

Thesis abstract

Embodiment, affect, and relational practice in the emergence of leadership

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Adopting a feminist posthumanist practice perspective, this thesis explores how an affective form of leadership emerges from a situated practice, focusing on the everyday embodied knowledge work through which it is affected. It builds from two bodies of scholarship, the first frames leadership as an irreducibly processual and relational practice of producing direction for organising processes through collaborative agency, rather than the property of an individual “leader.” The second mobilises feminist Deleuzian readings of Spinozan embodied ethics to consider the power effects of its practice: what such emergent leadership does and how it feels to those affected by and affecting it. The research explores these concerns through an empirical case study of a situated practice anchored within a large work-integrated learning program at an Australian university from which, I argue, leadership emerges in a good and beautiful way. The leadership that emerges from this practice not only gets good work done but does so in ways that promote the mutually empowering flourishing-in-relation of all those entangled in its relational web. With the goal of contributing to the scholarship and more emancipatory practice of leadership in organisations, this thesis

explores the nitty-gritty details of the everyday intra-actions or embodied “habits of relating” through which this affective form of leadership is enacted, and the ethics and politics it affects. The three focus areas of the study are: the significance of embodiment and embodied knowledge in emergent leadership; the affective interplay between bodies and ideas entangled in this practice and the power relations, culture, and atmospheres they affect; and the embodied ethics or affective logic of this practice — the standards of excellence to which its practitioners hold themselves accountable, and the politics of relationality their practice affects. In concluding, the thesis reflects on the implications of the research for scholarship and practice, advancing collaborative reflective practice as a methodology of learning about leading.

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