Tampere University of Applied Sciences

Collective Leadership Unpacked

Embracing Opportunities, Tensions, and Complexity

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ABSTRACT

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Leadership as a one-man-show is an illusion (Jessl and Wilhelm 2023:17ff). Today, leadership as a concept is mostly seen as highly relational, taking place within groups of interacting individuals that operate in larger systems. But for many organisations, this does not mean that formal leadership seizes to exit. It is thus the coexistence and interplay of informal and formal leadership processes that this thesis is interested in. While the division of leaders and followers used to be clearer, we enter a field in which leadership is not attributed to one or a few formally chosen individuals, but where the roles of leaders and followers can change more flexibly. In other words: we enter the world of collective leadership.

This thesis focuses on two different types of collective leadership that are relevant to the work of a specific division of an organisation. These are (1) co-leadership, defined as 'a leadership couple that operates as a substitute for a single-handed leader' (Gronn 1999); and (2) shared leadership in teams, considering leadership to be 'a dynamic, interactive influence process amongst individuals in teams in which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of team goals' (Pearce 2004). The thesis questions how collective leadership manifest itself in a specific organisational context, which opportunities, and tensions its interplay with hierarchical structures produces, and how it can potentially develop further.

Regarding the case study chosen, findings highlight that while co-leadership is well recognised, leadership and teams are often not thought together. To foster an understanding of leadership as dividable, claimable, and implementable by everyone in a team, a set of measures can be taken. These include a thorough debate on team purpose and mandate; a clear definition of roles and responsibilities in teams; mechanism for decision making and conflict resolution; and a devolution of power to teams, by allowing for a degree of self-determined resources to achieve self-set goals. The thesis underlines that co-leadership and shared leadership in teams are often time intensive, especially in the beginning, as they require more communication, coordinating and negotiation. Yet, the effort may be worthwhile, as the advantages of co-leading dyads and self-leading teams are to react more quickly and diversly to new challenges, to integrate different views, to build on individual strengths, and to act more autonomously, which in turn reduces the pressure on top leadership.

Key words: collective leadership, co-leadership, shared leadership, teams, organisational complexity.

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS AND SYNONYMS

A Teams	A synonym for a specific type of teams at ORI that provide a service, referred to as ‘A’.
CL	Collective Leadership.
CoP	Communities of Practice.
Division X	The division studied; ‘X’ being used as a synonym.
F	A synonym for a word in a different language which combines elements of both management and leadership.
IPT	Initial Programme Theory.
ORI	Organisation of Research Interest, used as a synonym.
TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences.
VUCA	Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Collective Leadership Applied

As Jessl and Wilhelm put it slightly emphatically: leadership as a one-man-show is an illusion (2023:17ff). This idea is also referred to as the 'post-heroic' turn in leadership studies (Mieroop, Clifton and Verhelst 2020, 491). Today, leadership as a concept is mostly seen as highly relational, it takes place within groups of interacting individuals that operate in larger systems (Cullen-Lester and Yammarino 2016; Opsira et al. 2020; Pearce and Conger 2003). But for many organisations, this does not mean that formal leadership seizes to exit. It is thus the coexistence and interplay of informal and formal leadership processes that we need to study. While the division of leaders and followers used to be clearer, we now open a field in which leadership is not attributed to one or a few formally chosen individuals. Therefore, we explore a context in which the roles of leaders and followers can change more flexibly, potentially seizing to exist at all.

It is hence not surprising that within the field of leadership studies, the analysis of collective forms of leadership has gained significant traction over the past two decades. The term 'collective leadership' is used as a theoretical umbrella that encompasses a field of research concerned with "the shared, distributed, pooled or relational aspects of leadership, its emergence and relation to hierarchical leadership, as well as its impact on work and performance" (Opsira, Foldy, Fairhurst and Jackson 2020, 442).

This thesis joins this growing literature that stipulates that leadership qualities do not only have to lie with single, formally recognized leaders. It focuses on two different types of collective leadership (CL) that are relevant to the work of a specific division of an organisation. These are:

(1) Co-leadership, defined as a leadership couple that operates as a substitute for a single-handed leader (Gronn 1999)

(2) Team or shared leadership, the former referring to a team property in which team members have distributed leadership rather than focusing

on a single designed leader (Carson, Tesluk and Marrone 2007, 1217). The later considers leadership to be ‘a dynamic, interactive influence process amongst individuals in teams in which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of team goals’ (Pearce 2004). In practice, the notions above are often overlapping significantly. Hereafter, I shall refer to this type as shared leadership in teams.

For reasons of anonymization, the organisation is hereafter referred to as *Organisation of Research Interest,* or ORI as an acronym. The division, which is examined in ORI, is hereafter called Division X. At the organisation, as an exception, two colleagues can be heading an office or a department jointly. In addition, there are continued developments to work collaboratively with others in focus projects or A teams (A being a synonym for teams that provide services in a specific field of ORI) across departments, steered by coordinators, in which leadership is framed more in terms of team efforts. Finally, the organisation has taped into agile forms of work to embrace collaboration that produces results in a timelier and more innovative fashion.

While there is a focus on these two types, they are not analysed in isolation to other leadership modes. It is their interaction with hierarchical forms of leadership that is of interest to this study. Collaboration and hierarchy are not a dichotomy. To me, they represent two ends of a continuum or even a web of attitudes, values, and practices. This applied research thus studies how collective leadership interrelates with hierarchical forms of leadership.

1.2 Research Questions

The **main research question** of this thesis is thus:

> How does collective leadership manifest itself at ORI, which opportunities and frictions does its interplay with hierarchical structures produce, and how can it evolve?

This main question can be broken down into three sets of aims and sub-questions:

Framing and Analysing - Questions One:

What does academic research and empirical analysis tell us about collective leadership and its sub-forms? What are potentionals and limitations? How does it fit into the current *Zeitgeist* of organisational thinking?

Collecting Empirical Data at ORI - Questions Two:

What do ORI staff know and think about collective leadership? What are existing guidelines, experiences, and future expectations? Which dynamics challenge collective leadership practices?

Fostering Learning on CL at ORI - Question Three:

What recommendations can be drawn for ORI – based on prior research, and experiences and motivations of ORI staff?

The emphasis is on employing existing knowledge and research to stimulate organisational development in a specific context. At the same time, studying a particular case hopefully produces some contributions to an emerging research field.

1.3 Organisational Complexity and Shifting Leadership Patterns

This thesis applies an integrated understanding of leadership and organisational change studies. Research on leadership within an organisation cannot exist in a vacuum. Hence, to understand leadership dynamics at ORI, we need to reflect the culture and processes of change that the organisation continuously undergoes. Given that the organisation is a century old, it is steeped in tradition and history. At the same time, ORI is confronted with disruptions and change that mark the 2020's in Europe and beyond. These disruptions, the Covid-19 pandemic in particular, have underlined yet again that the workplace and the 'world out there' are not separate realms. To grasp leadership in flux, the thesis will thus have to touch upon concept of organisational complexity. To meet the challenges of the future in an interconnected world, the organisation has introduced new patterns to allow collaboration in teams beyond divisional and departmental silos, and it experiments with forms of agility. The aim is hence to understand shifting leadership practices as a reaction to a changing and dynamic context that demands for more flexibility, while not ignoring the need for safety and sustainability.

1.4 Relation of the Author to the Study Context

I, as the author of this thesis, have been working at ORI for over a decade, in roles as a follower and a leader. While I enjoy steering processes and taking charge, I also enjoy co-designing projects with colleagues and to play thoughts and ideas by others before taking decisions. Leadership roles have left me felt empowered at times, and alone and overwhelmed at others. And while I strongly believe in team efforts, I know from practical experiences that it is hard work to get into a flow, that teams can thrive only under certain conditions, that collaboration needs more time (especially in the beginning), that trust amongst members of a group is key, and that dynamics of power do not seize to exist within and beyond teams. My motivation to undertake this study is thus to better understand collective leadership as a theory and a practice. Subsequently, I wish to apply it, inspired by my journey of learning and a deeper understanding of different perspectives. This does not make me a neutral observer – and I fully admit to my research bias. Therefore, I am particularly attentive to the voices that underline why collective leadership is not perceived as useful in a given context. I also aim to be fully transparent when bringing in my own experiences and judgement.

2 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

'Leadership is a relationship' – this is the opening phrase of a prominent article by Kouzes and Posner (2003, 1). Yet to the authors, this relationship might be either a one-to-one or one-to-many affair. Over the past two to three decades, the collective leadership field has vastly expanded the notion of relationships in numbers and characters, delving into network, system, and complexity theories. Currently, there exists a plethora of terms and concepts that have developed. Appendix 1 (Ospina et al. 2020, 457) provides a comprehensive overview of fourteen terms and theories used in the literature under what might be called a CL umbrella, giving short definitions by academic authors. A rapid appraisal methodology, undertaken by Fairhurst, Jackson, Foldy and Ospina (2020, 600) finds that the terms most widely used in academic journals are distributed leadership, shared leadership, and collective leadership. In sum, neither the overarching umbrella terminology (collective, plural, pooled, etc.) nor definitions of various concepts subsumed are decisively structured in the existing literature. But as Klein and Hughes (2019,20) put it 'the label is not the important part here, and in fact trying to pin down the correct one is typical of predict and control' thinking'.

What makes it more challenging to establish theoretical underpinnings on this subject is that the sources of literature dealing with CL discuss theory, empiricism, and findings with very different audiences and logics in mind. On the one hand, there is a vast and growing popular, 'self-help', and coaching-oriented literature on leadership and organisational change, particularly regarding buzzing terms like agility. Very often, this literature is written either by executives or by coaches based on their experience, and they are offering very practical advice. On the other hand, the academic debate and theorising of related concepts has been ongoing for decades. This provides a pool of empirical data, offers systematising and a critical review reflecting on the ontology and epistemology of leadership theory.

Having scanned this 'literature jungle', key parts of this chapter are based on sources that bridge both logics, by combining academic knowledge, case studies, and practical tools (for example Jessl and Wilhelm 2023; Endres and Weibler

2019). Primarily employed academic sources are those that either give an overview or offer meta-analysis on the subject (for example Ospina et al. 2020, Fairhurst et al. 2020; Wu, Cormican and Chen 2020).

This theoretical chapter is divided into four parts. Part 2.1 will aim to introduce what might be called an ambiguous field of research, looking at formality and informality, as well as opportunities and limitations of collective leadership. Part 2.2 will then offer an attempt to systemise the field and establish frameworks for co-leadership and shared leadership. Part 2.3 zooms out again, offering lenses on organisational complexity and collective leadership by briefly addressing four schools of thought that are important for the context of this study: systems thinking, complexity, agility, and teal organisations. It then abstracts selected key concepts and tools for the study of CL. Part 2.4. concludes by addressing potential gaps in the literature, which may be relevant for the study of ORI.

This is not a classical structure for a theoretical chapter, which would ideally move from the general to the specific. Instead, the reader is asked to climb a mountain of theory in his/her imagination. At the beginning of the journey, he/she only thinks about collective leadership, trying to organise and structure what the term might mean. On top of the mountain, gazing over a beautiful mountain range, he/she realises that CL is connected to all these bigger thoughts of schools. Climbing down again, he/she reflects on the concept and tools that these schools offer and that can be employed to further advance thinking on collective leadership at his/her organisation.

2.1 Collective Leadership – An Overview of an Ambiguous Field

In this sub-chapter 2.1, we are going to explore how formal and informal leadership relates to collective leadership, and what the expectation and limitations of the CL concept are both in academic and the guidance-oriented literature.

2.1.1 Formal and Informal Leadership

Leader identity has traditionally been associated with formal and hierarchical positions, while informal leadership is increasingly seen to unfold in collective and distributed processes (Mieroop et al. 2020, 490f). But there is no clear dichotomy between the duos formal/hierarchical and informal/collective. Collective processes also integrate formal elements. Hierarchical processes incorporate informal elements. This is for example the case when a new team is created that has official coordinators, which do not have supervisory functions, but are supposed to steer processes (at ORI, A teams to be examined are an example). Formality and collaboration also merge when leadership is contractually codified in co-leadership structures, which then can be either formally or informally divided and shared by the leading dyad.

Formality and informality also relate to conceptualisations of leadership and management. In the European language that ORI employs, there is a term (beginning with F) which is often translated into 'leadership'.[1] Yet, as Jessl and Wilhelm point out, F has two dimensions: (1) leadership, i.e. to take initiative, win over colleagues for a cause and show which tactical and strategic goals need to be achieved and how to get there; and (2) management, i.e. to plan and budget, to organise and steer and to take responsibility. Such an understanding enables leadership to unfold even where formal management roles are not given (2023, 30).

By consequence, leadership is - at a minimum - the conscious and goal-oriented influence over other people (Nerdinger 2014, 84, as quoted in Jessl and Wilhelm 2023, 30). In an informal setting, such fluid leadership needs to be continuously renegotiated. It does not come with legitimate authority from a formal position that allows the influencing of subordinates. Instead, informal leadership needs to build on other sources of mobilization, such as specialised knowledge (Mieroop et al. 2020, 493), reputation or charisma. The process of brokerage and negotiation over roles and leading/following makes things more complicated. So why embrace collective leadership at all? We will address this in the next sub-section.

2.1.2 Opportunities Arising from Collective Leadership

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[1] ORI is a European organization, also working in a language that is not English. To keep ORI more anonymous, the country in which it operates will not be revealed. Yet occasionally the thesis needs to address differences in ORIs operational language and in English.

While this field of research is young, there is already an impressive number of studies covering different forms of CL. Findings vary depending on the empirical contexts studied and methods applied. In this section, I build mainly on a meta-analysis by Endres and Weibler (2019, 23ff), proving an overview, with the aim to highlight potential benefits of collective leadership. The authors categorise their results into three perspectives, highlighting the view of the individual, the team/organisation and society.

For the individual, increased work- and life quality is central. CL can offer a decreased workload because leadership is divided, meaning less stress, a better work-life-balance, more enjoyment, and a feeling of flow. It can ease the feeling of dealing with complexity because of joint reinsurance. Finally, it can increase the exchange and learning opportunities for individuals, as they benefit from a plurality of perspectives. Jessl and Wilhelm (2023, 88) add that staff members are willing to act more proactively and take the initiative.

From the team and organisational perspective, increased effectiveness and performance through learning, creativity and innovation are of essence. There is a lower reliance upon a single leader, who leaves a gap when absent. The quality of decisions is increased and there is more room for innovation and diversity. Teams can be more satisfied, as more information has been exchanged, and there is more trust, cohesion, and motivation. Gibeau et al. (2020, 466) refer to this as bridging, i.e. to 'mobilize and combine their member's respective sources of expertise, authority and legitimacy to bridge different logics and improve their integration within organisational decision making.' Wu et al. (2020, 49ff) confirm that the quality of the internal team environment (i.e., a shared purpose, social support, and a voice), as well as team heterogeneity are positively related to the emergence of shared leadership.

From the perspective of society, collaborate leadership ensures legitimacy under ethical aspects. The current *Zeitgeist* promotes participative and democratically based leadership, in which team members are included in decision making. 'Sharing is in – and that is also true for power and influence', as Endres and Weibler (2019, 26) put it. There is fewer concentration of power, which pre-empts self-centred and disconnected forms of leadership. By consequence, there is more transparency and control, reducing the danger of unethical or illegal management practise.

To give a practical example, Appendix 2 (Brun and McAuliffe 2023, 172) provides an overview of contexts of interventions, mechanisms of collective leadership and outcomes, based on the study of healthcare teams. In addition to the benefits of the team members, they include the benefits for the patients, i.e., their level of satisfaction and improvements in patient safety and care quality. This points to the important role of stakeholders beyond the team.

2.1.3 Limits in Theory and Practice

There is thus no doubt that CL has immense potential, but it is equally clear that it is no panacea to the perceived ills of hierarchical leadership. We now turn to the limits of the concepts, both from an academic theoretical perspective, which examines the ambiguities and theoretical blind spots, as well as from a practical perspective, highlighting under which circumstance CL is likely to produce difficulties or fail. The doubts in benefits of CL stem from different sources, ranging from the fact that claims are often based on scarce or muddled research findings, that there is a research bias towards the positive elements of CL, and that outcomes are depended on individual settings with no clear causalities.

As mentioned above, academic authors like Ospina et al. (2020) and Cullen-Lester and Yammariono (2016) try to address this ‘wild growth’ of theories by collecting contributions in special journal issues or by systemising terms and theories. They point to the fact that while there is ample theorising, the empirical foundations and methodologies upon which theories are build vary significantly in depth and quality.

Fairhurst et al. (2020) identify challenges for the field of study that are helpful to reflect upon in the context of this research. They coin the first challenges as ‘CL as an ambiguous leadership’ space, based not only on the many forms of CL, but on the fact that distinctions are often diffused. In addition, CL research is frequently emphasising the positivistic and rational. It depoliticises relations, focuses on the short term by ignoring the historical context, and sees the collective as separate from hierarchy. This significantly underplays dimensions of power, competition, disorder, and conflict (2020, 604f). Another challenge is to understand collective leadership fully as a plural process – one that is lived in relation to hierarchy, that represents the heterogeneity of individual experiences and that is fluid and temporal (202,608ff).

A further question is whether leadership disintegrates as a concept in collaborative settings. Quoting Denis et al. (2012, 274), Fairhurst et al. raise that ‘The interactive processes whereby leadership is produced easily shade into decision-making, collaboration or simply work. When “leadership” can no longer be attached to individuals at all, there is the danger that it may become a chimera’. Questions to be asked are thus what ‘we gain or lose from using concepts such as leadership versus collaboration versus teamwork? Whose interest are served by one term versus another?’ (Fairhurst et al. 2020, 607).

