Perceived challenges of shared leadership in teamwork – The case of Glaxo Smith Klein (GSK)

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Abstract

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The focus of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of the challenges of shared leadership (SL) from the corporative employee and teamwork perspective. Based on prior literature, SL in teamwork is defined as systematic and planned sharing of team leadership roles, responsibilities, and tasks, between two or more leaders. The main goal of the thesis is to examine the following two research questions: (RQ1) What are the potential challenges of SL for team members and team leaders? (RQ2) Through what kind of means and ways can challenges in SL be overcome or resolved?

The research embarks with a literature review of SL, discussing its benefits and preliminarily identifying a set of related challenges. The research then moves on to empirically investigate the preliminary challenges of SL – including task division, decision-making authority, responsibilities of the members in the team, and clear communication – from the viewpoint of GSK employees. Specifically, empirical research is conducted by using a qualitative research approach with semi-structured interviews. Five interviews were conducted with employees of GSK Finland, all having experience working in a shared leadership team, acting either as a team leader or a team member. The interviews, conducted both face-to-face and virtually, lasted approximately one hour each and were transcribed afterward, leading to 16 pages of material.

The results of the research are line with the prior literature, yet also extend the prior literature by identifying a set of practical manifestations of the preliminary SL challenges, two additional challenges, and ways to overcome the challenges. Based on the results, communication seems like the most substantial challenge of SL, and clearer communication as the most prominent way to overcome the challenges. Micromanagement and egocentric leading were two additional challenges emerging through the interviews with informants.

This thesis was commissioned by GSK, and the results of the research are to serve as a tool for the managerial implementations of SL.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and research questions

Shared leadership (SL) has been increasing in popularity within firms and organizations in the past few years. Likewise, growing attention has been paid to SL in academic research, from many different perspectives. SL is yet to be unanimously defined but according to Conger and Pearce (2003, 1) it is "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'. In practical terms, SL in team work, for instance, means that there is more than one leader for the team (Bergman et al. 2012) – or even that no formal leader has been assigned to the team, but all the team members engage in leading the team and one another (Hoch 2013). In the present thesis, I focus on the former case, that is, teams with more than one leader.

There are many studies, conceptual and empirical, about SL (e.g., Fausing et al. 2015., Acar 2010., Hoch et al. 2010., Bergman et al. 2015., and Chiu et al. 2016) but most of them are focused on the benefits and positives of SL and not so much on the challenges and the limitations. SL does indeed offer many benefits and advantages but given the relative lack of thorough research on the challenges, I chose to focus this research on them. The motivation behind choosing this topic is the fact that it is very different from traditional leadership topics. It was amazing to find a topic within leadership, which I am extremely interested in, and to discover an area that I could further examine. It is also a relevant and current subject for the fast-changing modern work environment.

In other words, the present research will critically examine SL, focusing on the challenges that it can pose, as well as potential ways to overcome them. Thus, while I will overview, as a background, key benefits of SL in previous academic literature, the research questions (RQ) focus on the challenges, as well as the issues posed by it to team members and leaders:

a) RQ1: What are potential challenges of SL for team members and team leaders?

b) RQ2: Through what kind of means and ways can challenges in SL be overcome or resolved?

1.2　Scope of research and limitations

Leadership as a concept is very vast and there are many different types of leaders, leadership types and styles, and leadership settings. Therefore, this report will limit the research to smaller teams with only two leaders and will exclude organization-level leadership (of, e.g., the executive management team/board). The focus is not to compare SL to other leadership types either.

Furthermore, the present empirical research is explorative in nature, and focuses on exploring the types of challenges of SL. It will not be a quantitative or experimental research that would confirm or test any particular negative effects (challenges) or positive effects (benefits) of SL. While the literature review part of this will discuss some of the known benefits of SL, the empirical research focuses, as mentioned, on the challenges, and how the challenges are perceived in the corporate world. The focus will remain on the perceptions and views of team members' and leaders without observing actual behaviour or performance.

1.3　Overview of research setting and case company

The research is commissioned by one of the largest and known pharmaceutical industries in the world, Glaxo Smith Klein (GSK). GSK is a British multi-business that focuses on medicines, vaccines, and consumer healthcare products. GSK researches, develops, and manufactures various pharmaceutical products globally. (GSK 2020.) The company was established in the year 2000 and their headquarters is located in Brentford, London (Wikipedia 2020).

The research at hand is commissioned by GSK's country organization in Finland and the report produced, and the findings discovered will be delivered directly to them. GSK as an organization focuses on various medical development cooperation and projects, which however, this research will not be focusing on. Instead, this research focuses on exploring the typical administrative teamwork setting within the country organization.

To support and further examine the key findings of SL, I have conducted a qualitative study by performing semi-structured interviews with the employees of GSK, from both team member and team leader perspective. The focus in the interviews was to identify challenges related to SL from team member and team leader perspective and ways, and ideas to tackle them. The interviewees

provided answers based on their own experience and knowledge on the matter. The outcome of the interviews shed some light on SL, and its challenges especially. After reading this report you will have a better understanding of some of the major challenges in SL from the corporative employee and teamwork perspective.

1.4   Structure of this thesis

After this introductory chapter, I will provide a literature overview of SL, including a brief discussion of its definition and benefits, as well as a preliminary identification of the main challenges of SL. The methodology of the empirical interview study is described next, followed by the results of the interview study. Finally, I will discuss the results and their theoretical as well as practical implications. In the discussion chapter, I also summarize the limitations of the thesis and provide suggestions for future research on the topic.

2 Shared leadership: Conceptual framework

As the business environment is getting increasingly complex, companies and firms are continuously trying to find more efficient ways to lead and work, for instance in teams (Burke et al. 2003, Clarke 2018). Working in teams has been proven to be more effective especially when the responsibility and accountability is shared among team members. SL has been increasing its' popularity for various reasons, e.g. its ability to enhance social integration, increase performance levels as well as effective knowledge-sharing (Sweeney et al. 2019).

Especially, the discussions in this chapter of the examining the relations of SL and team performance is written based on a review article written by Sweeney et al. (2019). The basic challenges of SL have also been recognized in the article, even though that is not what the article mainly focuses on. As for the challenges, for further discussion, I will be using literature beyond the scope of challenges within SL and also use external literature streams (e.g. of matrix organizations).

2.1 Definitions and antecedents of shared leadership

Leadership in teams generally is an interaction between a leader and team members where the leader influences the behaviours and attitudes of members in the team and cross managing between other groups towards achieving goals (Bass, 1990). Particularly *shared* leadership in teams, however, is yet to have a unanimous definition and it is still being conceptualized by many researchers. Acar (2010, 1740) states that SL is, in general, "the sharing of leadership roles, responsibilities and tasks". Hoch et al. (2010, 105), on the other hand, have proposed a more dynamic and sociable definition by stating SL to be a "collective, social influence process". It can also be described as an "activity that is shared or distributed among team members of a group or organization" (Pearce and Conger 2013). From the presented definition, I personally lead more towards Acar's (2010) definition of SL.
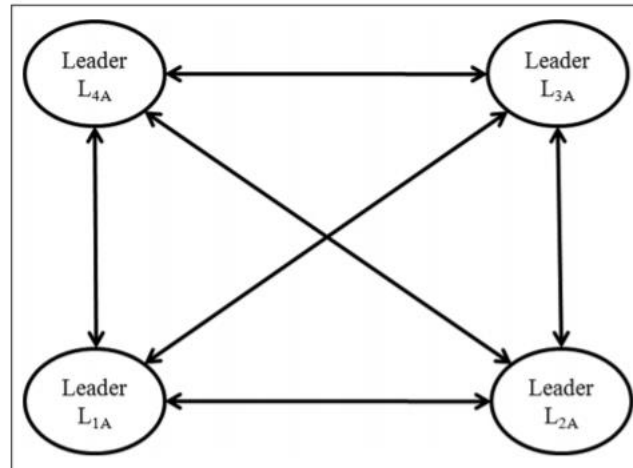
Figure 1. Visual depiction of the SL influence process in teams (Ramthun and Matkin 2012)

Whereas "normal" leadership is often assumed to be driven by a motivational, charismatic and goal-setting leader, the notion of SL rather assumes the motivation arising and goals being set from the team itself, in a self-directing way. (Hoch et al. 2010; Muethel et al. 2012). Definitions of SL differ from traditional leadership in terms of how systematic and planned it is assumed to be. Some academics and practitioners assume the notion of SL to be mainly an informal act of peers working as equals who are influenced by each other (or an effortless, non-systematic, and unplanned course of action) (Carson et al. 2007), while others view it to be a leadership approach formally adopted and implemented by a team or organisation (Friedrich et al. 2011). In this research I will lean more towards Carson et al.'s representation.

A shown in figure 1., in SL some or all team members act as leaders of each other and themselves. The idea of SL is to allow team members to step up and exhibit leadership and alternate depending on the occasion. Yet another definition suggests that time is one of the most important factors of the discussed leadership style: because the continuous change in the group dynamics, the nature of SL is inevitably to some extent a temporal – and possibly, temporary – phenomenon (Friedrich et al. 2011).

By and large, SL in teamwork can hence be considered as the spreading of leadership among team members (Hoch and Dulebohn 2017) by moving from an individual and dictatorial leadership style to a more collective style that enables organization with strong preference in participative team work to function effectively. (Burke et al. 2003, Clarke 2018). For SL to function effectively, however, leaders will have to have willingness to pass some of their authority

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to another leader – and potentially all team members, too (Hoch, 2013). Likewise, the other leaders and team members will have to have willingness to accept it (DeRue, 2011).

Adapting Acar's (2010, 1740) definition of SL being, in general, about "the sharing of leadership roles, responsibilities, and tasks" as well as the assumption SL is a formally agreed-upon approach (rather than unplanned emergent phenomenon; Carson et al. 2007), in this research, I adopt the following definition for SL in teamwork:

> *Shared leadership in teamwork is systematic and planned sharing of team leadership roles, responsibilities, and - tasks, between two or more leaders.*

Furthermore, in the empirical research setting, I will focus especially on teams of ten or less members, of which two to three have been nominated as leaders. In other words, I am not focusing on teams where all members are leaders or share leadership, or on very large teams.

