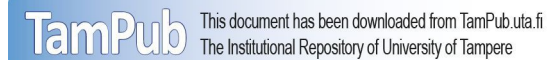


Room for *communitas*: Exploring sociomaterial construction of leadership in liminal and dominant spaces



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Abstract

This article analyzes the sociomaterial construction of plural and hierarchical leadership in liminal and dominant spaces. Combining insights from, first, the emerging body of studies exploring the role of spaces in sociomaterial construction of leadership; second, spatial management and organization research focusing on liminal spaces; and third, Victor Turner's social structure–anti-structure framework, it is argued that dominant spaces actively participate in a sociomaterial construction of leadership that reflects the social structure of an organization. Liminal spaces as places fostering the experience of *communitas*, then, actively participate in the sociomaterial construction of plural leadership if collectively used.

Introduction

The last decade of management and organization research has witnessed an increased interest in organizational spaces (Taylor and Spicer, 2007; Ropo et al., 2015). Moreover, as a part of greater 'material turn', a handful of leadership scholars (e.g. Hawkins, 2015; Ropo et al., 2013; Zhang and Spicer, 2014) have also recently turned their attention to physical spaces of organizations. In these studies, leadership is conceptualized as an ongoing sociomaterial construction to which both social and material aspects of organizing contribute actively. Following embodied, aesthetic epistemology (e.g. Ropo et al., 2013), the performative nature of organizational spaces is argued to stem from subjective embodied experiences.

Studying leadership from this perspective, in this article I utilize a relatively new stream of spatial studies focusing on liminal and dominant organizational spaces (Dale and Burrell, 2008; Shortt, 2015; Sturdy et al., 2006). With roots in anthropology (van Gennep, 1960 [1909]), liminal spaces are conceptualized as places that temporarily allow the suspension of the regular rules of an organization (Sturdy et al., 2006: 930). Liminality derives from Latin word *limen* which refers to threshold. Originally developed by Arnold van Gennep (1960 [1909]) in the context of ritual process, Victor Turner (1969, 1974, 1979) further advanced the concept of liminality in his works. For Turner, liminality on one hand “represents the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two positions” (Turner, 1974: 237) and on the other hand is “a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending, preserving law and order, and registering structural status.” (Turner, 1979: 465) Liminality, in other words, may refer to the in-between state of individual’s status-elevation process or to a more collective temporal suspension of social structure. As such, liminality is a state for individual and plural reflection of the ordinary and ideals in entails, even a state during which people “call those very ideals into question under conditions of sharp social change.” (Turner, 1979: 467) Due to its inherent strangeness, liminality unmask the potential problems of social structure.

As “almost anything may happen” (Turner, 1974: 13) in these spaces, liminal spaces present intriguing possibilities for sociomaterial construction of leadership, especially when compared to the dominant organizational spaces that embody formal corporate culture (Shortt, 2015). Analyzing the sociomaterial construction of leadership in these spaces, I utilize Victor Turner’s social structure–anti-structure framework, as for him liminality is a component of anti-structure that represents a temporal, potentially transformative departure from the ties of normal

social structure. Another component of Turner's anti-structure *communitas* is then utilized in conceptualizing the nature of leadership, as it refers to a strong sense of equality and togetherness within a community (Turner, 1974).

Following Edith Turner's (2012) thinking, here it is argued that the existence or lack of *communitas* defines whether everyday sociomaterial practices construct plural or hierarchical forms of leadership. Second, dominant organizational spaces are argued to actively participate in the sociomaterial construction of a type of leadership that reflects the nature of social structure of the given organization. If social structure fosters the experience of *communitas*, then the sociomaterial construction of leadership in dominant spaces produces plural leadership, while the lack of *communitas* leads to the sociomaterial construction of hierarchical leadership. Liminal organizational spaces, as places for anti-structural thinking and behavior, then, participate in the sociomaterial construction of plural leadership if collectively used. However, these in-between spaces may also indirectly contribute to the sociomaterial construction of hierarchical leadership if they – either due to design or use – emphasize the segmentation already present in a particular social structure.

The rest of this article is structured as follows. First, I review recent literature that conceptualizes leadership as an ongoing sociomaterial construction. Second, I introduce Turner's social structure–anti-structure framework, after which follows an overview of the features of liminal spaces. Finally, utilizing three illustrations, I combine the knowledge from these streams of literature and discuss the nature of sociomaterial construction of leadership in liminal and dominant spaces.

