

# Leadership practice and the enrolment of computational objects

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## Abstract

Globalised and networked organisations are characterised by interactions between people and technology that are foundational to their existence and outputs. This study addresses an area where little research exists: the relationship between [computational objects \(COs\)](#) and [leadership practice \(LP\)](#) in organisations (Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber 2009; Zammuto et al. 2007). Our research explores this relationship in terms of the presence and deployment of [COs](#) and their projections, and the enacted practices of those in leadership positions and their networks: what they do, how they do it, and why. In this position paper, we set out our theoretical perspective on this novel area of research.

Our research will provide grounded empirical data from which analysis of relations between [LPs](#) and [COs](#) can be undertaken, enabling possibilities for ‘breaking new conceptual ground, resolving existing theoretical puzzles, envisioning organizing processes, and revitalizing old concepts.’ (Barley and Kunda 2001, p. 76) We offer this approach at a time when enhancing the capacities of leadership is seen as pivotal to satisfying increasing ‘demands for leadership insights’ and restoring trust in institutions (Nohria and Khurana 2010, p. 5).

Our study addresses a gap at the intersection of [human-computer interaction \(HCI\)](#), [information systems \(IS\)](#), and leadership, evidenced by the particular challenges and opportunities presented to organizational leadership and their responses to these (Grint 2010). By examining the interplay between [LPs](#) and [COs](#) in present-day organizations, new understandings will emerge.

Setting aside for a moment that few studies on leadership take *practices* of as the unit of analysis (Tengblad 2012), we are especially intrigued by another exclusion in the leadership literature – the [CO](#). Despite the tremendous influx of [COs](#) in the workplace and the use of these devices as part of the mediating framework through which organisational life is enacted, little empirical research exists that explores the relationship between [LP](#) and [COs](#) (Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber 2009; Zammuto et al. 2007). This represents a void in both practical and theoretical knowledge we seek to address. Our exploratory study seeks to enquire, scrutinise, and analyse various forms of [LP](#) to understand and highlight their ramifications. Through an anthropologically-grounded work practice study, we seek to make a contribution toward a practice-based theory of leadership that includes [COs](#).

In this paper, we present our theoretical perspective, which includes the adoption of a practice-based approach (Nicolini 2012) and our position on the contentious domain of leadership. Here, we introduce Grint's fourfold theory of leadership, which suggests that leadership can be explained across four dimensions: 1) identity, 2) outcome, 3) position, and 4) process (2005). Our reading of this position is that leadership, rather than being an observable phenomena per se, is instead a quality that is ascribed processually and performatively to a range of conceptual and material objects, including people, teams, organisations, and [COs](#),

Yet Grint's typology does not specifically address [COs](#). Based on this omission, we present a brief sketch of how we extend Grint's fourfold in order include [COs](#). We therefore offer our theoretical extension of Grint's fourfold typology of leadership to help us to sensitise our field observation to the ways leadership may be attributed.

## **Acronyms**

**CO** computational object

**HCI** human-computer interaction

**IS** information systems

**LP** leadership practice

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