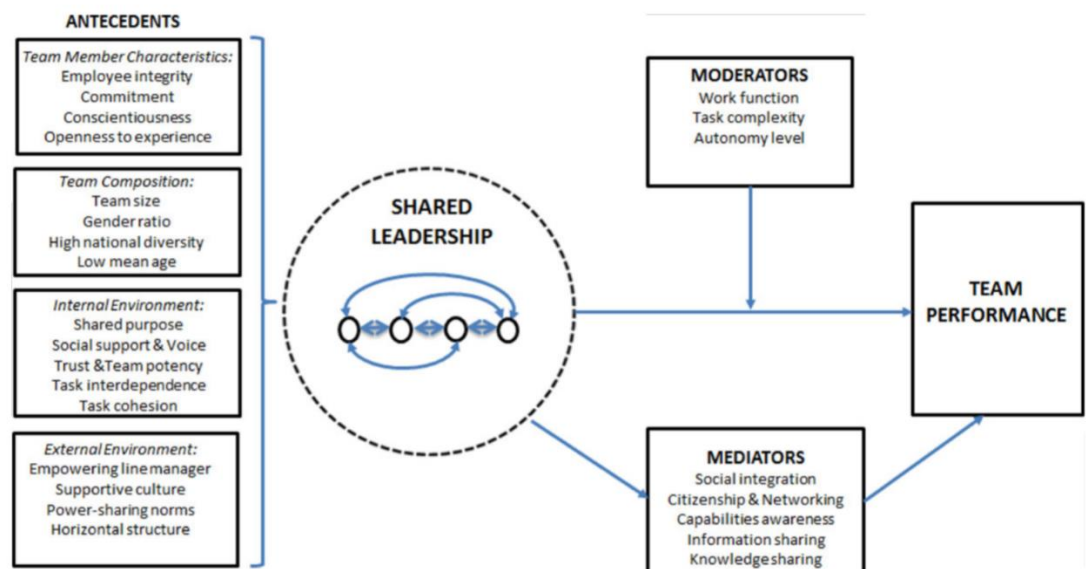## 2.2 Antecedents and contexts where SL is typically observed

Figure 2. Framework of SL: antecedents, moderators and mediators of SL and team performance (Sweeney, A. et al. 2019)

Based on a research review conducted by Sweeney et al. (2019), there are many internal and external factors that give rise to SL in certain settings and

contexts. Figure 2 reproduces Sweeney et al.'s (2019) summary of prior research, illustrating the findings from about 40 prior empirical studies of SL. As seen in the figure, these studies focus on the relationship or correlation between SL and team performance, especially. However, found antecedents of SL– i.e., individual, organizational, and contextual factors that give rise to SL, or correlate with it (as typical contexts wherein SL occur) – are also summarized in the figure. In other words, factors like team member characteristics, team composition, and internal and external environments play roles as antecedents of SL – or correlate with observed, high degree SL in particular settings.

Regarding *team member characteristics*, a higher degree of SL has been observed in, for instance, teams wherein employee integrity is also higher and team members' openness to experience is higher. Based on research of Hoch (2014), employee integrity is connected with SL, while Jain and Jeppesen (2014) express the importance of employee commitment and professionalism. Additionally, Hoch (2014) states that an important team member attribute giving rise to SL includes comprehension of responsibility and trustworthiness. Personality traits like loyalty, equality, fairness and transparency may also influence the degree in which team members engage in the sharing of leadership.

When it comes to *team composition*, the degree of SL observed correlates with the size of the team, ratio in gender, and nationality, as well as the average age. For example, shared, participative leadership style is preferred among women and therefore SL is likely to appear in teams where there are more women (Northouse 2001). Diverse nationality of team members also results in diverse knowledge and experience, and often leads to a more shared approach in leading. It has also been observed that a higher degree of SL correlates with lower mean age of the team, whereas SL is not so typical in teams with a high mean age. The team size, in turn, can have both positive and negative effect on the degree of SL. (Muethel et al. 2012.) On one hand, a greater team size could result in increased decision-making and information- processing, perhaps leading to more SL, but on the other hand, it could make the psychological distance between team members too overwhelming, possibly leading to less SL (Pearce and Herbik 2004, 296). In conclusion, socio-demographic characteristics play a substantial role in the emerging of SL in teams. (Muethel et al. 2012.)

Considering *environmental factors*, for SL to emerge in a team, the environment needs to be supportive. According to Carson et al. (2007) and Daspit et al. (2013) there should be three conditions present in the organization's internal environment, for SL to be observed: shared purpose, social support, and voice. Interdependence is another condition that enables SL to surface. Being dependent on other team members (Wassenaar and Pearce 2012, 382) and sharing responsibility and being equally motivated are binding factors when talking about SL. The effects of external environment on SL are yet untested but there are theories that trainings (Wood 2005) and financial rewards (Serban and Roberts 2016) could play a part in the emergence of SL and motivation of team members/ leaders.

All of the above discussed precursors may give rise to SL, or correlate with the degree of it observed in teams. Next, I shift to briefly overview the benefits of SL, before moving to address the focus of the present research: challenges of SL.

2.3 Benefits of shared leadership

When examining leadership, it is quite obvious that one person cannot possess, or it might be difficult to possess, all the necessary abilities and skills to lead knowledge-based team work (Pearce & Manz, 2005) nor does it contribute to team effectiveness as much as an informal leading type does (D. Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). SL has received increasing amount of attention, both theoretical and empirical, and its effects on team performance and -processes among various contexts. (e.g. Boies et al. 2010; Carson et al. 2007; Hoch et al. 2010b; Pearce and Sims, 2002; Sivasubramaniam et al. 2002; Small and Rentsch, 2010; Solansky, 2008). However, the understanding of antecedent conditions is yet to fully understood for SL to emerge successfully. (Fausing et al. 2015).

As visible in figure 2 above, the main benefit of SL has been assumed to be the increased performance of the organisation or team utilizing SL. Indeed, SL in commercial organizations (CO's), especially, has been proven to have a positive impact on team performance and effectiveness (Carson et al. 2007). Specifically, the performance benefits of SL can vary from enhanced team effectiveness through better utilization of intragroup skills and knowledge (Pearce & Conger, 2003) as well as improved personal performance for team

members (e.g., through overall feeling of being appreciated and needed as a team member; (Carson et al. 2007). When team members rely on each other for leadership, guidance and effort, results do improve (Carson et al. 2007).

In figure 2, Sweeney et al. has listed some "mediators" through which SL can occur; social integration, citizenship and networking, capabilities awareness, information-and knowledge sharing. These mediators can be considered as additional explanations *why,* that is, why exactly SL will in general have a positive effect on or association with team performance.

It has been stated that teams who share leadership get along better and understand each other better than in a team that practises the traditional leading style. They also share a mutual trust and feel a sense of belonging when working together but most importantly, team members can utilize their skill better because they are more aware of each other's qualities and potential (Bergman et al. 2012). Therefore, working in a team where leadership is shared may create and facilitate knowledge sharing and allow new ideas, and opportunities to emerge and/or be created. This could be a determining factor when trying to increase performance level. (Ocker et al. 2011.)

2.3.1   Other benefits of team leadership

There are most likely many benefits to SL in addition to the ones mention above. According to Pearce (2004) and Pearce and Manz (2005), a team's innovativeness is one possible outcome of SL, besides overall team performance. Being innovative is highly important for organization, in order for them to stay competitive and relevant in the field. Indeed, innovation involves the creation of fresh, and functional ideas, and methods within organizational settings, and is needed to survive the constantly changing business environment and surroundings (Hoch 2013).

Another potential benefit of SL is, almost by definition, team members' empowerment, or feeling of being empowered. This form of vertical leadership urges and encourages team members to assume responsibilities on their own. Moreover, when leadership is shared, it empowers team members to receive and accept more responsibility. (Fausing et al. 2013).
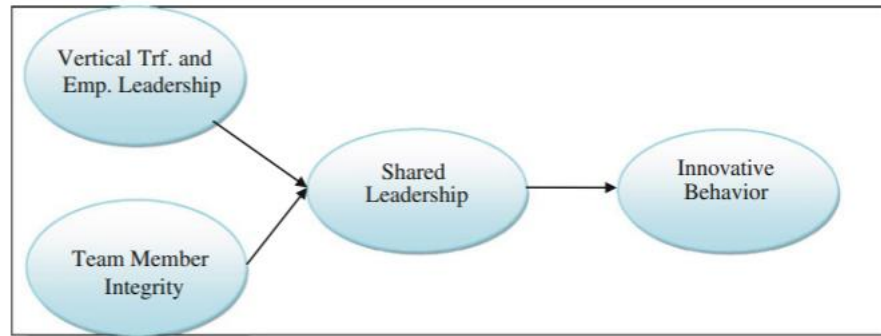
Figure 3. Input-Process-Output Model of Shared Leadership predicting Innovation, Vertical Leadership and Employee Integrity predicting Shared Leadership (Hoch, J. 2013)

SL, compared to a horizontal traditional leadership form, comes from vertical influence where a single team leaders' authority and guidance is substituted for or completed by various interactions with other team members. Instead of relying on one leader and hers/his knowledge and skills, SL allows the effective use and imposition of the skills and knowledge of other team members. (Carson et al. 2007). Given these theoretical advantages, SL should pose higher levels of team performance, especially in knowledge-based work environments where creativity, complex decision making, and flexibility is required. According to a research by Wasswnaar and Pearce (2012), SL has direct positive influence on performance, and therefore also supporting the above argument.
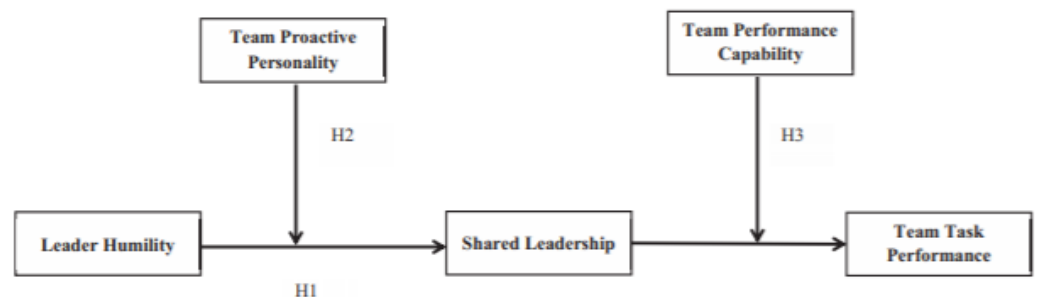
Figure 4. Conditional indirect effect of leader humility through SL (Chiu et al. 2016)

Among some other benefits is the ability for leaders to be humble. As visible in figure 4., there is an indirect effect of leader humility to team task performance and therefore performance in general. Owens and Hekman (2012) investigated the interpersonal characteristic of being humble as a crucial facilitator of SL. The characteristic of being humble as a leader supports, legitimizes, and

encourages leadership-claiming and – granting acts between team members and therefore promotes SL by directing their power away from themselves towards other members of the team. Academics have theorized leader humility as a fundamental for e.g. learning and socialized charismatic leadership, as well as above mentioned participative leadership. They conceptualize humility as the ability to acknowledge one's and peer's strengths and contributions, willingness to acknowledge and accept own abilities and faults as well as remaining open-minded and receptive of feedback. Summa sum. Leader humility has also been found to contribute to team effectiveness (Chiu et al. 2016) and is expected to be highly beneficial in a SL- system. (Owens and Hekman 2012).