Leadership through sociomaterial lenses

As Hawkins (2015) observes, there has been relatively little work in leadership studies that explores the ‘thing-ness’ of leadership. Quite recently leadership research has nonetheless experienced the material turn, as the issues of materiality, embodiment and aesthetics have been increasingly addressed by leadership scholars (e.g. Bathurst and Cain, 2013b; Hansen et al., 2007; Ladkin, 2008, 2013; Melina et al., 2013; Ropo and Parviainen, 2001; Ropo et al., 2015; Special Issue on ‘Materiality and Leadership’ in *Leadership*, 2013; Sinclair, 2005). However, as Ropo and Salovaara (2018) bring forth, much of this research focuses on the bodies of leaders-individuals: for example, how leaders’ bodies are seen (e.g. Ladkin, 2008; Sinclair, 2005); how their felt experiences, such as ‘gut feelings’, affect their decision-making (e.g. Hansen et al., 2007); and how their bodily gestures are perceived (e.g. Bathurst and Cain, 2013b). Some of these studies also explore the felt experiences of followers (e.g. Hansen et al., 2007; Ladkin, 2013), thus adding their bodies into the sociomaterial analysis of leadership. Common to these studies is the argument that our understanding of and participation in the social world is inherently embodied; that is, our senses, feelings and memories affect the processes of meaning-making, as well as how we interact in our everyday organizational lives and what kind of organizational practices we deem appropriate (Hansen et al., 2007; Ropo and Salovaara, 2018).

While embracing this aesthetic, embodied epistemology (e.g. Ropo et al., 2013) championed in the sociomaterial studies focusing on bodies, this article takes another look at a less-researched aspect of the materiality of leadership; that is, the role of organizational spaces in the sociomaterial construction of leadership. Although materiality in general has recently become a topic of interest for leadership researchers, organizational spaces have still quite rarely been studied through the lenses of leadership (Ropo et al., 2015). On the other hand, several closely related issues, such as politics, control and power, have been addressed in the studies of

organizational spaces; in this research stream, spaces are conceptualized as materialization of power relations (Taylor & Spicer, 2007). Dale and Burrell, for instance, have extensively studied the spatial and embodied aspects of organizations, researching, for example, how spaces reinforce corporate control and power (Burrell and Dale, 2003; Dale, 2005; Dale and Burrell, 2008, 2015). Their research, alongside others, greatly informs the theorization of the role of spaces in the sociomaterial construction of leadership.

A handful of leadership scholars have recently tackled the issue of spaces in the sociomaterial construction of leadership (Crevani, 2018; Hawkins, 2015; Oborn et al., 2013; Ropo et al., 2013; Ropo et al., 2015; Ropo and Salovaara, 2018; Zhang and Spicer, 2014). Like the sociomaterial studies focusing on bodies, in these studies leadership is considered as distinct from individual leaders (e.g. Crevani et al., 2010; Ladkin, 2010). Moreover, the performative nature of spaces is thought to occur through the embodied experiences of people using the spaces (e.g. Ropo et al., 2013). As such, spaces do not have independent agency, but they nevertheless are argued to “play an active role in generating, transmitting, legitimizing and undoing meanings associated with leadership” (Hawkins, 2015: 952). Oborn et al. (2013) note that enactment of leadership always involves engaging with organizational spaces and other material artefacts, which are never mere neutral backdrops. Following the thinking of Ropo and her colleagues, physical spaces can even be argued to be capable of leading people through the senses, feelings and memories these spaces embody (Ropo et al., 2013; Ropo et al., 2015; Ropo and Salovaara, 2018; Salovaara and Ropo, 2018).

Another common feature of the leadership studies focusing on the role of organizational spaces is that they view leadership as a process (e.g. Wood, 2005). Here leadership is understood as a phenomenon that is constructed in and through everyday sociomaterial relations and practices.

In this ongoing construction, both the social and the material (entailing embodied and spatial aspects of the organization) actively contribute to the processes of meaning-making related to leadership. Crevani perceives leadership “as an ordinary, repeated, not necessarily intentional, spatio-temporal, conversational achievement at work” (Crevani, 2018: 85). As such, the sociomaterial leadership studies focusing on the role of spaces share roots with other critical leadership studies that perceive leadership as mundane (e.g. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003), socially constructed and emergent (e.g. Fairhurst and Grant, 2010). Moreover, due to the close relationship with the research that conceptualizes spaces as materialization of power relations, this emerging stream of leadership studies also acknowledges power as central to leadership dynamics (e.g. Collinson, 2011, 2014). However, this does not necessarily imply that organizational spaces only reproduce power-over; instead, the subjective embodied experiences of spaces may also be producers of power-with (Salovaara and Ropo, 2018).

