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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Leadership and Followership in Hybrid Teams

By

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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One may argue that traditionally, leadership has been conceptualised as one-sided where leaders were held fully responsible for leadership outcomes. Nowadays, leadership often is discussed as a relational process influenced by both leaders and followers. Within the context of virtual teams, debates propose that the enactment of leadership and followership is not determined by hierarchy but by the organisation's processes and objectives, and by team tasks, expertise and team member influence. It is suggested that in virtual teams, tasks and responsibilities 'move' among team members as these communicate and interact to achieve common team goals. Such 'movement' creates opportunities for leaders and followers to emerge at different times.

This study aims to investigate this notion to provide insights that extend existing work on leadership and followership. This research embeds the investigation in hybrid teams, a team made up of both co-located and distant team members and a type of team that is becoming increasingly common in organisations even more so during and post-pandemic. This study aims to provide understanding of how leadership and followership unfold in teams that interact using mainly technology by collecting qualitative data via interviews and observations from four teams.

Analysing the cases individually and then synthesising commonalities and differences emerging from the thematic analysis, the findings indicate that within hybrid teams, the movement of tasks and responsibilities does occur. Shared leadership and shared followership unfold as team members engage in this dynamic process. This movement, experienced in different ways by team members, is influenced by factors including, the communications medium used by the team, a team's culture, organisational policies and procedures, and a team member's self-perception. It is suggested also that in this context, the relationships established at team formation stage are a major determinant of future team synergies and collaboration. In addition, while technology is inherent in these teams, the research emphasises empirically that face-to-face physical interaction remains critical. This seems to indicate that the 'visual' element provided by a communications medium may not be enough to develop and maintain a hybrid team, nor does it seem to be enough to reduce distance and avoid, or eliminate, 'gaps' between co-located and distant team members.

These findings provide the basis for considerations that organisations may want to make when planning for, developing, or maintaining virtual and/or hybrid teams. This research also raised further questions and it provided suggestions for future research that may bring further insights into the way in which leadership and followership unfold in virtual contexts.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Anna Maria Alden

Title of thesis: Leadership and Followership in Hybrid Teams

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature: Anna Maria Alden

Date: 2 May, 2022

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Acknowledgements

1.0. <u>Introduction</u>

1.1. <u>Background</u>

Leadership theory has evolved and changed radically over the years. Leadership was initially leader-centric, conceptualised as a one-sided approach (Malakyan, 2014). As was the case in the Great Man Theory, which posited that leaders were "*born, not made*" (Cawthon, 1996, p.1) and subsequently in, for example, behavioural theories and contingency theories, leaders were regarded as solely and fully responsible for leadership outcomes. Within these theories of leadership, a follower's contribution and input were not recognised. However, further developments in the study of leadership undertaken in response to the progress and development occurring in the working environment (Van Vugt and Ronay, 2013), particularly as a result of globalisation and advancements in technology, brought about a change in the way leadership was being conceptualised. The presence of the follower was being acknowledged and importance was given to the leader-follower relationship (Avolio et al, 2009; Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Dinh et al, 2014; Uhl-Bien et al, 2014). Such approaches, which include for example ethical leadership and charismatic leadership, however, still considered followers to be passive recipients of the leader's actions (Oc and Bashshur, 2013). Within this line of thought, the possibility that followers could influence leadership remained opaque.

As leadership theory continued to develop, it became apparent that leader-centric theories offered a "*limited*" perspective on the concept of leadership (Oc and Bashshur, 2013, p.920). Since leaders existed in the same social context as followers, researchers started to conceptualise that followers did play an active role in leadership (Oc and Bashshur, 2013). Recognition of this led to the notion that followers could also be affecting leadership outcomes and therefore it was important to take into consideration followers' attitudes, behaviours, traits, abilities and perceptions (Oc and Bashshur, 2013) to fully understand the leadership concept. Leadership was being re-thought. It began to be talked about as a process that was co-constructed by both leaders and followers as they

interacted socially (Meindl, 1995; Hollander, 2009; DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Blom and Alvesson, 2014).

Follower-centric approaches (including relational approaches) and followership theories propose that leadership is a process. However, in the former, although the relevance of followers to leadership outcomes was acknowledged, the follower held a "*static*" role (DeRue and Ashford, 2010, p.628; Malakyan, 2014, p.8). This meant that follower-centric approaches, an example of which is implicit leadership theory, did not allow for leaders and followers to trade and exchange their roles and functions. Leaders and followers therefore adhered to their roles in all circumstances and settings (Malakyan, 2014), with the leader remaining the driver and lever that caused followers to act. Followership theories on the other hand, distributed responsibility for leadership construction and for the realisation of leadership outcomes to both leaders and followers (Tanoff and Barlow, 2002; Carsten et al, 2010; Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al, 2014). Leaders and followers were thought to be interdependent (Malakyan, 2014; Alvesson and Blom, 2015), both being regarded as causal agents and therefore both being potential drivers as well as potential inhibitors of leadership (Blom and Alvesson, 2014). Examples of such theories include the leader-follower trade approach (Malakyan, 2014) and leader identity construction theory (DeRue and Ashford, 2010). Leader and follower relations and interactions are not determined by formal position and hierarchy but exist as a dynamic process contributed to by both leaders and followers alike. As a result of this interactional process, leader and follower behaviours become "*inseparable*" (DeRue 2011, p.129). As such behaviours rotate and are exchanged (Blom and Alvesson, 2014), team members (i.e. leaders and followers) co-construct leadership and followership to achieve common team goals.

In addition to the changes in the way leader-follower interactions have been conceptualised, wider changes in how organisations operate have influenced the purposes of this research. As a result of the decentralisation and globalisation of business and due to rapid advancements in technology (Zakaria et al, 2004; Hertel et al, 2005), virtual teams have become a widely used organisational arrangement

(Sivunen, 2006; Zakaria et al, 2004; Bergiel et al, 2008; Ale-Ebrahim et al, 2009; Nunamaker et al, 2009; Al-Ani et al, 2011). These teams utilise communication and information technologies to communicate, interact and collaborate across and within geographical, temporal, organisational and cultural boundaries to achieve common goals, tasks and objectives. As a result of their structure and inherent characteristics, and specifically due to team member dispersion, virtual team members work independently and autonomously "*shar[ing] and rota[ing] leadership*" (Zimmermann et al, 2008, p.321) in order to accomplish team objectives.

In today's work settings, and particularly since the start of the global pandemic in 2020, teams exist on a "*continuum of virtuality*" (Zigurs, 2003, p.339) and are more of a "*hybrid*" (Al-Ani et al, 2011, p. 225) nature. Rather than falling on one end of this continuum where all team members are dispersed and operating virtually, or falling on the other end of the spectrum where team members are all co-located and operate by communicating face-to-face, hybrid teams are composed of both distributed members as well as co-located members (Gibbs et al, 2017; Asatiani and Penttinen, 2019; Chamakiotis et al, 2021).

This thesis concentrated on investigating leader-follower interactions and relations in hybrid teams with the objective of understanding how leadership and followership unfold within this context.

Research concentrating on hybrid teams, on the way in which they operate and function, is an area which necessitates further exploration especially given the increase in such work configurations resulting from the pandemic. Researchers such as Al-Ani et al (2011), Gibbs et al (2017), Asatiani and Penttinen (2019) and Chamakiotis et al (2021) have called for supplementary research into virtual and hybrid teams. This call to research was one of the reasons to commence this study. While the research began prior to the pandemic, understanding hybrid teams and the leadership and followership dynamics therein, seem to be even more relevant in the pandemic and post-pandemic organisational landscape. According to researchers such as Ancona et al (2020), Barnes (2020), Feitosa and Salas (2020) and Henry et al (2021, p.2), virtual teams will remain a "*more permanent feature of many organisations*".

A second reason that led the researcher to this area of research was that, in a professional capacity as a consultant to various local organisations, she is conscious that, within the Maltese business community, team leaders and members are finding it a challenge to operate within a hybrid team environment.

