example thus illustrates one of the ways Tricia's leadership discourse incorporates behaviours which are typically associated with femininity, and which tend to get overlooked, but which are nevertheless an important aspect of 'doing leadership'.

Performing the stereotypically feminine relational practice of 'preserving', Tricia manages to combine transactional as well as relational leadership objectives: she reassures Daniel, which eventually ensures his compliance and cooperation concerning the implementation of the new programme; and by minimising status differences and taking

Daniel's concerns seriously, she creates a positive atmosphere and makes him feel understood and valued. Not only does she protect Daniel by providing positive reassurance, but she also nurtures the project by taking the caretaker's concerns seriously and offering solutions.

In this instance of humour, then, Tricia skilfully balances her role as a leader with her gender identity by displaying communicative behaviours stereotypically associated with femininity while achieving her leadership objectives: performing the relational practice of 'preserving' she displays the traditional feminine behaviours of protecting, nurturing and connecting thereby advancing her transactional (as well as relational) goals.

Mediating between subordinates

In addition to relational practices, a wide range of other discursive behaviours are also associated with femininity. The next two examples illustrate the ways in which Jill and Victor display another typically feminine behaviour, namely mediating between subordinates.

Example 6.6
Context: During a board meeting at A&B Resolutionz. Participants return to the meeting room after a break. During the meeting Tessa has been typing the minutes on the computer, but when she returns, she finds that Donald (her husband) has worked on the computer in the meantime.

1	Tessa:	um + oh what have you done
3	Donald:	I've (exited) out the minutes so they don't get lost
4		//cos\ you (weave) them off the server
5	Tessa:	/( )\\
6	Donald:	and the guys have to reboot the server to fix the
7		database ( ) with all the stuff on the projects
8		database so (ju-) don't //oh\ shit
9	Tessa:	/what\\
10	Donald:	//just\
11	Tessa:	/what\\
12	Donald:	//don't touch it (just leave it)\
13	Jill:	/don't do anything (don't move it a\\round)
14	Tessa:	(what)
15	Donald:	sit back and eat your biscuit [laughs] [...]
16	Jill:	[laughs] [laughs]: he means that in
17		the nicest possible way: [laughs]

Tessa seems to have serious problems understanding Donald's explanations as her responses in lines 9 and 11 indicate. The miscommunication between them may be the reason for Jill's participation in their discussion: she attempts to help Donald illustrate his point to Tessa '*don't do anything don't move it around*' (line 13). But even after Jill's intervention, Tessa still seems to be confused (line 14). Donald then employs humour to tease and perhaps subtly criticise his wife for her lack of understanding '*sit back and eat your biscuit*' (line 15).[3] This negatively affective speech act, however, is considerably mitigated not only by the humour but also by Donald's soft tone of voice and his laughter.

Nevertheless, Jill seems to consider it necessary to further mediate between Donald and Tessa. She produces more humour, and with her amusing comment, '*he means that in the nicest possible way*' (lines 16 and 17), she makes fun of Donald and subtly criticises his way of acting. This humorous remark enables her to further minimise the negative impact of Donald's behaviour on Tessa and to save her colleague's face. It seems then that Jill manages to resolve the misunderstanding and to reinstall the status quo of harmonious interactions between colleagues.

This avoidance of conflict and attempt to create a general consensus constitutes leadership behaviour which is stereotypically associated with femininity (Case, 1993; Hofstede, 1997; Holmes, 2000b). Humour provides a means for achieving this as it assists leaders to defuse negative feelings and mediate in situations of conflict (Caudron, 1992: 67; see also Morreall, 1997; Ross, 1992). By preventing the conflict from escalating and effectively calming the situation down, Jill also creates an atmosphere which may facilitate the subsequent more transactional progression of the meeting. Her discursive behaviour thus also has positive effects on the achievement of her transactional leadership objectives.

A mediating behaviour of a different sort is displayed by Victor in the next extract, which occurred during a meeting of the senior management team at Company S. The meeting is almost finished when Shaun comments on the colourful handouts that Neil distributed before the meeting.

Example 6.7

1	Shaun:	can you do us a favour too
2		and take all that colour off the front page
3		it's awfully expensive to print

4	Neil:	[laughs]
5	Shaun:	(it's) a whole page of ink
6	Neil:	oh okay yeah okay ++
7	Chester:	you can print black and white (view)
8	Shaun:	no it's still ( ) how much ink he uses
9	Victor:	(you'll) interfere with Neil's branding
10	Neil:	yeah i- it actually looks a lot better blue
11	Shaun:	yeah
12	Victor:	yeah we've noticed
13	All:	[laugh]

At the end of the senior managers' meeting Shaun criticises Neil for using an unnecessary amount of ink for his print-offs (lines 1–3). His rather direct and on-record criticism is, however, slightly mitigated by his subsequent explanation (line 5). Neil's responding laughter (line 4) indicates that he has understood and accepts Shaun's comment. But when Chester attempts to further mitigate the negative impact of the criticism on Neil by suggesting to '*print black and white*' (line 7), Shaun repeats his concern and dismisses Chester's mediating proposal (line 8). At this point Victor joins the discussion: with his teasing comment, '*you'll interfere with Neil's branding*' (line 9), he skilfully mediates between interlocutors without agreeing with any party explicitly.

Victor's behaviour in this extract resembles Jill's mediation between Donald and Tessa displayed in example 6.6. However, in contrast to extract 6.6 the humour does not end with the mediation. Instead, Neil justifies himself thereby further developing the humour: '*it actually looks a lot better blue*' (line 10). Victor's humorous reply '*yeah we've noticed*' (line 12) seems to restore the rather challenging and masculine style of the conversation which appears to be the normative way of interacting among members of the senior managers group at Company S (see also Chapters 4 and 5). In particular, by drawing on teasing to make fun of Neil, Victor qualifies his previous rather feminine attempt to mediate between interlocutors. With his teasing remark at the end of the humour sequence he thus seems to re-establish the status quo among the group members.

