

**Griffith University**

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**Leadership and the case of *TEXT*: a discussion**

Abstract:

In this paper I discuss aspects of leadership in relation to co-editing an academic journal. Because I had no formal training in leadership—not unusual for leaders in academia—I gather from memory experiences where I learnt about leadership, and combine these with reference to research by Karl Lewin and others, in a personal analysis of principles and practices which stood me in good stead for the task of editing *TEXT*.

Biographical note:

Associate Professor Nigel Krauth has published four adult novels (two of them national award winners, including the *Australian/Vogel Award* and the New South Wales Premier's Award) and three teenage novels, not to mention numerous stories, essays, book chapters, articles, edited collections and a major stage play. His work has been published in the Asia-Pacific region, the USA, the UK and Germany. His research investigates creative writers' processes and the teaching of creative writing, especially the supervision of HDR candidates. He is the co-founding editor of Australia's leading academic creative writing journal: *TEXT: Journal of writing and writing courses* <http://www.textjournal.com.au>

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Leadership – *TEXT* journal – Bob Hawke – Kurt Lewin

## Preamble

Leadership is often thrust upon those who don't feel ready for it. In the 1970s, as a young academic, I had success as a co-editor of *inprint: the short story magazine*, but was totally out of my depth as the chair of a steering committee to set up a new degree program in a College of Advanced Education. I had a successful career as a self-employed writer for a decade in the 1980s. In the mid-1990s, I was a surprise selection to fill the role of Acting Dean of my faculty for nine months, a position and set of responsibilities that I survived relatively unscathed. Thus, by 1996, when the idea of *TEXT* was first mooted, with my limited but varied experience, it might have been said I was equally ready for leadership success or failure.

## Setting up *TEXT*

*TEXT* is an online, refereed journal oriented towards the Creative Writing discipline that is published twice a year. In fifteen years, it has published almost 600 pieces—refereed articles, creative works and reviews. 50,000 visitors per year delve into its pages. It has a signed-up subscription list of more than 1,500 creative writing academics and others around the world. It received an A-ranking in the ERA journal rankings in 2009. It continues to attract submissions from national and international authors. It is, and has been, a success story.

*TEXT* was developed in tandem with the creation of an association of university writing programs for Australia and its region. The Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP) is now the recognised peak body for the teaching of creative writing in universities around Australia. Via *TEXT*, discourse about teaching and research in creative writing in Australasia reaches the world and, through their contributions, world experts in creative writing contribute to these discussions.

I remember *TEXT*'s moment of conception. Sometime in late-September 1996, Tess Brady and I were leaning in the doorways of our offices in the Education Building on Griffith University's Gold Coast campus. It was mid-morning, as I recall, and we had both just read emails about an approaching conference at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), to be held on 11-13 October, which was proposing the establishment of a new association, then provisionally called the 'Association of University Writing Programmes'. We confirmed across the corridor that we were both going to the conference. As our discussion progressed, we decided that we would, at the conference, suggest the idea of a journal to support the newly proposed association. We agreed that a new association needed a journal to promote and broadcast its doings.

But, being writers, we were immediately paranoid about our plan. We imagined that every academic in creative writing in Australia was having the same idea. We expected the UTS conference to produce a plethora of proposals for journals to represent the association's research and dealings. Tess and I stood in our doorways at the Gold Coast—not a city recognised as a centre of learning in the nation, we knew – and dialogued the possibilities. How could lesser-brick Gold Coast academics compete with sandstone gravitas? *By re-thinking the expected!* we decided.

Our discussion went like this. Our rivals would think ‘paper’, we surmised. Paper journals flourished in 1996 and were the undisputed norm. To reflect the ‘new, progressive’ ideas of the Gold Coast, and to get a ‘groovy’ edge on our imagined rivals, we decided on the key aspect of our proposal: it would be digital. The journal would exist on the web! This was so outrageous, we thought, that it would surely work as a surprise tactic that also made good sense. We would seem like cool leaders who knew what we were doing. And further: the *entire* process for the journal’s running would be digital. No paper submissions and reports; no paper involved in the process whatsoever. Therefore, we thought, minimal cost and no potential losses. We had both edited journals in the past and had lived in houses where the walls were lined with unsold copies. We didn’t know of any other journal at the time that was completely web-based, but we thought we could teach ourselves how to do it. It may seem like a primitive thought now, but we were convinced that our innovative idea would capture the imagination of the new association. (And, we soon found out, there was only one other web-based academic journal in Australia at the time – the *Australian Humanities Review*. Its inaugural issue was published in April 1996. It was the first, and *TEXT* the second, digital academic journal to be archived by the Australian National Library’s (ANL) Pandora Project. *TEXT* was archived by the ANL from 1997 onwards).

