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Chapter 6

Leadership as Identity: A Practice Based Exploration

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Abstract

This chapter explores what a practice based approach to leadership identity could look like. To do so it unpacks a story of an observed team interaction in an IT environment. The chapter proposes that primary reliance on interviewing or participants' explanation of leadership misses fundamental dimensions of the practice of leadership. Accordingly it focuses on use of space, artefacts and routines as an alternative series of constructs that reveal leadership identity through practice. Such a series of constructs focuses us on how leadership identity emerges between people as they go about connected work as opposed to their own internal reflections on the topic. This marks a radical departure from most identity related studies and shows the appeal of a practice approach particularly to research that wants to go beyond an individual as the source of leadership.

Bio

Brigid Carroll is an Associate Professor in the Department of Management and International Studies and Research Director of the New Zealand Leadership Institute both at the University of Auckland. Her research interests closely focus on identity, discourse, and power in leadership and the development of leadership practice. She is also involved in the development and design of leadership development interventions and programmes in organizations across New Zealand. In this way, along with the Institute, she tries to intentionally live a theory/ practice relationship.

Introduction

Imagine going into an organization as a leadership researcher with a particular interest in identity and not being able to talk or communicate in any way. That means not being able to question anyone about how they define and understand leadership or identity and perceive how either and both occurs. All one can do is observe people going about their daily work, listen to their ongoing conversations, and attempt to identify what is done that appears to be recognized as leadership identity. That's the practice challenge in a nutshell: uncovering what constructs such as leadership mean in 'whole' worlds where people in specific contexts, interconnected in their tasks, produce something we call work. A researcher can't isolate their particular construct (in this case leadership identity), invite people to talk to it explicitly, exclude other constructs that wander into such discussions (such as management or teamwork or role), and rely on people's description of

what they think or do. Such a researcher walks into the middle of multiple, ongoing, unfolding, processes where their privileged construct, if it is there at all, is intertwined with all manner of other social processes in the complexities of organizational life.

This chapter recounts such a scenario and attempts to explore how leadership and identity play out in pure practice. Of course pure practice is largely an ideal and researchers tend to be given a starting point. The starting point in this case was to shadow a team leader for a morning and learn about leadership in this organization from observing their interactions. While this sounds like it could be a thoroughly conventional 'follow a leader' study, this researcher assumed that the so-called team leader reflected a role more than an identity and could be doing any number of things (management, administration, human resources, specialist IT work) over the course of the morning. In short she had made no assumptions that leadership identity could be understood from studying this particular individual but thought this individual was as good as any to follow into the life of this organization and see what kind of leadership activity emerged once in the space. It is important to state from the outset that this researcher was theory led in making such distinctions and was bringing theory as a sensitizing lens to assist in grappling with complexity unlike 'the blank page' mindset of someone engaged in a more grounded theory exploration. A range of critical, process, and practice theories were helping this researcher hold leadership identity in a place of curiosity while suspending assumptions of what leadership or identity might look like and how those might be attached to individuals or groups. While a number of interactions were observed, this chapter will only focus on one.

Locating leadership in observations of interactions is not an easy enterprise to say the least (Kelly, 2008). It is certainly not straightforward to differentiate leadership from other social processes that happen in work environments such as management and technical expertise. One has the issue of deciding what is leadership and what is not. Researchers therefore tend to combine observations with interviews as a result to provide a point of calibration between how someone(s) attributes or talks to leadership as opposed to how they practice leadership. This can create its own

issues where talk of leadership often contradicts practice of leadership. For instance Sveningsson and Larsson (2006) talked to a manager who affirmed his leadership as transformational and visionary but who was observed doing very mundane and routine managerial/ administrative work. The researchers concluded that the subject of this study might be indicative of many knowledge-type workers thrust into managerial roles who create a fantasy leadership identity as opposed to any real leadership practice.

Clearly talking about leadership and doing leadership don't always equate to the same thing. Equally clearly, this phenomena we call identity would appear to sit on the more intangible and abstract end of the organizational construct scale. If I propose to investigate identity through predominantly observing leadership practice as opposed to interviewing subjects about their leadership practice then I have a considerable challenge on my hands. So why would I take this on? When academics discuss identity in a research related piece of writing like this one then it can often sound esoteric, objectified, and somehow different from how most of us identify and are identified as 'who we are' multiple times a day. Yet identity is considered absolutely central to contemporary existence and in fact one of the big differentiators between our modern society and more traditional ones (Giddens, 1991). Given the practice context in this identity chapter, I seek to engage with identity as intimate, intuitive, and resolutely 'common', albeit fluid and ambiguous in leadership moments and episodes, and seek to demonstrate how seeing and working in identity ways can shape and impact leadership practice.

This chapter will be built around an interaction that the author observed on a visit to a high tech, high growth, rapid pace, entrepreneurial, medium-sized business. Both the team leader and this interaction leader were chosen by the organization as exemplars of the kind of leadership that occurred in this context. This interaction then becomes a site to interrogate the identity emergence and dynamics of the leadership that did (or didn't) shape the work of one of its teams. A layering of conceptual material from literatures that help recognize and work with identity will be introduced: practice, practice-oriented identity studies, and leadership identity. The overall intent is to explore

how identity impacts leadership practice and whether it is possible to access identity work without predominantly relying on collecting 'talk' of leadership practice. I propose that a practice orientation to both leadership and identity has the potential to offer unique insight into the mutual constructing of leadership identity by both organization and subject and holds some promise of not over-estimating either the subject or the context in such a process.