Malta's EU accession in May 2004 was a catalyst for the growth of foreign direct investment. Over the years Malta developed into an international business hub, becoming a leading finance centre within the EU (Finance Malta, 2014). The researcher believes that this reality, although positive for Malta's economy in that it has brought with it increased business and employment opportunities, has also made the business environment more complex and challenging. Local businesses had to be quick in adapting to change or risked being left behind their competitors. Embracing innovation and learning to perform efficiently in such settings by making the most of the technology available is still an obstacle for many Maltese organisations (Times of Malta, 2018). The workplace is evolving rapidly, and the skills required in this new environment are continuously changing.

Given that Malta has become a global business centre, the increased incidence of hybrid teams and of having to operate virtually and face-to-face concurrently has become a reality. Although not knowing at the outset of this research work, hybrid and virtual working has become a reality for most organisations in their response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the contagious nature of the virus, businesses have had to change and adapt at an accelerated pace to keep disruption to a minimum and to ensure work continuity during these difficult times (Chamakiotis et al, 2020; Henry et al, 2021).

As mentioned, the research had commenced much before the beginning of 2020 and therefore before the Covid-19 pandemic. When the author initially had started working on this project, it was not predictable that such an extensive shift to virtual and/or to hybrid working would occur in multiple industries at such pace as generated by the responses to the global restrictions resulting from Covid-19. Given the focus of the research, the author believes that the findings of this research are timely, and indeed now relevant and important to a broader pool of organisations.

Even with this in mind, to date, the literature and empirical research on hybrid teams is sparse, and thus the research presented in this thesis may add understanding, insights and ideas on how to comprehend leadership and followership in such settings.

This thesis will be specific and will focus on the hybrid team, which is a particular type of virtual team. This study aims to provide an understanding of the dynamics of leader-follower interactions within such a setup as a way to conceptualise the leadership and followership dynamic in hybrid teams. Knowledge of this is important as it will enable hybrid teams to operate with more efficacy, placing them in a better position to achieve excellence in leadership and in followership, and in the outcomes of these processes.

1.2. <u>Research Focus</u>

This research focused on leader-follower interactions within a hybrid team context.

The researcher operated within a critical realist paradigm adopting a qualitative methodology. A collective case study was undertaken and data was collected from multiple sources using a variety of methods. Although multiple questions were formulated to set a framework to guide this research, the primary research question that this study aimed to answer was:

How do leadership and followership unfold in contexts that are mediated by information technology?

The researcher concentrated on understanding the interactions of team leaders and members in a work environment that is mediated by information technology. Within hybrid teams, team goals are achieved through the behaviours and actions of team leaders and members who are both co-located and dispersed and who predominantly interact and communicate by using technology. The researcher's intention was to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the organisational reality she

was studying. She aimed to generate sufficient in-depth data to enable meaningful conclusions to be drawn.

1.3. <u>Structure of Thesis</u>

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a literature review which concentrates on how leadership developed conceptually and theoretically, which includes followership theory and its relationship to leadership. The chapter will also provide a summary discussion on virtual teams and leadership in virtual teams, bringing together the two main areas of focus. Challenges faced by virtual teams are discussed. Literature specifically concentrating on hybrid teams was also reviewed. In the latter part of chapter 2 the research gaps that are identified and the two bodies of research (leadership and virtual teams) are brought together, culminating in the articulation of the research questions underpinning and guiding the remainder of the study.

Chapter 3 lays out the methodological approach adopted in this study. It highlights the rationale behind the researcher's decision to operate within a critical realist paradigm and her decision to adopt a qualitative approach. This chapter then describes the research methodology and research strategy, as well as the data collection techniques and analysis strategy. Ethical considerations and research quality criteria are discussed. The chapter will also provide an overview of the four case teams included in this study. Details of team selection and the rationale for the choices made are provided before presenting the findings of this research.

Chapter 4 presents the detailed findings of this research. In Chapter 5, the findings are discussed and situated within the wider debates of the extant literature; this will lead to a summary of how the research questions have been answered. Chapter 6 is the final chapter of this thesis and will articulate the study's contributions to knowledge, theory and practice. Reflections on the limitations of the research as well as areas for future research are detailed.

2.0. <u>Literature Review</u>

2.1. <u>Introduction</u>

This review investigates the germane academic literature of virtual teams and leadership, the two main constructs and ideas to be discussed within this thesis. Following an introduction to the concept and work looking at virtual teams, the review focuses on leadership theory to subsequently position virtual team leadership at the interface of this broad and ill-defined subject area. The review will then focus on the challenges faced by teams operating in an environment where communication is predominantly 'virtual' and on the factors that may potentially affect collaboration and communication within such teams. The notion of a hybrid team will be introduced to capture developing nuances of virtuality. The overall aim of this literature review is to survey the theoretical underpinnings and extant debates concerning the subject being investigated. All the aspects discussed set the context and build the foundations for the study reported in this thesis. The discussion presented in this review will also allow for a clear articulation of the working definitions adopted for this research.

A narrative review was conducted to achieve a comprehensive overview of the research area. As indicated by Baumeister and Leary (1997), this format of review aims to build theory by providing a "*comprehensive narrative synthesis of previously published information*" (Green et al, 2006, p.103). Initially, a systematic literature review was considered since it is suggested that it is "*methodical, replicable and transparent*" (Siddaway et al, 2019, p.749). Such an approach was not adopted, however, given that the data collated and synthesised when conducting a systematic review would have had to be directed towards a pre-specified research question (Daniels, 2018). With an aim more aligned to explore under-researched areas, the aim of the literature review was to develop the research question based on the gaps in extant debates. Even though a narrative literature review was chosen as the main form, the researcher chose to adopt elements of a systematic literature review. This was possible given the flexibility allowed by a narrative approach to literature reviews.

The researcher initially focused on collating a set of studies which had clear relevance to the area of focus, based on a broad exploration of the topic. Siddaway et al (2019) posited that this is, usually, the first step in establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria in systematic reviews when research questions have not yet been determined.

Peer reviewed journal articles formed the core of the literature review. Online databases were used (a list of these databases is found in Appendix I). Library searches using specific keywords/phrases or variations thereof were carried out. The initial search terms were identified with the researcher taking into consideration alternative terms (such as synonyms and different spelling) and concepts (such as mixed team and hybrid team). The main keywords and phrases used as search strings were 'leader', 'follower', 'leadership', 'followership', 'virtual team', 'hybrid team', 'mixed team', 'culture', 'trust', 'media richness', 'cohesion' and 'distance'. Inclusion criteria included articles written in English and articles for which full text was available.

Some articles were excluded at the screening stage and their exclusion was based on their title and/or abstract. Others were excluded once the full text was read for reasons relating to the study's design (for example, unsuitable data), scope of the study (for example, book/article reviews) or the date of publication of the study (when for example a more recent theoretical review had been conducted).

The search included both forward searches as well as backward searches.

Up to this point, the steps followed by the researcher were those indicated by Juntunen and Lehenkari (2019) as applied in systematic literature reviews. However, once engagement with the information and the literature commenced, namely extracting information, synthesising the information and reporting it, the literature review adopted a narrative form.

2.2. <u>The Virtual Team</u>

At its most basic, a team can be defined as a dynamic entity composed of two or more interdependent individuals who work together to achieve common goals (Peralta et al, 2018, cited Kozlowski & Bell, 2003), this being the definition adopted for this research. Such a conception of team is typically based on the traditional notion that team members interact face-to-face. An underlying assumption, albeit often implicit, is that they share the same location, or are in close proximity, so that they could interact physically. However, as a result of the decentralisation and globalisation of business, organisations have had to introduce new working arrangements, which necessitated the pioneering of new work methods, procedures and leadership practices (Malhotra et al, 2007; Whited, 2007). The rapid advancements in the field of technology have facilitated the creation of new mechanisms for coordinating work and have led to the inception of innovative work forms, business models and working practices (Lilian, 2014). One such organisational arrangement is the virtual team (Zakaria et al, 2004; Hertel et al, 2005; Ale Ebrahim et al, 2009) or "*e-team*" (the terms 'virtual team' and 'e-team' are used interchangeably by, for example Lilian (2014, p.1256). However, it is the former that will be used throughout this study given that it is the more commonly used terminology).

