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and hopefully laughter and applause to conclude (Norman, *Humour: An International Journal of Humor Research*, 14(3), 255-264, 2001). Using these job stages as the structure of the book, this introductory chapter can be considered the 'set-up' as it offers definitions and conceptions of humour and highlights the complexity of understanding workplace humour. Challenges in researching humour are identified and discussed and the ethnographic approach used in all of my research is explained and justified. The chapter concludes by offering the overall framework for the book by outlining the objectives and content of each chapter.

**Keywords:** Humour • The four humours • Laughter • Fun • Play • Respite

### Why Study Humour?

The worst job I ever had was well-paid, intellectually stimulating and situated in pleasant, aesthetically-pleasing premises. The reason why this job qualifies as my worst ever is because my staff, unbeknownst to me, decided that there would be no laughing at work! He considered humour to be noisy, distracting and an indication of 'off-task' behaviour by his employees. My colleagues resigned in droves and for me this job was worse than the summer job where I was constantly covered in grease just when sending down in my uncle's factory, worse than minding the ferocious dog lurking on my paper route aged 12, and even worse than the routine of packing groceries in my local supermarket for minimum wage. I lasted a mere 3 months in the no-laughter zone and my departure caused me to think very seriously of you if excuse the oxymoron (humour, fun and the importance of these social processes at work).

Fast forward 12 years and my organisational research and that of many of my academic-academic colleagues illustrates that humour is pivotal, fundamental and multifunctional in modern organizations. Humour can release tension and reveal hidden feelings (Pridem, 1985); help negotiate shared realities (Gray, Myers, & Scott, 2006); make a point without causing offence (most of the time); signify that those in power and power holders (Collinson, 2003); illuminate cultural dynamics