Following these studies, in this article it is revealed that physical spaces indeed play an active role in all sociomaterial constructions of leadership, whether plural or hierarchal. Oborn et al. explore healthcare reform and they argue that, in this reform, leadership was “distributed across multiple sociomaterial practices” (Oborn et al., 2013: 268). Zhang and Spicer (2014), on the other hand, study the reproduction of bureaucratic hierarchy in a Chinese government office and show how spatial and embodied elements were utilized to elevate the role of individual designated leaders. Here, the top management had the top floor offices built from the best materials, as well as having prioritized access to shared facilities such as elevators. Moreover, in this government office people with lower status actively made sure that they never walked in front of their superiors – subordinates always needed to follow the leader, both literally and figuratively. However, Zhang and Spicer (2014) observe that these walking orders were occasionally playfully reproduced within

groups of people from the same hierarchical level, as a colleague was ceremoniously given the leading position normally reserved for the designated leaders. As this typically occurred at elevator entrances or by bathroom doors, Zhang and Spicer's (2014) study demonstrates how even the most hierarchical architectures contain such in-between spaces that have the capability to produce and foster deviant behaviors that question the leadership sociomaterially constructed in the dominant organizational spaces. In other words, these in-between spaces, also known as liminal spaces, seem to participate to a sociomaterial construction of different kind of leadership.

A framework behind liminal spaces – Turner's social structure and anti-structure

All is in motion but some social flows move so slowly relatively to others that they seem almost fixed and stationary as the landscape and the geographical levels under it, though these too, are, of course, forever in slow flux. (Turner, 1974: 44)

As the above shows, Victor Turner perceives the social world as “a world of becoming”, instead of “world in being” (Turner, 1974: 24); for him, society is an ongoing dialectical process between social structure and anti-structure. Here social structure involves social flows that may seem fixed and stationary, but still are subject to a gradual change. Anti-structure, on the other hand, enables more radical change; it is “something positive, a generative center” (Turner, 1974: 273). Indeed, Turner views the more predominant state of society, social structure, as limiting, even negative when compared to the state of anti-structure (Olaveson, 2001). For Turner, social structure is a frame of social order that is “*consciously* recognized and regularly operative in a given society” (Turner, 1974: 237). Moreover, Turner (1974) argues that in social structure people are defined by their roles and status, and, consequently, this is a state that keeps people apart from each other as it constrains their actions and highlights their differences. In contrast to this differentiated and segmented system, Turner's anti-structure is an egalitarian state that entails ambiguity and thus

transformative potential. However, as Sinha (2010) argues, anti-structure does not necessarily imply such a reversal of roles as leaders becoming followers and followers turning into leaders. Nonetheless, it “presents society as an undifferentiated, homogeneous whole, in which individuals confront one another integrally, and not as ‘segmentalized’ into statuses and roles” (Turner, 1969: 177).

For Turner (1974), anti-structure consists two components: liminality and *communitas*. Liminality has recently become a topic of interest for management and organizations researchers. In their review, Söderlund and Borg (2017) note that apart from the liminal spaces also studied here, the concept of liminality has been utilized in investigating liminal positions and processes both at the individual and organizational levels. Leadership scholars have been especially interested in liminal processes in the context of leadership development (e.g. Hawkins and Edwards, 2017; Jones, 2006; Yip and Raelin, 2012).

While liminality has recently enjoyed a substantial attention from management and organization researchers, as well as a growing interest from leadership scholars, the other component of Turner’s anti-structure, *communitas*, is less studied. Hawkins and Edwards mention *communitas* in the context of creating suitable spaces for leadership development, defining it as “a sense of fellowship or togetherness” (Hawkins and Edwards, 2017: 205-206). Bathurst and Cain, on the other hand, offer a rare exception of organizational leadership study that explores *communitas*; for them, *communitas* implies “the ongoing act of *doing* community, of creating community through the adaption of a reflexive and open stance that invites community and engagement” (Bathurst and Cain, 2013a: 204). They argue that instead of authenticity, this act of “doing community” should be a requirement for leadership, thus advocating for more plural forms of leadership. Similarly, Parris and Peachey (2013) find that *communitas*, *inter alia*, experienced