Although it has to be acknowledged that defining a virtual team can be problematic, particularly if any such definition tries to accommodate multiple institutional contexts, at its simplest, a virtual team can be defined as a team that utilises communication and information technologies to communicate, interact and collaborate within and across geographical, temporal, organisational and cultural boundaries to achieve common goals, tasks and objectives (Ale Ebrahim et al, 2009) for which team members share responsibility (Zakaria et al, 2004). From this definition it can be inferred that a team is considered 'virtual' if team members are dispersed and their principal means of communication is facilitated through technology. Virtual team members can however still be part of the same organisation.

Virtual teams can be "*global*" or "*domestic*" (Lauring and Jonasson, 2018, p.393). The difference between them lies in the fact that, in the former, there is more reliance on technology to communicate since team member dispersion is geographically wider and therefore the prospect of face-to-face communication is less likely.

Virtual team arrangements offer multiple advantages and tremendous opportunities. They allow organisations the possibility to draw on dispersed knowledge workers and dispersed expertise (Cascio, 2000; Zaccaro and Bader, 2003; Rosen et al, 2007; Badrinarayanan and Arnett, 2008; Hunsaker and Hunsaker, 2008; Jawadi et al, 2013; Feitosa et al, 2018) especially when special talents refuse to relocate (Colfax et al, 2009). Some authors propose that when teams operate virtually, quicker responsiveness to market changes and to decisions taken are a greater possibility, since such arrangements allow for work to be carried out around the clock, thereby minimising downtime (Piccoli et al, 2004; Powell et al, 2004; Hunsaker and Hunsaker, 2008).

In today's world, however, teams are not always purely virtual in nature. They exist on a "*continuum of virtuality*" (Zigurs, 2003, p.339; Hoch and Kozlowski, 2014; Chamakiotis et al, 2021). At one end of the continuum, a team operates virtually and all team members are dispersed. At the other end of the continuum, team members operate in a physically close environment and communication is generally face-to-face since work is restricted to one location. Each team, depending on where it falls on the virtual continuum has different characteristics, different needs and different communication processes.

Teams, in general, face multiple challenges. However, for teams operating virtually, these challenges tend to be accentuated as a result of their structure and characteristics and more specifically due to the lack of physical and social interaction of team members (Malhotra et al, 2007). Effective leadership is necessary to overcome such challenges (Eckhardt et al, 2019; Chamakiotis et al, 2021). For example, according to Lu et al (2014), in order to operate effectively in a virtual context, leaders may need to adapt and modify their skills and behaviours to suit this context. Leaders may not be able to lead virtual teams in the same way they would

lead co-located teams (Drouin and Bourgault, 2013) – something that will be explored further in section 2.5 and 2.6. In addition, the way in which team members adapt to the virtual environment and the training they engage in to do so more successfully, together with their individual characteristics and key attributes, all affect the virtual team's outcomes and are a determinant of its success (Hamilton and Scandura, 2003; Drouin and Bourgault, 2013). Other challenges faced by virtual teams, which can affect team collaboration and team dynamics and which may be more difficult to overcome due to team virtuality, may be related to, for example, relationship management (Jawadi et al, 2013), particularly trust development and team cohesion (Zakaria et al. 2004; Sivunen 2006; Whited, 2007; Berry, 2011; Chamakiotis et al, 2021). Culture-related issues (Symons and Stenzel, 2007; Feitosa et al, 2018), communication breakdowns (Powell et al, 2004; Rosen et al, 2007; Ford et al, 2017), and coordination problems, for instance due to time zone differences (Zimmermann et al, 2008; Pullan, 2016) or to the limitations posed by the technology adopted by the team (Chen et al, 2007; Bishop et al, 2010), may also be an issue for the virtual team. If not effectively handled, these challenges may compromise team success and hinder the accomplishment of the team's objectives (Whited, 2007; Hunsaker and Hunsaker, 2008; Ale Ebrahim et al, 2009).

As mentioned above, team communication within virtual teams is different to team communication within traditional co-located teams. Adopting technology-mediated means to communicate and collaborate may affect team interactions and team dynamics, and by consequence may also affect leadership and followership practices, actions and behaviours within such teams. As a result, therefore, leadership of a team that operates virtually and also followership within that team may differ to leadership and followership within a co-located team. The extant literature debating such differences is reviewed in more detail later in this chapter.

This study will concentrate on virtual teams – for the reasons outlined in the introduction – and specifically on interactions occurring within such teams. The study is motivated to understand how leadership and followership unfold in such teams, with particular focus on how they unfold

in the virtual space. However, before specifically looking at virtual team leadership literature, it is appropriate to provide a general overview of leadership to present and discuss the different ways in which leadership has been conceptualised over the years. The leadership of virtual teams is a relatively new addition to the conceptualisation and theorising of leadership, and therefore this overview will enable the reader to position virtual leadership in the context of such developments.

Although the focus of this study is not the team *per se*, but the interactions that occur amongst individuals operating within virtual arrangements, given that leadership and followership have generally been studied within the context of teams, teams (as defined above) will serve as a context for this study.

2.3. <u>Leadership Theory</u>

The development of leadership thought and theory was gradual. Various perspectives have dominated the leadership literature with new conceptualisations emerging when researchers became conscious of a mismatch between theory and the lived realities in organisations. Mismatches and development in theory are not attributable easily to one single reason, although arguably a primary driver was the progress and development in organisational environments (Van Vugt and Ronay, 2013) in which existing practices could not be reconciled easily with available theories. Consequently, researchers adjusted their investigative lenses to bridge the gap.

In order to appreciate and understand the major changes in the leadership literature, and thereby provide a context to the emergence of leadership in virtual teams, a review of the debates in the field is essential. This review will be structured as follows: initially it will focus on leader-centric theories that concentrate on the leader's attitudes, traits and behaviours. It proceeds to focus on the importance of the leader-follower relationship. Subsequently, the review will address follower-centric approaches, relational approaches and the study of followership. The objective of the review up to this point is to outline developments in leadership thought and

thus no individual leadership theories are discussed. The focus will be on the abstracted level of leadership thought within the approaches/areas reviewed. Once these developments are presented, the review will focus on virtual team leadership and on the responsibilities, roles, skills, styles and behaviours necessary to operate in the virtual space.

In writing up this review, the researcher adopted a framework for discussing developments in leadership and followership theory which bears some similarity to Uhl-Bien et al's review (2014) of leadership research. Although Uhl-Bien et al refer to the fact that their systematic review was conducted from a follower and followership perspective, their review remains a comprehensive one which clearly distinguishes between different leadership approaches that emerged as studies of leadership progressed. In another similar review conducted by Crossman and Crossman (2011, p.484), it was indicated that difficulties exist when attempting to catalogue leadership and followership literature as categories tend to be "*broad"* and *"overlapping"*. The author of this study echoes these concerns and appreciates the challenge of trying to summarise a significant and divergent body of literature. However, the author believes that Uhl-Bien et al (2014) have overcome some of those problems with categorisation, as they clearly capture changes and developments occurring in the thought processes of leadership researchers; in this way they are creating a clear demarcation between the different approaches. It was primarily for this reason that the researcher chose to adopt Uhl-Bien et al's framework and present leadership theories in a similar way.

2.3.1. Leader-Centric Theories

Leadership theories were traditionally leader-centric, meaning the focus and emphasis was on the leader's traits and attributes. They were one-sided approaches (Malakyan, 2014), promoting the leader as a 'hero' (Vroom & Jago, 2007) and a 'great man' who was "*born, not made*" (Cawthon, 1996, p.1). Studies into leadership progressed and began to recognise that a leader's style, skills and behaviour were important especially since these could be conditioned by the context in which the leader was operating (Vroom & Jago, 2007). People were categorised

as 'leaders' and/or 'subordinates' (Epitropaki et al, 2013), where leaders were the influencers, and subordinates were considered passive recipients of leader influence, behaviour and actions (Oc and Bashshur, 2013). Such theories included, for example, trait theories[1], contingency theories[2] and behavioural theories[3].