There is also a strong connection between SL and creativity (Lee et al. 2015). In more traditional leadership forms, where the individual leader holds all of the power, creativity nor innovation are encouraged from other members of the team but left to the formally designated leader to create. It is then up to the team members to implement the idea or the problem-solving method created by the leader. However, when the team members are encouraged (Pearce and Manz 2005) and comfortable enough to discuss critically and elaborate in generating ideas, it may lead to awarding creativity. Creativity, in general, blossoms under supportive leadership (or in a supporting climate). A correlation between creativity and self-accuracy has also been found, specifically knowing, and understanding that something is not right before finding ways to improve them. (Hoch 2013). SL acts as one of the key levers to be implemented to enhance creative processes within organizations (Pearce and Manz 2005).

2.4   Challenges of shared leadership

The ever-evolving trends in the business environment has led towards a more team-base working structure. The need for continuous organizational change and increased complexity forces companies to evolve in order to stay relevant. The societal attitudes towards organizations are also changing and traditional individual leaders are facing cynicism and their motives being questioned. (Fausing et al. 2013).

As previously stated, and proved by many researchers, SL is in many ways positive and beneficial when working in teams. However, are there any disadvantages, challenges or other negative aspects associated with SL? Below, I

will discuss the challenges of SL from two perspectives. Firstly, (1) I interpret the "moderators" identified in Sweeney et al.'s (2019; see figure 2), as presenting certain challenges for SL. The "moderators" are factors that earlier research has found to (positively) reinforce or (negatively) weaken the effect of SL on team performance. The logic of why these moderating factors – or their inversed versions – can be assumed to present challenges for SL, is the following. If, for instance, under conditions of "high team autonomy", SL's positive effect on team performance if positively moderated (or reinforced), then under conditions of low autonomy, SL's effect on team performance is weakened – or even becomes negative. Thus, there is something in low team autonomy that poses a challenge for SL's positive effect on team performance.

Secondly, (2) I also preliminarily identify, as challenges of SL, four factors (task division, decision making authority, responsibility, and communicating clearly) that Sweeney et al. (2019) briefly mentioned in their research review as "challenges" of SL, although they do not discuss these challenges in much detail. Therefore, in discussing these four challenges in the subsections below (2.3.2), I also draw on related literature on leadership challenges in matrix organizations. Indeed, it can be assumed that the leadership challenges in matrix organizations are, in part, similar, or analogous with those of SL. This is because matrix organizations, individuals also have typically two (or more) supervisors/ managers, as they typically belong to two organizational units simultaneously. Moreover, it is seldom formally or fully specified to what extent an individual employee shall perform tasks for one unit or leader over another.

As there is a certain overlap between the challenges identified in (1) and (2), I present a summary conceptual framework in 2.5, which integrates the overlapping and same challenges into one.

2.4.1 Moderators weakening the positive effect of shared leadership on team performance

According to the research review and summary of Sweeney et al. (2019), the effect that SL has on team performance depends on various moderating factors. As visible in figure 2, especially (a) work function, (b) task complexity, and (c) autonomy level (Fausing et al. 2013) may shape the positive baseline effect of SL on team performance, that is, reinforce the baseline positive effect into even more positive, or weaken it into less positive or even null or negative effect.

When it comes to (a) *work function,* SL has been argued to work better in knowledge-intensive teams than in manufacturing work environment. SL may even have a negative relationship with teams that work in manufacturing. Therefore, I identify a non-knowledge intensive work function or environment, as one potential challenge of SL. Considering (b) *task complexity,* when work tasks become too much of a routine, or non-complex, Fausing et al. (2013) states SL could have no effect at all on team performance, meaning that SL is in fuller effect only when tasks are more complex (Wang et al. 2014). Thus, another potential challenge for SL is posed by its use in team tasks that are rather routine or non-complex.

Regarding (c) autonomy level, it has also been pointed out that SL works better in teams, wherein people are well aware of themselves and their talent and are interdependent. In other words, not knowing other team members' and one's own skills and potential can be challenging when sharing leadership. When there is a challenge in leading yourself effectively it makes it near impossible to be able to effectively lead a team. (Fausing et al. 2013). Therefore, low autonomy and self-understanding can pose additional challenge for SL.

2.4.2 Other challenges of shared leadership

As also mentioned by Sweeney et al. (2019), some researchers (e.g., Fausing et al. 2013; Serban and Roberts 2016) have pointed further concerns they connect with SL, beyond the aforementioned "moderating" factor challenges. Especially, the practical challenges named can be grouped under the four categories of (i) dividing tasks among team members and leaders, (ii) decision-making authority, (iii) responsibilities of team members, and (iv) communication issues.

(i) Dividing tasks across team members and team leaders

Another challenge for SL, partly related to team members' responsibilities yet partly distinct, pertains to dividing tasks across team members. As in teamwork setting, proper task division is likely to be a determining factor in the success of SL. Tasks can be divided in various ways and different leaders have their own ways of doing that. Due to the autonomy implied, in SL, tasks are often divided – at least to some extent -- depending on both the multiple team leaders' and the multiple team members' own interests, skills or personalities (Chiu et al. 2016). However, if taken to an extreme, this can pose a challenge,

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because the variety of the team members own interests can conflict with the variety of the tasks that need to be performed to get the team's work done, i.e., with dividing tasks by sections of the project or work at hand by appointing an area of responsibility to each member.

In addition to task division to and between team members, task division between multiple co-leaders of the team also poses a challenge. Because the co-leaders' task division can also affect their subordinates' work, it is highly important to be clear of everyone's responsibilities and pay special attention to the tasks that are included in those responsibilities. (Pearce and Conger 2003). The most straightforward way of diving tasks is to have a fluid approach on who is taking responsibility of what. (Pearce and Manz 2005).

The challenge of task division is also associated with team autonomy, as discussed above (in 2.4.1). Team autonomy – in the sense of self-awareness of team members' skills -- is a defining component of a team characteristic and it reflects strongly on how tasks are divided. Thus, when autonomy is low in the sense of such self-awareness, task division in SL can be especially challenging to implement effectively. Regarding the co-leaders, in particular, it can also be challenging at times if there are too many leader spirits and the "leadership space gets overcrowded". This can result in overlapping of talent and wasted effort. (Chreim 2015).

Moreover, dividing tasks in a teamwork environment is one thing but dividing credits for the end result can stir up further disagreement. Also, being able to step back when the other leader/leaders have better ideas and acknowledge the advantage it may offer the team, can be a hit on one's ego. Remembering that the team members are all working together towards a common goal can be forgotten during the process of teamwork, so it is important to acknowledge every one's contribution when crediting members of the team. (Hoch, 2013)

(ii) Decision-making authority

Again, partly related to yet partly distinct from responsibility-taking and task division, another challenge of SL can be posed by ambiguities in decision-making authority. **Who** has the power to make the (final) decisions about division of tasks and other aspects of teamwork (e.g., resource utilization)? Is the decision-making authority clear to everyone in the team? Also, if the responsibility of leading is shared among two or more people, do they have the same

amount of authority or does one, or some of them, have more? These are some of the issues that might arise when thinking about the decision-making when working in a team where leadership is shared.

In a traditional leadership setting where the structure is hierarchical, the equation is quite clear: the one and only leader has the authority to make decisions. But in a more collaborative setting where leadership is shared or where the sharing of decision-making rights is not experienced, ambiguity can emerge. In matrix organizations, like GSK, team members as well as leaders can assume wide responsibilities for various tasks and aspects, but the formal decision-making authority may still reside even outside one's own team. A study conducted by Sy et al. (2005) found that 43% of mid-level managers felt that they were not given the authority they need by senior leader in their matrix organization, to make decisions on a local level. Specifically, decisions already made by mid-level managers would often be reversed, or their ability to make decisions altogether could be blocked because of lack of trust by top executives, or their inability to share decision-making authority. Given the similar nature and objective of a matrix organization to SL, this applies in SL as well. (Sy et al. 2005).

There can also be a difference between formal authority and perceived authority (Sweeney et al. 2019). As an example, top-level executives naturally have the formal authority to make decisions about a variety of policies or regulations – yet they may lack perceived authority (or legitimacy) to make decisions affecting the implementation of policies at regional levels, let alone individual teams at the grass roots level. This also points to the importance of humble leader behaviour: Chiu et al. (2016) has argued about the importance of leader humility within social information processing (SIP) theory. Owens and Hekman (2012) has agreed by noting that being self-aware and being teachable is highly important in SL. As stated above in the benefit section, when it occurs in teamwork settings it is an advantage, but the lack of humility can pose a challenge.

(iii) Responsibilities of team members

SL is exactly that, the idea of sharing of responsibility for activities, tasks, decision-making, and overall leadership (Carsonet al. 2007). Responsibility-taking is one an important function of in leadership in general (not only SL), since it determines who possesses the overall accountability.

By definition, the approach of SL implies that responsibilities of one leader are actively distributed among other leaders and team members (Perry et al. 1999). However, sharing responsibility in principle – or on paper – does not mean that the persons involved actually take their responsibility, in working practices. In other words, even if getting employees committed to their responsibility flows from and correlates with amount of responsibility they are given formally, their actual responsibility-taking might in many cases be lower than that wished for, in SL. Thus, having team members or additional team leaders actually feel and take their share of the responsibility is an evident challenge for SL.

There is also a link between the challenge of responsibility taking and the before mentioned challenge of routine vs. complex work tasks. Whereas SL may better work in teams with complex work tasks, there may conversely be a greater challenge with responsibility-taking in complex task environments. This is because taking the bare minimum responsibility may work in other types of work environments, i.e., routine work processes, but in knowledge-based work where leadership is shared, commitment of the team members may even need to go beyond what is expected of them on paper. (Pearce and Manz 2005).

(iv) Communicating clearly

Communication in many ways is a key component in any efficient working environment. In the case of a team where leadership is shared, there needs to be a clear distinction between roles within the team so that potential confusions or ambiguities do not delay or intervene with the working process – and so that 'right' information (relevant for tasks at hand) is distributed to 'right' team members at the 'right' time. Role ambiguity can be a cause of a dysfunctional team (Burke et al. 2003). Not knowing which tasks are one's area of responsibility or just simply not having information about the daily tasks are can indeed delay, or worst case, alter wanted results.

