

Body of Leaders.

**How can creative practice research float the
potential for new forms of leadership
behaviour in organisations?**

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‘The soul craves beauty
Yet our world languishes in ugliness.’
– *John O’Donohue (2003)*

‘It doesn’t have to be that way.
Daring to care is the least we can do.’
– *Nancy Adler (2010)*

Signed certificate of original authorship

I, Christopher Conroy declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Communication/Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Statement indicating the format of thesis

What follows in this PhD thesis is a relatively unconventional non-linear examination of organizational leadership through the lens of creative practice research (CPR). Qualitative research through practice (Hope, 2016), in the form of the fictional *Work. Life. Balance.* playscript has been interwoven throughout the thesis chapters as a 'scriptology' (Rhodes, 2018) to work in unison with the CPR methodology. Unlike a conventional thesis, the literature review is not limited to a dedicated section under that title. Rather, a review of the literature is conducted throughout the chapters of the thesis as the story unfolds. In addition, a series of personal and professional semi-fictionalised stories are interwoven under the heading '*Reflections*'. While based on the recollections of myself, and/or others, of a real event in which I was involved or had relayed to me, these stories purposefully have imaginary details added or some facts changed such as names, places, gender, time period or circumstances to protect the identity of people involved. They are incorporated into chapters to provide genuine case study examples of the themes being examined. The overall aim is to create a

work that is an experimental, reflexive, personal as well as theoretically informed creative-critical process of incubation and emergent becoming.

Publications and Conference Papers

During the course of this PhD, the following publications and conference presentations have arisen:

2020 NiTRO Non-Traditional Research Outcomes

Title: When it comes to leadership ethics, truth is stranger than fiction. (Co-authored with Professor Craig Batty, Dr. Noel Maloney and Professor Carl Rhodes). Edition 30, <https://nitro.edu.au/>

2019 New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing

Title: Writing the Organizational Crisis: Embodied Leadership Engaged Through the Lens of a Playscript. (Co-authored with Professor Craig Batty).

2018 International Studying Leadership Conference (ISLC) Lancaster UK.

Title: Authentic leadership: Circling the same buoys? Can creative writing assist in relaunching the language of leadership? (Conference paper presented 18 December 2017).

2017 Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development

Title: Exploring the role of employee voice between high-performance work system and organizational innovation in small and medium enterprises. (Co-authored with Muhammad Athar Rasheed, Khuram Shahzad, Sajid Nadeem and Muhammad Usman Siddique).

2016 European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS) Naples, Italy.

Title: Followers can be leaders too, can't they? Reframing 'Them and Us' to enrich our understanding of the multiple intersecting dialectics of the leader-follower dichotomy. (Conference paper, EGOS Sub-theme 47: Reclaiming the Shadow for Leadership, presented July 2016).

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Abstract (maximum 400 words)

In a sea of endless stories of organisational ethical scandals, many of which are attributed to 'failed leadership' on the part of government, business, religious and community leaders, this PhD examines how creative practice research can be used as a way of inspiring – *or suggesting* – new forms of leadership behaviour. In the processual nature of being in our lives, if experience is valued as primary to consciousness as a way of active belonging, then it is argued that creative writing – and here specifically, scriptwriting – is a powerful medium to examine organisational experiences, especially those where an erosion of trust has occurred. By deploying the lens of affect in embodied responses through the playscript *Work. Life. Balance.*, the PhD asks us to move beyond singular, scientific modes of cognitive analysis towards – through creative practice – the elevation of emergent data from our physical senses. Experimental artistic forms apprehend experiences as a whole that allows subjective meaning to emerge, and so this PhD seeks to complement knowledge that is gained through objective scientific methods that view the phenomenon of leadership through its constituent parts. With

an aim of rendering a focus on emerging action that avoids the binary 'blame game', the PhD positions creative writing as a practice that provides the necessary balance for science to work in harmony with art and craft. As harmony assumes variation, not sameness, experimentation with the language of leadership has made expanded meaning possible through this research. Further, a dramaturgical process in which knowledge and personal experience is translated into dramatic fiction, not dichotomously pitting fact against fiction, provides multiple ways of seeing and thinking about leadership. With events, stories and concepts structured as dramatic scenes and acts, new ways of considering organisational conflicts, motives, moods, backstories and places emerge. It is argued that this mode of research allows new thinking in organisational fields of leadership, business ethics, management development, organisational culture and change management, and contributes to the artistic-aesthetic realm of creative practice research more broadly.