A Stand Up Meeting

Picture a very large, open plan room with approximately 100 people in. Those 100 people are sitting in front of computers in rows. Most of the rows are horizontal with pods of about 16 people facing each other. A number of long vertical rows bisect the room and seemingly construct boundaries which carve the room up into a number of areas or rectangular spaces. That all sounds very ordered and organized but the room doesn't feel that at all. People are standing, chatting and leaning over their stations, bags are on the floor, books (science fiction mostly) pile awkwardly on desks, lots of cartoons and reproduced visuals are pinned up behind computers and small toys, ornaments, figurines perch on computers and printers and in fact on any available technology. You wouldn't call it a loud room at all as people seem to talk fairly quietly between themselves but it's casual, relaxed, untidy, and personal. On the walls are a whole lot of work charts. Some of them are graphs showing work completed and many are tables of post-it notes on the move from the left hand column to the right hand as work is moved through 'ready', 'doing', 'testing' and 'completed' stages. By the quantity of graphs and tables on the walls, it is clear there are a number of teams in this room and they are pretty busy going by the sheer quantity of post-it notes at varying points of completion.

The team we are going to focus on is in the far right of the room in the corner. When I get there they are all sitting at their desks and working on their computers. Like all the teams in this hall, they develop complex software and online infrastructure. I perch on an unoccupied chair watching them. While some work alone, many work together in front of multiple screens. It's not

silent and intent work like somehow I have pictured software construction to be. There's gentle talking between people, multiple screens flying up on computers, people looking at them and away and then back again, people walking round and on the move and swiveling chairs to join in to other conversations and swivel back again. While it seems discontinuous work in the sense of people moving between different modes, it still seems like everyone has their own work that they are focusing on.

There's a team leader I've been shadowing for the morning. Let's call him Dan after one of the science fiction authors piled up on his desk. Dan would be early 30's and is wearing super casual-jeans, brown T-shirt, sneakers and baseball cap – which doesn't make him stand out given combinations of those would constitute a sort of uniform in this room. He has a team of about 8. His team of 8 encompass a number of young woman and men who look fresh out of university (assuming they are out of university as the organization does have an internship scheme) and some older men (40's). One of the woman smiles at me and strikes up a conversation about what she is doing. In the midst of that conversation she glances at Dan and says 'I see the koosch ball. It's team time.'

I look up and see Dan has got a koosch ball out of the drawer of his desk. It's an old, battered one that looks like it has got lots of use. He's still sitting at his chair, which is in a vertical row facing away from his team where some of the other team leaders sit, and he's lightly tossing it from hand to hand. That action is visible from where his team are sitting. No-one jumps up or flicks to attention but slowly over the next few minutes I start to notice them disentangling from their work. Some push their chairs back and swivel around looking around the area, some speed up their keyboard work as if they need to save or send quickly, while others begin what sounds to be a more casual conversation over greater distances with people further away. Dan himself starts to talk intently to one of his team members all the while bouncing the koosch ball. Somehow things feel in limbo as if people are transitioning into something else without a word being spoken. After a few minutes Dan gets up and walks towards the closest bank of post-it notes and starts to move some of

them. People slowly join him when ready and there's spontaneous chat as people point to post-it notes. Things get quite animated with lots of laughter. The last few in the team come up to the board and without me quite noticing how they do so, they form a more formal circle and go quiet.

Dan is holding the koosch ball and he starts to talk. There's no formal opening up of the conversation and he seems to start as if this conversation is continuing on from one they have all had prior. He seems to be filling people in on where work is at and it sounds pretty frank to me. There's comments like 'I'm not sure where we are heading on this...' and 'we thought we'd be done here but it's obvious we aren't...'. The team members listen but don't join in. Then he stops, glances round the circle and throws the koosch ball to someone; that someone simply recounts what they individually are working on. There isn't much eye contact and again the group listens. Dan listens too. When that person stops they look around for a moment and throw the koosch ball to someone else. And on it goes.

One of the older guys (let's call him Spike) has more energy than others. He hops from foot to foot, makes more eye contact than anyone else and seems to be barely suppressing a desire to speak. That is unusual as no one so far has openly pre-empted wanting it. On getting the koosch ball he launches into a very animated account of trying to solve a bug or glitch in the system without being able to successfully locate it. At this point spontaneous conversation breaks out and others join in and it's actually becoming a conversation where people are genuinely interacting. The conversation goes to and from Spike as more than half the group joins in. Dan stays fairly quiet at this point but shows he is engaged by nodding, making one word type comments ('yup', 'true'). After 3 or 4 minutes he joins in. He says 'So there's two ways being suggested to move on this thing right?' He looks at Spike and Spike nods and leaps in again gesticulating wildly and adding other dimensions of this search for a bug or as he puts it 'more than one'. Again people look up and begin to nod and join in. Another few minutes pass and Spike eventually passes on the koosch ball but not until completing his spiel to the degree he wants to.

