

**Embodied leadership: A Perspective on Reciprocal Body Movement**

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**Abstract**

This chapter explores the concept of embodied leadership in the context of leadership development in educational and other organisational settings. Instead of considering leadership as merely an activity that a leader does, we define it as a socially embedded phenomenon, happening through bodies in the shared ‘flesh’ of the organisation.

Embodiment, derived from phenomenology, emphasizes body-mind entanglement and the human body’s embeddedness in its cultural, historical, and social context. In this chapter, we explore what it means, from a body movement perspective, if we consider leadership as an embodied, relational phenomenon. To concretize these ideas, we use examples from dance movement therapy-based leadership facilitation. The purpose is to show, how taking an embodied, body movement-based perspective can lead to a more holistic understanding of leadership.

**Keywords:** embodiment; relational leadership development; experiential leadership, body movement, phenomenology of the body

## **Introduction**

We do not only see, hear and think other people, we also feel them through our bodies and all five senses. We also experience and create the leader-follower relationship through our bodies, not only through thinking and speaking (Hujala et al., 2016, p. 18).

Education can be defined as the process of teaching or learning, especially in a school or college, or the knowledge gained from this (Cambridge Dictionary). From the perspective of this chapter, education includes experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) in the context of arts-based learning (Sutherland & Jelinek, 2015) and the facilitation of embodied learning (Stolz, 2015). Educational leaders in schools are a focus of attention and under pressure to demonstrate their contribution to school improvement resulting in the literature addressing leadership in the context of school improvement (Heffernan, 2018). There is a range of models for educational leadership, for example, teacher, curriculum, authentic, visionary, servant, strategic, managerial, transformational, instructional/pedagogical and distributed (see reviews by Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Hallinger, 2003; Neumerski, 2013; Tian et al., 2016; Gumus et al., 2018).

Most definitions of leadership include it as an influencing process whereby an individual exerts their intentional influence over others to structure activities and relationships in a group or organisation (Yukl, 2002). In recent leadership research, there has been growing interest in how this influence happens between the bodies in organisations. Several leadership scholars have started to focus on the ontological and epistemological assumptions on embodied, human interaction underpinning leadership theories (Ladkin, 2013; Hujala et al. 2016). Research on embodiment in organisations often detaches itself from the dualistic,

causality chasing ontologies. Instead, leadership is considered as a collaborative, reciprocal flow (Küpers, 2013) happening among all stakeholders' bodies in the organisation. Therefore, it is not restricted to the actions of the leader. This understanding of leadership as a social, embodied phenomenon, could be useful in educational organisations where leadership may be undertaken by teams as well as individuals (Bush & Glover, 2003) and reflected for example in models like distributed collaborative and shared leadership (see for example, Flinn, this volume). These emerged in the 1980s in response to dissatisfaction with instructional models focussing on power and authority which teachers obediently follow (Nedelcu, 2013). Instead, the emphasis is on collaboration, team/group leadership (Harris & De Flaminis, 2016) and organisational learning (Hallinger, 2003).

Distributed leadership proposes that leadership is not solely the responsibility of one formal leader at the top of the organisation (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Improving Development/OECD, 2008; Harris & De Flaminis, 2016). There is an emphasis on interactions rather than actions; leadership is distributed amongst all members of the educational organisation and tasks are accomplished through the interaction of multiple leaders (Spillane, 2006). Different individuals can lead groups at different times depending on the task and context (Gronn, 2002). However, the benefits and effects, shared purpose and ownership of leadership depend on intentions and how leadership is distributed (Harris, 2013). It has also been posited that school systems (and individuals) need “to operate from deeper sources of intention and creativity” to lead change to meet future local and global demands (Schatz 2013, p.100).

Leadership development literature stresses the importance of leadership skills and attributes needed to be an effective leader, such as communication skills, motivation and inspiration, as well as better decision-making skills and accountability. Outside of education companies of all sorts realize that to survive in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and

ambiguous environment, they need leadership development programmes to expand the capacity of individuals to perform in leadership roles. Leadership development is oriented towards building capacity in anticipation of unforeseen challenges. Employing an embodied approach towards leadership development, when sensitively facilitated according to the culture and context of the organisation, including schools, can offer increased relational awareness, especially when directed towards distributed leadership development.