From a practical perspective, the reduced role of the leaders might be intentional. As a staff member of Greaterthan, a network organisation, puts it: leadership does not have to be ‘a big deal’ or something ‘visionary’. Instead, ‘leadership is shown in many small acts, for example making suggestions, explaining something, supporting others, or driving the process’. By breaking down leadership in this way, the willingness to lead rises. The central question is no longer ‘Who is the leader and who the follower?’, but how each member can practice leadership at the right time (interviewed in Jessl and Wilhelm 2023, 252).

Jessl and Wilhelm (2023, 89ff) also list other more practical impediments. First, particularly in the introduction period, CL is conflict- and time-intensive. Brokerage over decisions takes longer. The inward-looking orientation reduces the external awareness. The group may not continuously come into a process of implementation and discipline. If this happens, informal leaders will easily give up and staff will shy away from taking responsibility in the future.

They identify four general fields that need to show the right conditions for CL to work:

(1) The tasks and goals need to be fitting. I.e., they must be complex, benefitting from multiple perspectives and diverse knowledge, and be solved in a creative and exploratory fashion.
(2) The group needs to be ripe. I.e., people need to get to know each other, and have the time to learn to read each other. They need to be able to focus on trusting, and not to be pressured into functioning together. In this context, Brun and McAuliffe add an additional challenge: rotation, which increases the transient nature of teams and reduces the level of team stability (2023,168).
(3) Collective leadership forms need to be integrated into organisational culture – unwritten laws and practiced values need to be in line with CL. Self-interests, power plays and status-relevance cannot be the dominant shaping forces.
(4) Governance structures need to be conducive. Information needs to be able to flow, influence and scope for action needs to be given on all levels, not only to those who rise through the ranks, and privileges and reward need to be connected to team success, not only to individual performance.

The driving forces behind, limits of and contexts in which collective leadership are employed are thus vastly important to comprehend. As Snowden (2016) puts it: ‘We need to understand context before we imitate practice. If you do not understand the ‘why’ you should not replicate the ‘what’’. We are going to turn to organisational complexity in more depth in sub-chapter 2.3, providing lenses through which to understand collective leadership in complex organisational contexts.

2.2 Systemising Types and Narrowing the Focus

In the following, I build on Ospina at al. (2020) and Jessl and Wilhelm (2023) to systemise the CL field and narrow it down for my research purposes. Ospina et al. create a simple 2x2 matrix, mapping the academic discourse and dimensions, which is reproduced in Table 1.

Table 1: A map of collective approaches to leadership (Ospina et al. 2020:443)

		Dimension 2: View of collectivity	
		Collective Leadership as a type	Collective leadership as a lense
Dimension1: **Locus of leadership**	Leadership residing in the group	**Cell 1:** *'Collective' refers to plural forms of leadership and leadership resides in interpersonal relationships.* Dual/co-leadership; Shared leadership; Social network leadership; Team leadership.	**Cell 3:** *'Collective' refers to a theoretical lens and leadership resides in interpersonal relationships.* Practice theory studies (including leadership-as-practice); Relational leadership.
	Leadership residing in the system	**Cell 2:** *'Collective' refers to plural forms of leadership and leadership resides in systemic dynamics.* Multiteam systems leadership; Distributed leadership; Network leadership; Collective leadership practices; Complexity leadership.	**Cell 4:** *'Collective' refers to a theoretical lens and leadership resides in systemic dynamics.* Collective constructionist leadership; Discursive/communicative leadership; (some) Critical leadership studies.

I locate my research mainly in Cell 1 and take some elements of Cell 2 into consideration. Regarding Dimension 1, I am interested in leadership that resides 'in interpersonal relationships among members of a group'. However, I do not analyse this in isolation, but take interest in the broader system of embedded meanings, practices, and actions. Regarding Dimension 2, I am interested in CL as an empirical reality, what Ospina et al. refer to as a type, wherefore I am less interested in a theoretical lens that examines such reality (2020, 445ff). Yet, this does not render my research purely positivist or technical, as I aim to take differing perceptions, tensions, and relations of power into consideration to produce a critically constructive analysis.

With a major focus on Cell 1, Endres and Weibler offer yet another 2x2 matrix that zooms in further and provides orientation on the CL sub-forms relevant to the empirical reality at ORI.

Table 2: Four variants of plural leadership (Endres and Weibler 2019, 6) (translated by author into English)

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">Number of individuals which variably lead and follow</td></tr>
<tr><td>Two</td><td>More-----Many</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Fluidity by which leading and following occurs (intensity of sharing roles)</td><td>Low</td><td>Cell 1: Functionally distributed Leadership between two individuals: DUAL TOP ARRANGEMENT</td><td>Cell 3: Functionally distributed leadership within a group: DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP</td></tr>
<tr><td>High</td><td>Cell 2: Jointly shared leadership between two individuals: TOP SHARING</td><td>Cell 4: Jointly shared leadership within a group: SHARED LEADERSHIP</td></tr>
</table>

The table above thus summarises the two sub-forms of leadership that I am interested in, which I coin as co-leadership (the left column) and shared leadership in a team (the right column). In addition to numbers of those who are at times leading and at times following, the table adds the dimension of fluidity in which roles change and interlace. We will further explore this in the next two sub-chapters.

2.2.1 Co-Leadership

Co-leadership, with two leaders jointly inhabiting a leadership space, can thus look very differently, depending on (a) the relationship within the leadership dyad; (b) the nature in which the dyad engages with their team, department, or division; and (c) the ways in which they engage with top management and external actors.

Gibeau, Langley, Denis and Schendel (2020) examine these interplays. They investigate 20 co-leadership dyads in healthcare organisation, with a particular interest in how this enables ‘the bridging of competing demands and sources of expertise and legitimacy in pluralistic settings where multiple institutional logics coexist’ (2020, 464). They thus join the literature that reflects on co-leadership in a context in which two individuals bring in different skill sets and expertise to combine different logics. Very often, these are professional and managerial logics, for example in the medical field. Alternatively, the dual leadership is based on a division of tasks, for example in the film industry between director (artistic aspects) and producer (commercial aspects) (Ebbers and Wijnberg 2017).

Endres and Weibler (2019, 7f) refer to this as dual top arrangement (Cell 1, Table 2): two people have two different positions but are on the same hierarchical level. They are functional double heads, which continuously need to bring in their different professional views and rationalities. Spheres of influence of both sides are clearly marked and there is a distinct scope for overlapping roles. Yet, as overarching decisions need to be made jointly, this also bears the potential of conflict. Much of the literature focusing on this type hence looks at conflict resolution (Reid and Karambayya 2009).

Cell 2 of table 1 then outlines top sharing, a form of co-leadership in which roles are formally entirely overlapping. Neither member of the dyad can take key decisions on his or her own. How the dyad divides its work is up to the two dyad members. By consequence, areas of responsibility need to be negotiated, and role division and overlap needs to be organised and communicated. Studies researching top sharing often focus on everyday practices and communicative acts (Endres and Weibler 2019, 6f).

While Cell 1 and Cell 2 offer a good way to structure the focus, it is also important to understand that they are ideal types and in practice exist on a spectrum. For example, Cell 2 can include elements of divisions of labour, bridging, brokering and conflict resolution.

Klein (2018, 26) highlights that there are three leadership roles that can potentially be distributed in co-leadership configurations: (1) The visionary. To show how to realise goals and strategy, to motivate others, to adapt and to be in constant exchange with inner and external circles in this process. (2) The manager, to devise appropriate processes, to follow-up on tactics and everyday to-dos, to optimise and resolve conflict. (3) The coach, who cares about the personal and professional development of all team members to encourage learning and potential. Building on Gibeau et al. (2020, 469) configurations within distributed and shared leadership can thus include and produce elements of distribution, dominance, duplication, integration, and disconnection, depending on the individual dynamic of the dyad. To achieve distribution and integration, a high level of communication is needed.

2.2.2 Shared Leadership in a Team

The intensity and fluidity by which teams larger than two can negotiate and share leadership functions can also vary significantly. For this research, I introduce two definitions – one of distributed (Cell 3) and one of shared leadership (Cell 4) – that we then combine under the shared leadership in a team heading.

Regarding distributed leadership, we follow the definition by Gronn (2002, 429):

> The aggregated leadership of an organisation is dispersed among some, many, or maybe all of the members…. numerical or multiple leadership allows for the possibility that all organisation members may be leaders at some stage.

In this leadership form, there is a functional, task-oriented division of roles that is clearly articulated. Members thus have partial leadership roles that have been transparently and sometimes formally agreed upon. Leadership is distributed, not jointly owned. For example, leadership roles can rotate within the group or leadership roles can be based on the functional skills and competencies of members (Endres and Weibler 2019, 8f).

Turning to the fourth cell of table 2, shared leadership, Pearce and Conger (2003:1) offer the following definition for shared leadership:

> A dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organisational goals or both. This influence process involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upwards or downwards hierarchical influence.

Shared leadership is hence marked by more fluidity and interaction. The focus within shared leadership models is on various processes in which members glide into leadership roles, but also – and equally importantly – they slip into an active following role. Following becomes much more leadership empowering and decisive within the team leadership process. Shared leadership thus implies shared followership (Jessl and Wilhelm 2023, 13,47ff).

But what sort of leadership tasks can be shared in a team? And what are the most important tasks for those to follow? Jessl and Wilhelm summarise them by listing five ‘crystallising points’ in which leadership can be shared, but also needs to be articulated clearly: (1) Taking the initiative and going into the lead; (2) motivating others to join in and, if needed, to instruct them; (3) solve conflicts; (4) steer the team towards decision-making; (5) organise and take responsibilities. But one can also take other principles and practices of leadership, that are thought to address one reader, and easily imagine how these are distributed in a team, for example, the five practices of leadership by Kouzes and Posner (2003, 12): Model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable other to act and encourage the heart (see Appendix 3 for the practices and connected commitments).

Looking at the other side of the coin, the four crystalising points on which followership can be shared are: (1) to empower the (informal) leader; (2) to accept guidance and cooperate constructively; (3) Control agreements an actions by leaders and followers; (4) to recall the bid farewell to the (informal) leader (2023, 68ff, 78ff).

There is a rich research landscape outlining what makes teams work effectively – and consequentially, what shared leadership must embody to create thriving teams. There are broadly two strands of literature in this regard: The first strand of literature examines team dynamics: when a team functions well, it enacts leadership itself, so there is little need to reflect on hierarchies (more in line with Cell 4 of Table 2). The second strand examines the role of formal leadership outside of or team coordinators as part of the team in supporting teams (more in line with Cell 3 of Table 2).

Turning to examples of the ‘team dynamics’ literature, Lencioni (2003) underlines that teams need to reflection on:

(1) the importance of trust,
(2) the ability to address conflict,
(3) the need for commitment and accountability,
(4) and the necessity of producing tangible results.

In our discussion on ORI, all four elements will play important roles.

In another five-year study, Google analysed its internal team dynamics, asking how to build the perfect team (Duhigg 2016). The large-scale project, code-named Project Aristotle, found that it does not matter significantly who is part of a team, yet team behaviour, unwritten and/or explicit rules and a shared team culture do. They thus explored the importance of 'group norms', which are:

> Norms are the traditions, behavioural standards and unwritten rules that govern how we function when we gather: One team may come to a consensus that avoiding disagreement is more valuable than debate; another team might develop a culture that encourages vigorous arguments and spurns groupthink. Norms can be unspoken or openly acknowledged, but their influence is often profound. Team members may behave in certain ways as individuals — they may chafe against authority or prefer working independently — but when they gather, the group's norms typically override individual proclivities and encourage deference to the team.

The observable elements that counted the most were (1) equal distribution of conversational turn-taking and (2) a high average social sensibility, i.e., a high level of skills of intuiting how others feel based on their tone of voice, expressions, and nonverbal cues:

> The researchers eventually concluded that what distinguished the ''good'' teams from the dysfunctional groups was how teammates treated one another. The right norms, in other words, could raise a group's collective intelligence.

Joining the dots, the research concludes that creating psychological safety for team members is crucial, being defined as:

> A shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking…[It is] a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish someone for speaking up…It describes a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves.'

(Amy Edmondson as being quoted in Duhigg 2016)

Kortz (2018, 44) supports this argument by highlighting that leadership needs emotional agility, i.e., a flexibility in dealing with emotions, your own and those of others. The first step on this journey is to understand the power of your own emotions, and to continuously reflect what triggers them.

The second strand of literature on teams is more concerned with the enabling qualities of formal leadership, or in other words their skills to empower, so that teams can unfold their potential. Harris (2013, 551) stresses that formal leaders need to mobilize the leadership qualities and capacities of others. She also underlines that this requires organisational alignment, mutual understanding, and flexibility, rather than rigidity, prescription, or coercion. Permantier (2019, 23) summarizes this as the need for a new mind-set or attitude and new skills of leaders, which include, amongst others, to be open to culture change, to offer meaning and highlight values, to generate flexible work models and embrace agility, to create diverse teams, and finally, to see yourself as part of the solution and the problem. Regarding teams, he highlights three levels of evolution: Team spirit – moving from obligation to friendly connectedness; team leadership – moving from the despot to empathetic leadership; and team structures – moving from fear to liberating agility (2019, 250f).

To connect self-leadership, empowerment, and shared leadership, Jessl and Wilhelm develop a three-step model. The process for an organisation to reach shared leadership in teams is based on two prior steps: Self-Leadership – to define your own goals, your own values, to communicate effectively, to permanently reflect on your strength and weaknesses. Empowerment – empowering leadership means that bulk of responsibility lies with formal leadership/management. Formal leadership helps staff to foster their skills, to define goals, processes, and tasks autonomously and to make team members feel the impact of what they are doing. It is a culture in which power, information, knowledge, and successes are shared. Shared Leadership goes a final step forward, as it systematically reflects on who in a team is leading and following in which area at which time, which includes continuous explicit negotiation of tasks and roles (2023, 56ff).

2.3 Organisational Complexity: Schools of Thought to Situate CL

Having established a better understanding of how collective leadership can be type-casted and how it can operate, this sub-chapter zooms out again to embed CL within an environment of thought. It outlines selected schools of thought that can be utilized when studying CL in organisations: the first two are systems thinking and complexity theory, the second pair addresses agility and 'teal' organisational models based on Laloux (2014).

Notions of planned changed that can be managed have dominated the study of 'change management' for many years. The new truism of today seems to be that organisations must deal with intended and unintended consequences of change, catch them in flight and focus on relationships to respond while dynamics are unfolding (Varney 2021, 17ff; Olivier, Holscher and Colin 2021, 20ff).

To be clear, dealing with complexity is nothing new – after all, the term VUCA, meaning Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity, has been coined in the context of the Cold War (Roy 2023, 6). Kotter already stated in 1990 that coping with complexity and change are the two main functions that shape management and leadership (2011, 38). Yet, the pace of change and the diversity of problems compounded – in and outside of the workplace – is nothing less than staggering. Disruption and disorientation will rather increase then decrease (Tooze 2022). Hence, which schools of thought can help us understand and deal increasingly complex environments?

2.3.1 Systems Thinking and Complexity Theory

Olivier et al. describe a complexity mindset as moving from organisation as mechanical systems to organisations as living ecosystems, from 'either-or' to 'both-and' mindsets, from blueprint to process thinking, and from emotional intelligence to eco intelligence (2021, 25ff). An important foundation is systems thinking, which can be characterised as:

> Systems thinking emphasizes the interrelationship between its components rather than the components themselves. It does not try to

> break systems into parts in order to understand them; instead, it focuses attention at the dynamics between the parts as it transpires into networks of interactions. As such, systems thinking has two main complementary meanings: rising above the separate components to see the whole system and thinking about each individual component as part of the whole system.
>
> (Shaked and Schlechter 2016, 178)

Peter Senge places systems thinking within the context of organisational cultures and learning. In his book, entitled 'The Fifth Discipline' (1990), he outlines four essential ingrediencies of learning organisations: personal mastery (continuous learning), mental models (awareness of your own acquired patterns of thinking, as well as those within the organisation and challenging them), shared vision (within a team or organisation) and team learning (through dialogue and discussion). The novel (at the time) and fifth element that he added was the ability to see the organisation as a whole and to acknowledge the system around it. What he underlines in his framing of systems thinking is a strong element of agency:

> We are often blind to the inevitable interconnectedness and interdependence of what we try to do in any setting... Systems thinking helps us challenge counterproductive assumptions about authority in a productive way. Rather than pointing fingers, it fosters compassion. We realize that systems work the way they do, not because of any one person's individual agency, but because of our collective agency… when you really start to understand the true nature of social systems, you realize that the first corollary is that we have created the system, and therefore only we can change the system.
>
> (Eisler 2015, 8f)

Systems thinking moves our attention away from controlling a context, to staying awake, pay attention, participate, and respond to feedback (Meadows 2001, 58). According to Meadows, the ultimate feedback loop runs from 'the state of the system' to 'action/intervention' and back – with the 'and back' part being the important element of the sentence: we often focus too much on inflows, but not enough on outflows, which are unintentional and different from our expectations.