in a cause-related sporting event, encouraged servant leadership. These definitions, then, are in tune with Turner's conceptualization of *communitas*; for him, *communitas* is "the mutual confrontation of human beings stripped of status role characteristics — people, 'just as they are,' getting through to each other" (Turner, 1979: 470-471). Moreover, he argues that the experience of *communitas* is actually the key element in understanding the unstructured and undifferentiated state of anti-structure that emerges in the liminal periods of society (Turner, 1969). For Turner, "the bonds of *communitas* are anti-structural in that they are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, nonrational (though not *irrational*)" (Turner, 1974: 46-47); it is *communitas* that temporarily liberates humans from the limiting ties of social structure. Edith Turner, Turner's wife and an anthropologist in her own right, collaborated on and continued Turner's work on *communitas*. In contrast to Victor Turner's focus on the *communitas* experienced during various ritual processes, Edith Turner (2012) argues that *communitas* can be found from regular work within the right conditions. Moreover, she states:

Communitas is exciting; it makes people able to organize and work together. With this power, they will eventually develop organizational habits, structures, and rules of behavior, and ranks and positions. These often work well, if they remain on the human level; yet if they become overly law-bound, *communitas* will bubble up again from below and question the old system. (E. Turner, 2012: 4)

For Edith Turner, it is the experience of *communitas* that allows the building of social structure within a community, and, while rules and ranks eventually arise, the embers of *communitas* can still exist behind the social structure as long as it stays 'on the human level'. Moreover, if these embers are forgotten and the social structure becomes too focused on rules and ranks, eventually *communitas* arises again to question the system. This notion of *communitas* as a crucial element

of organizing and working together highlights the advantages of bringing *communitas* to the sphere of organizational leadership studies. Here it is argued that these embers of *communitas* set alight the dynamics of plural leadership, while the lack of *communitas* clarifies the nature of hierarchical leadership.

Liminal spaces in management and organization literature

As the previous section shows, Victor Turner's focus was on the mental liminal state and not so much on physical liminal spaces. Turner does discuss the material aspects of ritual process to some extent; for instance, he claims that liminal subjects often wear specific, almost uniform-like clothes that set them apart from other people (Turner, 1969). In this he shares Goffman's (1959) view that material items are important expressive equipment for the presentation of self, albeit in this case clothing symbolizes the temporal departure from the social structure and statuses it entails. Moreover, Turner makes a distinction between everyday social space and liminal space, arguing that liminal spaces are "framed spaces set off from the routine world" (Turner, 1979: 467). In the context of public rituals, however, he points out that social spaces can be hallowed for a liminal time, as such rites are often performed in, for instance, town squares (Turner, 1979). Still, Turner does give certain liminal spaces such as abbeys and churches some special characteristics, noting that these "spaces provide homes for anti-structural visions thoughts, and ultimately behaviors" (Turner, 1974: 293).

This notion of liminal spaces as homes for anti-structural visions, thoughts and even behaviors, then, is in line with the contemporary management and organization scholars' conceptualizations of liminal spaces. Dale and Burrell argue that a liminal space is "at the boundary of two dominant spaces, which is not fully part of either" (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 238). For them, liminal spaces are ambiguous spaces that don't entail clear ownership. Shortt (2015), too,

highlights this lack of ownership as well as the absence of usual norms, routines and social expectation as features of liminal spaces. In a similar vein, Sturdy et al. argue that within liminal spaces “the regular routines of the formal organization are suspended” (Sturdy et al., 2006: 930). Liminal organizational spaces (corridors, stairways, elevators and bathrooms) are often considered in direct comparison to dominant organizational spaces (offices, boardrooms and official breakrooms), which are perceived to embody corporate values (e.g. Shortt, 2015). Thus, as liminal spaces are found as homes for anti-structure, dominant spaces in turn seem to reproduce the formal social structure.

Iedema et al. (2010) argue that some in-between spaces of organizations gain their liminal qualities due to the lack of clear function: the hospital corridor they study included unexplainable ‘bulge’ that seemed to foster out-of-norms behavior because it didn’t fit to the surrounding architecture and the meanings given to the dominant spaces. On the other hand, liminal spaces often entail deviant behavior going against the very function of the space (Taylor and Spicer, 2007): corridors are used as places for conversations (Dixon, 1997; Iedema et al., 2010), bathrooms are made into informal breakrooms (Shortt, 2015) and elevator entrances offer an opportunity for the game of playing-the-leader (Zhang and Spicer, 2014). Whether it is due to the lack of clear function or people actively going against function, here it is argued that these transitory moments of out-of-norm behavior makes these spaces liminal. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the time we spend in these in-between spaces is often short, especially when compared to our presence within dominant spaces.