To be part of the solution to the world's problems, according to Hollingworth (2020), leaders in general in the 2020s (not only in schools) will need to improve awareness in three domains of consciousness i.e. presence to a) our self, our physical bodies, b) our social bodies, the social fields in which we operate and live, and c) the interconnected, global system of the entire body of the planet (eco-consciousness/the ecological self) (Payne, 2022).

In this chapter, we explore embodied leadership through the practice of dance movement therapy-based, embodied leadership facilitation. We focus on notions of the ways leadership is distributed, shared, and happening through the lived experiences of the body.

### **Embodiment: Intra-acting human beings in organisations**

Embodiment has been of interest amongst scholars of organisations, especially during the last three decades. This stream of research plays against the dualistic thinking of body and mind (or rational thought) as separate seeing how different bodily aspects affect organisational life (Küpers, 2015). The sensing, emotional body is considered much more than an instrumental or mere material device for rational thought. It is radiating meaning through its movements in a reciprocal flow (Ropo & Parviainen, 2001; Küpers, 2013) of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012).

Research on the body in organisations has been categorized in several ways (see Gherardi et al. 2013; Gärtner, 2013). The focus has been on, for example, *what* the bodies do through senses (it works, experiences and knows through them) (Gherardi et al. 2013) or *how* the

body and mind are entangled with each other and connected to their environment. In organisation and leadership studies, these background theories can be divided according to their ontological basis. Hujala et al. (2016) present four examples of these theories: social constructivism, practice-based studies, critical realism and phenomenology. Each of these perspectives presents a different understanding of what it is to be a human in organisations. These perspectives matter to the ways in which the concept of embodiment is understood and how it can be researched.

Our perspective on embodiment is based on Merleau-Ponty's (1964/1968) phenomenology of the body. In organizational research, this means that embodiment is about concentrating on the experiences of the sensing and moving body (Gherardi et al. 2013; Gärtner, 2013). More than that, we argue that embodiment can be also extended from an individual experience perspective into a relational ontology through Merleau-Ponty's (1964/1968) concept of *the flesh of the world* (see also Küpers, 2015).

Within this frame, embodiment is defined as the body-mind relational entanglement, where the human body's embeddedness into its cultural, historical, and social contexts is taken seriously (Küpers, 2015). This perspective is based on the ontology that Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 428) formulated as follows:

Universality and the world are at the core of individuality and of the subject. We will never understand this if we turn the world into an object, but we will understand it immediately if the world is the field of our experience, and if we are nothing but a perspective upon the world...

In other words, this field of experience can be thought as a systemic fabric in which we are embedded (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and which Merleau-Ponty (1968) conceptualized as *the flesh of the world*. On this view leadership is defined as a web of relationships between people and other tangible and intangible elements in organisations (Jääskeläinen & Helin,

2021). *The flesh* of organisations will therefore comprise other people, material conditions, and abstract thoughts/ ideas we carry and share through our bodies (Jääskeläinen & Helin, 2021).

Because our bodies are embedded perspectives upon *the flesh* of the organisation the embodiment of leadership as a phenomenon can be researched through mundane, bodily experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Hence, we do not only have a body, but we are our bodies which, in turn, are embedded in *the flesh of the world* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; 1968; Gärtner, 2013; Hujala et al., 2016). In other words, doing research from an embedded, embodied, phenomenological framework means emphasising the description of the body's experiences as they emerge in an individual (van Manen, 2014) whilst acknowledging that the description of that experience is never the same as the experience itself (Merleau-Ponty, 2012;1968, Heidegger, 2002; Husserl, 1995). In short, the experiential body is a perspective through which we can reflect on relational phenomena, such as leadership in organisations.

Biehl and Volkmann (2019, p. 2) go further in this endeavor by emphasizing the role of the moving body in their definition of *the flesh* as “kinaesthetic exchange processes from moving body to moving body whereby people respond to others through their perceptual interpenetration”. Based on this understanding of people's actions in organisations as a relational, ever-moving phenomenon, means that shifts in our concrete ways of moving change the dynamics in our relationships within our work communities (Biehl & Volkmann, 2019).