The clarity of communication may therefore be even more important than the amount of communication altogether. Especially in multicultural and diverse teams, miscommunication can be a real challenge. There has been a clear correlation between team cohesion and communication within culturally di-

verse teams. Therefore, one can assume it can have an effect on team motivation and willingness to stay in a team and work together towards a common goal. Unclear communication or the lack of communication all together can cause conflict within the team. (Pearce and Conger 2003).

2.5 Summary of preliminary challenges of SL
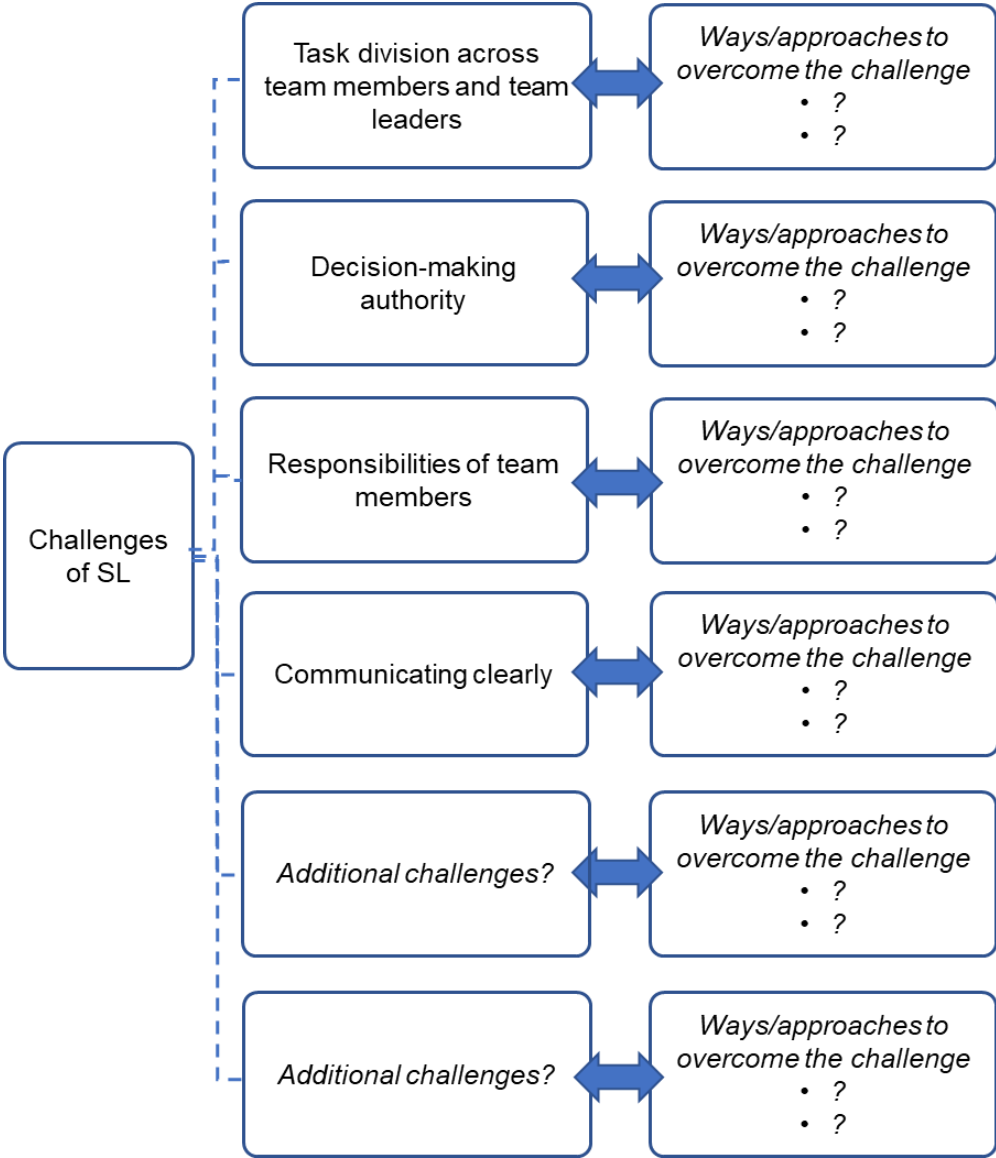
Figure 4. Summary of challenges preliminarily associated with SL and focus of the empirical study

As you can see above here, I have constructed a visual representation of the challenges discovered in the literature of SL and I will continue on explore the challenges in the interviews. These topics include task division, decision-making authority, taking responsibility and communicating clearly. The dashed lines indicate types of challenges related to SL. (Note that they do not indicate effects of or correlations between SL challenges.) The bulky arrows on the

right side of the figure indicate potential ways to overcome the challenges. (Note that they do not, either, indicate effects or correlations of the challenges.)

The purpose of the empirical interview study is to explore whether and how the challenges preliminary indentified above manifest themselves in the case of GSK's teamwork, and whether any additional challenges (not identified in the framework) can be revealed. It also reviews in what ways the interviewees could potentially mitigate the challenges.

3 Methodology

3.1 Overview of methodological choices

In the methodology section I will describing my methods of gathering data and analysing the data I have received. Overall, the research method was a qualitative interview study with a semi-structured format. I chose the qualitative interview study as the main method, because prior literature only allowed me to preliminarily identify a set of broad challenge areas associated with SL but did not provide in-depth insights to the practical manifestations of those challenges nor to potential ways to overcome the challenges. Thus, qualitative interviews enabled me to further explore and identify those manifestations and examples of the challenges as well as identify potential additional challenges from the interviewees' open-ended accounts – whereas a quantitative survey or register data would only allowed to gain knowledge of the extent to which the preliminarily identified challenges, especially, occur in the case company.

Further, I chose to use the semi-structured version of the interview study method, as I aimed to both gain more understanding of the practical manifestations of the preliminarily identified SL challenges (through more structured interview questions, asking interview to reflect on challenges) and identify potential additional challenges as well as ways to overcome the challenges (through unstructured, open-ended, thematic questions). Another reason for not conducting quantitative research was that the implementation of a quantitative research method would have required such a high(er) number of participants or respondents, that would have been practically impossible to execute it given the current resources and timeframe, and without compromising the quality of the results.

3.2 Data collection

The research data gathered for this thesis was from collected through interviews of the employees of the pharmaceutical company GSK in Finland. A qualitative research was conducted where five of the employees of GSK were interviewed about their perceptions of SL and its benefits and challenges, the focus remaining on the challenges, according to the research questions RQ1 and RQ2 (see Introduction).

The five interview participants work in various parts of the company, each specializing in different fields of operations, which allowed the sample to be, at the

same time, focused (through one and the same company as the interviewees' employer) and diverse (through different interviewees working with partly different kinds of teams and tasks).

The research is focusing on smaller teams where there are at least one leader and a co-leader, each of whom have some decision-making authority. This research excludes any larger teams of over ten team members. The interviewees are acting or have acted as either leaders or members to a team. The interviews were conducted individually face-to-face (3) and virtually via Skype (2). The interviews took place in weeks 11 and 12 of year 2020. All of the interviews were voice recorded, and thereafter, transcribed verbatim. This resulted in 11 hours, 54 minutes of interview recordings, and 16 pages of transcribed interviews in text format. The interviewees' privacy was ensured by stating and assuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the interview and the interviewees' responses before the start of each interview (including a commitment to erase all the interview recordings within six months of the study, as the interviewee might be recognized by her voice).

When designing the interview guide and questions, I wanted to be very clear with my questions so that they would be perceived and understood by the interviewees in the same way. This set the ground for the interviewees to respond to the questions with the right mindset. The questions were designed in a way that they would serve towards (indirectly) answering the research questions of the thesis: (RQ1) What are possible challenges of SL for team members and team leaders? (RQ2) How can challenges in SL be overcome or resolved?

Being semi-structured, the focus of the interviews was dual: (i) to gain more focused and in-depth information (and examples) from the interviewees about the challenges of SL preliminarily identified in the conceptual framework (figure 4) and (ii) to allow identification of additional challenges associated with SL as well as ways to overcome the challenges through more open-ended (unstructured) questions, relying on the interviewees' own accounts. Even with the former (i) questions, I tried avoiding questions that would be overly leading, making sure I would ask the questions in a way that did not come off as presumptions or that would otherwise direct the responses excessively. Most notably, I did not mention the challenges identified preliminarily in the conceptual framework until the interviewee had had the possibility to identify his/her 'own' challenges first, through the open-ended questions (ii).

The interview guide designed had six main sections, as follows.

a) Background (incl. demographic information) of the interviewees

b) Organization and their role in it

c) Shared leadership

d) Benefits of shared leadership

e) Challenges of shared leadership

f) Additional general questions

To conduct the interviews with this interview guide took between 47 minutes to 1 hour and 18 minutes. Below I will briefly describe the content of the above sections; a detailed list of the interview questions is attached to this report as Appendix 1.

In the first section, (a) background, simple demographic variables were asked about, as the interviewees' answers overall may be shaped based on their background and experience (e.g., age, culture/ethnicity) and diversity in backgrounds. Indeed, background diversity has also proven to be beneficial for performance within teams regarding cohesion, collectivism, agreeableness, and open mindedness. (Ramthun and Matkin 2012). After the background questions, I moved on to ask about the (b) organization the interviewees worked for and their role in it. Prior to the interview I was familiar with the employees and their position in the organization but did not know their specific tasks or responsibilities, so this question helped me to understand their role in the organization more. In this section, I also asked about teamwork and the extent to which the interviewees' weekly and monthly work consists of teamwork and if they mostly acted as team members or team leaders.

In the (c) SL section, I wanted the interviewees to ignore their own definitions and presumptions of the term "shared leadership" for the time being, and instead provided a simple definition of SL to them (see Appendix 1), in order to have all the interviewees answer the questions based on the same information and perception provided. After explicating a definition of SL to the interviewees, I asked if they are currently working or have previously worked in a team where leadership was shared. All the interviewees had some prior or current experience of SL.

Then I moved on to ask about the (d) benefits and (e) challenges they thought, experienced, or heard from others about SL. Regarding the (f) challenges, I wanted to first identify challenges that they have perceived in SL themselves, in their own words, before asking about their experience about the challenges preliminarily identified from the literature (Figure 4). In this discussion of the challenges with the interviewees, I also asked further probe questions related to potential ways to overcome the challenges, i.e., if the interviewees had any ideas or an approach that they had used to mitigate or overcome the challenges they themselves mentioned or the ones I asked about.