Finally, while the management and organizations literature on liminal spaces rarely utilizes the concept (cf. Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018), the experiences of *communitas* can be perceived in these studies. For instance, Dixon notes that corridors seem to take “away some of the sense of

hierarchy, making the participants seem more equal” (Dixon, 1997: 23). She argues that this equality is reflected in how easily one can join and leave a corridor conversation when compared to a conversation taking place in a dominant space. Iedema et al. (2010), too, highlight that liminal spaces allow temporal equal standings between people who usually hold different hierarchical positions. The comradeship of *communitas* can also be perceived in the bathrooms that the hairdressers of Shortt’s (2015) study utilized as informal breakrooms.

Sociomaterial construction of leadership in liminal and dominant spaces: illustrations

In this section, I combine the streams of literature discussed and present three illustrations related to the sociomaterial construction of leadership in both liminal and dominant organizational spaces. One of these illustrations is an extract from a previous study (Iedema et al., 2010), while the other two are exploratory accounts for argument development of this article. First, another look is taken at the ethnographic study by Iedema et al. (2010), as their description of hospital corridor offers an interesting illustration of the sociomaterial construction of plural leadership in liminal organizational space. Second, the story of Juhani (pseudonym), a member of top management for a concrete manufacturer, is recounted, as it demonstrates how dominant organizational spaces can also construct plural forms of leadership. Furthermore, this story also illustrates how change in social structure can change the nature of the sociomaterial construction of leadership. Finally, the story of Claudia (pseudonym), a member of the city’s executive management team, is told from the perspective of her indirect subordinate, demonstrating how the in-between spaces of organizations can act as liminal spaces fostering the experience of *communitas* only if they are collectively used.

Iedema et al. (2010) conducted an ethnographic study focusing on a multi-disciplinary clinical team in a metropolitan teaching hospital located in Sydney in 2004. During their fieldwork, they noted that corridor conversations played an important role in the life of the hospital:

These conversations became possible in this corridor space, we suggest, because the team capitalized on what they probably perceived to be a 'liminal' space; that is, a space that does not embody strong indications for staff about what is to take place within it. What appears to underscore the liminal character of this clinic's corridor is its 'bulge'— a widening of the walls in part of the corridor. This bulge drew people into it, not because it harboured a pre-defined functionality, but precisely because it lacked functional definition. In it, staff were able temporarily to step away from the linearity inscribed into their clinical practice, organizational purpose and professional procedure. The 'bulging' of the usually linear corridor walls created a niche that facilitated a kind of work-related 'hanging out'. The corner space that this 'bulge' created may also have engendered a feeling of being protected, affording kinds of conversations and exchanges that otherwise would not customarily take place. The 'corridor bulge' as liminal space helped members of the spinal rehabilitation team suspend the formalities of their respective clinical status and expert professional roles. [...] In suspending these pre-determined professional boundaries and rules that would normally be enacted in more traditional and central kinds of clinical work and space, the corridor bulge elicited conversations that ignored, or actively negated and denied, these interactive norms. Staff were enabled to step outside of their normal roles and busywork trajectories and engage with work issues in a way that only an interruption to behavioural flow

makes possible. This interruption, we suggest, was made possible by the excess space – the bulge – that was built into the corridor. (Iedema et al., 2010: 43-44)

Contrary to arguments posited by scholars of clinical literature, Iedema et al. creditably argue that the corridor conversations indeed increased the patient safety and enhanced the management of complexity in the hospital. Moreover, when taking the perspective of sociomaterial construction of leadership, it can be argued that this corridor ‘bulge’ as a liminal space actively participated in a construction of plural leadership. As the extract suggests, hospitals in general are highly hierarchical organizations in which professional roles and clinical statuses greatly affect everyday sociomaterial practices. Moreover, while hospital architecture, design and use of space are driven by the functional aspects (e.g. effectiveness, ergonomics, low cost and hygiene), dominant hospital spaces tend to reproduce these deeply hierarchical power structures (Sauer, 2015). The meanings given to the dominant spaces thus reflect the hierarchical social structure and these meanings, in turn, shape the “actions, interactions and sense of meaning, emotions and identity” (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 43). Subsequently, here dominant organizational spaces participated in the sociomaterial construction of hierarchical leadership; both the social and the material actively contributed to the maintenance of bureaucratic hierarchy and the formal leader-follower positions it entails.

