

## Bosses who joke with employees may encourage bad behaviour: Study

"Aggressive humour" could encourage employees to be chronically absent from work, ignore a manager's instructions, share confidential information, falsify financial claims or drink alcohol on the job, according to a study by NUS Business School.

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SINGAPORE: A boss who uses humour in the workplace could encourage employees to engage in deviant behaviour, according to a new study released by the National University of Singapore (NUS) Business School on Thursday (Apr 13).

The study said a leader's expression of humour may signal an acceptance of doing things that go against generally conventional behaviour at work. These include being chronically absent, ignoring a manager's instructions, sharing confidential information, falsifying financial claims or drinking alcohol on the job, it said.

Led by Assistant Professor Sam Yam from NUS Business School's Department of Management and Organisation, the study surveyed more than 400 full-time employees from companies in China and the United States, through two three-wave field studies, each separated by approximately two weeks.

Employees were first surveyed to report how humorous their leaders are in the workplace, followed by describing their relationships with their leaders as well as their perceptions of acceptable misdemeanours, NUS said. The final survey measured participants' self-reported work engagement and behaviours.

The study concluded that leaders can continue to express humour, but they need to minimise the use of "aggressive humour", such as teasing of staff members. This kind of humour will harm their relationship with employees and elicit more deviant behaviour from team members.

"More crass forms of humour on the part of a leader can also act as a powerful sign to team members that it is tolerable to break rules in negative ways," the study said.

### HUMOUR A "MIXED BLESSING"

However, the study added that humour from leaders is a "mixed blessing" and remains an important and effective organisational tool for bosses to successfully motivate their teams.

This can lead to better work engagement among employees, resulting in employees becoming more attached to their jobs, more hard working, more enthusiastic and more productive.

Asst Prof Yam said it is important for leaders to understand the correct and wrong methods to use humour in the workplace, so the organisation as a whole benefits.

"Managers should be careful how they portray themselves to their teams - increasing self-monitoring skills and becoming more aware of what types of humour are appropriate in different situations," he said. "A joke may start out as 'just a joke' but for managers in particular, its impact can have far-reaching consequences."

- CNA/am