Finally, moving on to (f) general questions about SL, I asked if the participants could see SL working in different areas of business or industry sectors, or if they thought that SL can have impact on team performance. I also asked if they thought SL had overall more positive or negative aspects, which would sum up their perception of SL in general. As a conclusion to the interview, I asked the participants if they have had any training for SL (especially working as a team leader).

3.3   Analysing the data

I began the interview data analysis by transcribing the interview recordings (11 hours 54 minutes in total) verbatim, resulting in 16 pages of interview transcripts. Keeping in mind of the questions I wanted answered with these interviews, I began reviewing the answers for the questions, focusing mostly on the discussions in the interview section about SL's challenges. I compared the answers received from my interviewees with one another and tried to find some similarities amongst them as well as with the challenges preliminarily identified in the conceptual framework (Figure 4). I tried to identify themes that arose from the interviews and matched with the categories in the conceptual framework. The themes that matched, I categorized further into sub-categories, indicating practical manifestations of the challenges preliminarily identified in the conceptual framework. These resulted in the bullet points under the preliminarily identified challenges, in the research results (figure 5, section 4.7). The themes that did not match with the categories of the conceptual framework I grouped together and categorized further. These resulted, in the research results, as the "additional challenges" (figure 5 in section 4.7).

4   Research results

In this section of the thesis, I will go through and present the results of my research. All of the information disclosed in this chapter will be contributing to the research questions at hand. I will present the findings in an orderly manner by going through each of the challenges discussed in the conceptual framework- chapter. The challenges are as followed; task division across team members and team leaders, decision-making authority, responsibilities of team members and team leaders, clear communication, micromanagement, and time consumption.

4.1   Task division across team members and team leaders

4.1.1   Emerged challenges regarding task division

Task division was the most disagreed perceived challenge among the interviewees, based on their experiences. Two of the interviewees perceived it as a real challenge and feels that it truly affects the course of the teamwork process. If tasks are not divided properly and extremely clearly the responsibilities will most probably get mixed up and something might be left undone. However, all the interviewees acknowledged that it could possibly be a problem but some of them just had not experienced it.

One of the interviewees mentioned their experience with a SL set up where the two leaders could not agree on the tasks and/or the team members they were giving the tasks to. This caused some discomfort and confusion for the members as well as criticism from the leader by the tasks given by the other leader. It was also stated to be one of the reasons why the team might not reach the desired goals and set the work process behind.

> *"It (task division) is a real challenge. I have learned that you have to be really clear on who does what. If it is not clearly stated, it will take away from the tasks itself and we won't get to where we need to be, and therefore do not reach goals"* – Interviewee E.

Three of the interviewees felt that it was not a challenge at all. They felt that if tasks are divided clearly (which is their experience on the matter) then there should be no problem regarding the tasks that each team member is expected to perform. They stated that task division is connected to good and clear communication and if that is handled properly from the beginning, task division will not be an issue. However, one of the interviewees who did not perceive task

division as a problem also stated that the relationship you have with the leader(s) might affect the division of the tasks. Members who have gotten along better and had closer personal connection and relationship with the team leader have gotten more congenial tasks. So, favouring some team members over the others has also stirred some criticism and drawback.

> *"My role and tasks are very clear. So, whenever I share leadership, I make my tasks really clear from the beginning. Communication is the key. The relationship you have with the team leader can also dictate what kind of tasks you get. I don't have personal experience, but I have heard from other people"* – Interviewee C.

Another interviewee, who did not personally see it as a challenge, did however state that if something unexpected were to happen e.g. a crisis situation, task division might very well be considered as a challenge.

> *"Not an issue at all. Our tasks are very clear. I can imagine that it could be a problem if, for example, there is a rush or something unexpected happens or more work suddenly surfaces."* – Interviewee D.

4.1.2   Ways and means to overcome the challenges

Most of the interviewees thought that clear and proper task division is strongly related to communication. They feel that being straightforward and clear about the tasks and responsibilities from the start decreases confusion and incoherence during teamwork and helps in achieving desired goals.

Another way of overcoming this challenge, coming from one of the interviewees who actually did not perceive it as a challenge, was to be selfless and help one another out as much as possible. Keeping in mind that the work is done in co-operation with other team members and remembering that they share a common goal helps to see things in perspective.

> *"Tasks are divided clearly so there are no issues. The co-operation has to work in order for the tasks to be divided fairly. You must be selfless when working in a team. When you look at tasks from a team perspective you have to be ready to help each other. But I do see that this could be a challenge."* – Interviewee B.

Informant B also stated that the best way to divide tasks is find out how much responsibility and work tasks is a team member ready to take on, while keeping in mind what is considered fair and what is not. Accepting people as they are and realizing their capabilities will help in the task division. However, the informant personally believes that people should go outside of their comfort

zone and challenge themselves with new kinds of tasks as opposed to familiar tasks, but retracts by saying that "in the real world, tasks should be given based on the employees strengths because at the end of the day, people rather do things that they are good at".

Informant D stated that task division is not a problem since their team uses a "task matrix" that they have built for the specific reason of clear task division, tracking of finished tasks, which tasks are done by which team member etc. It also includes a schedule that keeps the work pace ongoing and fluent. According to the informant, the task matrix has helped a lot in during the work process, especially since it is a visual chart. That could be one way to solve the confusion caused by unclear/ unfair task division and recommended to be implemented in other teams and projects going onwards.

4.2   Decision-making authority

4.2.1   Emerged challenges regarding decision-making authority

Decision-making authority might be the most talked about and most interesting challenge within SL. Who indeed holds the ultimate power in making the final decision? Interviewee A voiced a concerned, that "as a team member, who do we listen to if two leaders disagree and cannot come to an agreement." Even though, having two leaders and sparring, challenging to think wider and have various perspectives can be a positive thing, it can be problematic to share authority. Especially, how that authority is clearly communicated to the other members of the team, making sure that despite their differences, the team can still operate smoothly, and tasks are clear. In SL, there are likely major personality and character differences between the leaders which would most likely affect in the way they lead and make decisions.

> *"Yes, I think so. If people personalities are different, they most likely will disagree on decisions as well and when they share equal amount of power, of course decision-making can be a challenge."* - Interviewee B.

This was the case in some teams where there were two leaders and because one of the leaders was stationed in another country and either could not join the team meeting or did not care to. The absence resulted in decisions being made by the present fellow leader. However, since the absence leader did not attend the meetings and missed being a part of the decision-making, it caused problems. He/she also disagreed with the decision made which resulted in re-

visiting the decision. According to the interviewee, having two leaders is extremely time consuming, inefficient and confusing regarding decision-making authority.

Having leaders outside of the country also posed as a challenge according to some of the informants. Getting instructions for two leaders who are in separate countries can be challenging decision-making wise. If both, or all, of the leaders share equal amount of decision-making power, who are the team members supposed to listen to and take orders from? Even if one of the leader does hold the ultimate decision-making authority but is stationed in another country and might not know the real situation at hand, does it make more sense to listen to irrelevant or unproductive instructions from a physically absent leader or take relevant instructions from a leader/supervisor who is familiar with the problem/issue at hand?

> *"Definitely, from previous work the instruction I have gotten from a leader outside of Finland are not practical or reasonable at all compared to the leader or manager I have locally instructing me. So, the instructions do not apply."* – Informant B.

Three out of five however, did not perceive it as a challenge. They stated that as long as communication is clear from the beginning and the leader responsibilities are known within the team, it should not be a problem. Informant B confirmed that it has not been a problem within their team since everyone has been aware of their leader's roles and it has been clear from the start.

> *"In our team it is quite clear who does what and who holds the last decision-making authority, but in all leading, especially SL, it is important to make these decisions beforehand so that things flow smoothly and work, as well as making sure people know what to do".* - Interviewee E

4.2.2 Ways and means to overcome the challenges

It has been unanimous among the informants that communicating areas of responsibilities before starting the work process will dictate decision-making authority in each of the areas where decisions are made. Especially regarding SL, roles must be clear.

> *"Maybe during the planning of a project everything should be discussed and agreed before starting to work. When 2 or more people share leadership, it should be clear from the start that they share decision-making."* – Informant B.

An interesting approach to solving this issue came from informant C. It was suggested that getting to know the leader/ co-leader over a casual meeting or a cup of coffee can help set the co-operation on a good start and help build a better relationship with one another. This way they can find common ground and make it easier to work with one another as well as come to an agreement on decision-making authority. By having an open-mind and trust, decisions could be easily agreed on and /or, on appropriate situations where disagreements might occur, stepping down from mastery could become more probable.

> *"Getting to know the person and building trust between the leader/ supervisor and the member. Casual meetings over coffee and asking for best practices and people like to work and their way of doing things can get the team work on a different level."* – Interviewee C.

4.3 Responsibilities of team members and team leaders

4.3.1 Emerged challenges regarding responsibility

The matter of responsibility taking, both from the team member and team leader perspective, was perceived as a challenge by two of the informants. For one, they felt that a leader who is not active or present, or perhaps is stationed in another country, may add to their own, de facto responsibilities, and forces them "pick up the slack" caused by the non-active or absent leader. It was also stated that it is irrelevant how many leaders there are when it comes to taking responsibilities and that it has nothing to do with the number of leaders.

In some of the teams, the leader/ co-leader is stationed outside of the country, so another challenge perceived was the lack of spirit within the group and therefore, willingness and desire to be more involved with the group, by taking on more responsibilities. The fact that the leaders are located in other countries also made it hard for them to know and keep track of the true efforts and responsibilities of the team members. Another challenge related to responsibilities with leaders who are not in the same country, was the mentality that they can grow to have over the fact that co-workers or subordinates are not physically around you. They can feel less responsible for finishing tasks on a timely manner or not feel the need to participate in meetings etc. This made some feel like having only one leader would make the responsibilities of team members clearer. Informant C described the challenge potentially emerging from the leader's residing in another country as follows:

> *"Out of sight out of mind- mentality can also be challenging because it is easier to move, cancel or reschedule when the person is not in the same country with you oppose to when she/he is in the same building with you."* – Interviewee C.

One of the interviewees feel that it might have something to do with culture differences in the teams coming from various countries and/or having communication problems, as well as personality differences. Others might come on bluntly and take on more responsibility while others might sever away from it. One informant, for instance, implied that Finnish employees and leaders may be more used to taking responsibility of getting things done:

> *"When we work in teams in Finland with all Finns, it might be difficult for foreigners to understand how things are done in Finnish environment."* – Interviewee C.