Changes in the demands and expectations made upon leaders resulting from increasing pressures due to development and progress, called for a change in leadership perspective. This change in perspective became necessary to accommodate the perceived discrepancies between the "*modern and ancestral environments*" (Van Vugt and Ronay, 2013, p.2). As a result of this discrepancy, existing leadership theory was thought inapplicable to the current 'modern' environment; 'modern' leaders were therefore well-equipped to face challenges that no longer existed but ill-equipped to deal with new challenges resulting from the rapid changes occurring in organisational environments, such as technological advancement and diversification of labour (Van Vugt and Ronay, 2013). Focus, therefore, began shifting away from the leader's traits, attitudes and behaviours to a perspective that stressed the importance of the leader-follower relationship. The interactions between leaders and followers and relationship-building and nurturing became key factors in leadership (Avolio et al, 2009; Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Dinh et al, 2014; Uhl-Bien et al, 2014).

Notwithstanding such a change in thought, the role of the leader still involved devising and executing strategies to achieve goals and objectives. However, this new perspective increased focus on understanding how leaders motivated followers, how they showed sensitivity towards followers, built relationships with them and ensured follower commitment to the organisation's goals. Included in these theories of leadership are, for example, ethical leadership[4],

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1 Trait theories, as studied by for example Judge et al (2002), focused on the premise that leaders could be distinguished from non-leaders because they possessed specific leadership personality traits.
2 Contingency theories, suggested by for example Fiedler (1978), posited that leadership effectiveness was determined through a combination of leadership traits and situational factors.
3 Behavioural theories, as reviewed by for example DeRue et al (2011), focused on how leaders behave. They also suggested that behaviours can be learnt.
4 Ethical leadership as studied by for example Brown et al (2005), is based on the premise that leaders' actions and behaviours are guided by their ethical beliefs and values.

transformational leadership[5], charismatic leadership[6] and authentic leadership theory[7]. These theories gave importance to the development of a leader-follower relationship although they still failed to view followers as co-producers of leadership (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014). They held a "*static*" (Malakyan, 2014, p.8) view of both the leader and the follower; thus, leader and follower roles were still regarded as separate, they were not interchangeable, and they were not "*mutually empowering*" (Malakyan, 2014, p.14). Followers were considered passive receivers whereby duties and responsibilities were solely defined by the leader's actions, behaviours and control. These approaches ignored any influence the follower could have on leadership by treating a follower as someone with no independent thought.

2.3.2. Follower-Centric Approaches

Once the presence of the follower in the leadership dynamic was recognised, leadership researchers started conceptualising leadership as a social construction (Meindl, 1995; Hollander, 2009; DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Blom and Alvesson, 2014) in which both leaders and followers played a part. Leadership became a "*social relation*" (Kort, 2008, p.414) and such a change in perspective meant that leadership relied on the actions of both leaders and followers. Leader-centric theories were thereafter being considered incomplete and researchers paid attention to the development of this additional perspective of leadership (Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al, 2014).

Follower-centric approaches emerged for various reasons. One reason was to respond to leader-centric views (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014) which, after acknowledging the presence of the follower in the leadership process, were still offering a "*limited*" perspective (Oc and Bashshur, 2013, p.920). Another reason was related to the premise that, since it was being recognised that leaders and followers existed in the same

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5 Transformational leadership as investigated by for example Effelsberg et al (2014), focuses on the premise that leaders have a vision and they inspire their followers to execute change in line with their vision.
6 Charismatic leadership as studied by for example Shamir et al (1993) posits that leaders use their own charisma to inspire followers.
7 Authentic leadership theory as investigated by Gardner et al (2020) is practiced when leaders focus on building honest relationships with their followers.

social context, the follower was therefore equally important and relevant to leadership (Oc and Bashshur, 2013). Followers were being viewed as 'contributors' playing an active role in the leadership process. Therefore, followers' beliefs, traits, abilities, attitudes, perceptions and behaviours (Oc and Bashshur, 2013) became important considerations when studying leadership since through effective communication, upward influence, power distribution and by assuming responsibility and ownership of their work, they could have an effect on leadership outcomes (Whitlock, 2013). These outcomes could be both positive (such as goal accomplishment, the establishment of a positive working environment and the creation of synergies) as well as negative (such as distractions, conflict, and putting personal agendas before work commitments (Padilla et al, 2007)). Outcomes, however, had to be studied together with the processes that affected their emergence (Dinh et al, 2014). Emerging debates therefore suggested that processes changed and evolved as they were conditioned and influenced by context, by tasks and by the personal qualities and characteristics of both leaders and followers (Meindl, 1995).

Although followers' roles remain static in this stream of research (in that followers' functions and roles cannot be traded or exchanged in different circumstances and settings (Malakyan, 2014)), followers' attitudes, perceptions, traits and qualities can still affect the leadership process. When this aspect was empirically studied by Grant et al (2011), it was concluded that although the role of the follower is static, follower behaviour still affects leadership outcomes. Grant et al tested the effect of follower proactivity and extraverted leadership on group effectiveness and established that when followers are passive, dominant leadership results in better group performance and when proactive followers are paired with extraverted leaders, group performance is hindered.

Hence, to better understand leadership theory, researchers deemed it necessary to include followers in their analysis. They attempted to understand what motivated followers to allow themselves to be engaged and influenced by their leaders. According to Popper (2011)

these processes and means of influence varied from follower to follower. As a result, identifying and examining the "*sources of attraction*" (p.34) to leaders in different contexts was deemed relevant to this line of thought. Popper referred to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs' model to predict and explain what attracted followers to leaders and she suggested that understanding the psychology of followers is important in identifying followers' dominant needs, such as the need for security or belonging. Followers would be attracted to leaders who managed to satisfy their prevailing needs.

Follower-centric research emphasises that leadership is a "*social construction*" (Meindl, 1995, p.330) and therefore its effectiveness or ineffectiveness, apart from being dependent on the leader, is also dependent on the followers' disposition to be led. This, according to Alvesson and Blom (2015), depended on the perceived potential upsides of accepting a follower position (such as inclusion and decreased uncertainty) vis-à-vis the potential downsides (such as associated identity and autonomy). In addition, leadership effectiveness or ineffectiveness was deemed contingent on followers' enthusiasm to cooperate with their leader (as suggested by the 'Romance of Leadership' theory (Meindl,1995)), as well as on the presence of an environment conducive to leadership.

One area of follower-centric research that aims to capture the dynamic and contextual aspects described above, are implicit leadership theories (ILTs). Such theories focus on follower-held schemas of leadership behaviour and prototypes of ideal leaders. ILTs are determined by past experiences and cultural typecasts and also result from evolved and instinctive biases. Thomas et al (2013) suggest that these prototypes of ideal leaders and followers are malleable to varying extents.

ILTs were initially studied by using lists of traits, attributes and behavioural statements which research participants assigned according to the prototypicality of a leader (Epitropaki et al, 2013). Anti-prototypic items were included at a later stage to identify negative leadership traits. Epitropaki et al (2013) studied these lists of traits and identified

attributes such as intelligent, honest and dynamic, as common to all lists. ILTs are deemed important because they influence follower ratings of leaders and leadership behaviour (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014).

2.3.3. <u>Relational Approaches</u>

As implied by follower-centric research, for a leader to lead, followers must be willing to be led (Vroom & Jago, 2007; Jerry, 2013). A reasonable assumption, therefore, is that leadership may not occur in the absence of followership (Uhl-Bien at al, 2014). Alvesson and Blom (2015, p.267) posited that "*leadership relations without followership do not make sense, and the absence of the latter undermines or even precludes leadership*". Malakyan (2014, p.17), in a similar vein, concluded that leadership and followership are intertwined, making leadership a "*shared experience*". This 'shared experience' implies a mutual influence and relational process between leaders and followers; this notion being what led to the emergence of relational approaches as discussed hereunder.

According to Lord's connectionist information theory (Lord et al, 2001), leadership arises from various interacting factors (context, task and personal qualities of leaders and followers). Leadership is conceptualised as the product of a social system; such system being shaped by task systems and relational systems. These in turn affect both leadership behaviour directly as well as the followers' prototypes used to evaluate such behaviour. Followers who are dynamic and active agents (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014) are influenced by their leader and are able to act as influencers of leadership behaviour themselves.