Even though bodies in organisations are fundamentally connected to each other through the perceptions of their own and others' movement, it does not mean that we all melt into sameness (Verhage, 2008). Instead, as Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 428) wrote; we are all “perspectives upon the world”. The word *perspective* indicates that even though we are inside the world, we are still located somewhere, looking at other perspectives in *the flesh* from our

body's point of view. At the same time, the other perspectives of the world, for example, our co-workers, are looking at us from the point of view of their uniquely constructed, situated bodies. Hence, there is a constant reciprocal exchange of perception as we are at the same time perceived when we perceive (Merleau-Ponty, 2012).

Illustrated by the work of Husserl (1952) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) the body-mind entanglement refers to bodily movement and sensation as the vessel for emotional expression. Merleau-Ponty claimed that we gesture and connect through an expressive, ambiguous space of intercorporeality – a space that exists amongst and between our bodies. Taking our existence as happening in *the flesh of the world*, as if we are strings of the fabric with other aspects of the flesh, it could be useful to replace the terms *between* with Barad's (2003) concept of *intra-action*, which illustrates how our movement actions, feelings, and thinking happen *in* the nexus of the world.

### **Embodied leadership facilitation**

As a result of advances in these areas of research, there is a case to be made for the application of experiential, embodied, expressive movement-based interventions in the facilitation of leadership development in education and other organisations by experiencing new ways of being-in-the-world (Husserl, 1980). This is relevant, especially to shared (Pearce & Manz, 2005), distributed or collaborative leadership (Woods & Roberts, 2018) whereby interaction is crucial to its success.

Employing expressive movement, and other approaches from the arts, as methods in leadership development in educational and organisational settings, is increasing since they enable the surfacing of embodied, tacit knowledge, facilitating meaning-making, developing depth of self-understanding, and enabling aesthetic reflexivity. Aesthetic reflexivity refers to working with “the aesthetics of an experience (scenic properties, feelings and sensory–

emotional characteristics) as a means to managing the increasing complexities of life and work” (Sutherland, 2012, p.27-28; see Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013; Taylor, 2008; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009).

Expressive movement practice within leadership development is one of the arts-based approaches which employ experiential learning and deep reflection of lived experiences rather than focusing on objective analysis of data and articles. These approaches help leaders learn through aesthetic experiences which develop self-knowledge. Embodied expressive movement practices facilitate emotional experiences of self and leadership through the physicality of “bodily movement that enhances awareness of people’s embodied selves in the moment” (Sutherland, 2012, p.34). Embodied learning is intimate, involving insights and practical skills whereby the body is experienced as a source of effective knowing and learning (Payne, 2014, 2017b; Payne & Brooks, 2017). In embodied leadership facilitation the body serves as the primary medium for explicit processing cognitively without requiring verbal language.

From the outset, the *mind* is part of the workings of the body and thus concepts deriving from psychology such as memory, perception, calculation, and language are not understood as mental and abstract and separate from our bodies. Rather they stem from bodily experiences and sensorimotor capacities (Gibbs, 2005; Johnson, 2007; Shapiro, 2011). An embodied approach to educational and organisational leadership development can therefore support leaders to fully inhabit themselves, be accessible, and work with, rather than control, others.

Acting from this centred, grounded place increases the ability of leaders to be self-aware, listen, see the bigger picture, be present to self and others, creative, and lead during complexity, chaos and ambiguity, whilst processing information and responding effectively to help others get the best out of themselves. Aesthetic awareness, one of the defining



qualities of being human enabling understanding and judgement of the various qualities found in art, is key to embodied learning. It requires openness to affective elements, the entanglement of emotion, cognitive and bodily experiences and how aesthetic qualities of the self, others and the environment can enrich and cultivate ethical responsiveness (Payne, 2022). Outcomes include enhanced relational sensitivity and abilities to cope with unfamiliarity and complexity, currently needed more than ever.