Everyone has had a go and the last person throws the ball back to Dan. Dan tosses the ball in his hand and says 'we all good to go on?' but doesn't seem to expect an answer and no one seems to expect to give him one. Dan glances at his watch and rushes off to his next meeting. Given I'm shadowing, I rush off too but I glance back to see Spike still standing with a couple of people who he had fired up in the stand-up meeting. Still gesticulating and still talking furiously between them.

Through the Lens of Practice, Identity and Leadership

There's nothing about this story I imagine that would appear dramatic or unusual. Some readers would smile in recognition at the baseball cap, figurines on computers, and the series of post-it notes inviting movement on the walls. They would be those who know the feel of an IT space perhaps. Others could equally be shaking their head at a space that seems to run on such casual, quirky, non-urgent lines. They could be those whose own work space has a very different rhythm. Regardless of how familiar or alien this story is, it should be recognizable as a representation of work practice or of what really happens. Before we interrogate the identity and leadership in it, however, let's put words to what it means to take a practice perspective.

Practice

Attention to practice is driven by a sense of a gulf between researcher treatments of topics versus the lived experience of them and a sense that much of our research seems to 'strip out most of what matters' (Weick, 2007, p. 18). Practice theory therefore begins by asking the question 'what do practitioners experience "out in the real world"' (Weick, 2003, p. 453) although, in contrast to how it might appear, that is anything but a straightforward question. In fact answering that question means an entirely different kind of research attention and inquiry. Out in the 'real world' practitioners don't tend to abstract and separate out processes and treat them as 'stand-alone entities'. In the 'real world', practitioners encounter processes such as leadership 'in a holistic manner' as 'a meaningful, unfolding totality' (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011, p. 341). 'What people actually do' (Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008, p. 88) is not easily captured by any research that

works predominantly with practitioner's cognitive accounts of analyses of pre-set independent constructs such as leadership.

The premise we are offering here is that practice theory invites us closer to the lived reality of what people actually do. To do so it needs to grapple with a number of theoretical challenges. The first is the inherent situatedness, relationality, and interdependence of any self, other, artefacts, and contexts. That means any practice pursuit of identity and leadership engages with them amidst relationships, artefacts, and contexts. The second is the temporality of existence where action can't be neatly sequenced as in a flowchart but is instead 'entangled' in 'anticipation, uncertainties, and urgency' (Nicolini, 2009, p. 123) meaning practitioners negotiate choice, decisions, and ambiguity at every step. This makes things like identity and leadership more of a practical accomplishment than the managed project that appears in many of our textbooks.

If we put together the relational and temporal principles of practice theory then we end up with a focus on what (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 69) has called 'absorbed coping' where practitioners are immersed and embodied in a whole interconnected world. Much of the time this is routine, automatic and below the threshold of a cognitive, rational grasp but some of the time, when things go confused or unpredictable (something Dreyfus calls a temporary breakdown) we move to 'involved thematic deliberation' (Dreyfus, 1995, pp. 72-73) or what Yanow and Tsoukas (2009) refer to as 'analytic reflection' where we consciously pay attention to how and what we are engaging with. We would propose that identity and leadership through a practice lens are accomplished through both absorbed coping and involved thematic deliberation.

Our account of the standing meeting earlier in the chapter is thus an account of the 'absorbed coping' of Dan and his team. At this stage of the chapter you should have a sense of this team amidst their world surrounded by the objects and people that constitute such a world. Any leadership achieved by anyone is done amidst rows of computer monitors, post it notes, youth in jeans and sneakers, pyramids of science fiction books, cult series figurines and reprinted cartoons. In

the majority of the leadership literature the everyday clutter and direct spatial context of leadership is usually absent or at best tangentially and minimally referred to. However it should be clear that any leadership that might happen in this space is constrained and enabled by this space and the objects and people in it. Given no one has single offices, conversations happen when people swivel their chairs close to others and begin talking where they are or as people walk through or from/ to the large room. Something like a stand-up team conversation ritual makes total sense given this workforce is never far from computer screens (even in meetings they bring and look at their laptops and tablets) and hence needs something or someone to call them into a different form of communication and connection with each other. A practice approach draws us into 'a whole world' (given of course this 'whole world' of a large team room sits in a further 'whole world' of an organization and sector) where the doing of the constructs we academics like to study (in this case leadership and identity) are intimately intertwined with the routines that weave through real time, everyday space and work.

Identity

It is rare to study identity amidst the 'whole world' that practitioners live in. The closest we would have to such an approach is ethnographic studies with their thick description of place, space, rituals, and norms and the people who operate through such configurations. However ethnographic studies of leadership are rare to say the least with far more priority given to the direct verbal attribution or claiming of leadership through survey instrument or interview kinds of methodologies. The nearest to what we are trying to do here would be discourse approaches to leadership which seek for evidence of leadership in text (spoken or written forms of language such as in the form of a speech, email, prospectus) talk (in formal or informal conversation), and interaction (encounter between people that includes verbal and non-verbal engagement). Certainly discourse approaches would be congruent with a practice-type approach but there are other identity points of reference. We will seek to make these points visible in this section, while acknowledging the tensions in reading

identity primarily through observation, as in the need to 'refrain from objectifying identities as observable entities' (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 304).