In contrast, as the extract shows, the corridor bulge seemingly lacked a clear function; it was a “space out of space” (Van Marrewijk and Yanow, 2010: 10) in the hospital architecture. Consequently, as Iedema et al. point out, the meanings given to this space weren’t as aligned with the social expectations associated with the surrounding dominant spaces. This lack of alignment, then, allowed the members of the multi-disciplinary clinical team to leave their respective status and roles behind and encounter each other as equals; in this space they were able to experience

communitas (Turner, 1969). Moreover, they were able to equally negotiate topics rarely picked up in other spaces, which, in turn, led to actions taken in the hospital's dominant spaces. As such, this liminal space participated in a sociomaterial construction of plural leadership that held ramifications for life in the dominant spaces, as well.

Interestingly, the corridor bulge as a liminal space seemed to actively rebel the bureaucratic hierarchy embodied in the dominant spaces. In fact, the critique against the corridor talk in the clinical literature stems from these liminal spaces' nonconformist qualities relative to the bureaucratic hierarchy; scholars in this field are concerned about "the likelihood that the informality of corridor talk will fail to translate into the formal documentation necessary for decision-making by others down the track" (Iedema et al., 2010: 43). While their concerns are understandable when taking into account the purpose of hospital work and the risks it entails, the liminal space Iedema et al. studied nonetheless offers an interesting example of the sociomaterial construction of plural leadership.

The second illustration, then, shows that it is not only liminal spaces that have the capability to participate in the sociomaterial construction of plural leadership:

Juhani was a member of top management of a family-owned concrete manufacturer, as well as one of the owners as a member of the owner-family. The company operated from 1970s to early 1990s, after which it was sold to a larger company. During the time the company was owned by the family, there were two official coffee rooms and several coffee machines positioned all around the premises. The latter were mainly for the workers who could not leave their working space due to a critical stage of work; however, others were welcomed to use them as well. Both these informal spaces around coffee machines and formal coffee

rooms were important meeting places: coffee machines involved swift meetings between various stages of work, while formal coffee rooms fostered longer conversations that occasionally evolved into full-blown envisioning. Meetings in both spaces were spontaneous and involved people from all levels of the organization; while drinking coffee, a trucker could easily talk to Juhani or any other member of top management and vice versa. Everyone's opinion was considered valuable and both formal and informal coffee rooms fostered this belief. The change of ownership, however, introduced heavier bureaucratic hierarchy to the once independent manufacturer as it became a business unit of a larger company and subsequently spontaneous meetings around coffee lost their special character. While these meetings still happened, Juhani and other members of previous top management could no longer give green light to the ideas stemming from the conversations; instead, they needed to go through the path of formal, hierarchical decision-making. (Juhani, the informant)

In this story, it is the spaces around the coffee machines that are truly liminal; they are spaces somewhere in-between work and breaktime. However, while spontaneous meetings between people from all the levels of the organization occurred in these spaces, these encounters were typically brief due to the nature of work performed in these spaces. As it is, the coffee machines were purposefully positioned in these spaces because the work often constrained the workers from leaving their workstations; the operation of concrete mixers, for instance, required the constant presence of at least one worker. Both official coffee rooms, then, were utilized by everyone, though people usually ended up in the coffee room that was physically closest to them at the given

moment. Juhani, for instance, drank coffee periodically in both coffee rooms, as well as by the coffee machines.

As it was the formal coffee rooms that fostered the long cross-connective conversations about issues such as organizational vision, there were two dominant organizational spaces that actively participated in the sociomaterial construction of plural leadership. While official coffee rooms are by definition Goffmanian (1959) backstage, they are still dominant spaces in which the formal culture of a given organization is very much present (Shortt, 2015). The leadership sociomaterially constructed in these coffee rooms was not, in a sense, as 'plural' as the leadership constructed in the hospital corridor that Iedema et al. studied. While the manufacturer was a family-owned business, there was still something of an asymmetrical division of power present, as the designated leaders had control over all the crucial resources such as strategy, formal communication, hiring and firing, as well as decision-making (Collinson, 2014). Indeed, Juhani and other members of top management made the final decisions about whether or not to pursue an idea stemming from a coffee room conversation. However, there are still some definite characteristics of distributed leadership present in the sociomaterial construction of leadership in these coffee rooms. Edwards (2015) notes that distributed leadership is connected to the enactment of community, that in distributed leadership everyone is allowed to take the role of leader and others are ready to follow them. While Juhani and other members of top management were the designated leaders, they were more than ready to give the leading position to the workers in the coffee rooms, as they were very aware that in many cases the workers had the best expertise. As such, the plurality of leadership that was sociomaterially constructed in these coffee rooms was first and foremost about sharing leadership for effectiveness (Denis et al., 2012).