Without knowledge of the elements associated with embodied leadership, leaders are limited in their self-awareness and arguably their awareness of others. On the other hand, leaders who practice embodied leadership skills may more effectively connect with their followers in a synergistic relationship, though leaders' exact mannerisms may differ from culture to culture. More specifically, each of our bodily perspectives is unique in the sense that they "are distinguished by their unique ways of moving, gesturing and acting in respect to what is given in their intentional environment" (Heinämaa, 2018, p. 539). These different perspectives on leadership, whether from the role of the leader or other members of the organization, can be explored through these unique combinations of body movement qualities. The facilitation method, where the exploration of body movement is used for this purpose, has roots in dance movement (psycho)therapy (DMP/T) (Payne, 1992; 2006a; 2017a), and it has recently been applied to organisational facilitation in a work guidance context (Jääskeläinen et al., 2019; Jääskeläinen & Helin, 2021) as well as leadership development in schools (Woods et al, 2021).

Using dance as a research method in an organisational research context is the closest arts-based method to the embodied facilitation approach presented here. Dance has been used as a medium and as a metaphor in describing and researching organisations (e. g. Biehl, 2017, Mandalaki, 2019; Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2020) and as a 'tool' to support the development of certain leadership skills or capacities (Biehl, 2017; Hujala et al., 2014; Yams, 2018; Zeitner,

Rowe, & Jackson, 2016). For example, Hujala et al., (2016) used dance performances as a reflective inquiry for leaders and Zeitner et al. (2016) explored how dance can inform leadership education in multiple ways.

In the context of embodied leadership facilitation, dance could be better conceptualized as a kinaesthetic experience rather than as an art form (Biehl, 2017). Because dance as such can evoke associations such as belonging only to certain kinds of able bodies that have specific skills or capacities (Payne, 2004). In DMT, however, the focus is on expressive movement as a day-to-day activity.

Compared to dance interventions, offered, for example, by a dance pedagogue, DMT-based facilitation not only reflects body movement through a discussion but seeks new ways to relate to the environment (Jääskeläinen et al., 2019). Hence, DMT training increases the capacity to understand and facilitate the connections between pre-reflective feelings and bodily movement (Payne, 2004) and, subsequently, in leadership facilitation, how to use this knowledge in helping leaders to develop in their work (Jääskeläinen et. al., 2019). Dance movement therapists offer interventions (for example, expressive movement exercises, verbal questions or movement feedback) based on their finely honed skills and in-depth knowledge of embodiment: such as the understanding of when something changes in movement, something also changes in thinking (and vice versa) (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968; 1945/2012).

Furthermore, Shafir (2015) illustrates how, through proprioception (awareness of the position and movement of the body) and interoception (the sense of the internal state of the body, whether conscious or unconscious), the state of our body effects our affective state. Using a range of motor behaviours emotions are regulated by changing the state of the body. Postures, facial expressions and movement and breathing patterns are associated with specific emotions. Shafir et al. (2013) also demonstrated that three minutes of executing happy, sad, fearful or neutral movements enhanced the corresponding affective state. Imagining doing

sad or fearful movements or watching others expressing them through movement enhanced the corresponding emotion.

Exploring leadership through movement as a way of gathering information about the self and others, gives leaders possibilities to learn about their unique leadership perspective, for example, through learning how their emotions/thinking and movements are connected (Sheets-Johnstone, 2012). The movement experiences can be (and often are) reflected through discussions but simply living through the movement in practice gives space to the embodied experience, learning for example, to let go of any unnecessary tensions in the body (Karssiens et al., 2014) in the pre-reflective, pre-language level of experiencing (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012; Ylönen, 2006).

Facilitators, trained in DMT, use movement analysis tools to observe movement from *outside* to select interventions, but also their own body as a resonating informant (Zappa, 2020). With this, the facilitator seeks consciously, through their body-awareness attunement with the leader's body to empathise consciously with their bodily states (Samaritter & Payne, 2013). In phenomenology, this attunement is often considered to happen only at the pre-reflective level (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, 1945/2012; Verhage, 2008), but Geller and Porges (2014) argue it is possible to enhance this attunement purposefully, through embodied actions, to create a safer, trusting space between people for exploration to occur. From this basis, suitable experiential practices are selected, which makes this kind of facilitation perhaps more goal-oriented than the arts-based interventions brought into organisations by artists or pedagogues (Jääskeläinen et al., 2019).