Identity is generally represented as a struggle between the expectations of self, others, and organization/ community/ society (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). It's a struggle because in that intersection of expectations, individuals feel the need to represent themselves with coherence and distinctiveness whilst at the same time being aware of palpable contradictions, precariousness, fluidity, multiplicity, and fragmentation. Wrestling with such a struggle means that identity is an ongoing question or 'project' (Giddens, 1991) which complicates choices of who to be and what to say and do in any moment. Identity researchers gravitate to discursive methods because that is where identity work (struggle) is most likely to be visible.

Observation is deemed a much more ambiguous identity research site given it is often identity coherence and distinctiveness that is most in view and not identity struggle. Nor can a researcher assume that a calm, confident, and assured identity performance doesn't involve significant precariousness and contradiction; or the reverse where evident identity difficulty and ambiguity belie a strong distinctiveness or coherence. On the other hand scholars of interviewing in particular (Alvesson, 2003; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003) argue that the interviews that researchers predominantly use to probe into identity are not windows into the identity work in real work/ leadership contexts. Rather, they suggest, interviews are better seen as performances or constructions oriented at the research context, the perceived expectations or hopes of the researcher, and the nature of the interviewer/ interviewee. Practice theory and approaches offer a bridge between what a researcher can see and feel on site alongside what they can hear and interpret prior or subsequent to the practice being explored.

In practice terms the starting place is with a 'permanent dialectic between the self and social structure' with identity having 'a potential mediating quality'(Ybema et al., 2009, p. 300). In the stand-up meeting story we see a whole host of mediating elements that construct the identities

possible in this team. We see a team creating the culture of their organization just as that culture creates the identities in and of the team. Thus when Dan pulls on his jeans and dons his baseball cap, another team member puts another science fiction book on the teetering pile and different configurations of the team swivel their chair round to be immersed in a software discussion, they all sustain a way of being in this organization like others before them and doubtless others after them. However they in turn are responding to the historical and cultural texture of an organization that distinctively blends the ability to look and behave casually with an extreme high performance pace and tolerance for uncertainty. In short their work identities are mediated through self and social structure mutually and simultaneously. This marks a significant departure from many identity studies where identity appears to be often singular (something constructed by a self) and internal (constructed through self-stories and reflection).

From a practice perspective identity thus is 'complex, recursive and constantly under construction' (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 301). Given it is these things 'it implicates social maneuvering and power games' (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 306). So we see Dan as the possessor of the team koosch ball but unable or unwilling to verbally call the team to their stand-up meeting. He uses movement (walking away from his station), location (standing by the team process and results chart) and silence (waiting quietly for others to join him) to get this meeting starting. Likewise his team doesn't rush to the meeting but keeps talking, finishes off their phase of work and swiveling their chairs amongst each other. We could read this sequence of actions as Dan 'maneuvering' to gain the authority needed to start the meeting and his team illustrating their power to join him (or not) in a timely manner. The effect is of a form of minimalist authority where team leader and team act in interdependent ways to produce this event called a stand-up meeting. Individual and collective agencies are at play here as all 'choose' to take part in this event and make their process of 'choosing' quite visible.

Given we aren't relying on anyone's reflection or discussion of leadership and identity to give insight into these, a new set of identity dimensions are required. This chapter is going to highlight

three constitutive practice elements that traditionally have not been strong in identity research: physical space, routines and artefacts. I'm going to argue these are particularly significant in giving insight into leadership identity.

Physical Space

Physical space can be considered 'inseparable' from the knowledge that is its very purpose (Lee & Amjadi, 2014, p. 723). Physical space is 'intimately bound up with intentions, occupations and purposes' which makes it integral to the construction of identity (Dewey, 1938/1991, p. 52, in Miettinen & Virkkunen, 2005, p. 443). Physical space provides an 'emotional home for expert selves' (Cetina, 1997, p. 9). In the standing meeting account the physical space shapes a complex leadership space. Dan and the other team leaders sit facing away from their team but, apart from facing a different direction, they have identical desks, chairs, computers, and garb. We could interpret this in a number of ways: that team leaders are minimally differentiated from the members of their teams and share more similarity and proximity than difference; that distinction through position or title seems of little significance in this world; that team leaders sitting together suggest that the vertical relationships between team leaders are significant.

Team leaders sitting facing away from their teams is harder to interpret. From shadowing Dan more broadly I saw that much of what a team leader does was advocate, speak, and contribute on behalf of the work their team is charged with or represent the work of their team to other team leaders and beyond them to project, group, division, and executive leaders. Facing those other teams and the rest of the organization literally and symbolically then makes sense. Facing away from their own team similarly seems to have meaning. We could read it as a signal to the team that space is their own to lead, manage, fill, and shape and from what the researcher could see while there, this is exactly what they were doing. As such facing away indicates team leaders don't or shouldn't be in micro-management, supervision or surveillance over their teams. Their location on

the periphery or boundary of team space, then, indicates a certain identity position for a team leader but a host of choices as well. Watching Dan move between being one of the team (wheeling his chair to join a conversation between members of his team), one of the team leaders (leaning back in his chair talking between them) and in terrain not connected with his team (leaning against a wall chatting to the overall project heads) shows Dan shaping a team leader modus operandi in relation to the overall spatial configuration he practices in.