The interviewees also mentioned that an ambiguous task division can become an issue if the line between each responsibility is too thin. On the other hand, they also stated that if the tasks and responsibilities are not clear when they are assigned to team members and leaders, there is a possibility of overstepping into other's responsibilities and that can cause conflict afterwards when those tasks are supposed to be performed.

Finally, accountability was also perceived as a challenge related to responsibility-taking. As mentioned before, when responsibilities are not clear and the line between responsibilities between team member or team leaders are/become blurry, so does the appropriate accountability for the process and results. Which one of the leaders should instructions be received from and which one is accountable for the outcome?

These were the major challenges perceived with responsibility taking. Some related to unwanted responsibility and some obtained by accidently overstepping into someone else's responsibilities. Highlighting the extra burden felt by the team members due to the slacking/ physical absence of a leader/co-leader.

4.3.2   Ways and means to overcome the challenges

Dealing with leaders or co-leaders who are outside of the country, communication is the interviewees' best practice of informing and clearing out responsi-

bilities. Furthermore, it is considered important to be extremely clear with foreign colleagues on everything that a task or specific area of responsibilities includes. Culture being a strong guidance for actions and thoughts, the communication of the holistic meaning and content of the responsibilities needs to be equally clear for all of the members of the team.

Some informants also highlighted the importance of consciously and diligently avoiding step on to a colleague's lane of responsibilities:

> "It is important to stay in our own lanes and not overstep into other's responsibilities. We each need to have clear boundaries and responsibilities so that we know who holds the final decision-making authority in each situation and area." – Interviewee C

When it comes to taking on more responsibilities, one of the interviewees did not feel that having two or more leaders have nothing to do with it and in fact, having only one leader would make the responsibilities of team members more clear.

4.4   Communicating clearly

4.4.1   Emerged challenges regarding communication

Four out of five interviewees believed communication being one of the biggest challenges related to SL. One example was connected to leaders stationed outside of the country. A team member might get mixed instructions from their two leaders, one was stationed outside of the country and the other was local. When the communication between the leaders is not unanimous or not clear enough it reflects on the work the members do. The instructions from the leaders should be extremely clear and identical since overlapping of information can have serious effect on getting tasks done and reaching goals.

> "Something that recently happen was that I was training someone for a more practical task that I am personally in charge with, but I was not her supervisor. My supervisors advise differed from hers and the information we got was overlapping. The person getting trained got so confused and was wondering who to listen since the other person was her boss but was not experienced with the tasks given to her. It is important to communicate on a leader level and make sure to have unified opinions and processed before communicating them to the team" – Interviewee C.

Culture was also one of the factors that has been said to affect the communication being clear. Some countries meeting culture, norms and ways of working can differ from Finnish culture and therefore communications must be clear. For example, a meeting at one o'clock can have an entirely different meaning to people from another country or use of challenging word in conversations might not reach the recipient correctly.

Each team leader and member have their own way of communicating. When working in teams where leadership is shared, the communication from members, but especially from leaders, need to be extremely clear. The instructions from leaders need to explain in a way that is easily understandable for everyone in the team to ensued smooth and efficient teamwork.

On the other hand, informant D feels like communication issues are not related to SL or having two leaders but more when working in a matrix organization. GSK being a huge matrix organization, "there always is communication problems". However, it is mentioned that there are never mixed messages from executive management.

4.4.2   Ways and means to overcome the challenges

For tackling issues related to communication, there were many suggestions. Discussion and giving feedback were the most popular, however. When something is unclear or has been communicated poorly, asking questions and being proactive can be rewarding. Also, themselves, being extremely direct and forward, at the risk of sounding blunt, can also be effective in tackling the issue of poor communication. As a team member, you can also be honest and direct with the leaders when addressing confusion or issues. Proper communication will reduce time consumption and make working in a team more pleasant and clear.

> "I also always ask for feedback, and also see it as a possibility to give the leaders feedback." – Interviewee A

Continuous discussion is needed to keep the communication problem from getting bigger, according to informant C. Overlapping of information and unclear communication is something that occurs repeatedly and cannot truly be ever rid of since working in a huge establishment. However, the risks of poor communication can be minimized if there are continuous conversations and when team member ask questions immediately when something is unclear.

The informant also states that this is a problem that can be minimized with every single members unified effort.

> *"This question is very important in SL and it's crucial that these challenges are addressed, discussed and handled. Everyone involved should be included in the discussions and together a result should be found. Direct approach where issues are meant to be tackled is very important. Things should not be left as they are, it is highly important to discuss them. Also, gossiping in smaller setting is not the correct way of handling. Communication is the key."* – Interviewee E.

Another tactic was to get to know the members better before starting to work with one another. This might break the ice and build a comfortable environment, e.g. for a leader- member relationship. This way it might not feel impossible for a team member to address an issue or clarify something they might have misunderstood.

And then of course, from both team leader(s) and team members point of view, keeping in mind that the miscommunication could have been originated from oneself. So, reflection on one's own communication methods and making sure that everybody is clear on what you mean is a crucial part of solving the issue of miscommunication.

> "*Immediately talk about it and solve the issue. This applies every-where. Also, trying to understand the problem, where it is coming from and what is in the background, You can solve a lot by just trying to understanding and maybe reflect on yourself and think if you could do something different. Sometimes the fault can be found in oneself."* – Interviewee D

Cross-fertilization is also something that could help solve habits/occurrences of miscommunication. Opening up and sharing ideas with one another may encourage a more productive and open-minded mind set to listen and understand one another better.

4.5   Micromanagement

4.5.1   Emerged challenges regarding micromanagement

In addition to the challenges discussed above (preliminarily identified in the conceptual framework), two more challenges emerged from the interviewees' own accounts. The first of these additional challenges related to micromanagement. Micromanaging is something that team members had experienced from some of the team leaders, and even some of the interviewed team lead-

ers felt that they were being micromanaged by their superiors from other countries. Although micromanagement often occurs in many types of leadership contexts and settings, it seems that the interviewees experienced that the SL setting is particularly prone to micromanagement tendencies – as a team having two leaders may simply lead to a double risk and amount of micromanagement.

The challenge was stated to be more common with female leaders as they tend to be more detail-oriented and conscious. Men were perceived to be more focused on the "big picture" and said to pay little, to no, attention to details. They also tend to be sloppier and not think as rationally as women do. However, micromanaging, depending on the gender, could be both an advantage and a disadvantage.

> *"Females are more detail oriented they are more conscious, and they always follow up. They also tend to micromanage. Micromanaging can be a good thing and a bad thing. Some people need the kick in the butt ad someone hovering over them to make sure they get things done."* – Interviewee A

Especially, working in virtual teams, where the team members are scattered across the Nordics and Baltics, the interviewees experienced the doubts expressed by the (dual) leaders about team members' working habits as micro managerial nuisance. That is, team members may often get verbally questioned about whether and when they are coming to the physical workplace or whether or not they are working on the tasks they should be working on. This was perceived disappointing by the team members, being an "old-school" method of control-focused management, rather than trust-focused leadership. Interviewee C, for instance, noted:

> *"In virtual setting, trust of getting tasks done, and suspiciousness from the leaders, questioning if I am actually coming to work physically is frustrating. Definitely micromanaging. Which is kind of old school"* – Interviewee C.

As the dual SL approach may decrease the communication of any of the two leaders with the team members (compared with a situation of only one leader, handling all communication), micromanagement tendencies may further intensify. One of the team leaders might not be aware of the working habits or accomplishments of team members or the co-leader might not be aware of the tasks and instructions given or agreements agreed with the other leader, in order for the team to reach the results and goals that were set up for them. This

can result in micromanagement and constantly checking up on the team members – and by two leaders, instead of just one.

> *"Micromanagement also affects the team spirit when your leader is not present and does not know you or what you bring to the table/ how you work."* – Interviewee C

Another form of micromanaging that occurs within the teams, is when a leader and a co-leader or a team member who thinks they can do everything better. They do not believe in the power of teamwork and would rather do everything the way they believe is best. They are unwilling to share responsibilities, and the responsibilities and tasks that they do share, end up being critiqued, modified, and finished by themselves. Especially with SL, if there is no trust and open-mindedness between two leaders, this very well may happen among the two, as well, in addition to between team members.

> *"I have had colleagues that have been jealous of their work, they don't want other people doing work, they think they can do the best."* – Interviewee B

4.5.2   Ways and means to overcome the challenges

Addressing the challenge of micromanagement tendencies might be challenging, especially if it occurs within a SL setting. From a team member perspective, the informants have not tried any specific way of handling the issue. However, they do suggest communicating openly with the leaders and finding a way to solve the problem. Another option is to discuss with a local manager or a colleague.

For such SL, whereby co-leader(s) work virtually, the solution offered is that all of the leaders or managers in a team should be in the same country with each other. The distance between leaders create an unnecessary situation where the leaders might not be as aware of the work process as if they were in the same country.

The informants also suggested the need to stay open-minded and to self-reflect. They stateed that most of the micromanaging tendencies comes from the leaders' own personalities, which is why change might be difficult to achieve. Leaders, especially, need to understand the power of teamwork and how to utilize the skills of team members and trust them do their job sufficiently well – sometimes even better than any of the two leaders themselves.

> *"You need to be open and agree to the fact that someone can do it bet-*
> *ter."* – Informant B

4.6   Egocentric leading

4.6.1   Emerged challenges regarding egocentric leading

Egocentric leading was another additional challenge of SL that emerged from the interviewees' own accounts, beyond the challenges identified in the conceptual framework. Evidently, leadership in any setting is often to some extent flavoured by an egocentric character (or to some extent egocentric personality of a leader). However, some interviewees described the special ways in which egocentric leadership may manifest in SL, especially. Interviewee A has had an experience where two leaders have misused their leadership position by trying to enhance their own agenda by giving team members such tasks that serve the leader personally, rather than the team's teamwork or the overall team leadership. By using their authority in an ego boosting way, the leaders may have bid against the instructions given by the other leader of the team. Fighting for power can lead the team into a disadvantage, progress-wise, and cause harm to the team spirit and the working environment, not to mention losing the respect of team members. The informant also stated, albeit not trying to generalize, that egocentric leading mostly occurs with male leaders:

> *"Absolutely happens |egocentric leading |. They might use they authority*
> *to asks for favours and use employees for tasks they are not supposed*
> *to. I think, and in my experience, it mostly happens with men."* - Informant
> A

Personality differences might also intensify and reinforce egocentric behaviour whilst leading. Too many differences in character between the leaders (especially male leaders) might boost their need to "show off" and let their ego get in the way of proper and fair leadership. GSK is a cluster organization and teams from different parts of the world need to often work together, cross-managing within the organization. Moreover, the egocentric leadership tendencies may depend on cultural differences. Finnish people are quite open-minded and modern to the most part but that may not be perceived to be the case with other nationalities:

> *"If you want to discuss about any issues it might be hard to address the*
> *leaders. We work in a cluster organization so people do cross-manage*
> *each other. Finland is quite open and modern, but in different countries*
> *you don't have much say in anything and things tend to be quite bu-*
> *reaucratic."* – Informant C

With egocentric leading, there is often times selfishness involved. One of the informants stated that when they were leading a team with a co-leader, they were more interested in their own way of leading and (maybe unknowingly) always focused on themselves instead of the team. How they would do things, what they thought was for the best and what they wanted. Interviewee E, in turn, stated that she had personal experience with leading a team with a co-leader who was more focused on herself rather than the good of the team.