Another connected school of thought that is useful is complexity theory, which:

> …looks at the world in ways which break with simple cause-and-effect models, simple determinism and linear predictability and a dissection/atomistic approach to understanding phenomena, replacing them with organic, non-linear, and holistic approaches. Relations within interconnected, dynamic, and changing networks are the order of the day, and there is a multiplicity of simultaneously interacting variables. Here key terms are feedback, recursions, emergence, connectedness, and self-organisation.
>
> (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018, 27)

A helpful tool to know when to employ complexity as a framework in organisations is the Cynefin model. It identifies four behaviours a situation can display: simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic (Snowden and Boone 2007). Leaders and managers often confuse complicated and complex situations. In a complex situation, cause and effect are so intertwined that we only understand their relation in hindside, recognizing patterns and non-linear relationships. In a given situation, we are only able to probe, sense and response. However, we often frame these as complicated issues, believing that a clear analysis can help us with establishing relationships between cause and effect – and this is doomed to fail (Callahan 2010). The illustration below shows how the model combines an assessment of clear, complicated, complex, chaotic, and confused situations.

Illustration 1: About the Cynefin Framework, The Cynefin Company (2023)

(Removed for Copy Right Reasons – please go here to see the illustration: https://thecynefin.co/about-us/about-cynefin-framework/)

According to Snowden (2016), in systems thinking, you define the ideal future state, and you try and close the gap. By contrast, in complexity theory, you describe the present and see what you can change. By consequence, you define a direction of travel, not a goal. The journey itself leads you to findings that you did not now you would discover, and which may still have a high utility. With a strict goal orientation, one might miss these findings because they do not fit the pattern of expectation.

2.3.2 Agility and Teal Organisations

Another rather hyped school of thought is agility, including concepts around agile work, agile organisations, and agile leadership. Building on notions such as VUCA and grappling with a new business environment, seventeen technical thought leaders in software development published the 'Manifesto for Agile Software Development' in 2001, thereafter called the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al. 2001). It reacted to organisations that have grown, established processes, structures, and bureaucracies. Over time however, these organisations have a declined ability to respond to change and to adapt to new trends. They are thus out of tune when it comes to reacting to change and complexity. Building on the Agile Manifesto, Hesselberg (2018) offers the following definition for an agile enterprise:

> An agile enterprise is an organisation of engaged people that is relentlessly focused on customer value; that continually improves the way it operates; and that uses empiricism to swiftly embrace change in a sustainable manner."

For the study of collective leadership, agility thus offers the following points of connection:

(1) Individuals at work care about their work and have meaningful interactions with colleagues. People need to be at the centre - not tools, methods, and techniques.
(2) Understanding the 'why' behind the organisation and engaging with customers in an applied setting is important.

(3) There is no business as usual, but a continuous way to challenge and enhance the way you work.
(4) Practice informs theory, not the other way around. Decisions need to be based on empiricism.
(5) The future is unpredictable, so teams and organisations need to adapt to unexpected events.
(6) Agility is a culture and a mind-set, and thus a continuous journey (based on Hasselberg 2018).

Looking into what agility means for leadership, Roy identifies five basic attitudinal preferences that set agile leaders apart: ‘guidance over control, collaboration over hierarchy, cross-functionality over silos, adaptiveness over plan-centricity, and value-orientation over output’ (2023, 5). The world of agility, including the literature and training and coaching industry, offer a plethora of tools – from scrum master’s to loop approaches and sprints. I will explore some of these as they apply to practical work at ORI in the next sub-chapter. For now, it suffices to understand agility as a mind-set through which collaborative leadership can be influenced.

We now come to the last organisational lens that may influence how we understand and enact collective leadership: teal organisations. The term was coined by Frederic Laloux in his book ‘Reinventing organizations’ (2014). According to him, organisations have evolved, from red (current examples: mafia, street gangs; worldview: impulsive), to amber (catholic church, military, many government agencies, public school system; conformist), to orange (multinational companies; achievement driven) and to green (culture and empowerment driven organisations; pluralistic) (2014, 36). The next emergent stage are teal organizations. Using the metaphor of a living organism, they are built on the following three ‘breakthroughs’:

(1) Self-management. To operate effectively, systems are based on peer relationships, without the need for hierarchy or consensus.
(2) Wholeness. These organisations invite us to reclaim our inner wholeness, bringing all of who we are to work – not only the professional, masculinity and rationality driven facades.

(3) Evolutionary purpose. They have a sense of direction of their own. The future is not to be predicted, but members are invited to listen and understand what the organisation wants to become (Laloux 2014, 56).

Laloux goes into great depth to conceptualize these breakthroughs and to explain what it means to either build or transform an organisation into teal, outlining practices for structure, human resources, daily life, and major organisational processes.

From a collective leadership perspective, Laloux offers sometimes radical suggestions for practices to expand our thinking. To name a few: teams without project or lead responsibility and no management authority (but they embrace coaching when needed); many meetings, but no structured coordination meetings; no central staff functions such as HR and finance (instead functions are performed by teams themselves); peer-based processes for appraisals; self-set salaries with peer calibration for base pay; fully decentralised decision making; regular time devoted to address conflicts; information made available in real time to all (2014, 327ff).

2.3.3 Assembling a Conceptual Toolbox

Having outlined these four schools of thought, we now have a better recent historical understanding of the thought landscape that collective leadership resonates with. In this sub-section, I select concepts and tools, often from the schools of thought outlined, that are relevant to the study of collective leadership at ORI. I provide brief definitions, many of them based on Klein and Hughes, who have written a handbook on 'The Loop Approach' (2019), which has influence thinking at the organisation, as the approach has been a coaching tool. Klein and Hughes provide an excellent 'New Work Glossary'. These conceptual tools are ordered in two clusters: organisational modes and tools for teams.

(1) Conceptional Tools to Understand Organisations

Matrix Organisation: 'The matrix model is the answer that classical management studies offered to the question of how existing methods could be used to tackle increasingly complex external challenges. A matrix organization typically has two axes, going from top to bottom and from left to right. This means each employee can have two bosses, on both the vertical and the horizontal axes. This contrasts with the hierarchical pyramid, which is only organised from top to bottom. (Klein and Hughes 2019, 223). Some see the matrix organisation as having failed, as they 'led to the worst of both worlds, a cumbersome organisational structure, and the inability to adapt to fast changing contexts' (Satell 2015). Others think that one still can make the matrix organisation 'really work', by carefully designing 'where people report, what roles they should play, how the matrix works and who gets placed in leadership positions' (Bhalla, Gandarilla and Watkinson 2022, 2f)

Networked Organizations: 'Networks are informal structures. If it can fit on a traditional organisational chart, it's not a network…A network is just any system of nodes connected by links. So, any organisational structure is a network'. Networks have two characteristics: clustering, the degree to which a network is made up of tightly knit groups, and path lengths, the average measure of distance or number of links separating two nodes in a network. The task is thus not to 'break down silos', but to reduce path length, so that information travels faster. In this sense, networked organizations do not need to be flat, but the focus needs to be on informal structures and communication, forging a shared purpose (Satell 2015).

(2) Conceptional Tools to Understand Teams

Communities of Practice (CoP): 'are organized groups of people with a common interest in a specific technical or business domain. They regularly collaborate to share information, improve their skills, and actively work on advancing their knowledge of the domain.' Communities of Practice must have three traits: 'Domain – an area of shared interest: what we care about; Practice – a shared body of knowledge, experiences, techniques: what we do together about it; Community – a self-selected group of individuals who care enough about the topic to participate in regular interactions: who cares about it' (Wenger 1998, quoted and referenced on Scaled Agile 2023)

Roles: ‘A concept in many organisations that allows for responsibility to be distributed in an organisation by assigning roles to people. Roles are clusters of accountabilities, united by a shared purpose of those accountabilities. Roles are flexible, changing all the time through a governance process.’ (Klein and Hughes 2019, 228).

Self-organising: ‘In the context of ‘New Work’, self-organising is often used to describe all kinds of collaboration that do not rely on top-down planning and hierarchical control. In other words, self-organising systems organise themselves from the inside out. In them, responsibilities and rules for decision-making are often transparent and based on individual competencies. For self-organisation to work, it typically requires strong alignment around a shared great goal, such as a purpose.’ (Klein and Hughes 2019, 229).

The Loop Approach: An approach developed by the consultancy ‘The Dive’ ‘to teach the tools and behaviours that can best support a transformation to towards and evolutionary, agile organisation.’ ‘It helps organizations to identify practices suitable for the future of work and allows them to develop their own operating systems’. In order to get from a pyramid to a new model, that is yet to be defined, but of a more circular nature, one needs to go in loops – the journey is the destination, and things will not move forward in a linear fashion. The approach focusses on how teams work, ‘because it is where the real work happens. At their core, effective organizations are just a collection of effective teams that are aligned well’ (Klein and Hughes 2019, 19,33,89).

2.4 Preliminary Gaps in the Literature

Much of the literature reviewed underlines that it is important to understand how hierarchical and collective leadership interact. Given that organisational rules, cultures, and practices must be aligned, it is often easier for younger organisations to introduce collective leadership tools. This does not mean that organisations with long traditions can adapt – it is simply a more complex process.

Having scanned the literature and having current dynamics at ORI in mind, I sense gaps on the practical and 'harder' side of organisational reality that have only occasionally been addressed:

(1) Pressure on financial resources. Co-Leadership, for example, increases costs for staffing and means adjustment of staffing tables. This is often a solid hurtle that stalls the creation of co-leadership arrangements.
(2) Pay as a source of feeling treated unequally. In hierarchical organisations, the head of a unit earns more than the administrative officer. Why then should everyone be willing to take over more leadership, often equated with more responsibility and work? The expression that this is 'a question above my paygrade' does not come out of nowhere. Jessl and Wilhelm (2023, 48f) give the example of a manager saying to the team: "Hereby I pass all leadership for this matter to you as a team." Reactions to that (not always articulated) are likely: "Is that not her/his job?" "Now he/she is being lazy" or "He/she does probably not want to take responsibility for the results". Pay is an important factor regarding these reaction and mindsets. Hence, debates about collective leadership should include debates on equal pay when necessary – something that is seldomly done because of bureaucratic rules and organisational sensitivities.
(3) Recognition and acknowledgement are of critical importance. The way we feel valued in more traditional organisations is still very much based on recognition from above: we want to be seen, praised, and rewarded by our superiors. Collective leadership muddles traditional rituals of recognition, which means that an introduction of CL will also possibly come with tension regarding due and just recognition.
(4) Scarce human resource and time pressure. Introducing collective leadership – at least in its earlier stages - is time intensive. In a context in which it is hard to find staff and in which burn-out rates are high due to increased demands and workloads, there might not be an appetite by staff to invest in CL. Thus, if more collective forms of leadership are wanted, human resources and time budgets have to be created.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Overview of Research Method

In the following, I outline the aims, strategy, type, and philosophy underpinning my research.

3.1.1 Research Aims

In relation to the main research question and sub-questions outlined in the introduction, this thesis has three aims:

Aim One - Framing and Analysing:

To reveal what is already conceptualized and analysed regarding collective leadership, particularly on co-leadership and shared leadership in teams, and to understand how this relates to other concepts of leadership, as well as current discourses on organisational change.

Aim Two - Collecting Empirical Data at ORI:

To understand how concepts of collective leadership, existing in interrelatedness with established management practices and hierarchies, unfold in practice within a particular context at ORI.

Aim Three - Fostering Learning on CL at ORI:

To support institutional learning that builds on existent knowledge, internally emergent processes and the ideas and motivations of ORI staff.

3.1.2 Research Strategy

The research design chosen fosters the realisation of these three aims:

(1) To review the existing literature and theories on collective leadership.
(2) To read ORI internal sources, which cannot be shared here, but serve as knowledge on background.
(3) To gather primary data by conducting semi-structured interviews with staff, employing a qualitative approach to the interviews.

(4) To combine the insights gathered by providing recommendations on collective leadership for ORI.

The research puzzle, i.e., ‘something generally or specifically not known and therefore requiring sensible questions to be asked that are capable of solving the puzzle or part of it’ (Hart 2005, 58), can be formulated in layman’s terms as: If collective leadership is something that many of us approve of and may wish to see more of, why is it so hard to implement at an established, older organisation, willing to change? What can be done to make this transition easier?

3.1.3 Research Type

Hart (2005, 18f) divides theses for a master’s degree into three ideal types: the traditional, the literature-review and the worked-based thesis. This thesis is a predominantly work-based thesis. It is focused on a specific work-based issue of significance to an organisation (Aim Two), and its goal is to ‘draw out options, recommendations, and action lines’ (2005, 19) (Aim Three). In doing so, it builds on knowledge and theories within the academic realm. Yet, pre-existing studies are seen as informative to build on knowledge, rather than testing theories or findings of others (Aim One).

3.1.4 Research Philosophy

In terms of my research philosophy, I share a social-constructivist view on knowledge as being formed in the process of my research. I believe that ‘neither unchangeable truths nor a priori knowledge in the world exists’. Human beings, who are rooted in socio-cultural contexts, produce knowledge, reality, and its structures through social and linguistic interaction (University of Jyväskylä 2023). For me as a researcher this means the following:

> Social constructivism holds that individuals seek to make meaning of their social lives and that the researcher has to examine the situation in question through the multiple lenses of individuals involved, to obtain their definition of the situation, to see how they make sense of their situation and to focus on interactions, contexts, environments and biographies.

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018, 23)

I also believe in the study of practices that do not derive from 'conscious deliberation or thoughtful reflection' but are 'patterned social activities that embody shared meanings' (Pouliot 2010, 12; Adler and Pouliot 2011, 6). I am cautious of clear causalities and believe that 'there are several causes at work in a single situation and that these produce a multiplicity of effects' (Cohen et al. 2018, 94). To express it within the Cynefin Framework: when looking at collective leadership at ORI, we are partly looking at complicated issues, for which we can develop good practices (communication in co-leadership dyads for example) and partly at complex issues, for which we need to find emergent and exaptive practices, because we cannot clearly point to an apparent cause and effect relationship (the reluctance to work in an inter-unit team for example) (The Cynefin Company 2023).

Grappling with complexity theory during the MEL course has been eye-opening for me. I have worked in countries afflicted by conflict for many years – and the positivistic and linear approaches to highly complex problems that were often employed by international interveners, including myself, have deeply troubled me. Yet, while complexity theory with its focus on uncertainty, networks and connections, holism, emergence, relationships of the internal and external environments, and development through adaptation (Cohen et al. 2018, 27) all make perfect sense for me when reflecting on collective leadership at ORI, I sometimes do long for the good old days of prescriptiveness and best practises.

This tension – of humbly understanding the tip of complex processes on the one hand and wishing to spell out what could be 'improved' in my subjective view on the other – will not seize to exist when discussing my research findings. And that is understandable, as 'we are wired to make sense of things', wherefore 'our explanations tent to ignore complexity and explain it away' (Varney 2021, 65f). All I can do is to be reflective about it. In addition, other approaches as part of my research strategy could have aided the study of complexity, such as action research, and in general, more participatory, and collaborative forms of research. In a small step towards this goal, I am joining the staff-as-researcher movement, taking an insider view, and aiming to bridge my internal research on an organisation that I am part of with external research done by others (Cohen et al. 2018, 29). As Varney (2021,58) puts it: You've got to be in it to change it.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Secondary Data

Data for this thesis has been collected by reviewing three types of secondary data: academic literature, leadership and organisational development guidance literature, and internal ORI documents on leadership and teams. The theoretical chapter has already touched upon the difficulties regarding the different nature, logics and audiences of the academic and guidance-oriented literature (see page 10). To a more limited degree, I have used ORI-internally available data found on the intranet pages of the organisation. Given that these documents are not for public consumption, I do not quote from or summarise them, except for a one-pager on principles for management/leadership.

3.2.2 Primary Data - Interviews with ORI Staff

Primary data has been collected by interviewing ORI staff. I identify my interview approach to a lesser degree as a 'miner', extracting information and material from the interviewee, and to a larger degree as a 'traveller', 'who is traveling with the interview partner into an unknown country to co-construct knowledge' (Kvale 1996, as summarised in Cohen et al. 2018, 506). To facilitate that co-construction, I aimed to build on three important attributes: trust, curiosity, and naturalness (Woods 1986, adopted in Cohen et al. 2018, 507).

I employed a semi-structured interview set-up, which allowed for exploration on certain issues if the path of the interview took us there. This can also be coined as an 'interview guide approach' (Patton 1980, as reviewed in Cohen et al. 2018, 510). I specified topics and issues in advance in an outline form, pre-phrasing four to six questions under three major topics. I then decided on the selection and sequencing of questions in preparation for each interview with a specific interview partner in mind, reflecting on his/her individual expertise, adapting my questions during the interview if needed. This allowed me to strongly build on the interest and experiences of my interview partners while remaining conversational and flexible. A weakness of this approach is that I may have received different answers to different questions and gathered thicker and thinner primary data on different topics, dependent on the number of interviewees that I discussed topics with.

The three major topics that were covered during the interviews were: organisational change, shared leadership in teams, and co-leadership. There were about two to three sub-topics and corresponding sets of questions under each topic when starting the interview process, which expanded in its course. The overall outline of interview questions can be found in Appendix Three.

In total, I conducted twelve interviews with ORI staff on the basis of anonymity and confidentiality. Attributions to interviewees views and quotes in this thesis are given by referencing the interviewees random numbers (from one to eleven). The duration of each interview was between 45 and 60 minutes. This relatively short interview time was due to the fact that interviews were unfortunately conducted during the busiest time of the year, i.e., the end-year-rush to finish projects. Therefore, conversations had to be to the point, while simultaneously staying cordially to allow for trust, curiosity, and naturalness. In addition, as explained above, not all topics were discussed with all interviewees. Specifically, co-leadership issues were examined in depth with Interviewees 1,2,3,4, and 6, while organisational change was more intensively reviewed with Interviewees 7,8,9,10 and 12. All interview partners were asked about their experiences and views on shared leadership in teams. Ten of the twelve interviewees currently work within Division X. One interview was conducted with two interviewees at the same time, currently working as a co-leadership dyad. Informed consent to live transcribe and in certain cases with lower voice quality to additionally voice record the interviews was asked for and granted by all interviewed. Ten interviews were conducted in English to allow direct use of the material and of unalerted quotes. Based on the wishes of two interviewees, their interviews were conducted in their native language. I have known all interviewees as colleagues for at least two and a maximum of sixteen years. Seven of the eleven interviewees are currently working on the same hierarchical level as I am, four currently have a more senior leadership position.