Routines

At the core of this observation is a routine (the stand-up meeting). It is rare to focus attention on routines when researching leadership given leadership is more often linked to exceptional moments and contexts more than mundane and recurrent ones. If we take a practice approach to leadership seriously though, the routines that make up the day-to-day series of activities that constitute the work of the organization are precisely where we need to look for the presence (or absence) of leadership. After all 'organizational routines have been regarded as the primary means by which organizations accomplish much of what they do' (Feldman & Pentland, 2003, p. 94) and one could wonder how significant a contribution leadership is to what organizations do if it can't be found in such 'primary means'.

Process and practice theories have created a renewed interest in routines. Routines in the past have been predominantly too quickly associated with stability, repetition, inflexibility, and even inertia and considered of limited interest to scholars precisely because of these characteristics. However, increasingly scholars are seeing that routines are equally central to change processes and indeed are prime sites of variation, improvisation, and possibility (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). This more recent theorization on routine highlights its importance to constructs that are significant for leadership such as organizational or collective learning, conflict and power, interpersonal relationships, and meaning/ interpretation. From a practice perspective, routines focus us particularly towards the 'performance' of collectives and their choices or strategies that are always 'enmeshed in far-reaching, complex, tangled webs of interdependence' (Feldman & Pentland, 2003,

p. 104). If this is so then researching routines should shed light on distributed, relational, shared, and emergent configurations of leadership that practice approaches are most interested in.

In terms of this chapter we need to understand routines as integral to identity work. This should make intuitive sense given we defined identity work previously as the tension between representing self in stable and coherent ways in the face of the ongoing struggle in 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising' such representations or constructions (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165), which appears to parallel the precarious tension between stability and change in routines themselves. Consequently, there are two ways of analyzing routines with respect to identity: routines as either resource or discipline for identity (Brown & Lewis, 2011).

Routines are a resource for identity where individuals creatively craft a construction of self within the possibilities, discourses, and relationships that are nested in such routines. Such a crafting is never unfettered and without constraint but nonetheless there are myriads of configurations, shapes, openings, contradictions, and spaces to claim for any sustained identity work in even the most established of routines. Equally we note that routines can be understood in disciplinary terms where usually hidden or disguised in the routine are dynamics of power and control which seek to manufacture certain identities above others. Precisely because such power and control are hidden and/ or disguised then, while identities appear freely chosen, they are in fact a form of regulation co-opting and pre-selecting what identity representations are available. We are going to hold routines as both a resource and discipline for identity work and therefore in an ongoing tension.

The stand-up meeting routine demonstrates such a tension well. Clearly it is designed to pull people out of fairly autonomous and individual work trajectories and pull them together to pay attention to their existence as a team and the work that is located across and between them. Confining the speaking role to the possession of the koosch ball in theory gives anyone the capacity to claim and use a space of action (see the next section) however a very tight script operates

throughout this routine with only a few minutes available for each person. Like all routines this one has an ostensive dimension (the structure and 'rules' which govern it) and a performative dimension (the improvisational and adaptive choices which people make momentarily any time the routine is activated) (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). In the version of the routine we see Dan is low key, serious, and rational whilst Spike is flamboyant, passionate, and energetic. That combination in this particular performance of the routine could be read in leadership terms as Dan holding the kind of structure and format that allows one of his team (such as Spike in this case) to seize the limelight, command the attention of the team, and redirect collective thinking in a particular direction that Dan could not have known about prior to beginning the routine. This surely is distributed leadership in action?

However it is important to remember that Dan has the ultimate power over the koosch ball and the ability to mobilize and complete the routine when the koosch ball is in his hands. We note that such power over the koosch ball does not halt or stop the conversation between Spike and team members after the stand-up meeting has finished suggesting that the koosch ball is a catalyst or intermediary of leadership action that can extend beyond and from the routine.

Artefacts

Identity is usually talked about as something one has (or more normally struggles with) than the proposition that who we are/ want/ need to be is intimately connected with artefacts. Nevertheless, it should be difficult to picture yourself or anyone else without a relationship to artefacts, be they computers, PowerPoint, books, power tools, or sports equipment. A practice approach argues we have identity partly because of the artefacts we are associated with. In the stand-up meeting story the key artefact is a koosch ball and we will use this koosch ball to explore the relationship between identity and artefact. I should note however that the choice of the koosch ball as a key artefact is a fairly arbitrary one. The process and results chart marking the location of the stand-up meeting could be considered equally important as could the swiveling, wheeled chairs which allow the team members to form and reform in different configurations at will. All artefacts

no matter how unexceptional they are signify something about how work is produced between people.