Still in our doorways, Tess and I also traded possible titles for the nascent journal. We thought we might gain an advantage over our competitor editors by having a sexy title ready to go. We decided on ‘TEXT’. It seemed to capture all that was happening at the time: it was postmodern, digital and traditional too. It wasn’t folksy, craft or cottage industry oriented, like so much discourse about creative arts practice at the time. It seemed to us a title that lay within the ambit of the creative writer, but also had an academic ring to it. It held creative writing at arm’s length. It suggested objective research. But arm’s length was also exactly needed for the practice of writing: the pen must hit the page; the fingers must reach the keyboard.

Then we discussed how we might, at the moment of impact, out-strategise the horde of other eager editors-to-be who would jostle with us at the conference itself to present their ideas. We came up with the—to us—brilliant idea that we would launch our proposal with a drinks event. Yes, we would ply everyone with alcohol provided at our own expense. We hurriedly went to our computers and produced the documents which on 30 September 1996 we emailed off to the conference organisers. We even faxed the organisers, reminding them to look at their emails! (Brady & Krauth 1996).

This trading of ideas in doorways was a moment of leadership, I think. We knew we were talking about something that didn’t yet exist—might never exist, in fact—but we were prepared to analyse its potential and make a leap into the unknown to create it. We were committing to a way forward, on behalf of a cohort of people who, we thought, would like our ideas and want to follow. We felt excited, although we had no idea of the outcomes. We flew to the Sydney conference with one thought in mind: we would take on all comers in the attempt to create a journal for the emerging association. We were the ones who could do it. We had the more encompassing vision, the more innovative approach, the more determined passion for it.

At the meeting held in Room 405 of the UTS Design Faculty Building at 5.30pm on Saturday 12 October 1996 (*UTS Writing Programmes Conference 1996*), flanked by an armoury of red and white wines, Tess and I proposed our idea for a journal, and no competitor piped up. There was support all around. We were stunned. Our Gold Coast vision, seen with a view to a national way forward, had taken all by surprise, and furthermore, was to all tastes. It was a sort of anti-climax. There was no argument, no persuasion involved. 'Great idea. Go ahead and do it,' the meeting agreed. (see Fig. 1)

Ultimately, I would suggest that what Tess and I did was no different from and, in fact, had its basis in, what writers do whenever they decide to commit to a major project. There's a point at which you say: *Yes, I'll write that novel*. Setting out to write a major work is itself an act of leadership. The serious writer always thinks in terms of: leading a way in ideas; leading a cultural, moral or political discussion; and leading readers into new parts of their imaginations. *TEXT* was like a new book for us and, as it turned out, one that has kept being written.