If we imagine ORI to be a ship, the interview partners were selected because they fulfil one of the following functions:

(1) **Weathered Teams Sailors:** They have significant experiences (more then 10 years) within Division X, having worked in different constellations in teams, both leading and following. In addition, they have coordinated and steered important team processes beyond their unit, department, or division at ORI, making them formal or informal collective leaders. This set of criteria applies to all twelve interviewees.

(2) **Co-Leading Shipmates:** They have or are working in a co-leadership dyad (for at least five years) in Division X. From all currently practicing dyads at ORI, at least one member is interviewed. This applies to six of the twelve interviewees.

(3) **Organisational Change Captains:** They are currently in formal positions at ORI that allow them to shape the evolution of the organisation, particularly when it comes to forms of collective leadership. They fulfil this role either in Division X or at the human resource division of ORI. This criterion applies to five of the twelve interviewees.

There are significant shortcomings to this selection of interviewees. Firstly, while views of those interviewed differed, all but two have a similar age and have joined ORI around the same time (during the 2000's). Almost all are on a rotational contract scheme, meaning that they rotate between the position of desk officer, a head of office or occasionally a department/division head. Finally, they are all social scientists, and all have the same nationality. Interestingly, I only realised the similarities between my interviewees and myself in terms of background and career path when I had already conducted more than half of the interviews and scheduled the remaining ones.

If the scope of this research had been larger, it would thus have been important to interview colleagues from the administrative structure of the organisation. In addition, given that ORI has many offices around the globe, it would have been key to interview colleagues in these offices. This would have provided a deeper understanding of the various ways in which staff perceive leading and – equally importantly – following at ORI. In addition, it would include the element of cultural diversity.

Secondly, in an ideal world with more time, I would have chosen to interview staff of other organisations that are practicing co-leading and shared leading, and/or are transitioning from a traditional hierarchical organisation to a more mixed and networked organisational form. This would have been particularly helpful for ORI staff who are already designing and implementing tools to improve leadership qualities and teamwork at the organisation, as it might have broadened the scope and provided them with a wider set of ideas beyond the realm of the organisation.

3.3 Data Analysis

The primary and secondary data was analysed thematically based on topical content. A set of three broad topics (organisational change, co-leadership, and shared leadership in teams) was broken down into sub-headings and codes, which expand during the interview phase as emerging from the data. The online interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams, employing its integrated live transcription function. After the completion of an interview, I reviewed the transcribed data set, categorising answers, ideas and point of interests under the sub-headings and codes. After all interviews were concluded, the collated data was analysed, patterns were identified and organised into themes and sub-themes. In line with Cohen et al., the summary process ‘identifies key factors, key issues, key concepts, and key areas of subsequent investigation. It is a watershed stage during the data collection, as it pinpoints major themes, issues and problem that have arisen’ (2018, 680). Based on my findings, the literature was revisited again, not to confirm a theory, but to point to context specificity at ORI and highlight gaps which might be interesting for subsequent researchers.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The interviews were conducted with a promise to use the data anonymously. Thus, given the specifics of the organisation and the small number of interviews, I had to generalise certain points made (regarding a specific context or location) to guard the anonymity of the interviewee. The same was true regarding ORI as an organisation. While I originally planned to include a thicker description of ORI in this thesis, which would help the reader to better contextualise the information, I decided not to do so. Instead, I offered a more general introduction to ORI and provided specific context only where needed to understand the interview results.

As stated in the introduction, I am part of ORI. This has three sets of consequences: first, I have personal experiences, views, and ideas about the evolution of the organisation. Given that I wish to foster forms of collective leadership at ORI, this research bias may have lead me to focus on the positive elements of collective leadership. To balance my potential selection bias, I asked open questions that offer room for those critical of CL. When an interviewee was critical or of a different view then mine, I paid particular attention to understand and reflect on his/her point. Secondly, I needed to make my own views as leader and a follower transparent during the writing process. To do this, I thought about interviewing myself, but integrating that data into the findings seemed too artificial in the end. Instead, I aimed to clearly identify findings based on interviews, and my assessment and recommendations, based on my personal experiences, views and ideas. Thirdly, I understood which issues were sensitive and therefore should not be discussed in a published thesis. Overall, I selected a topic that is not problematic for the organisation, but any discussion on hierarchy and collaboration, on power and on the role of top leadership has a sensitive edge. I therefore admit to having employed a mild degree of self-censorship.

4 COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP AT ORI

4.1 Introduction to ORI, its Mission Statement, and this Chapter

ORI has between one and two thousand staff, who are based at two headquarters in a European country, a larger number of regional offices within that same country and over one hundred smaller offices abroad. In the process that has been leading up to an important anniversary, the organisation underwent a thorough organisational change process, beginning with a participatory approach. This included a survey of staff's opinions; in-person discussions and the creation of teams that focused on organisational innovation. Two of the innovation teams concentrated specifically on issues of collaboration. Building on these findings and recommendations by the innovation teams, decisions by senior management were taken to re-organise parts of the organisation and introduce new formats and pilot projects. All ideas generated by the innovation team were translated into reality, which, according to an advising consultant, is very rare and therefore a noteworthy success (Interview 10). In addition, a new mission statement was developed, which holds important insights on collective leadership themes as it outlines that:

> …our teams are made up of bright minds and committed individuals who perform their activities in an agile manner, with appreciation for one another and a clear focus. We view criticism and mistakes as an opportunity to review our actions and generate new ideas for our work as a team.

This mission statement, traditionally more focused on the thematic work of the organisation, thus provides a new and important basis for future teamwork, agility, purpose, appreciation, and a culture in which one learns from mistakes. But how does one practice this culture of working together daily? And what do these concepts mean in specific contexts? (Interviewee 10). Given that the statement is relatively new and that change takes time, these are questions that the organisation is in the midst of answering.

This chapter will summarise the findings from interviews with twelve ORI staff on organisational change and on two sub-forms of collective leadership - co-leadership, and shared leadership in teams. The sub-chapters on organisational change look more at ORI, but from the vantage point of staff within Division X. The sub-chapters on collective leadership focus mainly on the experiences made by staff in Division X. Division X is subdivided into 8 departments, each with a seize of 12 to 35 staff at headquarters, plus the responsibility for offices. Each department and the division have a head (and in one case even two), forming the group of formal leaders, which for the purpose of this study will be referred to as the top leadership group of Division X. As explained earlier, ORI's operating language has a word (starting with F) which combines leadership and management roles. Very often, colleagues used the term leadership or management, by which formal leadership is meant. I will therefore employ the term management/leadership to highlight that colleagues referred to the overarching concept starting with F.

I wish to make a technical note on the tense employed in Chapter 4. Traditionally, when referring to research findings, the past tense is used, except when there is a direct quote from an interview. However, I have chosen to use the present tense for the remainder of this chapter for two reasons: (1) All interviewees were conducted in November 2023, and the thesis has been completed in early December 2023. Using the past tense in paraphrasing the inputs of interviewees did not feel accurate, as the described processes are ongoing and not events of the past. (2) Related to the above, this thesis is to be understood as a temporal snapshot. When interviewees refer to the past, I refer to the past. When they use present tense, I wish to do the same to underline the temporality of findings. If someone reads this thesis in ten years, I kindly ask him/her to frame the thesis as a temporary excerpt of differently perceived experiences and realities, which have been collated in late 2023.

4.2 Organisational Change at ORI

4.2.1 Hierarchies, Matrixes and Networks at ORI

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, collaboration unfolds within an organisational structure. So, what is the current organisational structure of ORI? How hierarchical is it and how much is that changing? The answer given by several interview partners is: It depends. In terms of organisational types, ORI is divers, covering a broad range of shapes, conditional upon location, unit, and managers/leaders in charge (Interview 9). The perception of hierarchy thus very much depends on one's position and environment within the organisation (Interview 8).

Yet, in general, interviewees agree that ORI is currently undergoing a transformational period from a traditional or hierarchical form to one with network and matrix features (Interviews 7,8,9,10). They also agree that the mix of types will not seize to exist, i.e., features of a hierarchy, matrix and network will coexist in the foreseeable future. One interviewee describes it as field of tension between centralisation and decentralisation, where the shift is either more towards the one or the other, with a current tendency towards more centralisation, in that communication is more centralised and the structure of departments and divisions has been streamlined through re-organisation of units (Interview 10).

Just how much of the hierarchy is still needed is a matter of debate. Interviewee 8 characterises ORIs structure as an 'informal type of hierarchy where decisions are made informally or prepared in informal networks, and then at a later stage maybe approved by the higher hierarchy level,' on which senior management still has room for manoeuvre. Hierarchies on the organisational chart do not match de-facto hierarchies, yet, in general 'our hierarchies are relatively flat'. This is also due to frequent rotation, so 'everyone is at some position at some point [in his/her career]' (Interview 5).

Interviewee 6 disagrees:

> We always communicate that we are an organisation with flat hierarchies, which is nonsense. I think we have very clear hierarchies, but we try to hide them in a fog of word, in a fog of processes… You can empower people to a certain level, but it is very difficult to do this in an hierarchical organisation. There, empowerment has a limit and shared leadership has an even stricter limit. That makes it difficult to work in teams, which are based on this whole idea of working agile.

The quote illustrates how perceptions of hierarchies are related to the perceived space for collective leadership. We will turn to the limits of working in teams later in more detail later.

Why does the organisation hang on to the hierarchical pyramid structure? Interviewee 12 explaines that the administrative structure is hierarchical – i.e., responsibilities over finance, human resources and contracts are organised along hierarchical lines, which has an impact, but ‘does not always match reality’. In addition, ORI applies a job category system to fill its posts, which is externally imposed. Once a member of ORI staff, it is hard for many colleagues to move from one job category to the next, particularly for those doing administrative work at headquarters or being employed as local staff in offices (Interview 1,3,6,11). The job categories are aligned with salary levels and with a hierarchical structure.

Another stipulation might be that management/leadership clings to power. As Interviewee 9 outlines:

> A classical answer would be that the leadership is not ready to hand over certain powers to teams. But the other side is that the system and the teams are still very much relying [on] and looking at senior leadership.

Interviewee 8 echoes this sentiment: While there is a wish, shared by leadership, that the richness of experiences of all colleagues is reflected in decision making processes in teams, so that strong hierarchies are somewhat bypassed, there is still a strong feeling by staff that hierarchies exist, and there is a wish for guidance from the upper levels to be given.

One explanation for the need to have stable departmental and divisional structures is a feeling of safety, as Interviewee 7 explains:

> It comes back to making people feel secure in what they are doing. If you do this in one department it is less stressful for people because they still have their hierarchical head, which provides the whole setup. In case something goes wrong or in case there's a conflict, they can still come to me and say: ‘OK, please help me’. If you enter

> different departments then sometimes this gets some more complicated. You don't know [what to do] in case of conflict.
>
> What is the key definition of leadership? The best definition I like is it is the person who provides a secure environment to do your work. It it's not the person who tells you what to do, but to provide the environment…. And if you are in the network, sometimes maybe that person is sort of missing.

A key to provide safety in teams and networks might thus be to define and provide reliable conflict resolution mechanisms and persons to turn to as conflict mediators, a theme which again, we shall return to later.

Why, at the same time, does ORI need to alter the way it has been operating? Interviewee 12 underlines that moving from a hierarchy to a matrix or a network is not an end in itself, but has to be guided by the overall goal and mission:

> Just to say, OK, let’s have a matrix organisation for a change, is not the point. We have to be sure what we want to achieve. And if the aim is to give better advice, organising our work along policy fields makes a lot of sense for the time being, because the questions we get from our partners and the challenges we face cannot be answered by asking a single office…we have to bring different experiences and background together.

Interviewee 9 frames the push to different forms of co-working also as guided by external pressures:

> To operate better in the context where we work, a lot of agile management and quick reaction to changing environments and changing contexts [is needed]. If you have a very hierarchical structure, you are slower. You don't adapt as fast as necessary to changing context, as you don't bring in the knowledge and resource that you have…. In order to exploit this knowledge and these capabilities, it's beneficial for the institution to provide a framework where staff can bring in this much better in a more autonomous way, not only or always depending on leadership decision or approval.

The realisation of and call for more autonomy of smaller teams within their departments or division is echoed by three other interviewees heading units. After a recent reorganisation, some departments, and Division X itself have become larger. There is hence some preliminary thinking on how to create smaller units within departments to lessen the pressure on their heads. The question is how to 'move to a team structure, creating another layer of leadership, another layer of networks' (Interview 7). This would not only influence the work in a department, but also improve the communication between departments. Interviewee 8 states that he/she could imagine that thematic coordinators are placed at 'a more elevated level in the system and then a lot of communication is organised and streamlined via the coordinators' (echoed by Interview 12).

So, what do we call this mixed organisational type that ORI is currently representing? Some interviewees label it as a matrix, formed by the combination of the department/division level, organised around regional or cross-functional responsibilities, with the thematic level. Yet, this 'kind of matrix organisation is not very clear for most of the people working in it' (Interview 6). In this matrix structure, on the vertical level, you have very clear hierarchical lines along divisions and departments, and on the horizontal level, you have the new, partly officialised structures of focus projects, innovation projects, A teams, which work across divisional and sometimes also departmental lines and are often organised by expertise on thematic issues. And 'within the matrix, you always have a problem with the specialist/thematic leadership and the hierarchical leadership' (Interview 10).

At the same time, there is a networked character of the organisation, which some interviewees see as existing in parallel to the hierarchy and the matrix (Interview 10), while others believe that networks are the next evolutionary step, suggesting that because the matrix did not work, we are moving towards a networked organisation: 'The next model after the matrix is the network, which is much less strict and more flexible then the matrix model.' Thus, the network is better suited to address complexity and able to adapt to changes (Interview 7). The networked character also offers space for communities of practise, in which thematic experts can gather and advance thinking on complex thematic issues (Interview 9,10).

Whatever the preferred label might be, we can conclude that ORI has hierarchical, matrixed, and networked structural components – and there are good reasons why these components are likely to stay. There is also no doubt that their co-existence and interaction produces frictions of different natures, which should be addressed. These tensions can be summarised as existing around:

(1) Allocation of scarce time resources of staff (Interviews 2,3,6,7,11);
(2) The definition and communication of decision-making structures, as well as tools to address conflicts over decision making (Interviews 1,2,4,6,7,10);
(3) A more explicit negotiation, agreement and communication of what specific roles for those engaged in matrixes and networks entail (Interviews 1,4,6,8,10);
(4) Inflexible job categorisations, i.e., which correlates with specific requirements and defines the level of responsibility and salary. While some see inflexible job patterns as a deep thorn that will always reduce the ability of ORI to share more leadership in teams (Interview 3, 6,11), others underline that one simply cannot change the categorisation and that even despite it, there is a lot of room for manoeuvre to share responsibility, leadership, and recognition amongst all staff (Interview 7,10).

We will further explore these areas of tensions and how to potentially translate them into improvements when zooming in on collective leadership in dyads and teams. For now, we turn to notions of leadership of ORI.

4.2.2 Leadership and Teams at ORI

This thesis aims to think leadership and teams together. Hence, how do interviewees perceive changing notion of leadership at ORI? And how is this shift linked to collaboration in duos and teams?

An interview partner with a long career at ORI stresses the immense change in the perception and enactment of leadership roles since the 1990s. Thirty years ago, a traditional set of leaders, almost all male, dominated management positions at ORI in Division X, enacting ‘the little fiefdoms approach’, in which ‘people made vigorously sure that nobody is stepping on their turf’. What changed as of the early 2000 was that more women were joining the fray in leadership/managerial roles and that global and regional projects were introduced, which were initially met with a high degree of scepticism and resistance to work beyond traditional lines of responsibility. Acceptance to work together as managers/leaders only developed slowly (Interview 7).

Three interviewees agree that with an older generation retiring and a younger generation joining, a much more collaborative mindset and lateral ideas of leading entered the arena. At the same time, one should not over-associate generations with leadership styles, as there were (and remain) different approaches to leadership, with a dop-down, confrontational style on the one end and a team oriented, leaving-leeway-for-others approach at the other end of the spectrum (Interview 5). Yet in general,

> The debate that we have about the role of leadership as enabling colleagues is much bigger compared to 19 years ago [when I joined]. Collaborative styles or possibilities like co-leadership, which back then were rare exceptions, have now become more common and normal.
>
> (Interview 9).

Interviewee 10 stresses that it was not always a conscious decision by senior management to change notions of leadership, but that, for example, co-leadership occurred because colleagues consciously applied together as a leadership duo for a position, and hence pushed for ‘change from below’.

Interviewees mention external pressures that lead to a change in leadership styles, but there was not a strong focus on external factors in the interviews. Next to the idea of a new leadership ‘Zeitgeist’, there is a mentioning of increasingly complex problems that need to be addressed by diverse individuals jointly (Interview 9), and another remark on the Covid-19 Pandemic as a push factor to work together despite being in different locations through the application of new digital tools (Interview 5). Finally, moving inwards again, the appointment of a managing director of ORI, who is passionate about organisational development, is also referred to as a driver for transformation (Interview 10).

