

OBITUARY

In memory of Professor Ken Parry



Ken Parry, BA (University of Queensland), MBus (University of Southern Queensland), PhD (Monash University), Grad. Dip. Mgt. (Central Queensland University), Dip. Ed. (University of Queensland), Founding Editor, *Journal of Management and Organization*, and ANZAM Life Fellow.

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of Professor Ken Parry. His characteristics of independence and determination enabled him to far exceed his original prognosis with pancreatic cancer. He passed away peacefully, with no pain or discomfort in his final hours, on 11 February 2018.

Ken was very well-known to the ANZAM and JMO communities as the founding editor of this journal from 2005 through to 2010. In this role, he firmly established the journal as a high-quality outlet for research and set it on the path to international credibility. Everything the journal is now has been built on the firm foundations laid by Ken. We cannot thank him enough.

Ken was perhaps best known for his research in the field of leadership. In this massive field, he was one of the few who was comfortable with both quantitative and qualitative approaches, although in his latter years he leaned heavily towards the qualitative form. Indeed, he gave a healthy nudge towards autoethnographic approaches and the great insights they can reveal about organisational phenomena. He was widely regarded as one of the world's foremost experts in grounded theory, which was

recognised by the membership of the editorial boards of leading leadership journals: *The Leadership Quarterly*, *Leadership*, and *Group and Organization Management*. Even more significantly, he won the highly prestigious *The Leadership Quarterly Decennial Award* acknowledging the influential nature of his research on the field of leadership. He published more than 40 journal articles, most of which appeared in the highest-ranking journals in leadership, management, and human resources. His book, entitled *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Studying Leadership*, co-authored with Brad Jackson, is one of the best-selling books on leadership with more than 25,000 copies sold and has done much to bring leadership research to a broader audience.

Ken was an innovative voice in leadership research. More than advocating mixed methods approaches, he made a case for socially constructed perspectives. Traditionally and naturally, leadership scholars have considered leadership to be a quality of leaders. Ken was one of a wave of influential scholars who began to question this presumption. Rather than being about leaders, Ken argued that leadership was about the social process between leaders and followers. This may not be intuitive, but it explains why different people respond differently to different leaders, why we don't agree on whom we consider a leader, and why there is no universal or general theory of leadership. Ken's work pushed the boundaries yet further. He was interested in the language of influence, the metaphors, and the sense of leadership even as a music riff. In a keynote talk he gave at Lancaster University in 2014, he used the riff from Deep Purple's *Smoke on the Water* to illustrate that leadership is so much more than a person.

Ken was not just a world-class researcher; he was also a talented and committed teacher and a fierce advocate for bridging the research–practice divide. As a doctoral supervisor, Ken had 17 successful completions. As an undergraduate and postgraduate teacher, he would make strenuous efforts to connect with his students, often talking with them as they entered the classroom, and then tailoring the content to their particular circumstances.

As a colleague, he was a keen and caring mentor who helped many improve their teaching, research, and service. Ken also spoke regularly and passionately to business and always had an applied edge. He was keenly engaged with policy-makers and politicians, who readily sought his advice on leadership, leadership issues, and how to project themselves effectively to their audiences.

Ken personified all that is good about the ANZAC Spirit. A proud Australian, he made many kiwi friends during his time in Wellington with his infectious humility, his dry wit, and his heartfelt appreciation for fine New Zealand wine and exquisite rugby. Ken was a genuinely decent bloke, who will be sorely missed, and remembered with great fondness.

At Ken's funeral, the following verse from Robbie Burns was read. Everyone who knew him will agree that it captures the essence of Ken's spirit.

An honest man here lies at rest.
As e'er God with his image blest;
The friend of man, the friend of truth,
The friend of age and guide of youth:
Few hearts like his with virtue warm'd,
Few heads with knowledge so informed:
If there's another world, he lives in bliss
If there is none, he made the best of this.

Jon Billsberry
Deakin University, Victoria, Australia
Steve Kempster
Lancaster University, Lancashire, UK
Brad Jackson
Griffith University, Queensland, Australia

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