Saturday, 12 October, 1996			
8:30 - 9:30 a.m.	Registration: <i>Guthrie Theatre</i>		
9:30 - 11:00 a.m.	<b>Poetries: Postmodern &amp; Post-colonial</b> Martin Harrison Edwin Thumboo <i>Chair: Ron Pretty</i> <i>Room 404</i>	<b>Scriptwriting for Stage and Screen</b> Ron Blair Sue Castrique Gary Langford <i>Chair:</i> <i>Guthrie Theatre</i>	<b>Professional Writing</b> Maily Giber Kiji and Yasahuru Kiji Charlotte Clutterbuck David Swain <i>Chair: Sue Spinks</i> <i>Room 405</i>
11:00 - 11:30 a.m.	Morning Tea		
11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	<b>ELIZABETH JOLLEY</b> <b>Keynote Address - The Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination</b> Introduced by Yasmine Gooneratne, Macquarie University <i>Guthrie Theatre</i>		
12:30 - 1:30 p.m.	<b>Lunch</b>	<b>Readings:</b> joanne burns, Martin Harrison <i>Room 405</i>	
1:30 - 3:30 p.m.	<b>PANEL: WRITING PROGRAMMES AND THE UNIVERSITY</b> • Brian Dibble, Curtin University • John Barth, Johns Hopkins University, Ma • Joyce Komblatt, University of Maryland • Jan McKemmish, University of Queensland • Peter Turchi, Warren Wilson College, NC Convenor: Glenda Adams, UTS <i>Guthrie Theatre</i>		
3:30 - 4:00 p.m.	Afternoon Tea		
4:00 - 5:30 p.m.	<b>Writing and Communities</b> Molly Travers Colleen Burke Pat Cranney <i>Chair: Bev Roberts</i> <i>Room 404</i>	<b>Text as Performance</b> Nigel Krauth and Tess Brady Michael Hurley Anna Gibbs <i>Chair: Jan McKemmish</i> <i>Guthrie Theatre</i>	<b>Professional Writing</b> Claire Woods and Paul Skrebels Roslyn Petelin <i>Chair: Katherine Gordon</i> <i>Room 405</i>

§§ At 5:30 p.m. in *Room 405*, Tess Brady and Nigel Krauth will host a meeting (with refreshments) to discuss setting up a refereed journal.

**Conference Dinner:** Harold Park Hotel, Glebe. 7:30 p.m. Speaker **Frank Moorhouse**  
**Please Note** that payment for the Dinner is separate from registration. The dinner costs \$30:00 (excluding drinks).

Fig. 1. Page from the UTS conference program, 1996. Krauth Collection

## Memoir: personal case studies in leadership

I don't recall being given formal training in leadership. Like most people, I guess, I learnt through experience.

### Memoir 1

As a teenager I was a member of the Boy Scouts. Our troop leader was vibrant, enthusiastic and charismatic. He made scouting a lot of fun for us. He was cultured, intelligent and understanding of our problems.

It's a cliché, I know, but I was in a troop where the leader was dismissed for 'interfering' with the scouts under his control. I worked it out then, at the tender age of twelve, that leaders were human, and not infallible as the grandiose Lord Baden-Powell was famed to be. I remember being whisked away from the 1960-61 Lansdowne Jamboree and delivered home to my parents by a rival, God-fearing scoutmaster after the scandal broke. On the ride in his clattering VW, he kept asking me what had gone on. Although I'd not been involved in the key group, we all knew what had happened, because it happened on all our troop's camps. I kept thinking: 'Well, the boys and the scoutmaster were doing the kind of crazy stuff that boys do. The leader was no different from his charges. They were all driven the same way'. In this case, of course, the scoutmaster was an adult, and the boys were just boys. I saw the problem and the tensions. I said nothing.

From my Boy Scouts experience I absorbed none of Baden-Powell's superficial Victorian-era advices such as: Cut your fingernails straight across because that's the manly way to do it, etc. I garnered instead ideas that: *Leadership poses problems for those who are led. Leadership is complex and involves pitfalls. The leader is as vulnerable as those he leads.* Later I heard dinner-party talk about British officers shot in the back while leading their troops forward.

Having at last investigated what Baden-Powell actually wrote about leadership, I'm surprised to find the following. Giving advice about 'The Patrol'—the groups of 6-8 scouts into which each troop is divided, with a boy scout as each patrol leader—Baden-Powell addressed the Scoutmaster and said:

First and foremost: The Patrol is the character school for the individual. To the Patrol Leader it gives practice in Responsibility and in the qualities of Leadership. To the Scouts it gives subordination of self to the interests of the whole, the elements of self-denial and self-control involved in the team spirit of cooperation and good comradeship.

But to get first-class results from this system you have to give the boy leaders real free-handed responsibility—if you only give partial responsibility you will only get partial results. The main object is not so much saving the Scoutmaster trouble as to give responsibility to the boy, since this is the very best of all means for developing character (Baden-Powell 1930).