Hollander (2009) also postulated that leadership is a relational process built over time, involving an exchange (or transaction) between leaders and followers. He viewed the leader as a resource necessary for group goal attainment and the follower who acknowledged the leader's legitimacy, accepted to be influenced by the leader. In his work, Hollander explicitly allowed for proactive followership, not only for reactive followership (Blom and Alvesson, 2014). This theory may be considered similar to leader-member exchange theory (LMX theory),

another relationship-based theory. Both theories posit that leadership is based on an exchange (or transaction) between leaders and followers. However, echoing leader-centric conceptualisations, LMX theory still privileges the role of the leader as the primary driver of the leadership process (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien et al, 2014) unlike Hollander's relational view.

In Klein and House's 'charisma on fire' (Klein and House, 1995) and in Padilla, Hogan and Kaiser's 'toxic triangle' (Padilla et al, 2007; Uhl-Bien et al, 2014), the importance of having a conducive environment is highlighted. Klein and House take a relationship-based perspective where charisma is perceived to be 'a fire' that ignites followers' energy and commitment. In their work, Klein and House emphasise three key elements of leadership: the charismatic qualities possessed by the leader, followers who are open to charisma, and a conducive environment (Klein and House, 1995; Uhl-Bien et al, 2014). In Padilla, Hogan and Kaiser's 'toxic triangle', the researchers focus on the role of followers in destructive leadership and they posit that destructive organisational outcomes are the result of a combination of three factors (Padilla et al, 2007). These factors include destructive leaders (whose characteristics are charisma, a personalised need for power, narcissism, negative life experiences and an ideology of hate), susceptible followers (colluders who actively participate in the agendas of their destructive leaders or conformists who comply with destructive leaders out of fear), and conducive environmental conditions (such as instability and perceived threat). Padilla et al (2017) stress the negative impacts that leadership has when these three factors come together (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014).

Leadership is therefore the result of various factors and forces that 'intermingle' as conceptualised in Follett's 'power with' approach (Selber and Austin, 1997). Follett, as early as the 1920s and 1930s (Selber and Austin, 1997), gave importance to the relationship between the leader and followers as critical to a team's success. She insisted that leaders should not dominate followers – 'power with' and not 'power over' (Selber and Austin, 1997) – and that authority was not embedded in a

particular hierarchical position but in a person's knowledge, competence, skill and experience. Authority was therefore an 'intermingling of forces' between leaders and followers. The interaction of these factors and forces, the extent of reciprocal influence, and the quality of leader-follower exchanges all impacted leadership effectiveness.

Both Weierter (1997) and Lapierre et al (2012) based their studies on charismatic leadership. Weierter (1997) proposed that charismatic relationships emerge as a result of a reciprocal influence process that occurs between leaders and followers. This relationship together with the routinized messages delivered by the leader are affected by the follower and by contextual factors (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014). Lapierre et al (2012) also acknowledged the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the leader-follower relationship and positioned followers as co-creators of charismatic leadership. Therefore, according to Lapierre et al (2012), followership, which exists on a continuum from passive to proactive, has a bearing on the type of charismatic leadership manifested by a leader (socialised or personalised).

Follower-centric research (starting with Follett's work), which includes the relational approaches discussed above, is a stream of research that recognises the importance of followers as actors in the leadership process (Oc and Bashshur, 2013). However, these approaches, although acknowledging the follower and thus being deemed 'follower-centric', were interpreted by researchers, such as Carsten et al (2010), as still being leader-centric since they propose the leader as the causal agent and the leader's behaviour as the primary focus of the study. The leader remains the driver and lever that causes followers to act (Carsten et al, 2010; Uhl-Bien et al, 2014). Recognition of this is what prompted the emergence of followership as a distinct construct, the understanding of which is, arguably, necessary to fully understand the leadership process.

2.3.4. Followership Theory

Followership theory deals with "*the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process*" (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014, p.96). Followership approaches differ from the approaches discussed in previous sections in that they privilege the role of the follower in the leadership process. The followership literature positions the follower role and follower characteristics, behaviours, actions and reactions as pivotal in the leadership process, particularly describing them as drivers for leadership outcomes (Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al, 2014). Uhl-Bien et al (2014) went a step further and classified these outcomes, not just as positive or negative as described in section 2.3.2., but also as individual follower outcomes (such as follower effectiveness and advancement), individual leader outcomes (such as leader derailment), relationship outcomes (such as trust development) and leadership process outcomes (such as goal accomplishment). These outcomes come to fruition as the combined result of followership behaviours (for instance initiative taking) and leadership behaviours (such as consultation with followers).

Therefore, followership theory analyses and addresses follower behaviours and identities and the enactment of the follower role in relation to the leader (Carsten et al, 2010). When taking this approach, the lens is reversed in that followers are regarded as the causal agents, and not leaders as in leader-centric theory and as put forward by follower-centric approaches. Followership theory therefore does not assume that the leadership process starts with an act of leading, but it recognises that an act of leading can result in response to an earlier act of following (DeRue, 2011). Followership theory, the research into which is primarily theoretical and lacks an empirical bedrock, therefore involves studying power, control, motivations, personal characteristics, organisational climate, behaviours, desired outcomes and objectives of followers themselves to be able to conceptualise how, together with leaders, followers contribute to the construction of leadership and its outcomes.

One of the most contested and debated areas within the followership literature is the question to what extent leadership and followership are part of the same process or not. Researchers hold conflicting views (Tanoff and Barlow, 2002; DeRue, 2011; Whitlock, 2013; Blom and Alvesson, 2014; Malakyan, 2014) which need to be looked at to reach a working definition of both leadership and followership. Although recognising the interdependence between leaders and followers, followership is viewed by some as an active process separate to leadership and not part of the same process (Whitlock, 2013) whilst others, such as DeRue (2011, p.129), posit that "*leadership and followership are inseparable*".

Malakyan (2014, p.16) proposed that leadership and followership should be "*studied simultaneously*", this implying that although dependent, and possibly interchangeable (as the leader becomes a follower and vice versa – as discussed below), leadership and followership are separate functions. Malakyan (2014) introduced the leader-follower trade (LFT) approach where leaders and followers trade their functions, roles and responsibilities to improve relationships. Leaders and followers take on each other's perspectives to maximise mutual effectiveness. The LFT approach assumes mutual influence of leaders and followers; the objective of this approach being the creation of mutually empowering synergistic relationships. These relationships are a determining factor in the achievement of maximum group and organisational effectiveness.

Tanoff and Barlow's perspective (2002) and Blom and Alvesson's perspective (2014) were somewhat different. Tanoff and Barlow stress the importance and value of studying followership theory as a "*key component of the process of leadership*" (p.157). This was evidenced through their empirical research which demonstrates that leadership and followership are regarded as "*the same animal with different spots*" (p.163) and therefore behaviours exhibited by an exemplary follower are similar to those displayed by an effective leader. Tanoff and Barlow examined the relationship of the constructs of leadership and followership. The former was based on a five-factor model of trait

personality (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness) and the latter was based on a model of followership styles (passive, alienated, pragmatists, conformists and exemplary). They observed positive relationships between these two constructs highlighting the importance of understanding the followership construct together with the leadership construct. They concluded that the understanding of followership can positively contribute to the better achievement of effective leadership outcomes. As sketched out previously, most of the work in this field is theoretical, with this being one of the few empirical pieces of work – thus providing some confidence in the proposition that leadership and followership need to be considered in tandem.

Blom and Alvesson (2014) positioned followers as co-producers of leadership - they posited that followers could be both drivers as well as inhibitors of leadership. These researchers adopted a case study approach (utilising in-depth interviewing of both leaders and followers together with observations of meetings/interactions) and concentrated on two knowledge-intensive organisational units to investigate managerial leadership intervention and support. Their objective was to gauge the demand and supply of managerial leadership intervention which to a large extent is initiated and/or inhibited by followers. Their findings indicated that followers not only dictate the quality and quantity of leadership that they desire, but they also define when and if leadership intervention is required. They conceptualised such leader-follower dynamics as 'leadership on demand'.