Hence, the phenomenological understanding of embodiment, more specifically, the reciprocity of relating, expressing and moving bodies is acknowledged and used purposefully in DMT-informed embodied movement facilitation processes for leadership development. Therefore, it is essential that the facilitator has the training to reflect on, and understand, their

own embodied reactions through the self-awareness of their unique ways of moving, reacting and thinking.

Even if it is tempting to detach some individual exercises to use in any kind of leadership facilitation, this heightened skill in self/body awareness should be acknowledged. Hence, to use expressive experiential movement methods effectively for leadership requires, in our opinion, experiential familiarization and postgraduate education. Moreover, the education on therapeutic matters ensures the capacity to take care of the issues that might arise from the embodied exercises. For example, emotional reactions and responses deriving from one's personal history (see for example, Rothchild, 2000). The skills, knowledge and understanding gained in DMT training ensure that the embodied facilitation does not fall into subject-object separation, but the visible, sensory body of the facilitator is considered as a resonating, reflective medium as much as is the leader's body in the 'flesh' of the facilitation.

### **Leaders' resonating bodies: Experiences of embodied facilitation**

In this section, examples of the leaders' experiences of embodied facilitation are provided: from the ENABLES project in the UK<sup>1</sup> in which the first author (Helen), facilitated embodied methods and from the second author's (Pauliina) research project in Finland<sup>2</sup>. Helen provided some simple embodied movement practices to university colleagues to enable them to facilitate educational leaders' understanding of leading change in schools within a European-wide research study (Woods et al., 2021). Following their making of a collage to represent their experience of leading change with others in school, volunteer participants engaged in a short, facilitated body awareness practice. They were then invited to consider

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<sup>1</sup> ENABLES was a European Union funded project with five countries contributing to develop methods from the arts and embodied practices for strengthening distributed leadership capacity in schools.

<sup>2</sup> The second author's PhD project concerning embodiment in organizations in which she guided group formed, embodied group facilitations for employees and individual leadership facilitations in health care and social services organizations in Finland.

one aspect of their collage that stood out for them. The stimulus instruction was the same as that for the collage creation i.e. “express how you experience leading change with others”. But this time participants were invited to respond using gestures (which could be more than just hands). Their gestures were video recorded as part of the recording of the online workshop. They were then offered five minutes to write reflections on their gesture/s or the option of drawing a reflection with reference to their embodied experience of leading change in school.

For trained DMT practitioners wishing to include a development of this practice an alternative derived from the ground form of the discipline of authentic movement – a method employed in DMT (Whitehouse, 1999; Adler, 2002; Payne, 2006b) is offered as follows:

In the group individually using hand gestures solely, participants in the role of ‘mover’ *moves* the aspect of the collage which stands out most for them. If online, they could use a mobile device to film the gesture. After writing reflections on the gesture invite participants to share their writing in the group. Additionally, as part of the sharing participants might be invited to share their film (if online) or, if face to face, their gestures with group members who act as ‘witnesses’ to the movement (of the mover). The ‘witnesses’ could then comment, without judgement, and using self-referencing language on their experience in the presence of the **mover’s** gesture/s. Their experience might include any feelings triggered, thoughts/stories, images, physical sensations in their body or a movement response beyond words. Comments received by the mover from the witness could be incorporated into their new understanding and knowledge about how they lead change, as they wish.

Embodied verbal reflections<sup>3</sup> on the embodied movement leadership development task include: “watching everyday gestures shared made me feel quite moved”; and from a ‘mover’ “I do that gesture all the time when teaching etc. reflecting I think I see blips in the road, I

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<sup>3</sup> All verbal reflections have been taken verbatim from the video recording

don't have to have a plan for everything. I never thought about that in such detail, so very useful"; and another volunteer 'mover' commented "I had no idea what was going to come out but really loved what did come out, going to be useful to reflect on my leadership experiences. I have not reflected on my leadership style so to do this is interesting." And from a witness to the sharing of gestures: "I resonate with the other gestures". More than one "loved it!". Finally, from a mover "I felt vulnerable doing the gesture, trying to embody a concept on leading in gesture took some time but it came from somewhere, I saw it go into my head but then managed to get something but hated it, weird for me".