However artefacts have traditionally been overlooked in organizational studies, let alone leadership, because they have been seen as passive adjuncts to far more significant phenomena such as environments, structures, strategies, cultures, and technologies. Things people held or used or worked with from this research perspective could be understood as mere props for personalities, stories, and activities far more deserving of research attention. However if we take up the challenge of studying processes like leadership 'as they really happen' then the simple truth is leadership happens as individuals and groups use, hold, and work with artefacts (see, e.g., Sergi, this volume). The first challenge to doing so is to rethink the very nature of artefact, object, and tool. The tendency when we think of these at all is to view them as fixed, static, instrumental, and something to be merely used. The last of our terms, 'tool' would come the closest to such a definition however in leaving even tools in such a space we neglect their role as intermediaries with the ability to broker realities such as power, status, control, and knowledge. Beyond tool, objects, and artefacts have an even more complex existence. If we could view them as historic, symbolic, textual, emotional, and social and not just 'object-like' then we could see their capacity to facilitate identity, meaning, relationship, and purpose.

Stopping seeing artefacts in terms of 'thingness' means beginning to see them as 'non-fixed', active, agentic, and as epistemic or capable of embodying what is not known (Nicolini, Mengis, & Swan, 2012, p. 613). Nicolini and his colleagues invite us to view artefacts as 'triggers of contradictions and negotiation' that set up a 'problem space' (Nicolini et al., 2012, p. 621). It's the difference between seeing a koosch ball as a mere toy that is good to hold or throw versus seeing it as a signifying object with the capacity to constitute a leadership space. In the stand-up meeting account the very sight of it in Dan's hands signals a moving away from individual work stations into 'team time' and a collective communication/ workflow ritual. At the moment as the team catches sight of the koosch ball, we can begin to sense 'the problem space' that the koosch ball creates. The

team has choice in how they respond to the koosch ball after all. Dan's actions seemed to recognize this as he chose to juggle it in his hands for 3 to 4 minutes, walk casually up the section of the wall with their posters full of post-it notes, immerse himself with the post-it notes,, and in effect wait patiently for his team to pull themselves out of their work of the day and respond. That he never gave a verbal instruction or any sign of impatience could be read as an understanding of his team's 'space of action' (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996) at this point.

However artefacts are also symbols of authority that can be used to exercise or challenge power (Lee & Amjadi, 2014, p. 724), signify status, confirm dependence, independence or interdependence, and influence or shape individual and collective trajectories (Swan, Bresnen, Newell, & Robertson, 2007, p. 1814). Given Dan is in possession of the koosch ball, he would have had some confidence that his team acquiesce in the ritual to follow. Certainly he seems comfortable in not giving any instructions or direction beyond the visibility of the koosch ball and his movement to the wall to make this ritual happen. Artefacts then 'can be used to mobilize action' (Swan et al., 2007, p. 1814). Dan presumably is a team leader even without the koosch ball in his hand but when he appears with the koosch ball and walks towards the spot by the wall he is mobilizing what someone in his team called 'team time' and a different kind of connection and communication between his team.

Miettinen and Virkkunen (2005, p. 443) remind us that 'norms of action and cognition are objectified into artefacts' hence the koosch ball opens up a certain kind of team time norm. We could see the stand-up meeting then as a breaking of the more technical/ technology-oriented conversation/ meeting norms of the rest of the day which the koosch ball enables. Both Dan and his team potentially become something different in the circle with the koosch ball. Indeed 'the (re)constitution of objects is a central resource in the development of professional and organizational identities' (Engeström & Blackler, 2005, p. 312) and the koosch ball constitutes a different suite of identities. The identities we need to focus on in this chapter are leadership ones so

we'll bring leadership into this chapter directly and then turn to the question of leadership and identity.

Leadership

If you have read even a little of this book, you will be aware that tracking Dan for evidence of leadership is a forlorn endeavor for a practice-oriented approach. Hopefully it has become evident that while shadowing Dan was a point of entry into the organization, we have looked for leadership of which he is a part more than leadership which he 'does'. The introduction of this book states that a practice perspective would look for leadership 'in immanent often non-deliberative collective action emerging from mutual, discursive, recurring patterns in the moment and over time among those engaged in the practice' (Raelin, this volume). If we read our interaction through the lens of this definition then we see the stand-up meeting as a routine or recurring pattern of activity that this team engages in. Leadership doesn't exist a priori to the interaction but emerges (or not) from this meeting. That makes leadership a collective property or what this definition refers to as 'mutual', where those who are part of the interaction play some role, whether they know it or not, in how leadership emerges. One way we can ask this of our interaction is to ask 'what leadership configurations emerge when interactants share a newly formed leadership space?' (Chreim, 2015, p. 7).

We have already discussed that this space opens up when the team leader (Dan) picks up the koosch ball and moves to the designated part of the wall where this group tracks their progress. This is a routine that happens every day at approximately the same time but even though it is a routine it is not a pre-determined one. Both Dan and team have a myriad of choices about who to be in this recurring routine. Remember our artefact, the koosch ball, constructs a 'problem space' (Nicolini et al., 2012, p. 621) that participants can mediate, negotiate, challenge, adapt, and subvert. Every time Dan picks up that artefact and throws it to someone else, he can never be entirely sure what will happen. Chreim (2015, p. 21) proposes 'the more ambiguous the space the greater the

room for actors to fill in' and that such 'practices help structure the emergent leadership configuration'.