This interesting observation concerning Victor's mitigation of his performance of femininity by drawing on aspects of a masculine style parallels Jill's and Tricia's behaviours in examples 6.3 and 6.4. In these extracts the two women leaders used humour to attenuate the impact of their (stereotypically masculine) display of power by employing

behaviours stereotypically associated with femininity. But Victor's conflict of competing interests seems to be somewhat different than the double bind in which Tricia and Jill regularly find themselves. It seems that being caught in a conflict situation in which they have to assert their leadership competence while simultaneously enacting their gender identity poses a greater problem to women leaders. Men displaying 'feminine' behaviours, by contrast, appear to be caught in this serious double bind to a lesser extent, and may in fact 'experience positive evaluations for using co-operative, feminine speech styles instead of being negatively evaluated for going against the norms and expectations of their gender' (Mullany, 2007: 183; see also Cameron, 2003). It thus seems that men and women leaders face different demands when attempting to negotiate and construct various aspects of their professional and gender identity in their everyday workplace interactions.

However, the degree to which leaders mitigate their display of feminine and masculine styles depends on the norms developed in their respective communities of practice as well as on aspects of the culture of their workplaces.

Gender, workplace culture and communities of practice

In Chapters 4 and 5 I have illustrated that the leaders' discourse is substantially influenced by specific values that characterise their workplaces as well as by the discursive norms that have been developed among members of their working groups (which form communities of practice). The examples discussed in this chapter illustrate yet another way in which workplace culture and communities of practice impact on leaders' discourse, namely via enacting gender. In particular, the ways and extent to which leaders draw on elements of gendered speech styles is considerably influenced by the normative ways of communicating that characterise their workplaces and their working groups. This is particularly manifested in the relative masculinity or femininity of their workplaces and the ways in which feminine and masculine speech styles are regarded as normative in the specific context of the leaders' communities of practice.

The observation that different workplaces and specific working groups within them may create different norms of what counts as acceptable and unmarked gendered behaviour is illustrated, for instance, in example 2.2 (as discussed in Chapter 2) where Donald provides advice and

guidance to his subordinate Ann about how to write a letter of offer to a new employee. By talking Ann through the process, he performs the relational practice of 'mutual empowering' (Fletcher, 1999). Similar to the other types of relational practices outlined earlier, 'mutual empowering' is considered to be a stereotypically feminine behaviour. It describes the 'act of enabling, or contributing to the development of another' (Fletcher, 1999: 55). Among the various practices that are associated with this type of relational practice is 'empathic teaching', in which 'the perceived needs of the learner are paramount' (Fletcher, 1999: 56). By talking Ann through the process of how to write a letter of offer and making sure she knows what to do, Donald persuades her that she can perform the task, and thus successfully achieves his transactional as well as relational leadership objectives.

Interestingly, Donald's display of these feminine activities is not mitigated in a similar vein as Victor's behaviour in example 6.7 above. In contrast to Victor, Donald's performance of stereotypically feminine behaviour in extract 2.2 is not followed by masculine behaviours, such as the use of challenging humour to relativise or even annihilate the impact of his previous relatively feminine performance. Ann's reaction – that is, the fact that she does not make fun of Donald – indicates that his display of femininity is not marked in this context but seems to be in accordance with behaviours regularly displayed by members of this organisation. For Victor, on the other hand, it may be particularly important to mitigate his performance of femininity in order to comply with the overall rather masculine discursive norms and practices characteristic of the senior management group (as reflected, for instance, in the 'biting' teasing style discussed in Chapter 4), and to maintain his status within this community of practice.

At A&B Resolutionz, on the other hand, members seem to have developed more flexible norms regarding appropriate leadership styles. In contrast to Company S, this workplace appears to consider feminine ways of doing things as equally acceptable and views them as integral aspects of the performance of leadership. This assumption is supported by an analysis of Jill's behaviour: she often incorporates elements of feminine speech styles into her discourse (for example, her use of self-denigrating humour to portray herself as a '*technical klutz*' in example 3.7) and she also self-consciously displays stereotypically feminine behaviours (such as in example 6.1 discussed at the beginning of this chapter). Thus, what counts as acceptable, normative feminine and masculine behaviour varies across workplaces and is in particular negotiated in the leaders' working groups.

Bringing gender to the forefront

In addition to enacting and constructing gender by drawing on discourse practices that are indexed for masculinity and femininity, leaders also sometimes make gender an issue and bring it to the fore. Two ways in which this is done are discussed here: firstly, leaders may use humour in their workplace to create distinct gendered subgroups from which members of the other sex are excluded; and secondly, women leaders, in particular, sometimes make fun of the gendered stereotypes they are confronted with.

Creating distinctive gendered subgroups

In Chapter 3 I have shown how leaders employ humour to construct an in-group often by making fun of an absent out-group. In addition to this behaviour, they also sometimes generate either all-female or all-male groups – and by explicitly excluding members of the other sex, they not only reinforce solidarity among members of the in-group but also construct gender divisions. Example 6.8 illustrates how Jill employs humour as a boundary marker. By making fun of the organisation's male software engineers, she creates an all-female in-group and enhances a sense of belonging among those present, particularly among herself and her colleague Lucy, thereby bringing the gender issue to the forefront.

Example 6.8
During a conversation between Donald, Jill and Lucy. The women repeatedly make fun of their special status in the male-dominated organisation (see also example 6.1).