Van Vugt et al (2008) and Van Vugt and Ronay (2013) who studied leadership from an evolutionary perspective, seem to have found merit in all these views. They specify that leadership and followership must be studied together (this implying that leadership and followership are separate and distinct functions). However, further on in their analysis they move closer to the view that positions leadership and followership as part of the same process since they conclude that leadership theory would be incomplete if it failed to consider the psychology of followers

and therefore the importance of followership (this indirectly implies that the study of followership is part of leadership theory).

DeRue (2011, p.129) views leadership as "*a series of interlocking acts of leading and following*". He believes that the leadership process is such that the actions of one individual, irrespective of whether that individual is following or leading, gives meaning and legitimacy to another's following or leading. Recognising this interdependency between the acts of following and leading makes it possible to comprehend leadership as a process and to understand how leadership emerges and evolves. Alvesson and Blom (2015, p.267) specify that "*leadership needs to be considered…. as a relational phenomenon in which followership is a key element*". The researcher supports the view that followership, as an integral part of leadership, should be studied as part of leadership. She believes that leadership and followership are part of the same process and one cannot exist without the other. Since both leaders and followers are causal agents in the process, it is the input of both that is essential to achieve outcomes.

Being a rather new construct, theoretically the notion of followership is still finding its base. Currently, followership theory has been conceptualised in two ways. One of the conceptualisations focuses on hierarchical roles and addresses followership from the perspective of individual schema and follower behaviours and actions that affect leadership outcomes. The other lens looks at followership as the interaction of leader and follower behaviours and relations in a social context. In this latter approach, leadership and followership are tied to behaviours and actions rather than to roles.

2.3.4.1. Role-Based Views

Role-based views focus on implicit followership theories (IFTs), follower schemas and follower roles. IFTs propose that individuals, through past experiences and socialisation, develop their own personal ideas and assumptions about the traits and behaviours that are characteristic of followers (Sy, 2010). Uhl-Bien et al (2014) suggest that the prototypes or typologies developed (for example, an

effective follower would demonstrate commitment, independent problem-solving, self-motivation, courage and credibility) can be used as a benchmark and interpretational background (Van Gils et al, 2010) to categorise followers (as ideal or not). This has a bearing on how followers choose to enact the follower role (Carsten et al, 2010), on the traits and behaviours that they consider essential for success in the follower role, and therefore on the followership cognitive schemas that they develop. Van Gils et al (2010) link this benchmark to LMX theory. Their model suggests that both followers and leaders base their contribution to the leader-follower relationship on their expectations of the person's role (leader or follower) and on the different ILTs and IFTs held by individuals.

Various researchers think that follower schemas are influenced by context (Carsten et al, 2010) and constructed (or not) through socialisation (Epitropaki et al, 2013). According to Carsten et al (2010) and Oc and Bashshur (2013), followership constructions range from passive to proactive, with the active follower falling in between these two extremes. Carsten et al (2010) also acknowledge the existence of the 'ineffective follower' described by them as a follower whose schema did not match the context in which they were operating. Kelley (1988, p.143) however believes that an ineffective follower is a "*sheep*" lacking initiative, following the leader blindly and failing to have a sense of responsibility.

Carsten et al (2010) used qualitative research to analyse how followers view their role in organisations. They covered perspectives relating to the social construction of followership, the advantages and disadvantages of occupying a follower role, the qualities, attributes and behaviours that make effective followers, and the factors that they thought facilitated or hindered the follower role. These researchers concluded that followership constructions or schemas range from passive to proactive and the level at which these schemas influence social constructions in organisations is related to context and determined by leadership styles and organisational climate. This therefore implies that followership holds different

meanings for individuals filling that role and consequently there could be cases where individuals try to avoid followership positions to disassociate themselves from something which is not "*high-status and identity-boosting*" (Alvesson and Blom, 2015, p.268).

Oc and Bashshur (2013) reviewed followership literature and posited that this literature acknowledges the existence of different types of followers enacting the follower role in different ways. These researchers refer to, for example, the proactive follower at one end of a continuum who takes decisions and challenges the leader, to the passive follower at the other end who follows the leader blindly and simply executes orders given. In their research they also concentrate on power, influence and dependence and describe the role of social impact theory (considering strength, immediacy and the number of the sources of impact as determinants of influence) at both an individual and group level. They conclude that followers could impact leadership behaviour through power or feedback if leaders depend on followers for information, affiliation or for maintaining a positive self-image. Alvesson and Blom (2015) however pointed out that excessively proactive and influential followers are counterproductive to the team and negatively affect the leadership-followership process.

Lapierre et al (2012) linked followership to charismatic leadership and positioned followers as co-creators of charismatic leadership since followers' IFTs (and even leaders' IFTs) have a bearing on the type of charismatic leadership, socialised or personalised, portrayed by their leader.

2.3.4.2. Constructionist Views

Constructionist views of followership distinctly contrast the role-based views discussed above. These constructionist views support the notion that together, leaders and followers (whereby leader and follower are not terms that refer to hierarchy), co-produce leadership outcomes.

One of the challenges that these views have to address is that, for the leader-follower relationship to work, however, there had to be

some recognition of the difference in the status, identity and power associated with being one or the other (Alvesson and Blom, 2015). The problem here lies in the expectations associated with these roles since being regarded as a follower is all about submission and therefore may bring about feelings of inferiority eventually resulting in a negative self-view. Alvesson and Blom (2015, p.279) proceeded to point out that although "*followership is a position and identity often negatively experienced compared to leadership*", it is still necessary for leadership to occur.

Russell (2003) referred to a similar concept in her research. She posited that leadership is a social process with a strong relational element. Leaders need followers' consent to their leadership and therefore need to establish and maintain positive working relationships with 'different' followers. Doing so means that a leader's position should be within the community they lead, and therefore they should be in-group members (Tee et al, 2013) rather than on top (hierarchically speaking) risking out-group membership.

Jerry (2013) acknowledged the dynamic interplay between leaders and followers. He mentioned communication, trust, collective responsibility, care and pride as qualities that should be worked on by leaders and followers to ensure effective leadership outcomes. He also postulated that for a leader to lead, followers must be inspired to be led and be willing to be led. Similarly, Blom and Lundgren (2020) suggested that there needs to be a significant element of voluntariness on the part of potential followers to accept to be influenced. These researchers conceptualise followership as being all about voluntary compliance to the leader's influence. 'Voluntary' generally implies that an act is not caused by compulsion, obligation or ignorance. Purely voluntary followership, however, is generally not possible since organisations and the systems within which they operate tend to 'push' individuals to compliance. For this reason, the authors speak about degrees of voluntariness when referring to followership. Such degrees can be influenced by factors such as the individual's self-esteem and psychological maturity, the individual's

culture, and contextual factors including leadership style and organisational climate. Blom and Lundgren (2020) concurred with other researchers such as Alvesson et al (2017) that some degree of voluntariness is essential for followership.

Tee et al (2013) considered that leadership outcomes are the result of dynamic social interactions. They based their theoretical research on social identity theory and self-categorisation theory and investigated how followers identify with their leaders (these regarded as in-group members) and feel a sense of belonging to a collective shared identity. Emotions and feelings of unity and similarity are shaped by both leaders and followers as they interact to construct effective leadership outcomes. Leadership is therefore a group level process which is affected by group level emotions and collective action.

DeRue and Ashford's (2010) leader identity construction theory proposes that leadership and followership are co-constructed socially through a process of claiming and granting of leader and follower identities. These identities are exchanged and shift over time as individuals interact and influence each other.

To further emphasise the dynamic nature of followership as highlighted in the mainly theoretical works referred to above, reference should be made to Shamir's co-production theory (2007) and Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien's relational approach (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014). Both these approaches view followership (and leadership) as non-static; this meaning that both followership and leadership could change as individuals act and respond in context. In his co-production theory, Shamir (2007) proposed that leadership is produced when leaders and followers feel a sense of collective responsibility and jointly work to advance their goals, vision and behaviours to ultimately achieve team and organisational success. This view positions followers as co-contributors of leadership outcomes. In Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien's relational approach, leadership is viewed as a relational process co-created by leaders and followers in context (this perspective was also shared by Smith et al, 2018).

