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Title: Interaction-as-*intra-action*: A more-than-human relational perspective on collective leadership.

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Collective leadership (CL) is considered ‘a movement towards new horizons’ in the ‘reframing of leadership as we know it’ (Raelin, 2014: 2). It can be described as a type of leadership practice that takes a social constructionist position which argues that social encounters can be explained by exploring and understanding the interactions people have with one another. From this perspective, CL is developing through the relational turn, where it can be described as ‘multiple individuals assuming (and perhaps divesting themselves) of leadership roles over time in both formal and informal relationships’ (Yammarino et al. 2012: 382).

In this paper we take the position that social encounters are only partially explained by people’s relationships with one another (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Raelin, 2016; Uhl-Bien, 2006). In so doing, we are inspired by Hawkin’s (2015) argument that there appears to be a possible ‘neglect’ from leadership scholars in exploring the ways non-human actants can impact social relations (p.952). With this in mind, we aim to explore social encounters further, by offering a way to broaden what is meant by *interaction* within the social constructionist paradigm. Therefore, we argue for a more-than-human understanding of relationality which aims to acknowledge the interplay between human and non-human entities.

We do this by interpreting ‘relationality’ in more complex ways, drawing on Fairchild’s (2019) conceptualisation of more-than-human relationality, and specific strands of new materialist scholarship which places emphasis on a turn towards materiality (Fox & Alldred, 2017). From a theoretical perspective, we rely on Barad’s (2007) theorisation of interactions as ‘intra-active’ which describes the mutual co-constitution of entangled agency. This means that agency may not be a pre-existing given, associated with humans. Rather interactions can occur between human and non-humans, where people and things are intermingled and the ability to act emerges from within rather than outside of that interaction.

Raelin (2018) alludes to these intra-active ideas in his work on CL when he suggests that,

the interaction that occurs, however, is more than an exchange between individuals. It is often an in-the-moment intra-action – not inter, but intra-action – out of which a dynamic unfolding may emerge through some form of leadership agency that reorients the flow of practice (p.61).

In similar ways, Shotter (2016) also relies on the prefix ‘intra’ to explain how things are dynamically related to everything else. Shotter places an emphasis on explaining life as ‘emerging and growing within a back-and-forth communication-like process occurring within the currents of *intra*-mingling activities from within which it emerges’ (p.135). This understanding of intra- appears to be considered in isolation to human agents, whereas the shift of emphasis from ‘inter’ to ‘intra-action’ can also encourage things other than human to be agents in the construction of knowledge (Barad, 2007).

There appears to be little explanation as to what ‘intra-action’ means in the context of understanding relational, collective leadership and the non-human. We seek to further explain Raelin’s in-the-moment intra-active ideas on CL by drawing out (and interrogating) the relational links (human and non-human) within the social and material world. Therefore, the paper is underpinned by the suggestion that:

we cannot study materiality without studying social relations, and we cannot study social relations without understanding how the material gives substance to these relations and contributes to the development of new possibilities for action (Hawkins, 2015: 954).

The motivation for drawing on these ideas stems from an action research project, which was undertaken as part of a change initiative programme in a Kenyan bank, conducted by the third author. We will use the data to formulate three vignettes to explore the interrelationship between the social and material world. The analysis, thereby, focuses more on what humans and things can do when they interact, as opposed to identifying the relationship between humans and things (Fox & Alldred, 2017). We identify three non-human entities; the Evangelist mission, the clarion call, and hippo tooth/eagle wings, and analyse how engagement with all three achieved shared meaning, responsibility and an embeddedness that drove the direction of the change project.

In the discussion we are then able to consider three overarching points to contribute to the collective leadership literature, relating to more-than-human relational collective leadership, embeddedness and the materiality of collective leadership. The overall aim of the paper is to

argue that CL can be facilitated through entangled and often complex *intra-active* encounters that occur between people and non-human entities. Our paper contributes to the call for submission by offering a non-traditional way of conceptualising leadership in regard to social and material relations.

Word count: 745 (excluding references)

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