All the comments show the gesturing contributed to reflections on leadership, some loved it, another hated it, and three did not participate on screen, but those who did seemed to receive some insight into their leadership. The comments demonstrate that employing embodied practices can be challenging for some so a great deal of care and safety is required to facilitate the practice when there is no specialist available to conduct such sensitive work. People tend to feel vulnerable expressing themselves through their bodies. However, there is an advantage in inviting participants to explore through a non-verbal, embodied, out-of-the-box method. It engages people differently, challenging them in an unusual way whereby new knowledge from the body can be mined.

The second author (Pauliina) wanted to seek an embodied and arts-based method to write from the qualitative research material she had gathered. She wanted to take the phenomenological perspective on how it is possible to know and write about others' experiences, which means that the writing is always positional, happening from the unique situation of the writer, even when presenting others' experiences through the writing bodies (Jääskeläinen & Helin, 2021; Thanem & Knights, 2019). Knowing is therefore always partial, shedding light on some aspects of the phenomenon that itself escapes the words which try to capture it (Richardson, 1994; van Manen, 2014).

To follow the ideology in DMT where a client/participant's wordings of their embodied experiences are valued (Payne, 2004), Pauliina decided to form poems out of the sentences and expressions from the transcribed interviews of three leaders who participated in her embodied facilitation. Poetic forms of writing about others' experiences are used in multiple ways in research writing (Helin et al., 2020; Richardson, 1994). For example, Chadwick (2017, p. 62) used poetic forms "to reproduce transcripts as sensory texts re-evoking the visceral dynamics of story-telling". With this, the writer invites the reader closer to the experience, through the resonance the poem evokes in the reader's body as they posit themselves in the writer's/speaker's position. The leaders' stories were told from their unique perspectives on the 'flesh', spoken from the first person's position. Pauliina wanted to maintain this first person's position in the research writing to bring the text into a dialogue with the reader (Sword, 2009; Chadwick, 2017).

Pauliina translated the Finnish transcriptions into English and arranged the sentences in the form of a poem. While arranging the sentences, she kept reading and re-reading the original transcriptions, also with a translator, to ensure all aspects the leaders mentioned, remained present in the poems, without excess words or repetition. Compared to the original excerpts, these poems summarized and shortened the stories of the experiences (Chadwick, 2017) while making the text more spacious, airy and breathy. Forming the leaders' words into poems can be a better way to express interviewees' speech than cutting quotes into prose form because the speech itself is closer to poetry than prose (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). The second author selected one of the three poems she made (see below), which highlighted how the leader understood embodiment in the leadership context.

First, the alarm in my brain:

“wait a moment”

some small gesture, when a person comes in,  
and I sense there will be something,  
a fast movement  
and then it comes

I am by myself in those situations

although I receive criticism, it still starts from me  
how can I be ready to receive it, and if I am not ready  
what kind of message can I give with my body?

Although my mind can be a mess because all the criticism coming my way is not necessary

still, as a leader, I  
need to create a generous space  
to the other

so that she can say what she needs to say.

It is very much about how I look like as a body

show with my body  
and how I am.

If I can be calm in my body and confident,

whatever there is, then the situation goes forward  
and opens up  
and we are able to go forward.

But if I start there to show with my body how uncomfortable I feel,

moving restlessly, jumping around....  
then it will resonate with the other person

It's about power, too

in the leadership  
the leader has some power more than the one who is led.

I take the armchair

then our chairs are of the same kind  
It isn't equality but somehow  
we are at the same level  
I give a message that now I am here  
and I stop and I listen.

I try to remember

what happened and who did what  
at the same time  
I try to give a bodily message  
that we will get through this together and we will find some solution

Then I am leading

not confronting the employee.  
And that is the resource of leadership  
to forget your position and listen to the other  
their important and wise thoughts.  
Much wiser than mine.