Therefore, to understand the dynamics of this process, these researchers concentrated on communication occurring in interpersonal interactions, such as understanding how acts of influence trigger certain responses. Jerry (2013) also suggested that a focus should be on communication as one of the main factors that has a bearing on followership and on the co-construction of leadership outcomes.

Taking a different approach, more closely aligned with identity studies, Collinson (2006) argues that individuals are social selves and should be studied as such. He proposed three types of follower identities; conformist selves who manifest ideal behaviours, resistant selves who demonstrate opposing behaviours, and dramaturgical selves who become expert manipulators of themselves and of information. Collinson believed that by recognising and understanding these different selves, leader-follower interactions could be better comprehended.

The manner in which a leader and follower interact may also be dependent on their attachment style and on the state of their relationship – thus drawing on social psychology to explain the leadership and followership dynamic. Hinojosa et al (2014, p.598) posited that the leader-follower relationship is a "*key attachment relationship*" and followers look up to their leaders for security, comfort and support. Attachment styles, which, as mentioned by Hinojosa et al (2014), could be secure, insecure, ambivalent or insecure avoidant, are developed in early childhood and shaped by life histories and experiences. However, they are still affected by contextual factors. The authors linked attachment style to authentic leadership and concluded that the most effective leadership outcomes are achieved when an authentic leader-follower relationship is established since such a rapport is primarily based on enhanced self and relational awareness and on mutual trust.

2.4. <u>Conclusion</u>

The developments in leadership theory have been captured mainly at an abstracted and broad level in the previous section. Changes in thought and perspectives have brought about a shift in focus, with a view presented now that leadership is no longer being tied solely to the leader and the leader's actions and behaviours, but that the follower and followership are an integral part of leadership.

The next section in this review will focus on virtual team leadership and will provide an overview of related literature. A proposition explored is that, within virtual teams, communication occurs primarily through technology and that this affects leader-follower interactions, and therefore team member collaboration and team dynamics. An assumption that is tested in the review is that the absence of physical interaction, as is common in virtual teams, means that leaders and non-leaders (followers) act, behave and interact differently. This may give rise to challenges which, although also faced by co-located teams, are more pronounced in virtual settings. These challenges will be discussed in detail given that they may affect virtual team member interactions. Reference will also be made to the notion of a hybrid team, a type of virtual team that operates virtually with some of its members, and the type of team that will be the focus of this research.

2.5. <u>Virtual Leadership</u>

Lilian (2014) posited that virtual leadership, or e-leadership (it appears that these two terms are being used synonymously in literature, but, it is the former which will be the term used throughout this study, given that it is the more commonly used terminology), is seen as the response and solution to the global changes that have come about as a result of technological development and progress. It is the new and expanding context in which today's leaders function and operate, and therefore the ability to lead virtually is being considered a core competency for leaders and managers (Horwitz et al, 2006).

Avolio et al (2014) suggest that virtual leadership is a process that should not be studied solely from the perspective of the leader. They believe that this is no longer appropriate given the dynamic environment within which modern leaders operate. This aspect and debate ties in directly with the developments in leadership theory as discussed in section 2.3.; specifically where leadership started to be conceptualised as a process towards which both leaders and followers contribute and which is therefore affected by both leaders and followers alike. Jarvenpaa and Tanriverdi (2003, p.405) describe the virtual system as "*transient, boundary-less, lateral and computer-mediated*" and therefore the virtual form calls for both leaders, and also followers, to re-think their roles, duties and responsibilities in the leadership process in order to adapt to the demands imposed by virtuality and to be apt to perform in a virtual context (Eckhardt et al, 2019).

Seemingly, therefore, it is essential that virtual team members (including team leaders) adjust to different work styles and cultures, leverage harmonious team processes and utilise technology appropriately to ensure effectiveness and to create workplace efficiencies (Pinjani and Palvia, 2013). Eckhardt et al (2019) suggest three readiness challenges faced by individuals embarking on virtual work: mental readiness to overcome problems related to connectedness and cohesion, technology readiness to combat communication and collaboration issues, and relationship readiness to overcome problems with establishing a common team identity and with the fostering of trust. Annunzio (2001) and Kissler (2001) also refer to specific virtual leadership attributes, such as the ability to perform in uncertain environments and the importance of being values-driven (these attributes are referred to hereunder). In addition, Comella-Dorda et al (2020) suggest that, in post-pandemic times, additional adaptation on the part of virtual team leaders is necessary to manage work-life boundaries and to ensure virtual team members' well-being. The researcher is of the view that such adaptation is not applicable solely to virtual team leaders but could easily be extended to followers in virtual teams given that the adaptation of followers is just as essential and important – this, of course, presupposes the dynamic relationship between leaders and followers outlined previously.

A virtual team's performance and the team's ability to achieve pre-set objectives are therefore dependent on how successful team members are at adapting to the virtual environment, on the regular training team members undertake to perform effectively in the virtual space, and on the individual characteristics and key attributes of team members (Hamilton and Scandura, 2003; Drouin and Bourgault, 2013). Pullan (2016) pointed out that generational differences should also be considered and accommodated. When team members' exposure to technology use varies and virtual work does not come "*natural*" (p.59), additional adaptation may be necessary. In addition, Ford et al (2017) put forward a strong argument when they propose that the selection of team members should not only be based on competence, knowledge and skills, but should also be contingent on their personality and propensity to trust. This is a view which the researcher fully supports given the importance that developing trust and trusting relationships has on the success of all teams and therefore also on virtual teams. This will be explored further when trust in virtual teams is discussed in section 2.12.1.

In addition, apart from referring to the necessary adaptation on the part of virtual team leaders and members, it is also important to mention that the organisation's structure should be one that supports virtual work and does not inhibit it. Asatiani and Penttinen (2019), when referring to virtual team performance, indicated that this depends on the flexibility allowed by the structure of the organisation's policies and procedures. This ties in with a point made by Kissler (2001) where he mentions that bureaucracy and virtual leadership may be incompatible.

The need for adaptation on the part of both virtual team leaders as well as non-leaders has been highlighted above. Support from organisations, by incorporating an element of flexibility in their policies and systems, must also be in place to ensure virtual team success. The next section will outline debates about the effect that technology may have on leadership. It will focus on understanding the proposed roles and responsibilities of virtual team leaders as well as the behaviours and skills the literature suggests are required to perform effectively in a virtual team. The

leadership styles which researchers believe to be most applicable to virtual structures will also be discussed.

2.6. <u>Technology and Leadership</u>

The way in which technology has transformed teamwork has great implications for leadership (Larson and DeChurch, 2020). Teams are using increasingly sophisticated technologies to operate in the digital age. Drouin and Bourgault (2013) and Chamakiotis et al (2021) theorise that leaders cannot lead virtual teams in the same way they would lead co-located teams. Researchers such as Jawadi et al (2013), Cowan (2014) and Lu et al (2014) suggest that leaders should develop new skills and/or adapt and modify existing skills when managing virtual teams. Such skills should enable the management of a vast array of communication strategies and project management techniques as well as focus on human and social factors (Zigurs, 2003) to fulfil both task-related and relationship-related roles.

Cortellazzo et al (2019, p.14) consider leaders to be "*key players*" responsible for overcoming the challenges imposed by physical and organisational distance. As a result, leaders cannot afford to focus solely on goal achievement and task accomplishment, especially if this comes at the expense of building trusting relationships with team members (Tworoger et al, 2013). In fact, Kissler (2001) and Annunzio (2001) both stressed the importance of honesty and of being values-driven when leading virtual teams. A quick adaptability to change, constant learning, flexibility, the ability to transfer ideas, and the ability to work in disorderly and ambiguous environments are amongst the virtual leadership attributes they identify as key to working in technology-mediated environments.

The researcher believes that, as technology continues to develop, virtual working will more closely replicate working in a face-to-face environment. When the differences start to blur and disappear and interactions become more visual, it will be more likely that leaders will behave virtually as they do face-to-face (Symons and Stenzel, 2007). Curiously, considering the active narrative that leading (and thus following) is different in virtual

teams, Avolio and Kahai (2003, p.327) still suggested that although leaders and followers relate to each other differently in virtual teams when compared to face-to-face teams, the authors are still confident that "*leadership mediated by information technology can exhibit exactly the same content and style as traditional face-to-face leadership, especially as virtual interactions become more visual*". Adopting a communications medium which allows visibility and clarity of actions and behaviours will enable team members to establish a presence and to feel the presence of others within the virtual team.