Juhani's story also demonstrates how the social and the material are mutually entangled (Oborn et al., 2013) in the sociomaterial construction of leadership. Under family-ownership, the social structure of the manufacturer retained the embers of *communitas* even though there were clear positions in place. Juhani, for instance, recounts that occasionally he temporarily took over the operation of concrete mixers when the actual worker needed to step away for a moment. This was possible because Juhani had previously operated concrete mixers before taking up the top manager position; here the rules of behavior entailed that if someone could take over the job (i.e. having the capabilities needed as well as being present), it was done without any fuss whenever needed, no matter what their formal position was. The meanings given to the dominant spaces, then, on one hand reflected and on the other hand shaped these values. Coffee rooms, for instance, invited people to participate to the cross-connective conversations, as they were conceived as spaces in which anyone could express their opinion.

However, as the change of ownership introduced bureaucratic hierarchy to the life of the manufacturer, the social structure changed and the embers of *communitas* were ultimately put out. While the coffee room conversations still took place, they seldomly were realized into actions due to the heavy chain of decision-making within the larger new owner-company. Similarly, although the actual physical spaces of coffee rooms didn't change, as the social structure infused to them changed, they now participated in the sociomaterial construction of a more hierarchical form of leadership. As these dominant spaces held the memory of different times and a different type of leadership (Ropo and Salovaara, 2018), the experience of this new leadership was likely particularly bitter. This highlights that no matter the nature of social structure, dominant spaces tend to enforce it.

The third illustration demonstrates that while the less dominant in-between spaces of organizations are often associated with more anti-structural thinking and behavior, they do not always foster *communitas*:

Claudia was a member of the city's executive management team, a small group of leaders that was highly visible in the community and held a tremendous amount of political power. As is typical of government agencies, our city had a bureaucratic hierarchy and Claudia was my boss's boss. I enjoyed a cordial relationship with Claudia, however the power distance seemed greater with line level staff. At our office, there were two women's bathrooms; one had a single stall and was designated for use by persons with a disability. The other had five stalls. One day I noticed Claudia going into the bathroom for disabled persons and I found it odd, given that she was not disabled. Over time, I noticed that she never used the larger bathroom and always used the single stall bathroom. I wondered if she was embarrassed to go to the bathroom in the presence of her staff. (Claudia's indirect subordinate, the informant)

Claudia's motivation for not using the common bathroom can only be speculated, but nonetheless this story illustrates that it is somewhat misleading to call all in-between spaces of organizations liminal spaces when liminal spaces are understood as places for anti-structural thinking and behavior (Turner, 1974). Bathrooms, like other in-between spaces, can of course foster the experiences of liminality and *communitas*, as, for instance, Shortt's (2015) study shows. While the common bathroom of this story could have also served such a purpose for the other users of the space, it is clear that any chance encounter between Claudia and her subordinates didn't occur within this space. There was no possibility for her and her subordinates to experience *communitas*

in the common bathroom, let alone to momentarily try out the less hierarchical positions it would have entailed.

Whatever the reason for Claudia's behavior, it can be argued that through her actions she ended up upholding the sociomaterial construction of hierarchical leadership. Dale and Burrell argue that one way in which spaces produce power effects is through "the processes of inclusion within and exclusion from specific spaces" (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 48). They point out that spaces are often purposefully built to foster only certain people doing certain activities, thus excluding others and constraining deviant activities. While here Claudia's exclusion is based on her own actions and not on spatial design (in fact, the bathroom of this story was supposed to be a space of inclusion for all female members of the organization), the effect is nonetheless the same: it sets a physical distance between people who are already divided by the bureaucratic hierarchy of their social structure. In this sense, then, the in-between spaces of organizations may also indirectly participate in the sociomaterial construction of hierarchical leadership.