This leader highlighted what regulating her bodily reactions meant for her in the leadership encounter. Body awareness is the key to this kind of recognition and regulation of emotions (Füstös et al., 2012). We define body awareness as being aware of aspects of the self, body, behaviour, traits, beliefs, feelings, thoughts, images, sensations, and movement, for example. In this process, this awareness as they emerge in the body becomes the focus of intended attention. Physically this means being aware of bodily sensations and space incorporating how one navigates the external environment, and being dynamically aware i.e. how one applies different energies to applied tasks (gentle/forceful, direct/indirect, quick/slow etc.).

If body awareness always happens in the *flesh of the world*, doing something about the notions of our emotions is already intra-acting (Barad, 2003) with someone or something. Therefore, regulating one's emotions by recognizing and reflecting on them is already co-regulating (Geller & Porges, 2014) as we adjust our behaviour, in other words, seek attunement with other bodies (Verhage, 2008). As previously mentioned, even if this attunement is something that happens pre-reflectively, without thinking about it (Verhage, 2008), returning to our bodily information through developing our body awareness is a skill that can be learned. This is a perspective which is distinctive from the methods used in the production of art processes as a reflective medium. The body itself is the focus and the medium for understanding and possibly changing the ways a leader relates to their work.

A leader gave an example of this when she explained how she wanted to give, through her body, a message that she is present, calm, equal and listening to her employee even though a lot was going on 'inside' her. Hence, she did concrete actions with her body to soothe the situation so that she could create the best possible situation to solve the problems together with the employee. This kind of co-regulation is based on our pre-reflective attunement with other bodies (Verhage, 2008), where the non-living artefacts also affect our sense of self

(Merleau-Ponty, 2012). The leader wanted to give a message of being on the ‘same level’ and *with* the employee by sitting at the same level, in the same kind of chair.

Even though we seek attunement with other bodies at a pre-reflective level, we still *can* also direct our attention to our body’s information to regulate the attunement. In other words, we can direct our movements (‘inner’ movements of body awareness and visible body movements) to create more safety in our encounters (see Geller & Porges, 2014).

According to Karssiens et al. (2014), leaders, as well as people in other positions, can get stuck in specific, automatized ways of acting, which can prevent them from wondering if the prevailing patterns are the best way in the current situation. Aiming one’s attention towards bodily senses and movements can help leaders to be more mindful and grounded in the ‘now’ moment and with that, to “open up to situations and people with freshness again and cope with the present situation constructively” (Karssiens et al., 2014, p. 237).

Both Helen’s and Pauliina’s experiences in offering the embodied methods in leadership and organisational contexts, in general, brought up the question of vulnerability in bringing attention to the body. Some participants even resisted the whole idea, while others embraced it fully (see also Jääskeläinen & Helin, 2021). For future research on embodied leadership, it would be interesting to address the question of why these kinds of methods evoke such different reactions. Why the body and its natural movement as a medium for reflecting our being in the world are still so easily bypassed and discarded even though there is ever-increasing knowledge on how human beings are embodied creatures, embedded into their changing circumstances.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter showcases how embodiment viewed through phenomenology’s ontological and epistemological worldview can offer a holistic perspective on leadership in organisations including educational settings. The embodied leadership under discussion is viewed as a

socially embedded phenomenon, which does not emphasize the subject/object separation. Instead, leadership as a phenomenon can be illustrated as a reciprocal flow (Küpers, 2013) of intra-actions (Barad, 2003) in the ‘flesh’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) of the organisations. These new ways of conceptualizing leadership in education are needed to express more accurately how leadership happens through the intra-connected bodies and their movements.

Our emphasis in this chapter has been to create more understanding of embodied leadership by describing the basics of embodied leadership facilitation and illustrating leaders’ experiences when they attended to their expressive bodily movement. For example, the phenomenological understanding of body-mind entanglement came up in the leaders’ meaning-making processes and reflections on how the pre-reflective information became reflective through cultivating body awareness. Examples illustrated how dance movement therapy’s methods have some unique ways to show concretely how leadership is always embodied.

The embodied leadership facilitation model presented uses knowledge of perceptual reciprocity (Merleau-Ponty, 2012) which transmits through moving bodies, as a source of participatory knowing, but also as a place for transformation to occur. Therefore, the chapter illustrates what it means if leadership is reconsidered; rather than through the leader’s position but as genuinely distributed and transmitted through the intra-actions of the moving bodies in the organisations.

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