I have no desire to go on record as a supporter of Robert Baden-Powell's methods, but I agree with what he says in this section of *Aids to Scoutmastership*. Through having been led before, and being aware of the effects of leadership, one develops an understanding of the responsibilities, dangers and successes involved. It sounds simplistic, but being led well by an unselfish leader who cares for her/his charges and is not wielding power for personal gain, is an advantage-experience for the budding leader. Being provoked to analyse why one was well led, or why badly led, provides good education in leadership.

## **Memoir 2**

When I was at university in Newcastle, NSW, I worked holidays at the BHP steelworks. I was assigned as a fitter's mate, boilermaker's mate, or whatever was available. The BHP happily employed Newcastle university students because they were useful to bump up the workforce in holiday periods when regular workers preferred to take leave.

During one of my employments in a Christmas break, we went out on strike. I recall the issue was that a worker in my section had sworn at the foreman. The foreman was an intelligent, thoughtful, quietly charismatic young Russian fellow. The worker who told him to get fucked was an old Aussie lag who slunk behind the coal washer every shift and slept on a sugar bag. I guess the foreman let it slip to his superiors that someone had told him to get fucked. Clearly then, the administration latched onto it. They sacked the worker who had the temerity to say such words to a member of staff. And we, the workers, supported our colleague in his right to speak that way to the foreman, by striking.

I more or less happily forewent my pay for a week while the dispute lasted, even though I needed the money to get myself through my next year of university. I didn't think telling anyone to get fucked was a reason to be fired, nor also for hundreds of men to lose their pay over the issue. But when we went back to work I was told by fellow workers: 'The Company always does this at Christmas. They're on the lookout for any chance to create a situation for a strike. The strike helps them because national and international orders for steel slow down at Christmas time.'

From this I learnt that you need to find out *exactly why* those above you make their decisions. In the above Christmas event, there was no principle at stake, just a cynical manipulation of workers for the temporary sake of the bottom line. My BHP experience made me aware of the politics of work, of *agents provocateurs*, of dirty tricks in the workplace perpetrated by the lowest and the highest ranks of the industry hierarchy. Being a leader at any point in the pecking order involves knowledge of what everyone below and above you is up to. Upon this knowledge you survived; but it also helped your subordinates to survive and, thus, you helped your organisation, your whole industry, to survive.

## **Memoir 3**

I consider my father was an admirable leader in his circumscribed domain. He led the family by saying: 'Whatever you do, do your best.' He had the knack of talking with us, as kids and then also as adults, about everything and nothing much at all. He used humour, often ambushing us with a pun or a left-field smiling comment. But in that communication there was a subtext that respected our intelligence and assumed we'd pick it up. He led by imparting ideas about thinking for oneself, being authentic and not being influenced negatively by others. His message was: check your facts, work out that your principles are good and then stick to them. He was a probation and parole officer, and his professional life involved advising others what to do with their

lives. It wasn't until his funeral, when his kids spoke about the influence he'd had on us, that we realised what a great message he had always given us.

#### ***Memoir 4***

At the Clunes Booktown festival in 2011, Bob Hawke was introduced as Australia's best-loved leader – although an ANU study places him second behind Kevin Rudd (ABC News 2008). The devoted crowd in Clunes hushed as the oracle was asked to speak about the qualities of leadership and how he had applied them over nine years as Prime Minister and for a decade before that as a highly influential union leader. I sat in my plastic chair, transfixed in the packed venue, listening eagerly. I was surprised to find that I already understood his profound strategies and techniques.

Hawke's insights and practices were seemingly simple. 'Lean in doorways,' he said. 'Communicate with people.' Learn what your followers do, and what they want you to do. Analyse what those above want of you. Balance those above against those below. Mainly, in building your policies, don't impose what you yourself want, impose what your constituency wants, subject to your insightful overview of the matter and its context. 'But, in the end, as leader, you're the one who makes the decision,' he said. And therefore you have to own that decision. 'If it's not the right one, it'll come back and bite you on the bum.'

Hawke's consensus-based leadership style, and his self-proclaimed "love affair with the Australian people" (Bateman 2004) has been blamed for his failures as much his success.