Discussion and conclusions

In this article, I have explored how plural and hierarchical leadership are sociomaterially constructed in liminal and dominant organizational spaces. In tune with the management and organization studies investigating liminal spaces, here it is found that dominant organizational spaces reinforce the existing social structure, as the social flows related to the structure are strongly interwoven in these spaces. However, it is emphasized that the social structure entwined with dominant spaces does not necessarily imply to an oppressive "gaze of corporate power" (Shortt, 2015:653); instead, the social structure of an organization, and hence the dominant spaces, may as well produce power-with (Salovaara and Ropo, 2018). In other words, our embodied experiences of a dominant space reflect the ranks and rules that the social structure involved entails; for

instance, an open office space as a dominant space may be perceived as an inspiring haven for collective work or, alternatively, as an oppressive, panopticon-like place. As here leadership is understood as an ongoing sociomaterial construction to which both the social and the material contribute actively, it is argued that dominant organizational spaces actively participate in such sociomaterial construction of leadership that reflects the social structure of a given organization. Whether this sociomaterial construction of leadership produces plural or hierarchical leadership depends on the existence of *communitas* behind the social structure. Following Edith Turner's (2012) thinking, if the experience of *communitas* exists within the social structure, people are first and foremost seen as equals despite their respective ranks and the rules that make up the social structure. As this is reflected in our experiences of dominant spaces, here these spaces participate in the sociomaterial construction of plural leadership. However, as the illustration from the manufacturer shows, the social structure may change in a manner that puts out the embers of *communitas*. In such cases, the sociomaterial construction of leadership in dominant spaces changes towards a more hierarchical form of leadership, in which people are first and foremost perceived through their formal ranks. Similarly, the embodied experiences of dominant organizational spaces in an organization that is already highly hierarchical reflect this type of social structure, as seen in the dominant spaces of the hospital illustration. Here, too, dominant spaces actively participate in the sociomaterial construction of hierarchical leadership.

In contrast to dominant spaces, in-between spaces of organizations either lack clear function or more easily allow brief moments of deviant behavior which goes against the function of said space. Following the literature of liminal spaces in management and organization studies, in a way, the social structure of a given organization is not as interwoven into these spaces as it is in dominant spaces. This is partly due to the relatively small amount of time we spend in these in-

between spaces, as well as due to the less restrictive functionality of these spaces. As shown in this article, these spaces *inter alia* foster informal conversations (Dixon, 1997; Iedema et al., 2010), temporal escapes from formal corporate culture (Shortt, 2015) and even playful critique of bureaucratic hierarchy (Zhang and Spicer, 2014). This rich opportunity for temporal, out-of-norm behavior makes these spaces home for anti-structural thinking and action; it is within these organizational spaces that the experiences of liminality and *communitas* most easily arise, especially within a hierarchical organization, as shown in the liminal space of the hospital illustration. The experience of *communitas*, then, especially plays into sociomaterial construction of more plural forms of leadership, as it unmask the equal human beings behind their formal ranks and the rules their normal social structure entails. However, as the story of Claudia indicates, this *communitas* can only be experienced when the in-between spaces are collectively used. As it is, these in-between spaces can also indirectly participate in the sociomaterial construction of hierarchical leadership if they – either due to design or use – physically highlight the segmentation already present in the social structure.

Finally, in this article I heavily utilize the concept of *communitas* in conceptualizing the sociomaterial construction of both plural and hierarchical leadership in liminal and dominant organizational spaces. In this I lean on Edith Turner's (2012) thinking, who argues that the experience of *communitas* is the very basis for organizing and working together. Here it is argued that the sociomaterial construction of plural leadership implies the existence of *communitas* behind everyday sociomaterial practices, while sociomaterial construction of hierarchical leadership indicates the lack of *communitas*. It is the experience of *communitas*, or lack of this experience, that defines whether people are perceived as ultimately equal or through their formal roles within an organization. However, as Sinha (2010) notes, the anti-structural components of Victor Turner's

framework may seem too idealistic for a leadership scholar. This is mainly because the framework seems to assume that once unity is achieved through the experience of *communitas*, the hierarchical social structure will naturally change (Sinha, 2010). As Salovaara and Bathurst (2016) note, bureaucratic hierarchies still exist all around the world even though plural forms of organizing have been found desirable by leadership scholars and companies alike for quite some time now. I agree with their argument that this may be due to “the tendency and culturally prevalent expectations to revert to hierarchical, leader-centric forms of guiding organizations” (Salovaara and Bathurst, 2016: 1). However, while not necessarily as transformative as the thinking of Edith and Victor Turner seems to suggest, here it is argued that the experience of *communitas* nevertheless arises from time to time even in the most hierarchical organizations. Moreover, it is within liminal organizational spaces that these undifferentiated and egalitarian bonds of *communitas* can be most easily experienced, as in the example of the Chinese government workers and their games of playing-the-leader at the elevator entrances and by the bathroom doors (Zhang and Spicer, 2014). Liminal spaces can truly lead us differently through our subjective embodied experiences of organizational spaces.

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