1	Jill:	//+ ac\tually I still remember
2	Lucy:	/mm\\
3	Jill:	we hadn't been in here very long at all
4		[…] and I was trying to work out what was out
5		there was a line clothes line just kind of out the
6		window and I was looking out (one of the) windows
7		and (I thought) [high pitched]: what the: hell is that
8		on the line and it was all these chicks' G-st//rings
9		(and I thought)\
10	Donald:	/yes [laughs]\\
11	Jill:	[high pitched]: that's kind of: //( ) you know like\
12	Lucy:	/[laughs]\\

13	Jill:	(stimulaic) for [high pitched]: the day
14		it's like (what) and it:
15		took me like several minutes of squinting to work out
16		[laughs]: (what I'm) looking at but I //thought ( ):\
17	Donald:	/(the) the thing is\\ the guys didn't know this cos
18		//( )\
19	Lucy:	/is that right\
20	Jill:	/[laughs]\\ cos they're software engineers so
21		//[laughs]\
22	Lucy:	/yeah I was gonna say\\ (developmentors)

Making fun of the absent male software engineers, Jill and Lucy – two of the few women who work at A&B Resolutionz – create a distinct feminine in-group within the predominantly masculine environment of their workplace. This sequence of anecdotal humour is initiated by Jill's lively narrative about her early days at the company (lines 3–9). The humour evolves from her description of the clothes line (lines 7–9), which is particularly amusing because of the high pitch Jill uses to imitate herself. Portraying the software engineers as guys having '*those chicks' g-strings*' hanging outside their window, Jill makes fun of them thereby distancing herself and Lucy from this particular subgroup of the company. Using the derogatory expression '*those chicks*' (line 8) she also makes it clear that she does not consider herself and Lucy as part of this particular female group. Eventually, Donald seems to interrupt her in what could be understood as an attempt to protect the software engineers: '*the guys didn't know this cos*' (line 17). Although it is not clear from this interaction whether the software engineers did not know what was outside their window because they did not recognise what was hanging there or because they simply did not look, Jill nevertheless takes the chance to make even more fun of them: she explains their lack of knowledge with the fact that '*they're software engineers*' (line 20), and Lucy joins her '*yeah I was gonna say developmentors*' (line 22).[4]

This extract illustrates that the women are well aware of their special status within the predominately masculine environment – a fact which they sometimes exploit as a reason for bonding. And by jointly making fun of their male colleagues, Jill and Lucy not only create a distinct gendered subgroup but also assert themselves in this masculine workplace.

That women seem to be marked exceptions in the masculine environment of A&B Resolutionz is further supported by a comment from Ann, a project manager and one of the few female staff members at A&B Resolutionz, when she found out that the company was planning

to hire Beverly: '*another girl cool*'. This slightly ironic comment nicely illustrates the fact that female staff at the organisation are aware of their minority status. This awareness may ultimately have some influence on their discursive performance, in particular on their choice of discourse strategies that are indexed for gender.

However, it is not only the women who employ humour to create distinct gendered subgroups from which they explicitly exclude members of the other sex. The men, too, draw on similar means, albeit to perform slightly different functions. The next extract is taken from the senior management team at Company S. Although none of the leaders participates in this humorous sequence, it will be discussed here as it provides a good example of the ways in which men create a distinct group by debarring women. The example occurred at the end of a senior managers' meeting at Company S after all items on the agenda had been discussed and the meeting was about to finish.

Example 6.9

1	Chester:	that was the other thing we didn't agree
2		the process for it
3		we needed a process for how we're going to write
4		these targets those being critical ones
5	Shaun:	(the four of us go off) and beat ourselves up
6	Chester:	righto well
7		you have your session with your five or ten with Jacq
8		and then we'll go off and beat ourselves up then
9	Joel:	going off means ( )
10		we stay here or we go out and have some lunch
11	Shaun:	I thought we might have some lunch
12	Joel:	okay good call

Shaun's suggestion to '*go off and beat ourselves up*' (line 5) as a way of solving their disagreement on a particular issue is clearly meant humorously. However, the fact that he only includes '*the four of us*' (line 5) in this plan means that Jacqueline, the only female member of the senior management group, is left out. Although '*beat[ing] ourselves up*' (line 5) refers to discussing the issue informally over lunch, the men signal to her that she will not be part of this activity.

This sequence of fantasy humour is developed conjointly among the (male) members of the senior management team. Chester picks up Shaun's initial humorous suggestion and dwells on it further by proposing that

Jacqueline may express her point of view in a regular meeting with Joel after which the male members (that is, Joel, Shaun, Chester and Victor) resolve their different opinions separately. Interestingly, Neil is also excluded from this particular group which might be due to the fact that the decisions to be reached are outside his area of responsibility.[5] Shaun and Chester's humorous suggestions of 'beating themselves up' in order to come to a solution is then ratified and qualified by Joel, who spells out with an ironic twist what Shaun's initial suggestion entails: '*we stay here or we go out and have some lunch*' (line 10). Eventually the men agree to discuss their opposing views over lunch (lines 11 and 12).

The humour initiated by Shaun and further developed by the other male members of the senior management group is self-denigrating. Instead of making fun of those who are to be excluded from their all-male in-group as Jill and Lucy do in example 6.8, Shaun, Chester and Joel use themselves as the butt of their humour: in particular Joel's explanation of the relatively harmless meaning of 'beating ourselves' (see line 10) ridicules their 'macho-behaviour'. The men's choice of this rather unthreatening humour may be due to their consideration of Jacqueline's face needs. While it is relatively safe for Jill and Lucy to make fun of the absent software engineers in the previous example, Shaun and the other senior managers who construct this particular gendered subgroup might refrain from using more threatening humour because Jacqueline is present.