Like the President of a Republic, Hawke derived political legitimacy and strength from his direct relationship with the people who elected him ... Hawke's political demise came about when Caucus reasserted—took back from the people as it were—the [Westminster-system] right to choose who would be leader. (Mills 1993: 4)

Hawke's rise, and his demise, indicates the delicate balance between the styles of leadership identified by pioneering organisational psychologist, Kurt Lewin and his colleagues. Lewin classified three main styles: *authoritarian (autocratic)*—where the leader determines policy and strategies, and tells the followers what to do; *democratic (participative)*—where policy and strategies are arrived at through group processes with the leader assisting; and *laissez-faire (delegative)*—where the leader tells the followers to solve the problem and basically leaves them alone to do it (based on Lewin, Lippitt & White 1939: 273).

It appears that, depending on the climate and context surrounding a situation of leadership at any time, the leader needs to be adaptive enough to read the immediate requirement presented by the constituency and to move with.

#### **Leadership in action: how we ran *TEXT***

I give here my own point of view in relation to co-editing *TEXT*. I acknowledge Tess Brady, my co-editor in the early years (1997-2005), has her story to tell. So too will Jen Webb (2005-2010) and Kevin Brophy (2010-current) have their stories. These

stories will deliver different perspectives, different claims to responsibility, and different layers of praise and, or, blame. With regard to Lewin's classification of leadership types, I feel that at most times *TEXT* has been run by democratic and participative means. But there also have been occasions when the authoritarian and the laissez-faire came into play.

Regarding the authoritarian method, I remember the situation when *TEXT* received an email threatening significant legal action over a piece we had published. There was initial discussion between the editors, the author of the work, and others who assisted in *TEXT*'s publication. The general feeling, I assessed, was that *TEXT* should fight this challenge because there was a moral issue about an author's rights involved. At the same time, I knew *TEXT* had no money set aside as a fighting fund, nor did the publisher, the AAWP; to get on our high horse without any sort of horse to ride would be a bad mistake. Additionally, I thought the aggrieved party did indeed have a case—slender, yes, but it could have blown up in our faces. On my insistence, we pulled the article off the web.

I acted autocratically on that occasion, but I did so based on my own experience as a novelist threatened legally a number of times in the past. Regarding my expectation of my colleagues' reactions at the time, I knew I was being dismissive of their arguments (which I agreed with anyway), and I wasn't proud of the decision, but I simply believed that my way was the way to go. I suspect it was the certainty with which I insisted on the action that persuaded the others to go along with it. I suppose they thought: 'Oh, he seems to know what he is doing'. I am delighted to say that we heard nothing further from the aggrieved party, and the author involved not only agreed with the action once it was done, but went on to excellent further achievements. In terms of Lewin's classifications, this was a case where an autocratic action led to a successful result.

However, the opposite sort of action can also be required. For example, with problems arising from the editing of *TEXT*'s series of themed special issues, a laissez-faire style of decision making was used. From 1997 onwards the editorial aspects of these special issues were largely handled by the *TEXT* editors. Special issues editors put together a group of papers, and *TEXT*'s general editors saw them through to publication. This meant that, when the idea of special issues gained in popularity, the burden of work on *TEXT* editors increased dramatically. Our solution was initially to delegate to the guest editors full responsibility for delivering publication-ready documents to *TEXT*. But this didn't solve the problem. Guest editors had trouble understanding the *TEXT* culture and its detailed requirements for publication, and the *TEXT* general editors still had to proof and code the work. It became apparent that an eminently capable person, to whom we could delegate completely the job of Special Issues editor, was necessary. Donna Lee Brien suggested she could do this job, and it was handed to her entirely ... and very successfully, it must be added. With this editorial role in place, decisions regarding the special issues are mostly made utilising the democratic, participative model.



The above are included among the things I am proud of in the evolution of *TEXT* over the past 15 years. In this time I have learnt, above all else, how an academic journal must nurture and protect its authenticity, reputation and accessibility.

*Authenticity* relates to the way the journal undertakes its core business. This can be described in leadership terms as a commitment to the ideals of best practice in research and teaching in the Creative Writing discipline. *TEXT* is the sole publication representing the study of creative writing at tertiary level in the southern hemisphere, while at the same time most of its subscribers are from the northern hemisphere. In this truly world-wide context, *TEXT*'s editors remain painfully aware that the publication must retain its academic and artistic integrity, and must be an authoritative voice for its discipline.

