

**Why the quest for authentic organisational leadership is tied up in knots and how creative practice research might help us to set it free.**

**Christopher Michael Conroy**

**RMIT University School of Management, College of Business, Melbourne, Australia**

In a sea of seemingly endless stories of corporate ethical scandals in Australia, public sector corruption, criminal mistreatment of Afghanistan civilians by Australian defence special forces, unethical religious institutional responses to child sexual abuse crimes, even (heaven forbid) ball tampering 'cheating' in international cricket, many of which are attributed to 'failed leadership', the aim of this paper is to examine the potential for research-led creative practice to inspire and support new forms of authentic leadership behaviour. The research does not seek to objectively determine the authentic from the inauthentic in a binary sense of one being good and the other bad. The intention is to reflect upon the potential for creative practice to consider the primary value of experience over consciousness, staying with our senses to explore embodied responses to our experience of the world rather than the habitual scientific mode of analysis in cognitively jumping to conclusions or ideas about those experiences. By employing the affective methodology of creative practice, the paper examines whether the habitual scientific cycle of becoming fixated on those conclusions might be disrupted through the elevation of emergent data from our physical senses in order to contribute novel, new knowledge that encourages future scholarly work in the fields of organisational behaviour, relational leadership and creative practice research. Dibben et al, (2017), examine leadership through the lens of process metaphysics, where leadership is experienced subjectively within ourselves as an internally complex occasion of experience, where experience is primary to consciousness; ie. we must experience something first before we can become conscious of it, closes the binary gap that underpins management as social science of quality-quantity, man-nature, mind-matter, capital-labour, leader-follower. According to Dibben et al (2017), it is not only the artistic interdependence with the medium that is the focus of interest, but also the intradependence; and a consequent demand emerges for an investigation of leadership as an intra-subjective process – in the midst of things and (immanent) relations. The focus of this paper is to examine whether the elevation of emergent data from our physical senses via creative practice can contribute to an investigation of leadership as an intra-subjective process thereby disrupting the more traditional habitual scientific cycle and potentially assisting people with formal organisational leadership responsibilities in 'coming to their senses' (Springborg, 2010). Central to this exploration will be the view that deceptive behaviour is not the exclusive domain of any one side of the leader-follower dichotomy that underpins decades of research in leadership, management and organisations. If it is the norm for researchers and practitioners, alike, to regard the pressures leaders and managers face when trying to act in morally responsible ways (Cunliffe, 2009) or organisational hypocrisy (Gheradi, 2017) as a matter for leadership to fix or as a failure of leadership, then through creative writing we might begin to imagine new possibilities for addressing such an organizational malaise. Through characters and affiliated plotlines, we can examine this organisational phenomenon to appropriately question fundamental assumptions about leadership, based on the premise that authentic behaviour does not reside solely on one side of the dominant social science leader-follower dichotomy but is more relationship based in nature, how the relationship looks, feels and appeals to one's conscious and unconscious aesthetic sensibilities (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Similarly, Taylor and Hansen (2005) claim that, like experiments, aesthetic forms of expression allow us to reconsider and challenge dominant classifications and not only transform

organisations, but the lenses we use to view them (Taylor and Hansen, 2005). Batty (2016), Wood (2018), Davis (2013), Taylor (2002), Heathcote (1983), Baker (2018) argue for the capacity of creative writing in the form of novels, scripts, poems and more, to evoke or render sensory experiences in the sense of embodied, subjective, lived human experience. Humans move to meet experience – in terms of the ‘internal relation’ of what we make of what happens to us, as distinct from the ‘external relation’ of what simply happens to us (Dibben et al. 2017). Creative practice has the capacity to create that experience. If leadership, like art, is ‘experienced’ by processes by which they are created, then creative practice assisting organisational actors to remain with their senses long enough to allow emergent sensory data to inform their actions rather than jumping to conclusions about what is happening around them through habitual cognitive analysis (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010), then the potential exists for more authentic, ethical leadership outcomes to emerge for the benefit of society. As a *combination* of creative and critical elements, not one plus the other, (Lee et al. 2015), creative practice shifts away from binary positions of one or the other towards a co-existence that strives for balance, harmony and completeness. The inadequacy of a purely scientific perspective has been highlighted by leadership and management scholars and philosophers alike. For example, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) argue that science, art and philosophy have a different focus regarding understanding and knowledge yet have always gleaned learning from each other to make linkages in the process of enquiry that are necessary in the interests of broader more complete outcomes (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; Wood, 2018). Similarly, Mintzberg (2005) argues for the balancing of art, craft and science in a managerial style where art represents vision and creative insights, craft represents practical experience and science represents facts and analysis (Mintzberg, 2005). Highlighting why science, alone, is incomplete, Gheradi (2017) notes a symptom in the orthodoxy that points to the position of the researcher – or leader, manager, employee – as a disembodied external observer of life. Together with the limitations of researchers’ vocabulary for getting in touch with the sensible as a disembodied and external observer of life, Gheradi (2017) argues for renewed focus on ordinary affects made present by a process of atmosphere attunement and embodied writing that call for experimentations in doing fieldwork and writing about it.