Moreover, in contrast to Jill and Lucy, the senior managers at Company S appear to act as 'gate keepers' carefully monitoring the boundaries of their particular in-group within the organisation (Holmes, 2004). For these men, humour seems to be a powerful tool to exclude the only woman of the senior management group from a potentially important activity. Despite employing relatively unthreatening humour, the male managers clearly exclude Jacqueline from their all-male group and, more importantly, from the informal process of reaching a decision. Even though she is allowed to express her opinion in a regular meeting with Joel and his '*five or ten*' other staff members (line 7), she is excluded from the informal gathering in which crucial decisions are made. In spite of the fact that due to her official role in the organisation she might actually have more influence on the decision-making process than the men admit in this humorous sequence, Jacqueline is nevertheless depicted as an outsider who is not allowed access to all groups in this masculine environment.

Examples 6.8 and 6.9 thus illustrate some of the ways leaders and other organisational members employ humour to construct distinct

gendered subgroups. These all-female and all-male groups seem to perform different functions for women and men in the predominantly masculine context of IT. For the women, constructing these groups seems to be a means of 'doing femininity' by emphasising their special status and thus eventually attempting to claim their place in a masculine environment. The men, on the other hand, appear to employ the strategy of creating all-male groups primarily to reinforce their hegemonic status within the organisation thereby signalling to their female colleagues that they are not full members since they are not allowed to participate in the same processes as their male counterparts. As a consequence of the women's exclusion from what might be described as 'the old boy network', they may also be excluded from 'top management and access to information about organizational politics' (Zey, 1998: 49; see also Berryman-Fink, 1997). This problem is referred to as 'the glass ceiling effect', which prevents women from moving into the top positions in their organisations (see for example, Berryman-Fink, 1997; Burke & Davidson, 1994; Humphries & Gatenby, 1996).

Sending up gendered stereotypes

In addition to drawing on discursive strategies typically associated with masculine and feminine behaviours to subtly combine the sometimes contradictory demands of 'doing leadership' and 'doing gender', leaders may also overtly put the gender issue on the agenda and signal their awareness of its omnipresence and potential relevance. One particularly interesting way of doing this is making fun of the very stereotypes that they sometimes readily adapt and adopt, or vehemently reject and dismiss (see also Holmes & Schnurr, 2006). This behaviour is displayed by Jill, who sometimes uses humour to send-up the stereotypes she has to deal and compete with when interacting in a predominantly masculine environment. Humour, particularly self-denigrating humour coupled with irony, seems to be a valuable strategy for resolving this conflict between gender and professional identities.

Example 6.1, from the beginning of the chapter, nicely illustrates this point. It is reproduced here for ease of reading.

Example 6.1

1	Lucy:	and you're not gonna have a monitor
2	Jill:	I'm not gonna have a monitor
3		I'm not //gonna have\
4	Lucy:	/now you've got\\ room for a pot plant

5 Jill: ( ) perfect //there you go\
6 Donald: /[laughs]\\
7 Jill: you can tell the (girly) office can't you
8 Donald: yes //(yeah)\
9 Lucy: /[laughs]\\

This extract demonstrates that gender is not a static attribute but something that is produced through active participation in the workplace and other contexts (Alvesson & Billing, 2002: 74). It shows how Jill emphasises her femininity within the boundaries of the predominantly masculine expectations of her workplace thereby contesting and challenging masculine norms of leadership. And her discursive performance plays a crucial role in this process. In particular, using humour in this context provides, as Holmes, Stubbe & Marra (2003: 450) note, an 'avenue for a subordinate group to assert their differences while expressing frustration and ambivalence at the effects of marginalization'. Like the women studied in Speer (2002: 368), by constructing the humour conjointly Jill and Lucy 'resist and ironies the (masculine) interpretation' of what women's offices stereotypically look like. This results in what Speer (2002: 368) describes as 'a collaboratively produced stereotyped version of femininity'. Making fun of the special status she and Lucy share, Jill self-consciously sends up feminine stereotypes and thus brings gender to the fore. She thereby finds a way of challenging the gender stereotypes prevailing in her workplace (see also Jill's ironic self-description as '*technical klutz*' in example 3.7).

A similar observation is made by Mullany (2007: 202), who found that some of the women in the two UK companies she studied also used the terms 'girly' and 'girls' as means to 'deliberately mark themselves out as different from their male colleagues'. Like Jill and Lucy the women in her data thereby 'draw attention to gender differences in a positive, celebratory way in order to invoke humour and enhance solidarity and collegiality amongst themselves' (Mullany, 2007: 202). And irony seems to be an excellent tool for doing this as it 'helps speakers to make a complaint about gender inequality without actually complaining, problematising what is taken for granted and highlighting its rhetorical, constructed, and constructive nature' (Speer, 2002: 372).[6]

Summary: Leadership discourse and gender

The examples discussed in this chapter have illustrated that the processes of 'doing leadership' and 'doing gender' are interrelated, and that gender

makes its way into leaders' discourse through a variety of channels, namely via the masculine bias of the concept of leadership, the overall masculine orientation of the IT profession, the relatively masculine cultures of leaders' workplaces and the predominantly masculine discursive norms that characterise leaders' working groups. This masculine hegemony is reflected on various levels of leaders' discourse: in the use of linguistic features traditionally associated with masculine and feminine speech styles, in the display of communicative behaviours stereotypically associated with masculine and feminine ways of doing things and in bringing gender to the forefront. By engaging in these processes, individuals construct their professional and gender identity in ways that reflect aspects of their (gendered) workplace norms, while at the same time responding to (gendered) expectations of leadership.

This chapter has outlined a number of ways in which leaders draw on humour in order to address these gender-related issues and to balance the various aspects of their gender and professional identity. In particular, in their use of humour, leaders regularly employ features of gendered speech styles and display discursive behaviours indexed for masculinity and femininity. They make use of humour, for instance, when exercising control and being authoritative (behaviours traditionally associated with masculinity), as well as when performing relational practices and mediating between colleagues (behaviours typically ascribed to femininity). However, the specific ways in which notions of gender are enacted (and responded to) in the leaders' discourse are dependent on the discursive norms negotiated among members of the leaders' working groups (which form communities of practice) and the specific values that characterise their workplaces.

