



Research Thesis

**The Existence of Leadership
as Phenomena**

by

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**Submitted in fulfillment of requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Engineering**

University of Technology, Sydney

Date: 1 February 2014

Certificate of authorship/originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that this thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Acknowledgements

I am thankful to many people for their assistance and support during the progress of my research.

Sarahann Simpson has never wavered in her support and understanding over what must have seemed an interminable period. Despite enduring her own challenges over the past 12 months, she refused to let me give up and insisted that I promise to continue to completion. This work is dedicated to her courage and strength. We have been married for more than thirty two years and I love her now more than ever. Also Madeleine, Joseph and Gemma Simpson for the love and support they have given their mother and their indulgence of what must have seemed a crazy and indulgent project on my part.

My supervisor Dr Ken Dovey has provided enthusiastic supervision and encouragement. He has been always open to new ways of looking at the world and has provided inspiration through his experience and knowledge of the material with which I have been grappling for so long. Also, Dr Cathy Killeen, my co-supervisor, who was my first point of contact at UTS for this project and who provided sage guidance in some early decisions.

My thanks to friends, colleagues and contributors— your assistance was essential to my work and is acknowledged and appreciated. In particular I would like to thank Dr Rod Gill and Dr John Wolfenden, my supervisors in the first attempt at this work before I transferred to UTS. I also want to thank my work colleagues who inspired and motivated me throughout this effort, and in particular the people who contributed to the interviews and discussions that are an important part of my story.

In memory of my father, Robert David Simpson, 1922-2012.

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Abstract

Toward the end of my research I came to doubt the existence of 'leadership'. My doubt emerged as a strange uneasiness and I began to recognise that other writers had described something similar. Rather than proceed on the assumption that 'leadership' existed I decided to address my loss of faith directly and ask 'does leadership exist?'.

In order to address my fundamental uncertainty I needed to change my research approach. In effect I started my research again, adopting as my method a critical and analytical form of autoethnography. Empirical material is now drawn not just from my conversations with others but also my own experience of researching and practicing 'leadership'. As analytical autoethnography is relatively new I adapted guidance provided for group reflective practice (Fook & Gardner 2007; Stacey & Griffin 2005) as the framework for my analytical approach.

Analysis and interpretation is interleaved within the narrative, and set against a theoretical background provided by key references. Research validity is an issue for autoethnography and to maintain research validity I was guided by several papers by Alvesson and his associates ((Alvesson, Hardy & Harley 2008; Alvesson & Kärreman 2007; Alvesson & Sandberg 2011, 2012; Sandberg & Alvesson 2011; Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman 2009).

My narrative tells the story of my involvement in an attempt to build a 'leadership' culture, my evaluation of the outcome of that attempt, and my continuing engagement with theory to interpret what had occurred. Writing this narrative has altered my perspective of what people describe when they talk about 'leadership'. I now see 'leadership' as an active principle of relatedness between leaders and followers and their purposes and resistance. I can now more clearly see the existence of leadership in its three forms: as a word, a concept, and related phenomena.