While this change is undeniable and impressive, others underline that we do not know how notions of leadership at ORI have changed, given that there was and is little discussion and thus no strong common understanding of what leadership entails. By consequence, leadership is practiced in very diverse forms within the organisation (Interview 5,10,11). When filling a formal leadership position, the thematic expertise, professional competences, and the ability to represent are perceived to play an important role – less so general management, coaching and crisis management competences, which are all key when leading a team (Interview 10). As interviewee 6 puts it sharply:

> Right now, it seems that if you are doing a nice presentation, you are perceived as a brilliant colleague. But has anybody asked the people you work with daily in your office? …That means that the information gathered on your leadership skills needs to be broadened.

This also points at the need to include voices of colleagues and teams in appraisals of management/leadership.

While there exists an official ‘one pager’ on ‘Principles of Leading/Managing Staff’ at ORI from 2019, only two of five interviewees asked about it know of its existence. The paper addresses the roles of managers/leaders and lists three main pillars of competences under the following headings:

- Management/leadership promotes the impact of ORI.
- Management/leadership places employees in the centre of their action.
- Management/leadership engages employees in further developing the organisation.

The paper highlights the wide scope of leadership roles of managers and focuses on how they are to approach, lead, and empower colleagues and teams. Yet, notions of self-leadership and shared leadership in teams, concerning all staff, are not covered in the guidance. However, this was four years ago – and as Interviewee 9 underlines, ‘moving to a level at which teams are given more leadership is something the organisation is trying to do currently’, yet ‘things do not happen overnight'. The shift requires cultural change and only evolves by practicing it through trial, error, and retrial, making it easier each time.

Questioned whether issues of leadership and teams are thought together at ORI, six interview partners answer either that:

(a) they have not thought of this question before, and/or
(b) they believe that they are not strongly linked, but that it would be good/not harmful if they were and/or
(c) in the rare cases that debates are linked, this concerns the role of management to enable and empower teams.

Interviewee 8 stipulates that discussing leadership and teams jointly would lead to more autonomy and accountability of teams. Another interviewee emphasises that there has been and still is a culture of management (specifically top leadership of Division X) leaving a lot of scope and 'long ropes' for staff, while taking final responsibility if push comes to shove. It is precisely this culture of providing a general course and leaving room for action that fosters autonomy. But leading teams means more: 'It is fostering not only the autonomy of individuals, but of teams, which includes to make sure that everyone has a role, allowing them to bring in their full potential and special skills' (Interview 11).

'Leadership is not a role; it is everybody's task' (Interview 7). If we aim to think leadership as a notion that is relevant for all staff, one ought to start with self-leadership. For this, 'the foundation offers a lot of tools to explore and to get to know yourself better, your strength and weaknesses.' But while there are 'a lot of instruments for self-leadership exploration, there is no nudging by ORI' (Interview 6). This 'nudging' could happen by better understanding each other's skill sets and competences, by encouraging staff to complete their skill sets, and by being clearer on what is needed to enact leadership. After all, 'there is a variety of leadership competences – and no one has all of them to the same amount' (Interview 6). Interviewee 12 agrees that 'we very rarely address the strength of people. We rather try to sort of describe our colleagues as equal.' This would also mean that there is room for generalists in certain positions and for specialised subject matter experts in others.

Interviewee 10, quoting a title of a book by Breidenbach and Rollow (2019), underscores that ‘new work needs inner work’. This means that a higher degree of introspective is needed:

> It requires a lot of personal reflection on how to break out of traditional patterns, because there is not that clear attribution any longer. You cannot put everything on your boss. You need to grapple with yourself and your colleagues much more profoundly – and you have to be willing to do that.

To conclude this section, it would be good ‘to make leadership more explicit’ – in a first step by spelling out what it means to different individuals (not only to managers), but more important, by enacting it in daily work practices, after all, ‘one cannot change the mindset of people per se, but one can change how people work together’ (Interview 10).

4.3 Co-Leadership in Duos

This sub-chapter examines how co-leadership duos work in teams. Six of the twelve interviewees have been or are working in a format in which they share the same post, dividing it and both working part-time (often referred to as job sharing). But co-leadership exists on a broader spectrum. For example, other interviewees have been or are working in a duo, which consists of two posts, to lead a project or parts of an office together (Interview 1,6,7,9,11). Some also have been or are working in a lead/deputy co-leadership arrangement (Interview 9,12). While all three forms are co-leadership arrangements on a different scale, this sub-chapter focuses on the experiences and views of the first group, the job-sharers.

In addition, four interview partners not working in duos are asked if they could imagine doing so. Two answer that they would be generally interested, depended on finding a good co-leading match (Interview 5) or because it is difficult to ‘imagine to be a lonely wolf at the top’ (Interview 11). Two decline, because ‘coming from a notion of providing psychological safety for teams, I would be worried about a scenario of co-leaders not coming to terms’ (Interview 7) and because they prefer more autonomous sub-teams instead of a co-leadership arrangement

(Interview 9). Five currently non-practicing interviewees are additionally asked about the perceived pros and cons of co-leadership.

4.3.1 Formal Arrangements and Processes of Job Division

Co-leadership duos applied jointly to one full-time position advertised. Out of four dyads examined, three applied as a couple, sharing a family. They then received identical tasks as per contract (Interview 1,2,4), but with part-time hours. Dyads often start with 50% part-time each at first, which were in three cases increased to 75% (and shortly 100% for one couple, based on additional roles beyond the originally foreseen project). The increases to 75% were due to an increased workload (installing a new office, receiving a larger budget, exceptional circumstances) and/or additional roles and responsibilities (Interviews 1-4). One duo also explicitly argued that additional time budgets are needed to properly communicate and coordinate as a co-leading team (Interview 4).

In practice, dyads estimate that they probably work more than the contractual terms stipulate, but that this is still perceived as fair to a certain degree, because:

> The fact that there is two of us requires more time because we need to coordinate and there's certain things that duplicate time because both of us sit in a team meeting where it would normally only be one person sitting in a team meeting, or it's important that we're both in the same situation.…but overall, it seems a fair deal because it offers us opportunities and a way of living - being able to work, have a private life and family life.
>
> (Interview 2)

All dyads have developed a system of dividing the job. All have an agreement on different topical leads for either certain subjects or regions. A topical lead means in practice that, the person not in the lead can question what the other does in his/her area, but that they will have to live with the decision the other makes in their leading area (Interview 3). This clear split in responsibilities reduces the workload and pressure, as one is not responsible for everything (Interview 12).

Beyond the topical leads, there are other leadership roles which are divided based on strength and interests. These divisions happen more informally. One part of a dyad described that he/she is comparably better at team motivation, team dynamics and coaching, while the other part of the dyad is responsible for public speaking roles (Interview 1). Another interviewee outlines that he/she is 'the more empathetic leader, but also worried about what other think, which can be a strength and a weakness at times', while the other part of the dyad stays less involved and is therefore sometimes able to solve conflicts from a more neutral ground (Interview 4). Another division mentioned for two dyads is between long-term and short-term thinking and action: while one part of the dyad is more scenario and future oriented, focusing on strategic developments and structural issues, the other is better at providing quick reactions and saying 'let us do this now' (Interview 4, also Interview 1,6). Dealing with conflicts and prioritising are other comparative strengths alluded to (Interview 6).

Regarding managerial roles, responsibilities for finance, personnel, general office management, organisational development and communication with senior leadership are raised by the dyads. In one case, one part of the dyad first focused on finance and then on personnel, yet bigger decisions are always made together (for example, hiring a new team member) (Interview 1). In another example, joint responsibilities for finances had been pro-actively requested and formally approved. In general, however, the duos agree to a need for close coordination:

> These are areas that we always did together. Then it's often a case-by-case separation of work how we divide tasks. But generally, that's an area where there's a lot of coordination. And actually, I appreciate that a lot, because usually you're quite lonely in these positions obviously and it's nice to bounce ideas.
>
> (Interview 3)

Interviewee 4 describes a similar pattern, adding what it means to first discuss issues and divide tasks:

> Even if you divide the work, there are always what we call 'the grey zones', which you cannot divide 100% …This requires more communication and joint decision making - and based on these discussions a division of tasks: who responds to an email, who is going to set up a process, who follows up.
>
> (Interview 4)

Regarding decisions on who joins which meeting, working in a dyad demands clear communication to the team and to senior leadership (Interview 4).

4.3.2 Prerequisites for Leading in a Dyad

> The very basis for this working well is the respect and recognition we have for each other's work, and we had that before we started the co-leadership.
>
> (Interview 2)

Together with the element of trust (Interview 12), respect and recognition probably form the foundations of collective leadership – and we will turn to trust, respect, and recognition later when addressing shared leadership in teams. In more practical terms, Interviewee 4 stresses as an important prerequisite:

> Be clear on your ground rules and on who takes responsibility for what when you apply for the job and before you start - also to make your application more convincing for the employer.

Next to respect and ground rules, shared overall values and goals are highlighted by several interview partners. These values and goals can address management styles (for example being team oriented (Interview 4)), or political leanings (for example 'wanting to be more feminist and on the left side of the debates' (Interview 3)). Nonetheless, having shared values still allows for very different personalities and perspectives, as Interviewee 2 underlined:

> It's a running gag, since last year as part of the team development, we did personality testing, and we have the official certification that [my dyad partner] and I are diametrically opposed personality types.

Overall, joint values and goals offer a framework in which to address differences and conflicts (also Interviewee 2):

> We have common goals and that gives us a framework for any conflict to not to be a disagreement…The fundamentals are there, and we agree on the fundamentals. So, I don't think it has ever happened that there has been a conflict around something very fundamental.

In sum, important prerequisites for co-leadership identified by ORI practitioners are respect and recognition of each other’s work, agreements on ground rules and responsibilities, and shared goals and values to resiliently face differences and conflicts.

4.3.3 Advantages of Co-Leadership

The question on advantages of co-leadership has been asked to those practicing or having practiced co-leadership (six interviewees), as well a few colleagues imagining and perceiving how co-leadership works (four interviewees).

The most frequent advantage named is having a sparring partner to consult. As a result of that exchange and consultation, better decision making is possible. (Interview 1,3,4,7,9,11). For a dislocated office structure, this means to have a colleague on the same level to directly discuss political events and developments in the region or country (Interview 1). As Interviewee 3 puts it:

> To bounce of ideas and develop them together. I am certain certainly better at my job for having [my dyad partner] on my site with a different set of skills, expertise, and perspectives’.

Interviewee 4 is certain that this produces a better form of decision making, because it combines different, transparently debated perspectives. Decision making goes beyond the rational: You get support on an intellectual and management level, but also personal and psychological.

This already covers part of advantage number two: Realising that we all have different perspectives on what is happening (Interview 1,4,6,11,12). We all recognise different things, focus or awareness on distinctive issues and ask different questions to our counterparts. Four eyes and ears are thus able to hear and see more. This applies to team dynamics, to thematic issues or to strategic orientation. Co-leadership thus allows for more diversity (Interview 1,12). It makes you realise that your perspective may be very gendered and allows you to learn and broaden your horizon, thus avoiding tunnel vision (Interview 11,12).

As already highlighted in the previous sub-section, co-leadership allows for a combination of different strengths and skill sets (Interview 1,4,7,9,11): ‘basically, the organisation gets two skill sets and specialisations for the price of one’ (Interview 2). As Interviewee 1 adds:

> You can build on your strength. The classical job of a head of office places a lot of demands on you – we all have our weaknesses and strength, there is no one who is good at everything. And because we were two, we could cover more of these leadership functions.

A fourth argument is that it allows colleagues to balance their private and professional lives (Interview 1,3,4,6,7,9,11). ‘Co-leadership is a very attractive possibility to take on such a position and parallelly have a family and a life’ (Interview 6). This means by consequence that co-leadership supports breaking out of traditional family patterns where one partner earns a salary and the other stay home with the kids, potentially lessening his/her career ambitions (Interview 11). Especially in partnerships, one can accommodate two careers (Interview 3).

Further advantages highlighted by interviewee 3 are to be ‘working less, being less stressed and more productive at work’ and stepping in for the other: when ‘one travels for work, the other one is at the office. One can be ill, the other one can be at the office’.

A further issue stressed particularly by interviewee 3 and 4 is the potential model character for (1) the wider team, (2) the organisation and (3) the external partner spectrum. Regarding the team that works directly with the dyad, co-leading practices can build a bridge towards shared leadership in teams. This is because:

> We have to make a lot of things explicit between us that otherwise would happen in one head of leadership. I think our [colleague X], she/he is benefiting from that because now she/he part of us debating. It is nice to show in the team that often, when we are not on the same page, it opens space for them to come in and weigh in on certain issues…We also made the conscious effort to move away from everything going over the director's desk and to give a more prominent role in decision making to [other members of the team].

(Interview 3)

Interviewee 4 stresses the link between co-leadership and team dynamics:

> The decision to be in a co-leadership arrangement has a lot to do with my experiences with a team oriented approach….I always had the feeling [the work] is more successful if you work together with at least another person…I am more open to different perspectives and critical feedback, also from the team.

Interviewee 4 hopes that co-leading serves as a model-character for the organisation and for ORIs cultural change, showing that ‘a team-oriented approach works in practice’. Regarding interaction with external actors and partners, ‘some get it, and some don’t’, the latter viewing it as rather alien, particularly in certain cultural contexts. Yet in any case: it does send a message (Interview 2,4).

Regarding the impact on the team, Interviewees 1 and 6 emphasise that a co-leadership duo offers more potential for team members to connect with on or the other:

> Different persons have different relations and different preferences. The moment you have two leaders, you offer more potential for other to relate and to open themselves up.
>
> (Interview 6)

To summarise this sub-section, the seven main advantages of co-leadership at ORI are seen as:

(1) Having a sparring partner to consult with.
(2) Making more informed, transparent, and diverse decisions.
(3) Combining strength and skills.
(4) Balancing private and professional lives.
(5) Being less stressed and more productive.
(6) Showing your team and organisation that you can lead together.
(7) Offering more scope for the team to connect to one or the other co-leader.

4.3.4 Challenges and their Transformations

The advantages outlined above seem very tempting. In fact, one is left wondering why not all of us co-lead. But without a doubt, co-leadership also has its challenges, opening room for tensions and conflicts. Plus, for the organisation, there are additional costs. We are now going to explore the most debated concerns by interview partners and possible ways to address them.

The first set of issues raised concerns the relationship between the co-leadership dyad and the team that they work with. As Interviewee 4 puts it:

> Co-leadership can be a challenge to a team, particularly abroad, given cultural differences. Hence, the change can be abrupt for a team. Especially in the beginning, there is confusion for some team members…It is very important that you get the buy-in from team members to this sort of leadership, otherwise it clashes.

To get this buy-in, one has to build trust. As Interviewee 1 outlines:

> The team has to get to know two personalities, to understand how they work together, to know if one speaks with the other. For us it was clear that we coordinated, that we are open. But the team was insecure if this is really the case.

Interviewee 3 echoes this sentiment, particularly when the team has already experienced co-leadership and frictions and conflicts in relation to it. It is therefore important to clearly communicate how the dyad works together:

> [We tell the team] ‘What you discuss with one of us you've discussed with both of us’, so that they don't take the brunt of coordinating between [my co-leader] and I. It is not on the team but is on us. That also means that we have to be conscious when confronted with a specific decision. Is that now a case that I can leave it, where I know what [my co-leader] would say? Can just go with it? Or [do I need to] very deliberately say ‘Well listen, I need to coordinate first’. That requires a level of coordination, find each other and be able to make that call in a given situation.

Interviewee 4 also underlines that ‘you need to communicate clearly which decisions you can take, and on which ones you need to consult. And you need to be clear that there is time needed to reflect jointly before you can give an answer.’

The second issue is dealing with conflicts over decision making or over other difference (Interview 1,4,9). As Interviewee 1 describes it:

> For example, do we still want to do more? Do we want to take on additional partner/project XYZ? Who is the final judge? Sometimes decisions need to be made in a timely fashion and this bears the risk for conflict. So, you need to voice your concerns soon and diplomatically, constructively but critically.

Interviewee 1 and 6 both see three connected issues at ORI: first, decision making processes are often unclear; second, conflicts are often avoided; and third, there are few or no tools for conflict management and resolution. As Interviewee 6 puts it:

> Decision making is a deliberation process, where we both kind of try to get a feeling of the limits of the other, of the preferences of the other, and then find some common ground…It is sometimes like dancing in the dark and you try not to hit a wall.

They thus underline that ORI staff needs to ‘learn more about different conflict resolution methods and to make sure which one is applied at which point’. This also requires clearer rules on when a dyad needs to find a solution itself, and when they can turn to a neutral party, who can help (Interview 1). On the other hand, Interviewee 12 highlights that some personalities do get into open confrontation, they rather step away, sort out all the arguments and give in based on rational reasoning. The embrace of conflict resolution mechanisms thus will also depend on negotiations between different personality types.

To give a further example: while Interviewees 2 and 3 outline the benefits of embracing arguments in front of the team, Interviewee 6 underlines that a situation can tilt, so it is not a difference of opinion, but a clash that turns into open conflict. This ‘becomes a zero-sum game for the audience’. Hence, there always needs to be a protected space for the dyad.

While the relationship with the team is important, Interviewees 1,2, 3 and 4 also discuss the relationship with other colleagues at ORI and senior leadership, which can be different for the two co-leaders. As interviewee 2 and 3 point out, the difference itself is not an issue, but it is important that there are equally deep relations for both dyad members: ‘We both get our moments of recognition and are equally active within the network’ (Interview 2). For this to happen, it is vital to achieve a balance, without ‘the one being more content and the other being more management/admin, because that effects your visibility. So, your subject matter expertise needs to be equally distributed’ (Interview 3, echoed by Interview 1).