In addition to creating and enacting gender by regularly drawing on discursive practices that are indexed for gender, leaders also employ humour as a means to make gender visible and to bring it to the forefront. In particular, by creating distinctive gendered subgroups (from which members of the other gender are excluded) and by sending up gendered stereotypes leaders make gender an issue.

These processes illustrate the omnipresence of gender in the workplace context. And discourse clearly is a particularly important channel through which leaders create and reinforce – as well as challenge and resist – the specific gender norms and expectations associated with leadership performance.

7
Conclusion

Humorist Bob Ross once said that 'a leader without a sense of humour is like a lawn mower at a cemetery – they both have lots of people underneath them, but no one is paying them any attention' (as cited in Kerr, 2005). This quote nicely summarises the general perception that humour is an essential aspect of 'effective' leadership.

The analyses and discussion in the previous chapters have illustrated that leaders indeed regularly employ humour in its various forms and functions in several contexts ranging from formal business meetings to informal chats in the corridor. Humour – perhaps more so than other discursive strategies – assists leaders to achieve their transactional and relational objectives, often even simultaneously. Far from being a superfluous discursive strategy employed to distract from the transactional aspects of workplace talk, humour actually performs a range of important functions in a workplace context. In particular, due to its versatile and ambiguous nature, it is suitable to express and respond to the complexities of the leadership process (including the combination of transactional and relational objectives).

The detailed analysis of leaders' use of humour in the previous chapters has illustrated that discourse lies at the heart of the leadership process, and that leaders' discursive behaviour contributes considerably to their leadership performance. Discourse not only plays a crucial role in the enactment of both transactional and relational practices, but it is primarily through their discursive behaviour that leaders actually 'do leadership', that is, achieve their various workplace objectives. Moreover, viewing discourse as the main indicator of leadership performance takes into account that leadership is a dynamic performance, something people constantly do and negotiate in their everyday

workplace life. It thus seems that the role of discourse in leadership processes cannot be overemphasised.

The close link between leadership discourse and leadership performance is reflected, for instance, in the fact that many of the observations made with respect to leaders' discourse are compatible with insights from (non-linguistic) leadership research. This agreement is particularly apparent in the factors that were found to influence and be influenced by the performance of leadership, such as the culture of leaders' workplaces, the dynamics and activities of their working groups, as well as the notion and enactment of gender on all levels of their workplaces. Linguistic analysis of leaders' discourse shows that these constraints are not only reflected in (non-discursive aspects of) 'leaders' performance but are also manifested in the ways in which they 'do leadership' discursively, particularly in their choice of different types and styles of humour.

In this final chapter I will draw on the various arguments and insights gained from the detailed analysis of the specific ways in which leaders in this study used humour in order to support the claim that discourse is a vital aspect of leadership performance and should thus be considered in leadership theories. In particular, the findings of the previous six chapters show how the interactions of humour, gender and workplace culture provide important insights into the complexities of leadership performance.

Transactional and relational aspects of leadership discourse

The central role of discourse in leadership performance has been thoroughly demonstrated in the previous chapters. In their discourse, the leaders skilfully combined both their transactional as well as relational leadership aims, thereby 'doing leadership'. In particular, Chapters 2 and 3 have shown that the leaders' discursive practices can be viewed as an expression of leadership performance while at the same time being the most important means through which leadership is constantly created and enacted. Through their discursive behaviour (particularly their use of humour) the leaders enhanced their leadership performance and portrayed themselves as particular kinds of 'effective' leaders in the context of their workplaces. Depending on their specific roles and workplace objectives, they, for instance, used humour to make sure subordinates know what to do, to remind them of their duties and to provide critical feedback, as well as to reinforce solidarity and create a sense of belonging among members of their team.

The examples discussed in the various chapters also provided abundant evidence for the notion of leadership as a dynamic performance. Through their use of humour, the leaders portrayed themselves very differently in different situations. They constantly highlighted different aspects of their leadership identities – at times being authoritative and displaying their power overtly, while at other times minimising status differences and portraying themselves as equals to their subordinates. Thus, rather than assuming *one* leader identity, they emphasised and foregrounded different aspects of their professional identities, and due to its inherent ambiguity and the potential to convey multiple meanings humour is an excellent means to achieve this. This observation clearly highlights some of the advantages of pursuing a discourse analytical approach to the study of leadership, a point I will discuss later in more detail.

Although all leaders in this study used humour to assist them in the performance of transactional and relational leadership activities, they differed substantially in the type of humour they used as well as in the style in which it was delivered. These variations were accounted for by distinct characteristics of the leaders' working groups and aspects of the culture of their workplaces.

Leadership discourse in context: The impact of working groups and workplace culture

Leadership discourse, in particular, norms of what are considered appropriate ways of interacting (more specifically, using humour) vary across workplaces and even across different working groups. In particular, as Chapters 4 and 5 have indicated, the styles of the leaders' humour (and that of their colleagues and subordinates) are closely linked to the discursive and behavioural norms which make up elements of the shared linguistic repertoire developed among members of the leaders' working groups, which in turn are embedded in the larger context of their workplaces. By employing discursive styles (such as teasing humour) in ways that are considered appropriate in the leaders' respective communities of practice, the leaders also reinforced these practices and thereby actively participated in the constant development and shaping of the norms that characterise their working groups.