On the day we see this stand-up meeting it is Spike who is proactive about gesturing for the koosch ball, who creates real energy and conversational dynamics in the circle, and who creates some meaning that others seem to relate to both in the meeting and beyond. Dan alternatively listens, stays quiet, checks his understanding with Spike and the team, and waits for Spike to pass the koosch ball on. Dan maintains authority in this interaction as he paces the meeting and ensures the koosch ball passes to others but Spike gives the team something to be involved in and contribute to. Any leadership that we are prepared to recognize here happens within a configuration of Dan, Spike, and the team in relation to each other, their context and its norms, and the artefacts (post-it notes and koosch ball) that constitute the uncertainties and possibilities in and from this interaction. Given this interaction on this day played out in this manner, something new may be possible that wasn't there previously. Looking back at Spike and teammates still talking vigorously as both Dan and researcher leave suggests the seeds of something possible. We might be prepared to call such emergent energy, connection, focus, and meaning evidence of leadership.

Leadership and Identity

This chapter so far has interrogated 'the absorbed coping' of one of the teams in this organization. However having a researcher track Dan for a substantial part of the day probably did constitute a 'temporary breakdown' of routine which did occasion some reflection and rationale from Dan as we walked to different parts of the building for different interactions. Thus to this observational material we can add some of Dan's reflection about leadership. Dan thought the stand-up meeting went well but didn't elaborate. In terms of his role, he likes being a team leader, admits that the technical leading aspect of his role is most comfortable and compelling and that he has to intentionally work at the relational 'leading people' side of what he does. However he made a distinction between *leader* and *leadership* that seems crucial here. In terms of *leadership* he

admitted, that while he can't exactly define leadership, he senses it is more than having an aggregation of leaders and feels the absence of something in this space. That absence is typified by him realizing he doesn't have something he needs like a contract or piece of information or some kind of larger leadership story that relies on some kind of cross-organizational collaboration and culture and that the largely technical environment directed by leaders doesn't enable that. This feeling of something missing, which he names as leadership, is something to him that seems to encompass something different from his team leader role. Hence in a few simple sentences Dan conjures up the complexity of leadership in this context and a sense of the struggle that contains his identity work. One possible researcher interpretation is that by 'absence of leadership' he means the connected, collaborative, cross-organizational kind of *leader-ship* configuration that is different to having *leaders*. This was corroborated by other team leaders who overheard Dan at this point and joined in the discussion. If we put the clues we have together on practice, leadership, and identity, we get a subtle and multi-dimensional picture of leadership identity in practice. Dan, Spike, and the team in this interaction create leadership (or not) in a particular spatial configuration replete with significant artefacts and existing routines. Leadership if it happens here at all happens on the work and that work has been historically, culturally, temporally, and relationally constituted. While we have focused on Dan and to some extent Spike, the identities of all participants in this interaction are being shaped by a context that privileges a casual belonging, a fast paced and unpredictable culture, and a deep love and fascination with technical work. In this interaction we see a very competent technical expert (Dan) in a work routine that only a team leader with an artefact can drive but that any participant (think Spike) can co-create with him and others if they choose to. For a few moments 'a problem space' opens up rendering Dan silent and Spike drawing the attention of others. Once such 'a problem space' has been negotiated, new action and possibility are theoretically possible.

Identity work in this organization revolves around the struggle between the ever present technical drama of the work and the absent signs of something else that Dan for one is prepared to

call leadership. We would imagine that this struggle manifests itself differently for any individual but for Dan it is evoked in moments when he swivels round to engage in the technical talk he loves with his team and the times he stays with his back to the team and talks to the other team leaders around him perhaps looking or trying to create this missing communication, connection, and direction he calls leadership. There are hints of struggle when he lets the koosch ball call the team into the stand-up meeting without using his voice, authority, and position overtly. Again there are clues of struggle when he moves post-it notes around the poster and begins the meeting as if he is picking up the conversation from when they last were here and avoids a formal opening of the meeting. Dan's identity work is a constant shifting and transition between the technical and leadership dimensions of his role amidst the awareness and worry that leadership, even though not defined, is absent. Dan is a team leader and a good one in the eyes of his organization given his selection as our shadow subject but he shows us that being team leader doesn't add up to the presence of leadership.

While this is a less personalized and internal identity study perhaps than many in identity-oriented research nonetheless we offer it as a powerful and practice embedded look at how identity shapes leadership in the intersection of individuals, their context, and their relationships.

Implications for Leadership and its Development

The purpose of this book as a whole is to show what kind of difference a practice approach can make to the study of leadership and more particularly in terms of this chapter how a practice approach to identity opens up still further insights and innovations into leadership and its development.

