

LEADERSHIP WITH HUMOUR: USING HUMOUR TO LEAD YOURSELF AND OTHERS

SYLLABUS

VU Amsterdam Summer School

21 July – 4 August 2024



Any general questions for the Summer School support team? Contact amsterdamsummerschool@vu.nl.

Course Details

Title	LEADERSHIP WITH HUMOUR: USING HUMOUR TO LEAD YOURSELF AND OTHERS
Coordinator(s)	Emilia Bunea, PhD.
Other lecturers	Tbd.
Study credits	3 ECTS
Form(s) of tuition	On campus
Approximate contact hours	45
Approximate self-study hours	2-3 hours per day

Teaching staff

Dr. Emilia Bunea (course coordinator) is a leadership educator and researcher. She previously served in senior roles at large financial corporations, most recently as CEO of an organization with 2 million customers, and currently serves on the board of directors of an asset management company. Emilia received her Ph.D. in Management from VU Amsterdam and is a CFA charter holder. She lectures on leadership at business schools and companies around the world. Her research was published in [Human Resource Management Review](#), [Frontiers in Psychology](#), [Academy of Management Proceedings](#), and shared through outlets such as [Harvard Business Review](#), [Le Monde](#) and [Psychology Today](#). Her [TED talk](#) at London Business School received wide acclaim. She sometimes does standup comedy in her spare time.

Course description

Managers looking to up their leadership skills used to get advice like “if you are not naturally funny, better stay away from humor at work. If you are naturally funny...better stay away from humor at work”.

Not any longer. Recent research shows that humor is an essential leadership skill. Funny managers are trusted more and are seen as better leaders. They foster employee creativity, increase work engagement, make change feel more manageable and newcomers feel more welcome.

And humor can be learned, sharpened, and controlled just like any other charismatic leadership technique.

Participants will learn about and practice with:

- Humor in relation to key leadership concepts: inspirational leadership, self-leadership, influence and motivation, leading across cultures, power and leadership, leading effective teams.
- Fueling your creativity and finding humor all around you.
- Tips and techniques for creating humor, from long-form funny stories to short jokes and from prepared presentation content to improvised comebacks.
- Choosing the right humor style as a leader.
- Avoiding research-documented pitfalls of humor in leadership, such as shutting down employee voice; signaling that misbehavior is acceptable; or diminishing one's own authority as a leader.

Learning objectives

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- Have a complete understanding of frameworks applicable to leadership, including leadership styles, individual motivation, influencing without authority, leading teams, leading change and ethical leadership – and of how humor interacts with them;
- Know leader humor's antecedents and outcomes, and conditions under which it may misfire;
- Be familiar with, and able to use, the 12 humor tools;
- Understand the positive and negative implications of the four humor styles;
- Have enhanced self-confidence about being able to develop their humor abilities and the practical tools to do so;
- Have a deeper understanding of their own "humor profile" in connection with a deeper understanding of themselves as (future) leaders;
- Be more effective communicators and influencers in a leadership context.

Assignments and Assessment

Pre-course assignment: Fill in the Humor Styles Questionnaire, link will be provided in advance.

Course pre-requisites: Knowledge of basic leadership concepts is recommended, although not compulsory. Pre-existing humor skills or abilities are not expected, and the course is decidedly not a "who's funniest" contest.

Course assessment

Simulation 20%

Reflection journal 30%

Written and group assignments 30%

Individual presentation 20%

For the simulations, each participant will play a leadership role in a realistic work setting and will apply the humor skills learned.

The Reflection journal will consist of daily reflections on class takeaways and connection to one's own experiences and goals.

The group assignments are designed to foster creativity in a team context.

Individual presentations will allow each participant to work on their personal humor style in a business setting.

Full attendance is required for completing the course. Active in-class participation is encouraged.

Provisional reading list

Beard, A. (2014). Leading with humor. *Harvard Business Review*.
<https://hbr.org/2014/05/leading-with-humor>

Bunea, E. (2022). Can humor make you a better leader? Lessons from managers who dabble in comedy. *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/to-manage-is-human/202211/can-humor-make-you-a-better-leader>

Stolin, D. (2022). What educators can learn from comedians. *Harvard Business Publishing Education*. <https://hbsp.harvard.edu/inspiring-minds/what-educators-can-learn-from-comedians>

Course Schedule

Monday, 22 July, 10:00 – 15:00

Understanding your humor profile. The seven humor skills. Skill one: Surround yourself with humor and reflect on your own sense of humor.

Introduction to humor in leadership. Humor styles vs. leadership styles. Transformational leadership and humor. Playfulness with a point (“instrumental humor”).

Tuesday, 23 July 10:00 – 15:00

The seven humor skills. Skill two: Cultivate a playful attitude.

Improvisation comedy workshop (with special invitee). Applications in leadership.

Wednesday, 24 July, 10:00 – 12:30

The seven humor skills. Skill three: Laugh more often and more heartily.
Practice with tools for lateral thinking and changing perspective.
Case study, Part 1.

Thursday, 25 July, 10:00 – 15:00

The seven humor skills. Skill four: Create your own verbal humor.
Unpacking how humor is made. Practice with individual humor making tools.
Humor and the “Four Cs” surrounding leaders: Context, Culture, Colleagues, Clout.
Case study, Part 2.
Group exercise: humor writing, unlocking team creativity.
Introduction to simulations.

Friday, 26 July 10.00 – 15:00

The seven humor skills. Skill five: Look for humor in everyday life.
Learning from stand-up comedy. Applications in leadership.
Case study, Part 3.
Inspirational leadership: theory and practice. Role of humor.
Influence and humor. Understanding individual motivation.

Monday, 29 July, 10:00 – 15:00

The seven humor skills. Skill six: Take yourself lightly and learn to laugh at yourself.
Case study, Part 4. Conclusions.
Leaders’ self-management toolkit. Psychological capital, burnout, self-handicapping & impostor syndrome. Role of humor.

Tuesday, 30 July 10:00 – 15:00

The seven humor skills. Skill seven: Find humor in the middle of stress.
Leading effective teams...with humor.
Leading change...with humor.

Wednesday, 31 July, 10:00 – 12:30

Bringing it all together. Group and individual humor practice.
Simulations 1-4: humor in a realistic leadership setting.

Thursday, 01 August, 10:00 – 15:00

Bringing it all together. Group and individual humor practice.
Simulations 5-15: humor in a realistic leadership setting.

Friday, 02 August, 10.00 – 15:00

Individual presentations, group feedback.

Conclusions, takeaways, practice-at-home kit.