However, as argued in Chapter 5, the leaders' discursive behaviours are not only related to the specific norms developed in their working groups but also reflect distinctive aspects that characterise the cultures of their workplaces. An analysis of the ways in which leaders engaged

in conjoint humour illustrated how they constantly enact and thereby reinforce, shape and modify aspects of the culture of their respective workplaces. It was assumed that this dynamic relationship between leadership and workplace culture manifests itself on two levels: in the ways in which some of the distinctive values come to the fore in leaders' discourse (such as by explicitly making humorous references to the usually hidden values that characterise their workplaces), and in the ways in which leaders incorporate aspects of the culture of their workplaces into their discursive behaviour (as for instance reflected in the ways in which they engage in conjoint humour). These two processes illustrate some of the ways through which the leaders play a crucial part in the constant enactment and modification of these aspects of their workplace cultures.

This impact of the leaders' working groups and their workplace cultures was also reflected in the relative appropriateness of gendered speech styles for the performance of leadership.

Leadership discourse and gender

In addition to providing insights into workplace cultures and aspects of group dynamics, leadership discourse also reflects the specific struggles many women in leadership positions have to face when attempting to balance their professional and gender identities. In spite of recent developments in research studies which emphasise the existence of a 'female advantage' by arguing that 'effective leadership is congruent with the ways in which women lead' (Eagly & Carli, 2003: 810), masculine ways of doing leadership are still viewed as paradigmatic ways of 'doing leadership' in many workplaces. As a consequence, masculine ways of interacting are often regarded as the norm, particularly in workplaces with a masculine culture, such as the IT organisations of leaders in this study.

Chapter 6 has illustrated how the women leaders sometimes utilised humour as a channel for dealing with the double bind of having to portray themselves as 'effective' (and often masculine) leaders while at the same time being expected to maintain their femininity. It appears that for these women humour is a particularly valuable tool which enables them to escape this conflict by combining elements of masculine and feminine speech styles in their discourse.

Women leaders in this study not only skilfully used humour when displaying discursive behaviour indexed for femininity and masculinity, but they also exploited this discursive strategy in order to respond to the specific gendered stereotypes that they had to face on a daily basis

in their predominantly masculine workplaces. In particular, women leaders made use of the various functions of humour in order to criticise and challenge the dominant discourse. Thus, instead of accepting that certain professional domains are masculine, and adjusting to masculine workplace norms, they constantly modified and reconstructed the masculine values of their workplaces (and their profession) by successfully introducing feminine ways of 'doing leadership'. And their discourse provides paradigmatic ways of 'doing leadership' effectively.

Discourse analytical approaches to leadership and other organisational phenomena

This case study has not only explored some of the discursive processes through which leadership is enacted, but it has also illustrated the various advantages of pursing a discourse based approach and of drawing on naturally occurring conversational data for an investigation of the ways in which leadership is actually done on a day-to-day basis. It appears that an in-depth analysis of the ways leaders verbally interact with the people they work with on a day-to-day basis provides particularly interesting and valuable insights into the diverse ways these leaders actually 'do leadership', taking into account the specific expectations and norms of their working groups as well as specific values of their workplace culture, and how they deal with the various (often gender-specific) challenges they are confronted with.

Chapters 2–6 have focused on individual aspects of leadership discourse, and have discussed the ways in which a number of social factors impact on the leadership processes as reflected in the leaders' discourse. In particular, as discussed in Chapter 5, the discursive performance of leaders (and other organisational members) may reveal interesting insights into the ways in which the relatively abstract concept of workplace culture is put into practice and enacted on a concrete level: through their discursive behaviours, and, in particular, their use of humour, organisational members constantly draw on aspects of the culture of their workplaces, thereby reinforcing, challenging and modifying it. Not only does such an undertaking provide a useful tool for an investigation of an organisation's values and their interpretation (and constant enactment) by members, but by considering members' discursive performance in an assessment of workplace culture, researchers are also able to acknowledge and do justice to the dynamic nature of workplace culture and to view it as an ongoing process. Moreover, a detailed discourse analysis of leadership performance may also provide insights into the impact leaders actually have not only on the construction and

maintenance, but also on the change of their workplace culture (a point that we have explored elsewhere in more detail, see Holmes, Schnurr & Marra, 2007). And taking discourse into account may also facilitate the identification of less salient subcultures within the dominant culture. These subcultures are often difficult to identify, and an analysis of members' discursive performance seems likely to prove a valuable means of investigating these often hidden but important parts of an organisation.

Hence, there is potential for a rewarding examination of workplace culture as well as leadership processes through systematically incorporating linguistic analysis into other types of investigations. Discourse analytical approaches to leadership clearly provide a valuable tool for analysing and making sense of the complexities of leadership behaviours, particularly by providing insights into crucial aspects of leadership processes which may remain hidden by more traditional approaches (see also Fairhurst, 2008).

A note on humour

Although the main objective of the research was to illustrate some of the ways through which an analysis of leadership discourse may offer new insights into the complexities of leadership performance, the study also has, I believe, some implications for humour research.

In particular, an investigation of leaders' use of humour in their everyday interactions with their colleagues and subordinates highlighted some of the difficulties inherent in humour research. Although a lot has been written about humour, this discursive strategy remains an underresearched area of interest, which is particularly reflected in the relatively small number of empirical studies of humour in natural (i.e. non-laboratory, non-scripted) settings. This research has responded to these shortcomings in its methodological set-up as well as in an assessment of the semantic and pragmatic functions of humour.

Findings particularly emphasise the crucial role that context plays in the use and function of humour. In its analysis as a means to 'do leadership', two contextual levels were considered: the group context in which the humorous utterance occurs and the wider organisational environment by which the former is embraced. It was shown that both, the micro- as well as the macro-level context have considerable impact on the specific ways in which humour was used by the leaders and the people they work with. This observation clearly highlights the importance of conducting humour research in natural settings and considering situational constraints in order to be able to generate reliable

findings regarding the uses, functions and meaning of this complex discursive strategy.