4.6.2 Ways and means to overcome the challenges

As egocentric leading is partly perceived as a personality feature of many leaders, it is somewhat hard to address or solve. Interviewees suggested, however, that communication is – again – a potential way to overcome it. Here, communication means being honest and straightforward about the issue and making sure the criticism/ feedback is given in a constructive way.

> *"Communication is the key. You need to level with the person even thought it might be challenging when talking about people's personal character. It takes practice from the leader to not rise above the others and that's why it is so important to give feedback so that the person has a chance to improve and change their behaviour. In my experience, even though these matters are difficult, people appreciate when you are honest with them and be straight. It takes guts and a spine to give good and appropriate feedback."* – Interviewee E

Furthermore, one should always keep in mind – both as a team member and as a team (co-)leader -- that even though you do not think of yourself as egocentric, others might still do so. Moreover, one should behave in a manner that is open minded and respectful towards others. If a process is not going one's own way, one should sometimes hold one's tongue and keep in mind that one is working in a team and not on one's own, and that the team's performance, not individual performance, is what counts at the end of the day.

4.7 Conceptual framework

Challenges of SL

Task division across team members and team leaders
Equality/Fairness
- Decision-making authority
- Unexpected/ crisis situations
- Leaders "pets"

↔ **Ways/approaches to overcome the challenge**
- Communication
- Giving and receiving feedback

Decision-making authority
- Dividing authority
- Leader differences (personality, leading style, opinions etc.)
- Ambiguous ultimate authority
- Trust issues
- Egocentric leading

↔ **Ways/approaches to overcome the challenge**
- Communication/ Sharing opinions and thoughts
- Building a "task matrix"
- Open-mind

Responsibilities of team members
- Accountability
- Fear of overstepping
- Micromanaging
- An unavailable leader forces to take more responsibility

↔ **Ways/approaches to overcome the challenge**
- Being open-minded
- Self-reflection & feedback
- Humility
- Leaders located in the same country

Communicating clearly
- Culture (time, working habits, norms etc.)
- Contradicting instructions from local vs. senior leaders
- Egocentric leading
- Matrix organization
- Hierarchy

↔ **Ways/approaches to overcome the challenge**
- Continuous communication clearly and directly
- Voicing opinions
- Giving feedback
- Cross-fertilization
- Being open-minded
- Build relationships

Additional challenge 1: Micromanagement
- Non-local leaders
- Continuous proving of performance and attendance
- Trust issues
- Bureaucracy

↔ **Ways/approaches to overcome the challenge**
- Clear and honest communication
- Building trust

Additional challenge 2: Egocentric leading
- Personality conflicts
- Misuse of authority
- Selfish agenda

↔ **Ways/approaches to overcome the challenge**
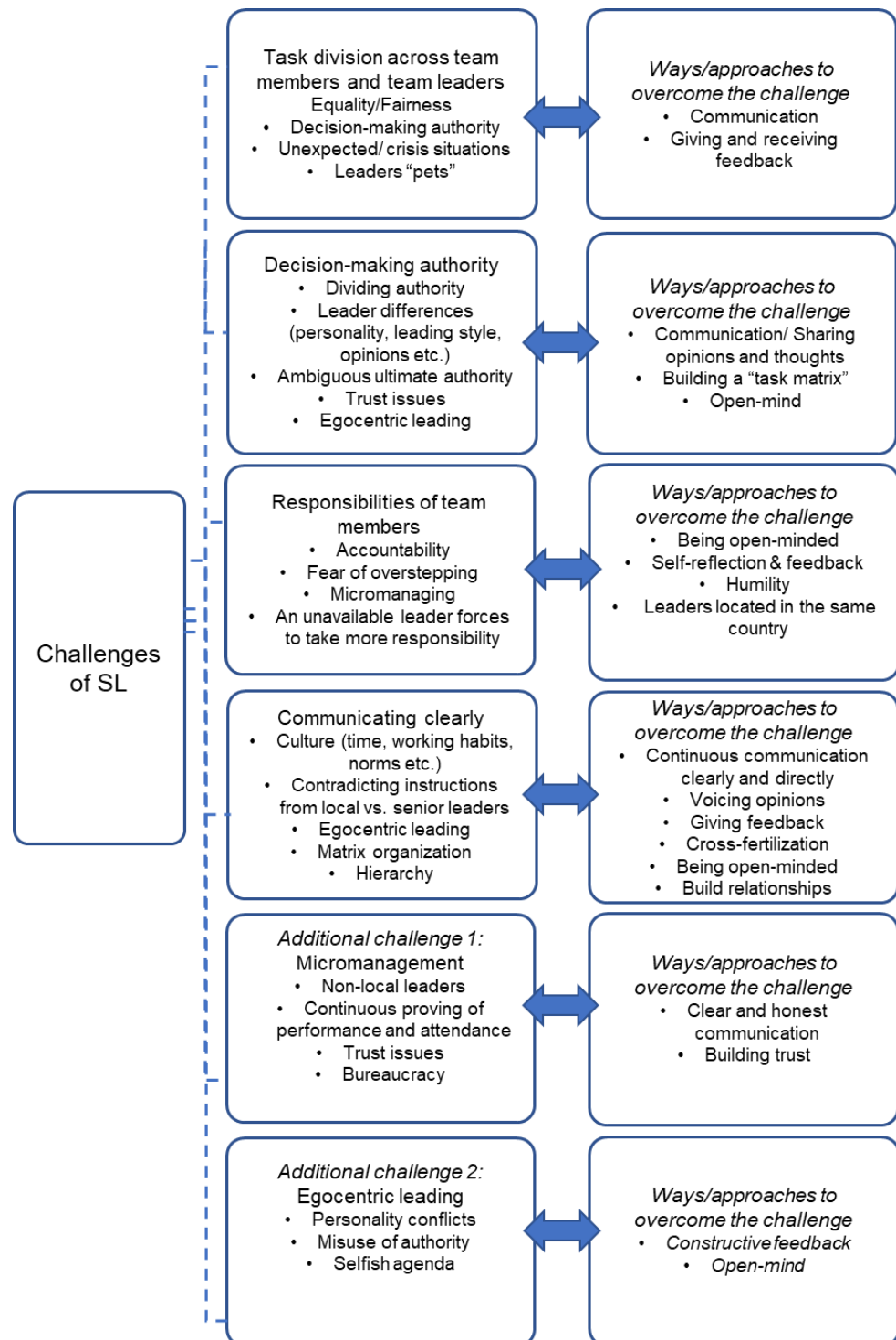- Constructive feedback
- Open-mind

Figure 6. Conceptual framework of challenges perceived in SL.

5 Discussions

5.1 Theoretical implications

Below, I will briefly go through the findings of the interviews and discuss their relevance to the topic of challenges perceived in SL when working in teams. Overall, I began the present research with a review of related literature and theories, in order to gain preliminary understanding of the topic and discover relevant and helpful studies and facts about SL and topics that are associated with it. Thereafter, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews for the purpose of deepening our understanding of the perceptions of challenges related to SL from the perspective of employees working at GSK.

The results gotten from the qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews were valuable in further exploring the challenges faced in teamwork lead by more than one leader. Already the theoretical part of the thesis preliminarily identified challenges of SL, noting that they are relevant to the level of performance a team can reach, for instance. Especially, the systematic review of SL written by Sweeney et al. (2019) was a useful source of preliminary understanding, helping me to determine which areas of the challenges I wanted to focus on and include and ask in my semi-structured interviews. Other articles on leadership, teamwork (e.g. Carson et al. 2007), team performance (e.g. Chiu et al. 2016), and culture affecting leadership implementation (Muethel & Hoegl 2010), allowed to identify further challenges.

Overall, I included the SL challenges preliminarily identified from prior literature in the interviews, exploring whether some of these challenges would also be discovered through the interviews – while also paying attention to further challenges emerging from the interviewees' own accounts. As it turns out, there were numerous similarities found between the literature and the interviews, yet more detailed manifestations of the challenges were also revealed, as well as certain additional challenges altogether.

Analysing the results of the interviews and comparing them to the literature allows to conclude that SL does have challenges that might be affecting the overall team performance. For example, division of tasks, based on both the literature and interviews results, will most likely be, to some extent, difficult in many teams with SL. Clear task division in the beginning of the teamwork process will help the shared leaders reach goals. Furthermore, dividing tasks

clearly from the start may help to create a comfortable foundation for the team to work in and eliminate any confusion that might have been created in a dysfunctional task division. As Acar (2010, p. 1740) stated, SL is, in general, "the sharing of leadership roles, responsibilities and *tasks*". Based on the present research, I would emphasize the importance of efficient sharing, by paraphrasing this into: "Effective SL is about the *clear* sharing of leadership roles, responsibilities and tasks".

As for the challenge of decision-making authority in relation to SL, this might be the most expected challenge when leadership is shared. Who has the final authority among the leaders if there are more than one of them? Based on the answers given by the interviewees, the final authority is not always fully clear to the team members and therefore could blur their judgment of which orders to follow. This finding extends the common challenges identified in the literature of matrix organizations to the theory of SL. Ambiguous leadership power can also be one of the reasons some team member interviewees viewed SL to be time-consuming and even partly unnecessary altogether.

Responsibility taking as a challenge turned out to be quite tricky. The discovered association between employees committed to taking responsibility with the amount of responsibility they are formally given can be affected by the complexity of tasks – which prior literature also noted to moderate the effect of SL on team performance (Chiu et al. 2016; Sweeney et al. 2019. Even though SL works better in complex task environments, it might, based on the present findings, discourage responsibility taking. However, there were not many mentions of this from the informants, as most of them had not had experience on the matter. Some of the interviewees did, however, perceive that an absent leader (or a leader located in another country) posed a challenge, both when it comes to desire to take up more responsibility and to commit to the responsibilities they already had. Yet, some interviewees did not perceive this challenge to be necessarily related to the number of leaders, but rather to individual personalities and cultural backgrounds of the members and leaders.