If, as a practice approach such as this one demonstrates, leadership is spatially configured, relationally distributed, artefact-mediated and embedded in multi processual routines (intertwined leadership, management and expert processes), then it's the co-existence, rather than the

separating out, of leadership with other social processes that practitioners most need insight into and assistance with. Using leadership, as we often do, as a loose umbrella term that covers authority, expertise, influence, power, accountability and even management risks more than theoretical imprecision. It also impedes the capacity of teams and collectives to sustain the sparks and seeds of action and innovation that begin in routines such as this one and increasingly carry the intra-preneurial future of an organization. For example we would argue that this chapter shows Dan using his authority in understated ways that succeed in inviting a leadership voice from within his team (such as Spike) to coalesce the expertise of the team in ways that are not possible when they are not talking together in this way. We could also speculate that whether such leadership energy can be sustained beyond the duration of this routine is going to rely on the team taking joint accountability for the issue Spike raised, Dan finding ways to keep distributing power through to Spike and his allies to pursue a resolution, and combinations of people committed to influencing the stakeholders and processes that 'create' bugs in complex systems. Dan is right to understand that being 'team leader' does not in any way ensure that leadership even exists and let alone is effective. Every time someone is appointed division, group, or team leader, dynamics of authority, power, influence, expertise, accountability, and management need to be re-negotiated and constituted if leadership is to accompany such appointments.

This might feel well near impossible if leadership was the result of deliberate, intentional, strategically planned activity but at the very least, a practice perspective points to far more resources that can be mobilized to create possibilities for leadership than are commonly recognized and mobilized. This chapter drew attention to spatial configurations, routines and artefacts as pivotal sources and disciplines for leadership. All three enact leadership in largely symbolic, relational and emergent ways that, while often hard for practitioners (and researchers) to put cognitively into words, nevertheless 'speak' intuitively and innately to the way the work has been done, is done, and could be done in the future. Taking these resources/ disciplines seriously might mean re-configuring spaces more frequently to enable different team, group, and organization

dynamics, experimenting with all sorts of technologies (not just information technologies but material tools and objects) and designing/ adapting new rituals/ routines that create different and new interactions. What could be most game changing of all are those spatial configurations, routines and artefacts that constitute the leadership of others around and beyond the division, group, or team 'leader'.

This chapter proposes that identity becomes center-stage when the focus moves to how leadership emerges from the practice of people connected to each other through their work. It is important to discuss why that is. Traditionally leadership has been associated with an individual's skills (Conger, 1992) or their position and standing and what individuals do (often talked about as competencies (Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008) on the assumption that leaders bring leadership (or not) to a role or position or challenge. In other words leader and leadership were deemed as existing a priori to whatever context it would be actioned in. Such a viewpoint makes it sensible to pay attention to how individuals turn into leaders and subsequently what they can do to exercise leadership. However a practice approach views any context or interaction as potentially ripe for immanent leadership action depending on how those involved understand themselves in relation to each other, their context, their shared work, and their purpose. That makes leadership associated with what people perceive they need to be (as opposed to what they need to do) and the series of tensions, judgments, and ambiguities that come into play as we negotiate being one thing or another. How we decide to be, though, is a more nuanced and complex enterprise through practice theory than many other identity approaches as individuals create and adapt leadership identity through how they use and move through organizational spaces; what artefacts and objects they collect, surround themselves with, and involve in conversation and action; what routines they build, take part (or not), and disrupt; and how they respond and react to the choices others are making. Leadership identity for those in this chapter is a complex struggle between the institutional norms and discourses this organization acquiesces to, historical and current decisions that re-create the

structure of this organization every day, and the agency that individuals seize and find in the gaps and cracks of what often appears as fixed and permanent.

This would appear to have significant implications for leadership development in particular. Leadership development removed from the spaces, routines, and artefacts which situate the leadership required makes little sense. Such spaces, routines, and artefacts in fact become a starting point for making the norms, resources, and disciplines that constrain and enable certain kinds of leadership over others visible and able to be talked about. At that point identity work and dynamics become central terrain for growing the repertoire of participants to be different in their leadership. Eventually experimenting with other spaces, routines, and artefacts holds the promise of disrupting historic and existing practices that don't achieve the kind of work needing to be done in the future and crafting new and novel practices that make possible what isn't in existence yet. This approach to development requires the introduction and support of 'identity-scapes' (Shortt, 2012) that grow and sustain the kind of leadership attuned to complex, uncertain and dynamic contexts.

Finally this chapter proposes that we need to change how we research identity and leadership identity in particular. If we were to take this chapter seriously, then, we would be asking our research subjects (who wouldn't just be designated 'leaders' but those connected to work where leadership might or might not happen) to construct journals of a typical day or week in order to identify the routines that anchor their week. We would attend those routines, not just once but multiple times, to observe the different performances of a routine and where different leadership possibilities are created. Of particular interest would be how a leadership trajectory is sustained beyond or across routines, structures, and positions, who plays a part in that, and what that part or contribution is. We wouldn't interview in the sense of doing 'an' interview but would be in ongoing conversation with those involved and connected in the 'work'. Interviewees would become sense-making partners to their 'involved thematic deliberations', as who they are and what they do in their leadership moves from tacit to aware in the multiple but momentary 'breakdowns' that occur daily between expectations and realities. Such 'talk' is placed alongside the insight we get from embodied

movement, use of material artefacts, negotiation of structures and spaces, and sensemaking of others in order to craft a more 'structural' understanding of how identity is forged moment by moment between the agentic and structural realities of doing leadership in a particular context.

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