The analysis further indicated that in addition to considering the type of humour used, the style of its delivery is also of crucial importance. This was particularly true for teasing and conjoint humour, but is also likely to affect other types of humour. In order to account for the differences in the ways teasing humour was employed by leaders and other members of their groups, for instance, three teasing styles – 'bonding', 'nipping' and 'biting' (based on Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997) – were identified and distinctive criteria to distinguish between them were developed: among the various pragmatic features that have an impact on these teasing styles, the presence or absence of joint laughter among interlocutors, the degree to which teasing is employed to challenge or support the previous speaker and the degree to which the teasing utterance is embedded in the previous discourse were shown to be of crucial importance. These criteria facilitate a description of the humorous instances and also enable a motivated interpretation and explanation of their functions in relation to the contextual norms in which they are embedded. It thus appears useful to modify and apply these criteria to further styles of delivery, thereby providing a basis for assessing, comparing and analysing other types of humour more appropriately.

Leadership discourse – where next?

In her recent work Fairhurst (2007: 3) proposes that discourse based approaches 'have the potential [...] to challenge, inform, and complement the still-dominant psychological approaches upon which so much leadership research is based.' I hope that this study makes a small contribution to this emerging field of research. However, my focus has been on just one of the linguistic strategies on which leaders regularly draw, namely humour, and there are numerous other potential avenues for future research, all of which will bring us a step closer to understanding this highly complex concept.

Clearly, more emphasis should be put on researching the phenomenon of discourse, which lies at the heart of the leadership processes. And while I have looked at leadership discourse from the point of a linguist, pursuing a discourse analytical approach in order to better understand the complexities of leadership is, I believe, a worthwhile undertaking not only for linguists but also for researchers from other disciplines. And indeed, researchers in organisational sciences and leadership studies increasingly pick up on the idea that discourse is crucial

for an understanding of a number of organisational processes including leadership (see for example the contributions in Tourish & Jackson, 2008; Clifton, 2006; Fairhurst, 2007).

One potential avenue for future research that appears to be particularly rewarding is a cross-cultural comparison of the discursive performance of leadership. Such an investigation seems likely to provide valuable insights into the ways in which leaders in different cultures incorporate national leadership expectations and values into their performance. In particular, focusing on the discursive strategy of humour in a cross-cultural investigation appears likely to yield interesting insights into the impact of national culture on both the performance and perception of leadership (Adler & Izraeli, 1988; Chiaro, 1992; Hofstede, 1994, 1997; Robbins et al., 1998; Schnurr & Chan, fc) as well as on members' use of humour (for example Chiaro, 1992; Davies, 2002). However, as Jackson (2004: 13) emphasises, in addition to investigating cross-cultural issues of leadership, there is an urgent demand to consider multicultural contexts, and to examine potential differences not only between but also within national cultures.

An examination of leadership across cultures as well as in multicultural contexts also has the potential to lay the foundation for investigating miscommunication. This area of research is particularly important in an era of globalisation and frequent company mergers – leaders who want to succeed in such a dynamic and frequently changing environment need to be able to adapt to new (corporate) settings and to understand different leadership expectations in different countries (Trevor-Roberts & Kennedy, 2003: 517). This also implies acquiring the various discourses prevailing in an organisation, including learning how to use humour appropriately, not only to achieve transactional and relational leadership objectives, but also to become a fully integrated member of the organisation and to have an impact on its people and its culture.

These avenues for further research illustrate that there are many more aspects of leadership discourse to be explored. Clearly, more research is necessary in order to understand the complexities of leadership processes. This study, however, has illustrated the significance and benefits of considering discourse in an assessment of leadership performance, and has demonstrated some of the complex functions of humour in this context, particularly with regard to identity construction. I hope that the investigations and arguments outlined here will contribute to an understanding of the multilayered notion of leadership, and that they will provide a starting point for further research into this area. Both leadership and humour remain two of the most challenging and interesting subjects to study.

Notes

1 Introduction

1. The term 'effective' when used as an attribute to describe leadership performance is cited with quotation marks throughout the book in order to indicate that rather than describing a fixed set of features and behaviours, notions of what is considered 'effective' leadership vary immensely across different contexts (this idea is further explored in Chapters 4 and 5).
2. Self-demigrating humour is explained in more detail in Chapter 3.
3. However, Attardo et al. (2003: 251) caution that there is no single ironic intonation cue but '[b]oth extreme and minimal pitch movement may be associated with ironic intent' and may be employed depending on the illocutionary force of the speech act and the intended effect on the addressee.
4. The various steps in the practical procedure of data collection and processing followed the procedures of the Wellington Language in the Workplace (LWP) Project located at Victoria University (see www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/lwp and Holmes & Stubbe, 2003b; Stubbe, 1998 for a fuller description of the data collection methodology and the corpus).
5. In comparison to other industries, IT is often viewed as predominantly masculine (Trauth, 2002), which is also reflected in the participating organisations: in all three companies the majority of staff are men, and in Company S, most senior positions are occupied by men; and at A&B Resolutionz none of the female staff works as a software engineer, which is a traditionally masculine position. The overall masculine make-up of these workplaces is further reflected in the kinds of communication patterns typically displayed by members (see Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a). This is discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.
6. Although some scholars note that there are certain differences between leaders and managers, in particular with respect to the tasks they typically perform (for example, Rost, 1998; Sarros, Butchatsky & Santora, 1996; Zaleznik, 1998), I will not consider these potential differences in much detail and follow Kotter's (2001) observation that there is considerable overlap in the activities typically engaged in by leaders and managers (see also Gardner, 1990; Northouse, 1997). Kotter (2001: 86) convincingly argues that both, leaders and managers, deal with 'deciding what needs to be done, creating networks of people and relationships that can accomplish an agenda, and then trying to ensure that people actually do the job'. Hence, both aim at achieving their transactional objectives while also considering relational aspects to some extent.
7. All names are pseudonyms.
8. Since some of the leaders attended the same meetings, the data for these participants is summarised in the same cells.