*Reputation* derives from the central integrity of the journal, but is also about how *TEXT* presents itself, and how it deals with its stakeholders—its readership, contributors, referees, publishers, advertisers and others. Also, its reputation depends on how *TEXT* deals with its crises as they arise. As an example, some serially rejected contributors might be inclined to spread the word that *TEXT*'s standards are overly strict, or biased, or unsympathetic. Part of a *TEXT* editor's leadership involves dealing with serially-rejected contributors and encouraging them forward to publication. For *TEXT* to retain its industry lead, its editors must be always watchful of its processes, the links it makes, the hot-spots of dissatisfaction it might create, and even, simply, its appearance on the web, to fervently protect its integrity and reputation.

*Accessibility* to all researchers in the field, including those early in their careers, has always been a priority for *TEXT*. Encouragement of young and old researchers alike, through a generous, highly engaged and interactive refereeing process, has been *TEXT*'s policy from the start. This type of policy is recognised as a major objective for journals in developing disciplines (Dam 2005). Editors do not build a discipline by mobilising cut-throat, dismissive refereeing methods. In *TEXT*'s history a few established scholars, who thought they might offload a poorly prepared manuscript onto a fledgling journal, have been helped through to international standard in their articles. Many aspiring academic writers, including Honours and PhD students, who have submitted below-par drafts, have also been assisted to improve their work to publishable standard. In both these situations, the discipline has benefited. An academic journal may be part of a cutthroat industry; but it must also have a heart.

In any research endeavour, good leaders look after the authenticity, reputation, and accessibility of their project: but this is time-consuming. A great deal of time has, therefore, been expended on *TEXT* and its authors by its co-editors, its reviews editors, its special issues editors and its creative works editor (who has just resigned after 15 years). Time-spent relates to health, and I don't wish to speculate on how *TEXT* activity has affected the health of its editors. Suffice to say that, in my mind, all of this is part of the richly rewarding fabric of leadership.

And finally, I have been asked by those who refereed this paper to explain how *TEXT* editors can publish in *TEXT* and how the double blind refereeing is therefore conducted, as it is an example of leadership and responsibility in action. The answer is: if an editor of *TEXT* submits a paper, the refereeing process is entirely handled by

another *TEXT* editor or other responsible person, such as the Chair of the AAWP. As a result, there are cases where *TEXT* editors' contributions have been rejected totally or have required significant rewriting. The editors of *TEXT* saw very early on the need for a squeaky-clean process in this situation. Generally speaking, however, across all the journals of all academic disciplines, in many cases of refereeing in the double blind situation the author of the article can be deduced or guessed at by the referees. This is one of academic refereeing's ongoing challenges.

## My conclusion

I've heard leaders speak. I've read leaders' statements. I've worked for leaders. I've been a leader. My experience includes suffering under people who failed miserably as leaders and caused trauma; it also includes working for capable leaders who kept their cohorts happily inspired and aspirational. I have learned from them all.

- My father told me I could run my own life so long as I researched and felt authentic about it.
- My Boy Scout career taught me that we're all weird in some way, and that leaders need always to deal with personal differences, not forgetting their own.
- My experience at the BHP told me to explore the motives of those above me and also those below me, and to discover the aspirations of all involved.
- Bob Hawke told me I could run the nation for 9 years on the understandings I had gained in running a university school for 3 years and co-running a journal for 14 years.
- My reading of Kurt Lewin and others assured me that a variety of leadership styles exists, and being able to move amongst them appropriately is useful.

A leader isn't really in the lead, s/he's the forward-moving point that is subject to contexts, discourses and influences all around. Leaders cannot possibly think that there's nothing ahead, nor that there's nothing behind, and the sideways ambush is an issue also. As a leader in academia, one is interpreter of a 360-degree variety of pressures, stresses, wants and surprises. You must make yourself *universal*, not individual, as a leader.

Regarding *TEXT*, it flourishes after fifteen years. The leadership of many in keeping it afloat and forging it ahead has worked so far. I'm confident this will keep going, because of the principles of leadership established. But as any leader might think: 'We will have to wait and see, *and do*'.

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