Communication was perceived as the key to a functionable SL, based on both prior literature and present research results. When communication is not clear, it will be an issue in many aspects of leadership, and especially SL. The clarity of communication self-evidently affects the work process, as well as the results and reaching of goals in teamwork. Miscommunication and/or the lack of

communication could also cause conflicts within the team. This was also confirmed by the informants. GSK being a multinational work environment with close co-operations with other countries, communication is one of the, if not the most, important factors of SL.

Micromanagement and egocentric leading were additional challenges that emerged during the interviews, in addition to the challenges preliminarily identified based on the literature review. Micromanagement in teams is considered to show lack of trust and confidence towards other team members and creates an unpleasant work environment. This has especially been relevant for virtual teams and in teams where one of the shared leader(s) is located in another country. The same goes for egocentric leading. Leaders fighting for power or confusing team members regarding authority incoherence will cause ambiguity and discomfort within the team.

5.2   Practical implications

Based on the findings as well as before mentioned theoretical implications, I have assembled some practical implications for managers or leaders associated with SL. Notable, even if ways and means of overcoming the challenges were identified on the basis of the interviewees' point of view, will they work in practice?

Overcoming the above examined areas of challenges within SL, more and clearer communication between the team members, between the team members and the team leaders, and between the shared team leaders will act as the most important tactic of approaching them. Communication is heavily related to all of the challenges stated above, and managers and team leaders would do good to start from increasing the level and clarity of their communication efforts. Clear and direct communication is crucial when dividing tasks, responsibilities, and authority. A smooth and open-minded start to any project or teamwork should be in a comfortable and open environment where managers communicate and signal that everyone is being recognized as an individual, and possibly get to know the team members as well as each other in an informal and comfortable setting (e.g., over a cup of coffee).

When facing a challenge regarding authority or task division, coming to an understanding with fellow leader(s) about final decision-making authority, as well as informing the team members with clear instructions and information about

who to ultimately answer to, could eliminate much of the challenge of ambiguous authority. The same applies to a situation wherein leadership is shared/distributed among team members. Only then can tasks and responsibilities be divided clearly in a way that would not be confusing for the rest of the team. This way the team members become more aware of the roles and areas of responsibilities of other members of the team.

Finally, a greater team size could result in increased decision-making and information- processing, perhaps leading to more SL, but it could make the psychological distance between team members too overwhelming, possibly leading to less efficient SL (Pearce and Herbik 2004, 296). This is also something for the managers to think about when assembling a team.

5.3   Limitations and future research suggestions

Even though the results and challenges discovered in this thesis were in line in prior literature as well as anchored in the interviewees' accounts, there are some limitations, too. Firstly, all the interviewees only had experience on SL from a knowledge-intensive work environment, while not having experience of SL in manufacturing work environment. So, the results received from the research are only focused on challenges of SL as emerging in knowledge-intensive work environments. One future research suggestion would be to examine the challenges of SL in a manufacturing work environment or comparing the differences in challenges between working in a knowledge- intensive vs. manufacturing environments.

Secondly, the relatively low number of the informants I had participating in the research could have affected the results. With a larger sample of interviewees, there could have been more challenges emerging, or the focus of the main challenges could have been different. What future researchers of the topic could also try is a quantitative research method with a larger sample group. For instance, the research could be conducted with a survey with fully structured questions (instead of the present semi-structured interview format). In such a larger quantitative research, the challenges of SL could further be measured, compared, and quantified against SL's benefits.

Also, the similar background of the interviewees could have somewhat biased the results. The employees I interviewed were all Finnish women, roughly middle-aged, and had almost the same amount of experience of SL in knowledge-

intensive settings. Perhaps a more diverse (gender-, age-, culture- and experience-wise) group of interviewees would have pointed out other challenges.

5.4 Personal development and learning

The thesis at hand has acted as a demonstration of the skills and competences I have acquired for academic report writing during my last semester studies in Haaga- Helia. I have tested different methods of writing a proper report and I believe I have developed my skills, particularly, in regard to writing in a more comprehensive, analytical, and systematic way. Following the Haaga-Helia guidelines for report writing, I have understood the purpose of them and learned to implement those instructions in practice.

Regarding personal growth, I have become positively critical, always questioning what I write and produce. Being able to answer critical questions I have set out for myself can enhance the quality of the produced text. Being critical, going back, and always improving on what I wrote previously, also helps identifying possible mistakes. Positive self- criticism has been my greatest achievement during my thesis process.

Maintaining perseverance on the other hand has been an ordeal. Constant revisits to the different chapters and figures of the thesis have been exhausting and sometimes unbearable. Perfecting each chapter and sub-chapter has, however, been ultimately rewarding and shaped the thesis into something I am proud of. Another – and perhaps even the main -- challenge I had with writing this report was time management. Time management is something we have worked on for years during my studies in Haaga-Helia, and it is still something I have to continue to work on. Managing oneself in such a long and demanding project is very tricky. Knowing yourself and your strengths will come in handy when planning the use of time to write a comprehensive report.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Semi-structured interview questions

Demographic

1. Age
   a. 18-24
   b. 25- 34
   c. 35-44
   d. 45-54
   e. 55-64
   f. 65-74
   g. 75 years or older

2. Ethnic origin (Relevance: people with different cultural/ ethnic background will most likely have different perspective)
   a. White
   b. Hispanic or Latino
   c. Black or African American
   d. Native American or American Indian
   e. Asian / Pacific Islander
   f. Other

3. Gender? (open-ended, so no one will get offended)

4. Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.
   a. High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
   b. Some college credit, no degree
   c. Trade/technical/vocational training
   d. Associate degree
   e. Bachelor's degree
   f. Master's degree
   g. Professional degree
   h. Doctorate degree

Organization and your role

5. Organization? What area/ field do you work in?

6. To what extent are your weekly work tasks done in teams? Can you describe what kind of teamwork do you actually do in practice? In terms of physically working together, having meetings, remotely/virtually working together, etc.?

7. To what extent is your monthly work constituted of project work/ teamwork, vs regular work tasks?

8. Would you say your role in projects/ teamwork is often "Team leader" or "Team member"?

a. **Leader**: Can you describe whether your team members also belong to some other teams or organisation units, at the same time as they belong to your team? To what extent do you have a matrix organization, i.e., do your team members also have other superiors than yourself?

b. **Member**: Who is your superior/team leader, or do you have several leaders?
    Can you describe whether you also belong to some other teams or organisation units, at the same time as they belong to leader X's team? To what extent do you have a matrix organization, i.e., do you also have other superiors than yourself?

c. **Both**: Male/Female dominative teams? Any difference between them two

Shared Leadership

As I mentioned when I contacted you, I'm especially interested in your experiences of Shared Leadership in teamwork. What I mean with Shared Leadership is simply the fact that your team, for instance, has two leaders. They can be equal leaders to the team, or one can be the main leader and the other a co-leader. But in any case, both of them (/you) are leaders to the team, having some independent decision-making authority too.

9. Are you currently working in a team where you share leadership with a co-worker or a team(member)? *(Team leader)*
    a. When? How? Can you describe what the team is/was like, how many leaders you were/had, and what roles did each of you/them have as leaders?

10. Have you ever worked in a team where leadership was shared by two or more leaders? *(Team member)*
    a. When? How? Can you describe what the team was like, how many leaders you had, and what roles did each of them have as leaders?

Benefits

11. What would you say are some of the positive aspects of SL? In other words, how would you describe the benefits, advantages, or positive sides of the shared leadership system/practice that you had/have?
    [then, after the interviewee has described their "own" list of benefits, I can still ask about benefits on "my" list]
    a. How about, would you say that the shared leadership system/practice that you had/have also had *effectiveness/good team performance* capability as its benefit?
    b. How about, would you say that the shared leadership system/practice that you had/have also had *creativity/ inclusive results* as its benefit?
    c. How about, would you say that the shared leadership system/practice that you had/have also had *responsibility/ increased team member involvement* as its benefit?

Challenges

12. Do you feel that there are any challenges related to the shared leadership system/practice that you had/have? What kind of challenges have you yourself experienced, or heard about from your colleagues?

    [then, after the interviewee has described their "own" list of challenges, I can still ask about challenges on "my" list]

    a. How about, would you say that the shared leadership system/practice that you had/have also had *lack of communication/ overlapping information or instructions* as its challenge? Can you think of any cases or examples of this challenge, based on your own experience or based on what you've heard from others?

    b. How about, would you say that the shared leadership system/practice that you had/have also had *authority issues/egocentric leading* as its challenge? Can you think of any cases or examples of this challenge, based on your own experience or based on what you've heard from others?

    c. How about, would you say that the shared leadership system/practice that you had/have also had *task division* as its challenge? Can you think of any cases or examples of this challenge, based on your own experience or based on what you've heard from others?

    d. How about, would you say that the shared leadership system/practice that you had/have also had *decision making* as its challenge? Can you think of any cases or examples of this challenge, based on your own experience or based on what you've heard from others?

13. Going back to the challenges we just discussed, have you used or tried any particular approaches or tactics to overcome challenge AAA? Or to alleviate or mitigate the challenge?

    a. What would you say could be an effective approach to overcome or mitigate this challenge, if you experienced it in future?

14. Have you used or tried any particular approaches or tactics to overcome challenge BBB? Or to alleviate or mitigate the challenge?

    a. What would you say could be an effective approach to overcome or mitigate this challenge, if you experienced it in future?

15. Have you used or tried any particular approaches or tactics to overcome challenge CCC? Or to alleviate or mitigate the challenge?

    a. What would you say could be an effective approach to overcome or mitigate this challenge, if you experienced it in future?

16. Have you used or tried any particular approaches or tactics to overcome challenge DDD? Or to alleviate or mitigate the challenge?

    a. What would you say could be an effective approach to overcome or mitigate this challenge, if you experienced it in future?

General

17. How would you comment on the suitability of the kind of Shared Leadership system/practice that you have had, in other type of work environments?

    a. Manufactural (i.e manual work, or machinery)? Why?
    b. Knowledge-intensive work (KIBS, i.e. legal, accountancy, and many management consultancy and marketing services, engineers and other specialists)? Why?

18. Do you think the kind of Shared Leadership system/practice you have had can affect the overall team performance? Goals? How?

19. Would you say that overall, there are more positive or negative aspects of SL?

20. Would you recommend SL for organizations that focus on goal-oriented teamwork? Should a team always have a leader?

21. Have you had any training for sharing leadership? When? How intensive? Was it helpful? If no, should you have had?

22. Final words/ Conclusion