From an organisational perspective, co-leading requires more time and may lead to higher costs. Both members of the dyad need to jointly be involved in certain issues, coordinate on them and at times both be present at the same meetings. The time budget to jointly operate is thus higher for a dyad than for a single manager/leader, meaning potentially less time for other things (Interview 9). As highlighted prior, decision making may also be slower. Finally, there can be additional costs for the organisation, either if time budgets need to be increased, or if there are extra costs for dyads that are not couples, particularly abroad (i.e., housing allowances or school fees that would double) (Interview 7,12). This may lead the organisation to choose for or against a co-leadership application based on a cost-benefit analysis. But in the end,

> It is always a question of ‘What is the better alternative?’ If the co-leadership application is just a better package than an individual application, you may be willing to bear the additional cost. Or maybe it's also a very challenging role that no one person can actually deal with.
>
> (Interview 7)

A final concern raised is that co-leading teams might turn out to be unbalanced, in that one does constantly put more work into the job, or one is ill for a longer time, so that the work is on the shoulders of only one dyad member, which then may lead to frustration and conflict (Interview 7).

But there are tools to address these challenges. We now look at coaching and daily tools to support co-leaders.

Several of those practicing co-leadership at ORI underline the importance of external coaching (Interview 1,4,6). Coaching offers a protected space to be explicit about leadership styles, to investigate issues in a structured fashion, to address differences and to develop tools for coordination and conflict resolution.

As Interviewee 4 puts it:

> Coaching helps you to understand what you and the other want to be as a leader. You have to make choices, so what is important? What do we want to achieve in our team? Because there is such a variety of tasks that you cannot fulfill each of them one hundred percent.

But even with coaching, the application of tools needs to be practiced, applying a trial-and-error method to see which ones work best (Interview 4). Coaching can also help to reduce the feeling of being overworked and to draw joint limits to the realm of work (Interview 1).

An important recommendation is to begin coaching before you start your work as a co-leadership dyad. As Interviewee 6 recalls, in the beginning

> We both worked our heads off without knowing exactly where the strength and weaknesses of ourselves and the other were. So, there were a lot of conflicts emanating from implicit beliefs….[Coaching] helps making things explicit.

In addition, the establishment of daily tools and daily ground rules to collaborate is imperative. Given that a lot of communication and coordination is required, you need to create enough room for exchange, but you also need to set boundaries and rules on when to stop the exchange, particularly when the dyad is in a partnership (Interview 1,3). These daily tools and ground rules for a smoother collaboration can include:

- daily short check ins (Interview 6),
- communication via messenger services (Interview 2,3),
- joint calendars (Interview 1),

- a jointly decided structure of file keeping (Interview 1),
- a shared digital note taking system, such as Evernote, in which meeting notes, to-dos and shared decisions are included (Interview 2),
- electronic collaboration tools such Asana, Canva or Trello (Interview 1),
- a weekly day at the office on which both are there (Interview 1,4),
- monthly meetings on strategic, long-term questions (Interview 4),
- procedures on how co-leadership meetings, extended co-leadership meetings (plus trainee, team assistant, etc) and team meetings work in concert (Interview 2,3,4),
- decision whether larger events can be held on the same day, given that overlapping parts of the team are involved (Interview 1).

To summarise this sub-section, there are five areas, which can be seen as challenges and tensions of co-leadership, bearing potential for conflicts:

(1) A lack of clarity in communication and collaboration between the co-leadership duo and the team.
(2) Missing or unclear decision making and conflict resolution mechanisms.
(3) Unequal relationships with senior management, leading to more recognition of one of the co-leaders.
(4) The need for more time and a higher cost-intensity.
(5) An unbalanced division of work amongst co-leaders.

To address some of these disadvantages, coaching and daily tools for coordination, communication and conflict resolution are seen as helpful.

4.4 Shared Leadership in Teams

This section moves from two to potentially many leaders in teams. But before addressing shared leadership in teams, we have to understand the nature of teams at ORI and how people feel about working in them.

4.4.1 Types of Teams

What type of teams are members of Division X part of? In general, there are four pairs of team types. The pairs can be understood as spectrums, i.e., there is seldomly a team which is only the one or the other, but often teams are on the spectrum between the two poles:

(1) Teams that focus more on a thematic topic vs. teams focusing on organisational development/transformation. This also leads to different groups of stakeholders, for the thematic topics many stakeholders are outside of ORI, for organisational development, they often inside the organisation.
(2) Teams that exist within a unit (office, department, or division), hereafter called ‘in-unit teams’, vs. teams spanning across different units, hereafter called ‘inter-unital teams’.
(3) Teams that have a rather classical structural set up vs. teams that experiment with new, innovative ways of working together. An innovative team format within ORI is the ‘construction room’, in which team members have a scope to ‘think out of the box’ and experiment.
(4) Teams in which all members are on the same hierarchical level vs. teams in which job categories are mixed.

The collated list of all teams that interviewees mention underlines how often we work in teams, and how diverse they are. Thus, collecting general remarks on what collaboration and leadership in teams should look is bound to be analytically imperfect, in that people refer to different situations and types of teams. Therefore, it is advisable to be more specific on the context in which a team operates, which we will do when turning to the example of A Teams in the subsequent section. However, a general collation of perceived team traits and needs offers a pulse on what individuals think and feel when they reflect on teams.

While the conversations on co-leadership with interviewees appear to be very structured, the answers and discussion on teams are ‘all over the place’. This could probably have been averted if a more stringent and narrow set of questions had been chosen. Yet, in line with the above paragraph, it also illustrates that teams, which we often take for granted, are very complex organisms. Views on why certain teams work well and others do not are sometimes worlds apart. Any staff motivation to work in a team is based on individual prior experiences and relationships. Thus, any new team does not start to work with a white sheet of paper. As the previous chapter illustrates, close working relationships with one person already have many facades to be addressed. These facades seem to increase exponentially if more members join the team. The following sub-chapters therefore offer only a glimpse into team complexity.

4.4.2 Tensions Associated with Inter-Unital Teams

Teamwork is generally seen as something positive. Eight interviewees are asked about their best inter-unital team experiences and the factors that contributed to a good team dynamic. Each of them provides inspiring answers. And even when asked about negative experiences, as Interviewee 5 states:

> Teams at ORI do not fail. All of our teams function to a certain degree, because we are extremely capable of organising ourselves around a problem. There is always a solution and there is always a couple of persons who solve the issues. We are very resourceful in that regard.

Yet, in many interviews there is a feeling that we can do better – also because colleagues at ORI are generally constructively critical. There is overall contentment with in-unit teams expressed by five interviewees. Yet, intra-unital teams are more contested, wherefore this section focuses on them.

While we started to look at co-leadership by listing its advantages, the enquiry on inter-unital teams begins by listing the tensions ORI staff associates with them. Tensions can be defined ‘as the gap between what is and what could be’. In certain theories, tensions do not have a negative connotation, but serve as an impulse (Klein and Hughes 2019, 92). Here, I break with this understanding and intentionally focus on needs, problems, and conflicts, which point to potentials for improvements. I aim to put mixed or negative connotations out in the open, thereby hopefully being able to address them consequentially. The tensions are clustered into six sets, phrased each as an opening question:

(1) **How do we create clear roles and responsibilities?** What are the roles and responsibilities of each team member, but also of those working with

the teams? (Interview 1,2,3,9). Interviewee 6 stresses that we still think in a logic of what might be called 'jurisdictions' and not in logic of responsibilities: We need less 'I take care of area Y' and more 'I take the lead responsibility for Z…Only then can we move to common responsibilities for our project and become a team.'

(2) **Who has decision-making power?** Closely connected to the above, this set has two dimensions: First, what can the entire team decide? Is it just asked to come up with ideas and top leadership has the power to decide what is implemented, given that they administer resources? (Interview 1,6,8). Second, who in the group can decide? Is it the coordinator? Is it a majority? What are the governance rules? (Interview 1).

(3) **How can team members feel that they make a difference and that there is a sustainable impact?** Connected to the previous point is the next set of issues: a perceived shortage of influence and sustainability. The larger the team and the more inter-unital it is, the less in charge some team members feel. They also feel that their efforts are less recognised (Interview 2,3,4). Colleagues perceive that they put energy into a team process, deliver results on what could be done, and 'that is it. We have great ideas together, but we do not realise them jointly' (Interview 1, echoed by 6,10).

(4) **How do we avoid the 'on top syndrome'?** New teams are created without other tasks being officially dropped or resources being reallocated (Interview 6). 'We are supposed to be swift and smart, basically without resources and budget' (Interview 5). Questions over allocation of resources lead people to be stressed, because they have to manage their different affiliations (Interview 7). Plus, colleagues at ORI are generally characterised as 'motivated, they want to be dancing at all shows and do not like to make choices. So, we need a role which makes sure that people do not burn out' (Interview 7). Finally, it may be difficult to calculate the personal resources to be allocated to a given agile team effort, as these are often in flux and have shifting targets (Interview 5).

(5) **How do we build diverse, motivated, and more stable teams?** For some, teams are not set up with inclusivity in mind, for example they often are only integrating project managers from offices when prompted to (Interview 3). Because of staff rotation, teams are not very stable (Interview 1,8). In addition, for some team members, there is no intrinsic motivation. As Interviewee 4 puts it:

> We sometimes participate in team arrangements because we have to. It does not hurt too much, so it is not the battle to be taken up. In the end we patriciate, but do not put an effort into it.

To some, this is particularly the case when teams are installed 'top down' and not build from below (Interview 3).

(6) Finally, some interviewees point at issues around **trust and psychological safety** in teams (Interview 4,7,11). As Interviewee 4 highlights, in certain cases,

> We establish teams without enough time for trust building, to get to know each other and connect on a personal level. We need more time for listening and supporting each other. And we need more time for authenticity.

4.4.3 Shaping Resilient Teams

Addressing the questions above, what do inter-unital teams and their team members need to flourish and endure? The answers below are a combination of good and emerging practices at ORI, as well as wishes and recommendations expressed by interviewees. Again, we identify seven sets of ingrediencies for team resilience.

(1) **A Thoroughly Debated Mandate and More Explicit Devolution of Power**

There needs to be an in-depth discussion on the mandate with top leadership in the beginning of a team process. This can include discussions on the purpose, vision, strategy, expectations, and outputs of the team (Interviews 1,2,4,5,8). This also implies that the top leadership group in Division X may need more time for content-based discussions (Interview 8). Interviewee 2 urges ORI to embrace deeper and robust discussions in general:

> We are underutilising our most important resource, which is a global network. It's not networked, and I think we could do so much more with this network if we engaged in a lot more collaborative work exchange…but we are afraid of the discussions we need to have, the robust engagement on some things. This also means the devolution of power that would need to go with it.

After this initiation stage of joint debate and consent, interviewees stress that the team needs to have the mandate to act within the given framework, without interference or seeking approval from top leadership. This hands-off approach has to be combined with dedicated time and resources (Interview 1,3,11). Such a devolution of power needs to be reiterated and enacted repeatedly for people to trust the process. Equally importantly, as Interviewee 1 emphasises: ‘We need to start solving problems ourselves. We do not wait for leadership to tell us what we shall do’.

(2) **Motivated, Small and Divers: Ingrediencies for Team Composition**

Membership in intra-unital team needs to be voluntary. ‘If you push people into a team that they are not interested in or see as an additional burden, it does not work’ (Interview 5). For collective leadership to function, teams need to be small (Interview 2). They should be diverse in terms of skill sets, otherwise there is a risk that someone else with a similar skill set is always seen as able to complete a task. It is ‘a source of diffusion of responsibility because everybody thinks ‘OK, he/she will do that’ (Interview 9). Finally, Interviewee 3 stipulates to look for ‘bottom-up processes that grow from networks, as opposed to high flying ambitions’.

(3) **Getting into Action: Embracing Agility, Roles, Responsibilities, and Rules**

Several colleagues underline that it is important to embrace more agility and working in roles. What do they mean by agility? As Interviewee 6 puts it:

> Our understanding of agile works is a bit fuzzy because it means that we work a little bit differently. The backbone of the theory is that you have a different team logic, and you have roles.

Roles in turn need to be based on competences, not on hierarchy (Interview 3,7). Roles are flexible and rotating, not ever enduring (Interview 7,10), which also infers that there is a contiguous discussion on them (Interview 8). Roles include clear definitions on responsibilities, they highlight competencies, and promote the decision-making power of team members (Interview 6,7). Defining roles and joint rules is a team bargaining process, which takes time, as Interviewee 3 describes regarding a specific team effort:

> What is needed is a real collective effort, with agile work modes, etc. We needed a lot of time to discuss principles of how we collaborated. How do you collaborate with equals?

This points to another issues: the need to be transparent about hierarchies in teams, as only such transparent exchange can lead to a team agreement on how to jointly decide and resolve conflicts (Interview 1). Role-based work thus always means that leadership must be made explicit as it is being divided. In the end, ‘all know what leadership functions are and that it is not one person to enact them’ (Interview 10).

According to colleagues, certain mindsets need to be embraced: a culture in which errors can be made (Interview 4,10), and an environment in which we think in loops, i.e., embrace the idea that ‘we are taking a step back, but that the overall evolution is forward’ (Interview 1). Interviewees 9 and 10 underline that we need to be open to an innovation logic, i.e., not everything may be going according to plan, but we need to experiment, try, fail, and try again. And even if a process does not have the intended results, it may still have spill over effects and encourage others to try something different and new (Interview 10).

Interviewee 6 believes that still too many ideas are produced for the drawer. To put words into action, there may be a need to be more liability and goal targeted, for example through objective key results. But these tools need to be applied lightly, based on a short guidance that is not too complicated to overwhelm the nascent process (Interview 1). Finally, working in new formats allows for the joint creation of structures and instruments to work together effectively. This includes debates about the kind of meetings that are needed, what it means to have 'a clear agenda, a good moderator and a purpose'. Through these consciously applied instruments, standard procedures 'are challenged and change management is taking place in the teams' (Interview 8).

While all new tools offer opportunities, Interviewee 5 highlights that form needs to follow function. It is the overall aim and associated strategy that determines the structure of the team: 'We have a 'construction room' and a 'loop approach', that is great. But for what is my question?'

The examples given by Interviewee 9 and 11 underline that functioning teams can operate in a traditional fashion, i.e., being based on clear job profiles, not on agile roles; being strongly coordinated; and existing on a more permanent basis. Yet, imperative for these teams are strong set of joint values and goals to be reached. Everyone is needed and recognised for his/her strengths, and the exchange of team members is not superficial, but intense, intensity being created through weekly meetings and joint travel.

Finally, when getting into action, a stronger stakeholder engagement is needed, both of individuals in ORI, as well as with external stakeholders (Interview 1,8).

(4) **Consciously distribute time and resources**

'What I need? Dedicated resources: timewise and moneywise – those are the major points. Everything else works out' (Interview 5). To receive this, there may be a 'social contract', i.e., an estimation of the time needed to advance a team effort, and a subsequent negotiation with the heads of department, so that the team member is exempt from other duties for time spent on team XYZ. It is also immensely helpful to be liberated from your 'normal job' for several weeks to focus entirely on team XYZ (Interview 11). Interviewee 6 highlights that certain formats, like the ORI 'construction room' seems like an oasis for colleagues, but what is more important is that 'we make the oasis permanent'.

As already touched upon when discussing a devolution of power, the same is true for financial resources: there needs to be a transparent structure how finances are allocated (Interview 5), and ‘when you can give yourself a mandate, it needs to come with a certain degree of resources that you can define yourself as a group (Interview 3).

(5) **Focus on Team Building and Team Recognition**

Interview partners 1,4, and 10 underline that we need more time to build up relations in teams. This requires creating spaces in which team members can be seen wholistically, meaning that they are not only colleague X, fulfilling task Y, but they can bring in as much of their entire personality as they wish to. In addition, ‘Teams work because the teams work is acknowledged, because people feel recognised’ (Interview 6). Interview partners address the need for follow up and a clear communication by top leadership on the impact of the work of the teams. Work in teams is often taken for granted – and that needs to change (Interview 1,6,10). As highlighted prior, for many interview partners, this requires a deeper engagement and more thorough communication with top leadership (Interview 1,2,3,6).

(6) **Embed Outside Support and Transit to Inhouse Coaching**

Interviewees have substantial experiences with external consultancies, who provide support to a team. The language employed by colleagues often stems from the engagement with external consultants (roles, loops, etc.). Hence, there is no doubt that external consultants have an influence on how teams at ORI develop. Moreover, when an external consultant is engaged, the financial costs are higher, which means there is a stronger push to produce results. Sometimes this push can be helpful, at other times it clashes with the needs and speed of the team, which ironically may lead to a higher degree of team alignment and unity (Interview 5,11).

As Interviewee 1 points out, there are cases in which ‘a team gets an external coaching structure, but the structure dies when coaches leave’. According to Interviewee 8, this may occur because there are different structural and operational logics of newly trained team members and top leadership. Sometimes the coaching can be excellent, but the structure is not ready for it yet. Outside advice therefore needs to be embedded in the wider organisational change process (Interview 1).

Currently, two exiting connected processes are commencing at ORI. Firstly, a set of external consulting firms has been hired under the same framework agreement to support agile teams, with a conscious effort to bring learnings together. Secondly, his group of consultancies will train in-house coaches. As Interviewee 7 summarises it comprehensively:

> The status quo is that lots of different consultants are running around with different concepts. But when we did the first meeting with them, we realized that we pick from the same sort of school of thought or same sort of network that is out there...We agree that we will have a board where all the different projects that they are doing will be consolidated with the key lessons learned…We recognise the different experiences and expertise, and at the same time try and consolidate this into one picture.
>
> Also, we want to train people in these tools so that they are used by everybody, like we all use Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. We then have a set of things for our collaboration, how we do a meeting or when we make the decision in a group…
>
> This will have an impact on leadership. If we are to agree on something like a consent method for making decisions, it would automatically challenge leadership…I think that would also change the kind of leadership role that people play.

