

Body of Leaders.

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

Christopher Michael Conroy
University of Technology Sydney
Doctor of Philosophy (Communication)
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
2020



‘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.

This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program.

Production Note:

Signature: Signature removed prior to publication.

Date: 20 January 2021

Acknowledgment including reference to persons who have assisted in the research work itself or in the preparation of the thesis itself, including any editorial assistance

I am grateful to the following for supporting this research: Firstly, to principal supervisor Professor Craig Batty and panel member Dr Noel Maloney who have been a constant source of inspiration, expert guidance, care and unwavering support from the beginning at RMIT University in July 2016. Professor Carl Rhodes became a welcome addition to the panel at UTS in 2019 and has openly shared his wealth of knowledge and collegial spirit of kind, understanding support. I was also blessed to have had Professor Martin Wood as my initial principal supervisor at RMIT College of Business. Martin's guidance and 'arts in business' fellow traveller connection thankfully motivated him to take a chance on my project and share his valuable knowledge. Special thanks to Craig for graciously volunteering to assume principal supervisor responsibility upon Martin's departure to Leicester University in 2018. Craig has navigated me so ably, with good humour and humanity, through a change of school then a change of university. Each of these supervisors have generously shared expertise in their respective fields through patient guidance of this non-mainstream research project. One might describe their collective supervisory contribution as a case study in exemplary 'leadership'.

To Michael Leunig, Australian cartoonist, writer, painter, philosopher and poet for his permission to use several of his creative images as 'Figures' throughout the work. Their use is accompanied by the acknowledgement 'Image courtesy of Michael Leunig'. I am also grateful to Michael's assistant Nicola Dierich, for the valuable support she provided.

To Steven Chong, a professional copy editor whose expert proof reading of several chapters and valuable insights enhanced the final copy.

To fellow PhD students at UTS and RMIT with whom I have been fortunate to share the journey. Their collegial support and insights have contributed to the work that follows.

To Nicola from Bullet proofing for sharing her journalism expertise in creating images, revising tables and general formatting support.

To Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship (01/2019-07/2020).

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to my loving, supportive wife, Jane and our children Tim, Nicola, Isabelle and Chloe from whom I have learnt so much about life. I am unable to provide a scholarly reference for your collective contribution to this PhD but it has been significant and I am so grateful to you all.

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).

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
Lost in a fog	
I DEPARTURES	14
Wave	
Diving-in	
Wobbles	
<i>Reflections:</i>	
From Management to Leadership [1].	
WORK. LIFE. BALANCE. Playscript ACT 1 World	21
II UNDULATIONS	25
Protection	
Knots	
Ripples	
Inflow and outflow	
Streams	
Erosion	
<i>Reflections:</i>	
Walking the talk	
WORK. LIFE. BALANCE. Playscript ACT 2 Scenes 1 – 4	46
III EBB and FLOW	64
The Big Eddy	
Stability waves in a sea of process	
Building bridges	
Tiny fissures	
<i>Reflections:</i>	
The Wedding Planner	

The Death of a Salesman	
WORK. LIFE. BALANCE. Playscript ACT 3 Scenes 1 – 6	88
IV FLOTSAM and JETSAM	107
The Undertow	
Pulsing	
Smooth sailing	
Floating	
<i>Reflections:</i>	
From Management to Leadership [2].	
‘I hope someone in your family has died.’	
WORK. LIFE. BALANCE. Playscript ACT 4 Scenes 1 – 3	132
V VIBRATIONS	148
Circling the same buoys	
Shimmers	
Surfacing	
Learning to swim	
Leakage	
<i>Reflections:</i>	
Experimental	
Existential	
WORK. LIFE. BALANCE. Playscript ACT 5 Scenes 1 – 3	176
VI AN EVEN KEEL	182
A raft of change	
Recasting the language of leadership	
Frozen	
The twisting tides of Taylorism	
‘Tayloring’ a conversation	

Breakers	
Surfing the net	
Forks in the river	
Leadership	
Navigation	
Parting of the seas	
The good ship 'Lollypop'	
Status games – high stakes on the high seas	
The Tree of Knowledge	
<i>Reflections:</i>	
From Management to Leadership [3] – Our Iceberg is Melting	
Cold calling	
Someone else	
Will there be job losses?	
Status games and sad affects	
WORK. LIFE. BALANCE. Playscript ACT 6 Scenes 1 – 2	233
VII ARRIVALS	238
Dry dock	
Bubbling brook	
Rockpools of generosity, reciprocity and atrocity	
Balance: Work-life, life-death	
Perform and play	
Striving	
<i>Reflections:</i>	
Riccardo	
Marcellin's 'duds'	
Caffeine Kaylene	
From Management to Leadership [4] – public service	
WORK. LIFE. BALANCE. Playscript ACT 7 Scene 1	275

VIII TEMPORARY MOORING	280
Wave	
The sea-shell (shall) roar	
Floating free	
Postscript	296
References	298

List of Figures

Introduction

Figure 1 The Quitter (Leunig)

Chapter 1 Departures

Figure 2 Napoleon Crossing the Alps

Chapter 2 Undulations

Figure 3 The organisational rope

Figure 4 Narrative vs Fictional Approaches to Organisational Analysis (Phillips, 1995)

Figure 5 Categories of organisational aesthetics research (Taylor & Hansen, 2005)

Figure 6 Lecture slide, fictional university XYZ

Figure 7 The Three Poles of Managing (Mintzberg, 2005)

Chapter 3 Ebb and Flow

Figure 8 Linked eddies off Tasmania Australia (NASA 2000)

Figure 9 Colour wheel of practice-research (Hope, 2016)

Figure 10 A systems model of creativity

Chapter 4 Flotsam and Jetsam

Figure 11 Images of CMI – A Certain Maritime Incident

Figure 12 Creative practice – the 4th Thread?

Figure 13 The Ambassadors (Holbein, 1533)

Chapter 5 Vibrations

Figure 14 Emotion and Affect

- Figure 15 Models for Balanced Leadership
Figure 16 The Myth of Themanus (Them-an'-us)
Figure 17 The Golden Circle (Sinek, 2011)
Figure 18 Empathy
Figure 19 Border Force (Leunig, 2019)

Chapter 6 An Even Keel

- Figure 20 The '4 Step' Change Model
Figure 21 Functions of theatrical performance in unfreezing (Taylor, 2008)
Figure 22 The Tree of Knowledge (Selenitsch, 1989)
Figure 23 Leadership: Leaderstern and Leaderaft – Creative Convergence

Chapter 7 Arrivals

- Figure 24 Connect not conquer
Figure 25 Leadership: Leaderstern and Leaderaft revisited
Figure 26 Scratchings in the sand

Chapter 8 A Temporary Mooring

- Figure 27 Exploit – Create (Leunig)

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.