2 Transactional Aspects of Leadership Discourse: Humour and Getting Things Done

1. Although using challenging and teasing humour when giving feedback may be perceived as threatening to outsiders, in this context it constitutes appropriate and unmarked behaviour at Company S (this aspect is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).
2. This crucial aspect is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, which deals with the impact of workplace culture on leaders' discourse.
3. The interesting observation that leaders from the same organisation choose similar types of humour to achieve their leadership objectives are discussed in Chapter 5 in more detail.

3 The 'Other' Side of Leadership Discourse: Humour and the Performance of Relational Leadership Activities

1. This example has been modified slightly in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants.
2. 'Kindies' is an abbreviation of 'kindergartens'. Errol's comment refers to the fact that Tessa also works as a kindergarten teacher, and that the rather long board meeting may interfere with her teaching schedule.
3. The impact of the linguistic repertoire developed among members of leaders' working groups on leaders' discourse is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.
4. For a comparison of the ways in which leaders in New Zealand and Hong Kong, for instance, use humour to minimise status differences see Schnurr and Chan (fc). Interestingly, women leaders across a range of different countries were found to display this behaviour (for example, Beck, 1999; Kendall, 2003).
5. This aspect and some of the other ways in which leaders may effectively have impact on the culture of their workplaces are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

4 Doing Leadership in Context: The Impact of Working Groups

1. However, Mills (2002: 71) warns not to overgeneralise the behaviour of members of communities of practice but to take into account that 'although there may be broad agreement as to norms operating within that group, there will also be different "takes" on those norms'. Hence individuals may employ similar discursive strategies slightly differently in order to achieve their interactional goals, and depending on their status in the group, they may vary in their use of elements of this repertoire in order to construct, enact and negotiate their multiple identities.
2. However, although Boxer and Cortés-Conde treat 'biting', 'nipping' and 'bonding' as different functions of teasing, it appears useful to view these categories as *styles* rather than *functions* because they accurately describe the

ways in which participants pick up and respond to each other's humorous contributions. For a discussion of the various advantages of this approach see Schnurr (fc).
3. The examples have been slightly modified for ease of reading.
4. In Marra, Schnurr & Holmes (2006: 255) we have identified the relative publicness of the context as a further factor which may help explain these marked differences in Tricia's leadership styles: in case studies of two leaders we found that the relatively public nature of workplace meetings had an impact on leaders' behaviour and 'contributed to their contrasting leadership styles'.

5 Leadership, Humour and Workplace Culture

1. This example is further discussed in more detail later in this chapter.
2. For recent discussions on the various forms of resistance in organisations, see the contributions in Fleming & Spicer (2008).
3. However, this evaluation of teamwork seems to be contradicted by the organisation's rewarding system which recognises individual's outstanding performances rather than acknowledging the effort of entire teams. And in fact, participant observation and comments in the interviews indicate that although teamwork is certainly important for staff, the culture of Company S is nevertheless overall rather competitive and puts considerable emphasis on individualism.
4. Examples 5.3, 5.4 and 5.6 have been modified slightly in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants and for ease of reading.
5. By analogy to this initial project, Hofstede et al. (1990) conducted a second study in which they identified six dimensions to specifically measure and characterise organisational rather than national cultures. These dimensions describe *practices* rather than *values* of organisational members, and are thus less useful for an investigation of the ways in which specific organisational *values* are reflected in leaders' discourse. Hence, Hofstede's dimensions of national culture are used as a starting point here.
6. Wetas are relatively large insects endemic to New Zealand. They look like a cross between a cockroach and a cricket.
7. Throughout the recorded meetings, Shaun is often teased for mentioning food and indicating that he wants to have something to eat before continuing with the discussion.
8. The notion of 'creating team' is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.
9. This aspect is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.
10. This notion is further discussed in Chapter 6.

6 Balancing Leader and Gender Identities

1. For a comprehensive discussion of the notion of hegemonic masculinity see Wetherell & Edley (1999) and Speer (2001).
2. Following Ochs (1992) and Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 594) indexicality is understood as involving 'the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meaning'. That is, particular linguistic forms that index

identity are at the same time associated with particular 'interactional stances, such as forcefulness, uncertainty, and so on, which in turn may come to be associated with particular social categories', such as masculinity and femininity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005: 595–6).

3. The directness of Donald's criticism (which is rather untypical for the interactional style that characterises this close-knit community of practice and this workplace) may, in part at least, reflect the intimate relationship between Donald and Tessa.
4. Due to their specialist role and status it might be justified to assume that software engineers form a distinct subgroup with their own 'occupational culture' within the larger organisational context (Trice, 1993: 220). Occupational cultures have been described as 'distinct subcultures inside organizations' which are often overlooked in an assessment of the company's overall culture (Trice, 1993: 213); it seems that discourse examples, such as this one, provide evidence for the existence of these subgroups. And discourse based approaches may offer useful tools for investigating these subgroups and their impact on workplace culture.
5. This interpretation is further supported by Neil's reaction to the humour in which he signals no bad feelings about being left out.
6. Interestingly, the data does not contain any instances of humour where the men exploit gender stereotypes to make fun of their female colleagues in a similar vein. Using humour in such a sexist way, it seems, is thus not part of the normative way of interacting in the leaders' workplaces. Jill's sending up of feminine stereotypes in examples 6.1 and 3.7 should thus not be interpreted as attempts to make sexist jokes before the men get the chance. Rather, by sending up gendered stereotypes Jill and Lucy challenge masculine hegemonies by treating them lightly and bringing them to the fore.

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