Interviewee 9 explains that the build-up of a group of inhouse coaches is inspired by the example of another more traditional organization, that an ORI innovation team consulted with:

> They had made very good experience with inhouse coaches, communities of experts or any group or circle needed to advice on how to function as a team. As a team they were aspiring to shared leadership.
>
> (Interview 9)

These inhouse coaches are going to support teams in anchoring certain practices and decision-making processes. They will also form a network or community of practice (CoP) in which they can exchange as subject matter experts, to ‘not only generate knowledge, but to foster organizational learning, because they are going to be engaged in different areas and change processes’ (Interview 10). Interviewee 8, based on an externally coached team process, refers to these inhouse trainers as ‘ninjas’, passing on knowledge and experiences to create organizational routines. Plus, they may help to form a link to management/top leadership:

> They are in frequent exchange, they can discuss what's working well in the teams, what's not working, what's maybe needed from the management board. They sensitize the team on clashes and conflicts in the team that maybe the team itself will not be able to solve. They also guide the team to formulate or to raise their hand and say ‘OK, you management board, now this is where we have come to and we reached the end of the process if there is no clear decision on resources or on the composition of the team, or this or that’.
>
> (Interview 8)

4.4.4 A Case Study: Examining A Teams

One team type discussed in more depth during the interviews are the newly established A teams in Division X. The goal is to provide a better service on A (an anonymised core task that ORI fulfils) for external stakeholders on complex challenges by using the divers ORI network. This means bringing knowledge, perspective and competences from different locations together, and allowing for deeper connections between staff in offices and at headquarters. This in turn provides colleagues from abroad with a stronger feeling of having an impact on issues discussed in and steered by headquarters (Interview 9,12).

To do so, next to the vertical department line, a horizontal line of teams has been introduced, combining subject matter experts from different departments. The year 2023 was the initiation year of these teams. Each department head delegated two members to the four different subject matter-based teams, thus creating a team size of 16 to 18 members. The teams have been asked to define their own mandate. It has been repeatedly stressed that they do not need to fulfil tasks, which is seen as positive by some, as it does not increase the workload (Interview

6,11), and as insufficient by others (Interview 2,3,8). As one interviewee puts it, ‘I know that for us at ORI, as we are all activity driven, it is a little difficult to accept that the teams have not a specific task to organise something.’

Top leadership repeatedly underlines the self-organising character of these teams and their patience with this process. As a result, the experiences in the teams have been very different, with one team trying to tackle very concrete issues and another wishing to keep it as a broad platform for exchange (Interview 11,12). After the first year of observation, there might arise a need for professional guidance on team governance and on organising specific elements, knowledge management for example (Interview 12).

In discussions with interview partners, it becomes clear that there are tensions. At the same time, ideas and wishes on how to move forward are emerging. Many themes are strongly related to those more generally drawn out in the two previous sub-sections, so they will only be briefly mentioned. But the currently most pressing question for the evolution of A teams seems to be: How do we accommodate different wishes and needs regarding A team purposes and visions?

On the one end of the spectrum, there are colleagues who outline that these teams are not teams, but in fact networks or communities of practices, where people meet and keep each other informed. By consequence, there might be collaboration by a few team members evolving, or not (Interview 11). Interviewee 6 concurs, advocating to not overburden the structure and to avoid the ‘on-top syndrome’. He/she is thus rather annoyed if colleagues want to start projects in these teams that require his/her contribution:

> Yesterday we had a meeting. And there was again this idea of developing a project, doing something together. And we do not have time for that. Of course, we can avoid that this conflict if I just spend more time working, but that is not what I want to do.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have colleagues who think that a clear mandate and the engagement with top leadership is missing: ‘Why were the teams established, what are expectations from leadership? (Interview 1). Interviewee 2 agrees: the loop between teams and top leadership is absent, and ‘while the leadership is not getting fully involved, it is also not fully devolving the power'. The lack of clear roles, strategic objectives, joint projects, stakeholder engagement and feedback thus mean that these teams may not evolve further (Interview 2,3,4,8).

Interviewee 9 (echoed in part by Interview 12) calls for patience and trust in the nascent but evolving dynamics and feedback loops of the teams:

> What we are doing is bringing people together, who right now work on the same overall topic in a relatively isolated way. This interaction will have an impact on these people in their respective context, and on what they decide to do individually. Then it's not the case that out of the team this comes on top. But it will change the definition of what this team does... Discussions in the team will stimulate change: Maybe it is interesting for you and helps you to define what you want to do in your context.

In sum, there are four different mindsets:

(1) Kindly leave me alone, I have enough to do.
(2) This is a loose community of practice – and that is all it needs to be.
(3) If we do this, let us do it properly and engage more deeply.
(4) Trust the process – dynamics in the teams will guide our joint course.

How do we then find a structure in which everyone needs are addressed? And if we cannot address everyone's needs, whose are prioritised? Interviewees are not asked this question and do not provide answers unprompted. I will aim to outline some ideas when summarising the findings and providing recommendations in the next chapter.

Further issues raised regarding A teams, that have partly been discussed in more depth previously, include:

- The teams are too big, wherefore there is no real connection. Also, 'because teams are too large, the coordinators are in a more prominent role', but individuals 'have the feeling they can do little to change the team dynamic' (Interview 2,3,11)

- Being given the freedom to give yourself a mandate needs to come with a certain degree of resources that you can define yourself as a group (Interview 3, partly echoed by Interview 8).
- There should be a debate on the most important stakeholders and how to engage with them (Interview 8). Many of these stakeholders have very little time, so the scarcest resource is their attention. What can we do jointly to get it? (Interview 12).
- How do we avoid creating new silos through these teams? I.e., how do the teams, divided by topics, better engage with each other? (Interview 12).

5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORI

This chapter collates findings, assessments, and recommendations for ORI. While the content of Chapter 4 is to a large degree based on the knowledge and insights of other colleagues, this chapter is more subjective, as I select certain topics which I believe are central. I use the personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘we’ frequently, the latter emphasising that when I address staff in Division X, I include myself. Regarding the recommendations, I do not specifically address them to different parties (teams, top leadership, stakeholders, etc.), because I believe that it is a joint endeavour to embrace shared leadership. I do however stress occasionally that this is not only the task of top leadership or a team. Readers can thus reflect independently which imperatives apply to them. I will first begin with wider notions of leadership, then move to co-leadership and shared leadership in teams, and finally offer recommendations for A teams at ORI.

5.1 Widen the Understanding of and Debate on Leadership

Findings: Concluding the prior sub-chapter on shared leadership in teams, it is striking that questions of leadership are often not directly addressed. Notions of leadership may differ in a hierarchical, matrixed, or networked type of organisation. ORI will remain to have different typological features – it is hierarchical, matrixed, and networked. Yet, awareness of what potentially new leadership mindsets and styles are needed to navigate through this mix of organisational structures is vital.

There is an animated debate on teamwork at ORI, but it is often framed as separate from leadership. Thus, remarks like ‘top leadership needs to do this or that regarding teams’ are noticeable. Simultaneously, while not labelled as such, signs of informal and at times shared leadership are all around. They manifest themselves in the way colleagues are intrinsically motivated, how they reflect on their strength and weaknesses to combine them with others, how they take responsibilities for issues - often despite them not being in their job descriptions - , and how formal leaders reflect on empowering individuals and teams and actively asks them to take decisions.

Assessment: Relating to Jessl and Wilhelm's pedestal to achieve shared leaderships, ORI is already actively climbing the first step, self-leadership, and the second step, empowerment. Consciously taking the next step to shared leadership should not be too hard. But in order to do so, we need to make leadership more explicit, to address tensions, and to connect the dots between self-leadership, empowerment, and shared leadership. That implies connecting opportunities to reflect on yourself with work in teams, and (for those wishing to) creating more spaces to openly discuss their steps back and forward on the individual and joint journey.

It is important to understand how informal leadership manifests itself and how we combine our strength and weaknesses to achieve it. As Interviewee 10 pointed out, co-leadership dyads at ORI often already have made that effort, being guided by coaches to express their thinking on leadership tasks. Confronted with another, they need to reflect openly on themselves and their environment. If we practice that rather habitually in co-leadership, why do we rather irregularly do it in larger teams? Conscious shared leadership is already practiced on 'islands of change', like the ORI 'construction room'. That is applaudable and has a notable radiational effect. But we also need to deliberately see, foster, and encourage informal and every-day forms of leadership on 'the mainland'. And it is not only the role of top leadership to provide that recognition, but of all of us.

Recommendations:

- Foster and connect practices of self-leadership, empowerment, and shared leadership.
- Debate what leadership entails, including what formal and informal leadership roles there are for each team member and for top leadership. Provide a framework as 'food for thought' for ORI staff, but more importantly, it is practice and action that count. Thus, focus on debating and enacting leadership in each team context. To do so, allocated more time to get to know and acknowledge each other.
- Expand the spaces and tools to reflect on leadership. Currently, this happens for example in annual performance reviews between a staff member and his/her head of unit. Reflect on how to give feedback and recognition of leadership to peers, in teams and to supervisors. Widening the toolbox

to structurally evaluate team leadership qualities, particularly for formal management/leadership by employing a 180-to-360-degree feedback approach, would be helpful.

5.2 Embrace the Knowledge of Co-Leadership

Findings: The application of co-leadership practices has insights to offer, which are often applicable to other contexts, particularly to working in teams. To remind ourselves, the most important benefits are:

(1) Having a sparring partner to consult with.
(2) Making more informed, transparent, and diverse decisions.
(3) Combining strength and skills.
(4) Balancing private and professional lives.
(5) Being less stressed and more productive.
(6) Showing your team and organisation that you can lead together.
(7) Offering more scope for the team to connect to one or the other co-leader.

Five of the interview partners practicing co-leadership underlined that they aim to enact a 'team oriented' form of leadership. The sample group might be too small, but there may be a positive link between co-leadership and team leadership.

Co-leadership also crystalises potentials for tensions and conflict:

(1) A lack of clarity in communication and collaboration between the co-leadership duo and the team.
(2) Missing or unclear decision making and conflict resolution mechanisms.
(3) Unequal relationships with senior management, leading to more recognition of one of the co-leaders.
(4) The need for more time and a higher cost-intensity.
(5) An unbalanced division of work amongst co-leaders.

Again, all these tensions need to be addressed openly and do not only apply to co-leadership dyads and their teams, but also to the wider organisation and working in larger teams.

Assessment: During the interviews on co-leadership, I was struck by the richness of deep reflections. What co-leaders learn, both in terms of opportunities and pitfalls, is not only relevant for those wishing to co-lead, but also for the broader organisational context. There will be no conscious push from above for co-leadership, and that is very understandable, given the increased cost and scarcity of financial resources. But there is an openness to it. If a co-leadership duo applying for a job can build on their advantages vis-à-vis other applicants, they may get the job. This thesis hopefully provides them with useful arguments. In addition, the chapters on co-leadership in this thesis may serve as a first guide for those starting to co-lead, so that they can consciously address the challenges ahead.

Recommendations:

- As ORI, maintain an openness for co-leadership, despite high costs.
- Co-leaders offer insights for other aspects of teamwork at ORI. Thus, embrace their knowledge.
- Co-leadership has a strong impact on teams, and not all co-leading is harmonious. Address and learn from conflicts and tensions, have the courage to make them transparent and heed to the concerns of team members.

5.3 Focus on Self-Organised/Autonomous Teams

Findings: Teams are very diverse, wherefore there is no ‘one size fits all’. Each team needs to be seen in its specific context. To say it with Snowden, there are few best practices for teams, but many good and emerging practices. Reflecting on the teams we are part of makes us realise that they are all around us. And while they can strongly motivate us, there are often tensions. For intra-unital teams at ORI, these may manifest themselves around:

(1) Unclear roles and responsibilities.
(2) Unclear rules on decision making powers.

(3) Doubt in the impact of teams.
(4) An increased feeling of overburdening by involvement in too many teams.
(5) A lack of diverse, motivated, and more permanent team members.
(6) Questions of trust and safety in teams.

Intra-unital teams may thus profit from:

(1) A thoroughly debated mandate and an explicit devolution of power.
(2) Motivated and diverse members in smaller teams.
(3) Getting things done by embracing roles and responsibilities.
(4) A focus on team building and team recognition.
(5) Embedded external support and a transition to inhouse coaches.

ORI has made significant strides on these fronts, often in specific team contexts and in developing organisational frameworks. But there is still room for improvement to strengthen self-organisation and shared leadership in teams.

Assessment: Without a doubt, addressing issues around shared leadership in teams is complex. I would have loved to provide more solid and applicable answers on how teams can evolve and become more autonomous. What I can offer are pointers, summarised above.

What becomes apparent is that there is an abundance of different experiences and expectations of teams. While we thoroughly examine the ‘engine room’ of a team in special projects, in ‘every day’ contexts we take their workings more often for granted, which sometimes suffices and sometimes not. In addition, colleagues in Division X already explore how to address tensions more routinely. But we are also very good at avoiding team tensions by working around them. A more conscious effort to understand specific team dynamics and to address tensions openly and habitually would thus be beneficial.

While the literature focuses on different notions of distributed and shared leadership, this does not have much significance for ORI practice. A lot of leadership in teams is distributed, not fully shared. Plus, many teams are not operating in an agile fashion. Both these facts are not concerning. What matters more is a joint set of values and a purpose, as Simon Sinek (2009) puts it, to start with WHY, so that the HOW and WHAT can flow from it. Plus, based on positive experiences, teams need to truly trust in their autonomous space. There will be a lot of ups and downs on the journey to create more self-organised/autonomous teams, but it is the direct of travel that counts.

Finally, autonomy is subjectively experienced. It exists on a spectrum, on which binding commitment and close relationships are at the other end. Each one of us needs to find the right balance on that spectrum, individually and in teams. We can only find that equilibrium when we know ourselves, each other and have room to experiment.

Recommendations:

- On intra-unital teams, intensify the dialogue between teams and top leadership, thoroughly debate the mandate, and explicitly authorise a devolution of power, including to a degree over resources.
- Assemble motivated and diverse members in smaller teams, embrace roles and responsibilities, and provide a framework for conflict-resolution.
- Pay attention to team building and team behaviour, not by doing a workshop on it, but by allowing team members to get to know each other with their different facades (to a degree that is up to their choosing). Reflect on psychological safety: do all team members feel like they can voice their concerns? Do they pay attention to each other's needs?
- Offer more team recognition. In appraisal interviews, focus not only on personal achievements, but on team efforts. When creating smaller teams within one division for example, focus less on introducing another hierarchical level by empowering team coordinators and more on team structures, team spirit and team leadership.
- Reward good followers, i.e., those who know when to lead and when to follow and what it means to be supportive as a follower.
- Reduce the quantity of work, as all the above recommendations imply more time. Make a conscious choice on which teams and in which processes to engage in. Especially for intra-unital teamwork, establish a framework for negotiating time budgets amongst team member and occasionally competing top leaders. Currently, the responsibility to devise one's

time budget often lies with the individual – and that is important, because it is a façade of self-leadership. In addition, time budgets, especially when intra-unital, need to be owned jointly. For this, sometimes a colleague or team may need help in making decisions, therefore:

- Fully embrace the new creation of a pool of inhouse team coaches, or 'team ninjas'. Grant dedicated time budgets to those who wish to play this role. As inhouse client, be open-minded and recognise the effort of team ninjas.

5.4 A Teams: Accommodate all Mindsets and Define Roles

Findings: A-teams have been recently introduced at Division X, leaving abundant space by top leadership to be shaped by the teams. Currently, there are four types of mindsets of members regarding these teams, which are sometimes pulling the team efforts in different directions:

(5) Kindly leave me alone, I have enough to do.
(6) This is a loose community of practice – and that is all it needs to be.
(7) If we do this, let us do this properly and engage more deeply.
(8) Trust the process – dynamics in the teams will guide our joint course.

Assessment: These teams are new and perhaps the jury on them is still out. After a year of initiating A teams, some colleagues are satisfied, others are playing along, because it does not hurt, and some are dissatisfied. If the situation is left to evolve on itself, it may hurt the efforts of those who want to jointly engage and create. Therefore, a few initiatives to accommodate different needs are hereby proposed.

Recommendations:

- Clearly define the roles of coordinators and of top leadership, using a process by which coordinators and all top managers first develop roles themselves, and then seek feedback from teams and coordinators respectively. The aim is to agree upon well-defined roles, which are then shared with all team members.

- Addressing the diverse wishes of all four mindset-groups, Division X could introduce the following measures:
  - For those who want to leave, as they are already very busy. Let them leave. No one should be forced to engage with the A teams if they do not want to. If they are in a key position to hold relevant knowledge, either ask them to be purely transactional members of the communities of practice (to be explored below), or allow them to delegate membership to their respective colleagues, who have subject-matter expertise and who want to engage. Communicate that they are still part of the network and can always return with a more involved role.
  - For those thinking ‘This is a loose community of practice – and that is all it needs to be.’ Ensure them that they are exactly correct, as this is what the larger A teams of 16 to 18 members are for. In fact, think about renaming the A teams to A communities of practise. Provide coordinators with knowledge on CoPs and with professional support to develop tools on concrete elements, such as knowledge management. Negotiate agreement between members of the community to participate in two to three meetings a year, while creating an atmosphere in which people want to share. At the same time, offer spaces for asynchronous (i.e., at different times and spaces) exchange and learning.
  - For those who want to engage more deeply. Offer them the opportunity to create smaller A core teams based on a narrow common purpose and vision. Let A core-teams decide on their own roles and rules, but importantly, also give them a degree of co-determination when it comes to financial and time resources. When a core team assembles, ask them to gather at least four and no more than 10 members (in alignment with the Scrum Guide (Schwaber and Sutherland 2020,5), representing a diverse team, including administrative staff and programme managers, who are from at least three different departments. The teams are also requested to consult with and/or include relevant partners in other related A teams/CoPs. Core teams can write a pitch, outlining shared values and purpose,

visions and goals, relevant stakeholders, a division of roles and responsibilities, and their request for time budgets and funds. Offer a framework to discuss these pitches, by (a) providing bi-annual deadlines, so that a collective review is simpler; (b) appointing A team/CoP sponsors in the top leadership team, who are the first source of feedback, but who do not have the power to reject a proposal independently. The selection process of pitches and the subsequent negotiation process over time and resources needs to be transparently governed. Offer core teams a space to meet in person at least once.

- Those who trust the process and believe that dynamics in the teams will guide a joint course. Explain to them that while it is commendable to be relaxed, patient and open minded, others might need more assurance regarding strategic and tactical goals. Ask them to explain and debate repeatedly what it means to have an open-ended process. Congratulate them, as they are already employing a degree of complexity thinking.

Regarding the developments in the EU, we often speak of multi-speed Europe, where there needs to be consensus in some areas, while a coalition of the willing can push forward in others. In line with this thinking, Division X may need a multi-speed framework for A teams. This will not simplify the process and potentially produce tensions, but it may help everyone to feel recognised regarding their needs and motivations and to build on their individual strengths.

5.5 Support Top Leadership

Findings: Top leadership is often pressed for time. Many of the recommendations above increase their workload, while others might help to reduce them.

Personal assessment: As outlined under 5.1, there is a hierarchical mindset that points towards the responsibility of the other, most often of top leadership. Having been in leadership positions as head of office, I know that this is not always perceived as helpful. You already work long hours, doing your best to prioritise, and you are still asked to take on additional tasks - recognising informal leadership and team leadership, getting into deeper content debates on mandates of A teams, etc. At the same time, as Klein and Hughes (2019) put it, leadership needs to be fully onboard and able to actively participate in the process of team creation. As Project Aristotle at Google highlights, the traits that best managers share are 'good communication and avoiding micromanaging' (Duhigg 2016), both of which strongly support the work of teams.

If perceived as useful, individual coaching may help formal leaders to find answers the following questions:

- What do you do every day and what roles do you fulfil? (Hint: way too many)
- What roles get the high amount of time and attention? (Hint: often the wrong ones)
- What roles could be delegated to a team to free up time for important stuff?

(Klein and Hughes 2019, 202)

It may also be beneficial to engage their teams in this process, which in turn would make leadership roles of all jointly debated and explicit. This may occur along with interventions to strengthen autonomous teams, as outlined in prior sections. Again, the responsibility to fill such reviewed collaboration with life does not only lie with those who lead, but also with those who actively follow.

Recommendations:

- If required, allow for coaching for top leadership, reflecting on leadership styles and tasks, and on sharing leadership roles with their teams.
- Include teams in these discussions and underline the joint responsibility: if colleagues request more attention on some issues, they must be willing to yield attention on others.
- Encourage more open exchange between top leadership, including heads of offices, on these issues, for example during strategic retreats. Support the creation of a community of practice on team empowerment and leadership.

6 CONCLUSIONS

At the closure of this thesis project, I would like to reflect on the relationship between the theoretical underpinnings and the findings from interviews. I thenceforth conclude by outlining four underexplored themes that require more in-depth research.

6.1 Connecting Theory and Practice in this Thesis

I am reflective of the fact that the prior chapter discusses findings and offers recommendations, while drawing few connections to my theoretical underpinnings. While I see this as a shortcoming of the thesis, I also believe there are reasons for it. First, I feel that the voices and insights from ORI staff already cover an impressive range of knowledge that can stand on its own. I am truly thankful that colleagues took the time to speak to me, allowing me to create a mosaic of collective experiences. Second, I do not begin with a theoretical hypothesis that I plan to test. But while not always explicitly referred to, the theoretical chapter plays an important role in guiding my thinking and my course of questioning. The literature thus serves as important ‘knowledge on background’ that allows me to establish categories and frameworks, narrow my areas of interest, widen my view again to connect more recent organisational and leadership thinking, and sensitise me to my own entanglements, ambiguities, and blind spots.

Especially reflections on theoretical schools of thought – systems thinking, complexity theory, agility, and teal organizations - were essential for me to explore, for they made me feel less lost in the jargon of new work. They offered a sense of recent history in thinking on organizations. In addition, they opened a broader perspective on why we are often stuck in old patterns of predictably, and why it is tougher to explore the emergent and less known.

In comparing theory and practice, the opportunities and pitfalls arising from collective leadership as outlined in the literature and in the interviews overlap to a high degree. But the emphases and views of colleagues offer in-depth insights into a specific context. They are owned by ORI staff. Referring to Snowdon again, if we understand context, we do not simply imitated practices of others (2016).

Regarding leadership in teams, many topics are raised both in the literature and in the interviews. Yet, I am surprised by the centres of gravity in the discussion with colleagues. These are on issues which I notice in the literature, but either over- or underestimated. For example, I anticipated that the concept of psychological safety in teams, with resonates with my experiences, would play an important role in interviews, which it only does in three conversations. On the other hand, I was prior not reflective on issues around decision making processes and related conflicts. I would describe my personality as rather conflict-averse, wherefore I may not be sufficiently attuned to these concerns – until they are raised by several interview partners. Lastly, as already expected, debates on job categorisation conflicting with agile roles and on scarce resources were important threats in interviews, while particularly the academic literature reflects on job categories or on resources only marginally. To conclude, ORI readers of chapters four and five may regard some elements as under- and others as overrepresented, as it is our subjective view that influences our assessments.

6.2 Underdeveloped Themes Requiring Further Research

The first underdeveloped element to mention would be a focus on following. As stated in the methodology chapter, I have interviewed those who are more often in leadership roles than they are in followership roles. It would be desirable to widen the groups of interviewees and explore the diversity of voices in teams, particularly those of administrative staff at headquarters and colleagues in offices. This would lead to a more balanced focus on collective leadership and collective following.

The second theme underexplored is a discussion of collective leadership and gender. Colleagues stated that women more often informally co-lead, that it would be advisable to acknowledge this and transform it into formal arrangements (Interview 11). They stressed that with more women in leadership positions, a changing notion of leadership took hold (Interview 7). They highlighted the advantages of co-leading with a person of the other sex because it widens one's view (Interview 12). These are important issues and leads, but I feel that my sample size is too small to generate further reaching conclusions.

The third underexposed theme is on communication and collective leadership. CL increases the need for communication, and the wish for top leaders to communicate better was strongly underlined in Interview 6 and 8. I have mentioned the need for more and deeper communication through the thesis, but again, a more focused analysis of what ‘better’ communication means in all its façades would be useful.

The fourth and final theme to explored in more depth is on complexity thinking and leadership practices. There are many indicators in this theory that colleagues are intuitively grasping what it means to work in a complex organisational environment, but I do not manage to fully flesh out the relevant tools and techniques. Varney (2021) has written an excellent book on leadership in complexity, implying for leaders that they notice what is changing, spot vital signs of change, interpret reality in flight, and adapt responses. To unpack such practices at ORI would be a worthwhile endeavour.

I therefore acknowledge – as researchers so often do - that this thesis is only the beginning of a journey, as there is much scope for further investigation on collective leadership, both at ORI, as well as other organisations in which people try to transform their ways of interaction.

I conclude by dedicating this thesis to the teams that I have worked with, especially those operating in difficult environments. They know that I have not always managed to practice the recommendations I outlined in this thesis. I hence thank them for their patience, their team spirit, and their enthusiasm to learn, explore and lead together.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Leadership Theories in the CL landscape (Ospina et al. 2020, 457).

Appendix 1. Leadership theories in the collective leadership landscape.

Cell	Theory	Description	Examples[a]
1	Dual/co-leadership	Leadership couple as a substitute for the single-handed leader (Gronn, 1999)	Denis et al. (2010); Reid and Karambayya (2016)
	Shared leadership	'A dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both.' (Pearce and Conger, 2003: 1)	Carson et al. (2007); Ensley et al. (2006)
	Social network leadership	'Leadership . . . resides in the interactions between people thereby constituting a network of relationships that emerges and shifts over time' (Cullen-Lester and Yammarino, 2016: 173)	Balkundi and Kilduff (2006); Chrobot-Mason et al. (2016)
	Team leadership	'Refers to a team property whereby leadership is distributed among team members rather than focused on a single designated leader' (Carson et al., 2007: 1217)	Day et al. (2006); Ericksen and Dyer (2004)
2	Collective leadership practices	'A complex, multi-level, dynamic process that emerges at the crossroads of a distribution of the leadership role, diverse skills and expertise within the network, and the effective exchange of information among team members in order to capitalize on and coordinate their role behaviors and expertise' (Friedrich et al., 2009: 935)	Friedrich et al. (2016); Yammarino et al. (2010)
	Complexity leadership	'A recognizable pattern of social and relational organizing among autonomous heterogeneous individuals as they form into a system of action' (Hazy and Uhl-Bien, 2015: 80)	Marion et al. (2016); Uhl-Bien and Arena (2017)
	Distributed leadership	'The aggregated leadership of an organization is dispersed among some, many, or maybe all of the members' . . . [and] allows for the possibility that all organization members may be leaders at some stage' (Gronn, 2002: 429)	Fitzgerald et al. (2013); Spillane (2006)
	Multiteam systems leadership	'Two or more teams that interface directly and interdependently in response to environmental contingencies toward the accomplishment of collective goals' (Mathieu et al., 2001: 290).	DeChurch et al. (2011); Murase et al. (2014)
	Network leadership (networks)	'Leadership as an emergent network of relations, which is a shared and distributed phenomenon, encompassing several leaders who may be both formally appointed and emerge more informally' (White et al., 2016: 280)	Currie et al. (2009); White et al. (2014)
3	Practice theory studies (including leadership-as-practice)	'Leadership . . . emerges and unfolds through day-to-day experience . . . the people who are effecting leadership at any given time—do not reside outside of leadership but are very much embedded within it. To find leadership, then, we must look to the practice within which it is occurring.' (Raelin, 2017: 216)	Carroll and Simpson (2012); Sergi (2012)
	Relational leadership	'Leadership as a social influence process through which emergent coordination (e.g., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new approaches, values, attitudes, behaviors, ideologies) are constructed and produced' (Uhl-Bien, 2006: 654)	Fletcher (2004); Morley and Hosking (2003)
4	Collective constructionist leadership	'Leadership . . . exists wherever and whenever one finds a collective exhibiting direction, alignment, and commitment' (Drath et al., 2008: 642)	Foldy et al. (2008); Ospina et al. (2012)
	Discursive/communicative leadership	Discursive leadership lies 'at the intersection of little "d" discourse languaging practices . . . (and) big "D" Discourses that . . . are more enduring socio-historical systems of thought . . . ' (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014: 18)	Holm and Fairhurst (2018); Wodak et al. (2011)
	(Some) critical leadership studies	'Critical leadership studies . . . share a concern to critique the power relations and identity constructions through which leadership dynamics are reproduced' (Collinson, 2011: 181). (In this cell we refer to critical studies that surface how traditional leadership constructions reflect collectively constructed discourses and dynamics at the societal level.)	Alvesson and Spicer (2012); Gordon, 2010

Source: Adapted and expanded from Alexy and Hazy (2018).
[a]Includes empirical studies published after 2000.

Appendix 2. Initial Programme Theory

(Brun and McAuliffe 2023, 172)

Appendix

1. Initial Programme Theory (IPT)

CMOC #	Context	+Mechanism	=Outcome
1	Team training on-site	• Shared understanding and appreciation of others • Confidence in enhanced knowledge and skills in collective leadership	• Greater staff satisfaction through enhanced interdisciplinary teamworking • Improvements in quality and safety • Enactment of shared leadership behaviours
2	Team given permission/encouragement to self-manage and use co-design or collaborative approaches for improvement	• Empowerment and motivation through sense of shared responsibility for team performance	• Teams more innovative and adaptable, characterised by a culture of learning, collaboration and continuous quality improvement • Staff satisfaction • Patient satisfaction • Adoption and sharing of leadership roles and responsibilities
3	Dedicated time to reflect on and discuss team operations	• Greater role clarity	• System improvements, such as improvements/greater efficiencies in team processes around patient care • Enhanced teamworking; increased productivity • Effective team communication • Greater involvement of frontline staff in decision-making
4	Open, regular and inclusive communication and decision-making processes	• Enhanced trust and psychological safety • Sense of shared responsibility	• Effective communication, knowledge sharing and conflict management • Safety culture characterised by greater safety awareness and open discussion of issues • Team leaders willing to share leadership responsibilities and adoption of leadership responsibilities by team members
5	Lack of organisational support/ resources, senior clinical support, or a strong hierarchical culture	• Disempowerment • Lack of confidence in approach	• Avoidance of team working
6	Strong, supportive interpersonal relationships (formal and informal)	• Motivation to support others due to shared burden/responsibility • Trust and confidence in others' expertise	• Enactment of proactive helping behaviours (role blurring) that enhance team performance • Staff satisfaction and retention
7	Collective leadership is practiced	• Understanding that partnership needed for effective patient care • Internalisation of collective leadership concepts; shared sense of responsibility for team • Recognition and understanding of skills and expertise of others	• Patient satisfaction • Improvements in patient safety and care quality • Willingness to speak up • Senior colleagues more open and accessible • Inclusive and collaborative team working characterised by a 'give and take' approach

Note: Table adapted from De Brún, A., McAuliffe, E. (2020) Identifying the context, mechanisms and outcomes underlying collective leadership in teams: building a realist programme theory. *BMC Health Services Research*, 20**,** 261. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-020-05129-1

Appendix 3. The Five Practice and Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership

(Kouzes and Posner 2003, 12)

THE FIVE PRACTICES AND TEN COMMITMENTS OF EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP

1 MODEL the Way

1. **FIND YOUR VOICE** by clarifying your personal values.
2. **SET THE EXAMPLE** by aligning actions with shared values.

2 INSPIRE a Shared Vision

3. **ENVISION THE FUTURE** by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
4. **ENLIST OTHERS** in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.

3 CHALLENGE the process

5. **SEARCH FOR OPPORTUNITIES** by seeking innovative ways to change, grow, and improve.
6. **EXPERIMENT AND TAKE RISKS** by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes.

4 ENABLE Others to Act

7. **FOSTER COLLABORATION** by promoting cooperative goals and building trust.
8. **STRENGTHEN OTHERS** by sharing power and discretion.

5 ENCOURAGE the Heart

9. **RECOGNIZE CONTRIBUTIONS** by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
10. **CELEBRATE THE VALUES AND VICTORIES** by creating a spirit of community.

Appendix 4. Questions used in Interviews with ORI Staff

Tina Blohm, Thesis on Collective Leadership, MEL 20, November 2023

Block 1: Co-Leadership:

1) Why did you decide to work as a co-leading duo?

2) Do you have different roles in your contracts or are the tasks/profiles they identical?

3) How did and do you go about dividing work and roles? Where does one take the lead, where the other follow? What is decided jointly?

4) What are important prerequisits for your duo to work? What would you say are the main benefits of your arrangement?

   (Probing areas if needed:

   - Management vs. Leadership vs. Subject matter expert? Do you have more time for these different elements? More resources to give feedback to staff?
   - Better decision making? More diversity in decision making process?)

5) What are pitfalls and risks? Where do you see potential for conflict and how do you deal with it?

6) How do you communicate on your co-leadership roles? What are your daily practices of interaction:

   a. Amongst each other
   b. With your team
   c. With ORI managment and other colleagues outside of your team
   d. With external partners

7) Co-Leadership and Shared-Leadership in Teams: are the two interlinked? If so, how are they? How does this manifest in your daily work?

Block 2: Shared Leadership in Teams:

1) Within ORI, what teams going beyond your individual unit (i.e. inter-unital) were or are you part of? How did/do these team constellations differ? How do your roles differ in them?

2) If you think of a team dynamic with that worked well, which one was it and why did it function well? What were the success factors?

3) When were/are teams doomed to fail and why?

4) When we talk about teams at ORI and how they function, should we use a language of leadership at all, or rather one of collaboration or even a different language?

5) Do we need more teamwork at FORI? Why? And what is needed to foster that change towards more collaboration and agility?

   (Probe on subfields if needed:

   - Information sharing
   - Knowledge generation and sharing
   - Sharing of appreciation for success, recognition)

6) Power structures and team leadership: When do hirarchies and collaboration clash? What can be done to address these frictions?

Block 3: Organisational Context:

1) What type of organisation are we? How hirarchical are we? Are we a matrix or networked organisation and if so, why?

2) How has thinking on leadership evolved within the organisation since you joined?

3) What is the current leadership guidance and practice at ORI? What should it look like in your opinion?

4) Do you think we should think leadership and teams efforts togehter? Why, why not? (If not already asked under Block 2)

5) How would you define collaborative leadership within ORI?

6) Leadership, teams and complex problems or issues that we are aiming to analyse – are teams the answer? Is agility the answer? What is needed to work on these complex issues within the organisation?