2.7. The Roles and Responsibilities of Virtual Team Leaders

Maybe not unsurprisingly, the literature reviewed for the purposes of this thesis has indicated that, regardless of whether the team is a traditional team (where team members interact face-to-face) or a virtual team (where team members utilise communication and information technology to communicate), the role of the leader remains one of ensuring effective team functioning to achieve common goals (Zaccaro and Bader, 2003). Zaccaro and Bader (2003, p.381) referred to the leader's responsibilities as "*processes*", examples of which included articulating a vision for the team and communicating this vision effectively to team members, developing trust, enhancing cohesion, managing conflict and promoting knowledge sharing. Zimmermann et al (2008) classified these responsibilities as being either task-oriented (such as defining tasks and roles) or relationship-oriented (such as emphasising shared values) or an overlap of the two (such as coordinating interactions across time zones). In a later study, Al-Ani et al (2011) posited that a leader's role involves structuring team tasks and supporting socio-economic group processes. According to Derven (2016), the virtual team leader must practice inclusive leadership whilst performing the above-mentioned roles.

Wakefield et al (2008) grouped the responsibilities of a virtual team leader into four roles; mentor, facilitator, monitor and coordinator. They specified that, the better able a team leader is to draw on multiple roles as appropriate, the better equipped the leader is to successfully manage a

virtual team. This may mean less conflict within the team and greater perceived effectiveness of the team leader. Kayworth and Leidner (2002) suggested that in a virtual context a leader need not project multiple roles simultaneously as in a traditional team context or as outlined by Wakefield et al, but can perform the single role of mentor with written communication skills. Unlike some of the other debates that problematise roles of leaders in virtual settings, mostly in identifying the challenges of performing various roles, this argument seems to suggest that leading in a virtual context is simpler than leading face-to-face since adopting a single role, rather than multiple roles, should, according to Kayworth and Leidner (2002), be sufficient for a leader to be effective in a virtual setting.

Zaccaro and Bader (2003) grouped the leader's responsibilities into three roles. As team liaison the leader nurtures trust and facilitates coordination and integration; as team direction-setter the leader moderates team conflict, develops efficacy, manages team affect, and generates shared understanding and meaning; and, as team operational coordinator the leader enhances cohesion, promotes idea sharing and information exchange and develops social and human capital.

On the other hand, Pullan (2016, p.58) indicated that performing a "*facilitative*" role, and not focusing on control and command, is essential to lead high performing virtual teams. Leaders should find ways to connect team members and ensure they willingly collaborate amongst themselves. They should ascertain that team members are motivated to perform effectively, this resulting in the development of strong relationships based on trust.

In their qualitative research study, Jawadi et al (2013) referred to Denison et al (1995) who had identified four categories of roles, namely the open system role where the leader acts as innovator and broker, the role involving the rational pursuit of goals where the leader acts as producer and director, the internal process role where the leader is both a coordinator and a monitor, and the human relations role which sees the leader being a facilitator and a mentor. Jawadi et al's (2013) research demonstrated that the roles of mentor and facilitator, and producer and director, positively affect relationship-building in virtual teams. Open

system behaviours have less of an influence and internal process roles have no impact on the quality of relationships in virtual teams. High quality exchanges are the result of the leader focusing on both work-oriented activities and behaviours as well as on socially-related and relations-oriented activities, the latter essential to foster trust building and team cohesion.

Research conducted by Wakefield et al (2008), Jawadi et al (2013), Fan et al (2014), Korzynski et al (2013) and Pullan (2016) as cited above specifically identified various roles assumed by a team leader. The author is of the opinion that these roles and the responsibilities associated with each can however still be categorised as being either task-oriented or relationship-oriented or an overlap of both as depicted in Figure 1. This diagram which summarises the author's thoughts with respect to the studies referred to above, indicates that leaders perform multiple roles and hold various responsibilities. Certain roles, such as the roles of producer and direction-setter, can be classified as task-oriented roles, whilst roles such as mentor and facilitator, can be classified as relationship-oriented roles. Other roles such as those of coordinator and monitor can be categorised as being a combination (or overlap) of both task-oriented and relationship-oriented roles. Therefore, the studies referred to at the start of this paragraph seem to further confirm that, irrespective of whether a leader is leading a virtual or a co-located team, a clear distinction in their roles and responsibilities is not apparent. In addition, Al-Ani et al's (2011) research findings have evidenced similarities in leader characteristics of both types of team setup.
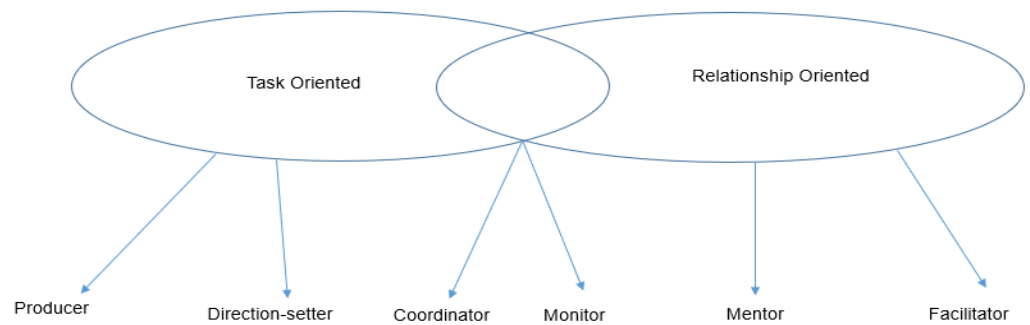
Figure 1 - Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

While there seems to be little evidence that leaders' performance and/or responsibilities differ significantly in virtual or face-to-face settings, Kayworth and Leidner (2002) sought to identify empirically the factors that contributed to effective virtual team leadership. Their research focused on 13 virtual teams from 3 different universities. Although results showed that the critical roles exhibited by leaders operating in a virtual context are similar to the ones manifest in a co-located team context, the authors, however, point out that it is the *emphasis*, or weighting, of certain leadership roles (such as communication) that may differ significantly as a result of situational factors (such as the nature of group interaction). Therefore, although many of the skills required to lead co-located teams may be applicable and transferable to a virtual context (Al-Ani et al, 2011), a certain degree of adaptation and modification on the part of the leader is still imperative. In fact, following a review of the literature incorporating studies on how technology has changed leaders and their roles, Cortellazzo et al (2019) concluded that to lead organisations in this technological age, leaders must develop different skills. These skills would be a combination of digital and human skills which will enable them to communicate effectively, foster team cohesion, cope with problems, engage in fast-paced change, and encourage initiative.

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2.8. <u>Behaviours and Skills Exhibited by Virtual Team Leaders</u>

The arguments outlined so far seem to suggest that a leader's roles remain the same irrespective of whether the team is co-located or virtual. However, due to the dispersion of team members in virtual teams, it may be more challenging for leaders to exercise particular responsibilities (Malhotra et al, 2007) and to fulfil their roles. Therefore, one may contemplate that it is the behaviours that leaders exhibit and the skills necessary to fulfil enact behaviours that may in effect differ. This could mean that certain behaviours and skills assume greater significance and importance in the virtual context. For example, drafting clearly written messages and seeking feedback is always important irrespective of whether the team is co-located or virtual. However, this may be more important in virtual teams since the incidence of face-to-face communication, where misunderstandings can be tackled immediately and any comprehension problems addressed quickly, is less frequent than in co-located teams. Lilian (2014) posits that since virtuality poses unique challenges to leaders, this new context makes leaders strive to obtain new skills (such as additional technical knowledge), to display particular traits (such as cross-cultural competence) and behaviours (such as initiating exchanges and knowledge sharing), and actively search for the necessary tools to operate effectively in this new environment. By doing so, leaders may be more successful in ensuring that challenges faced are converted into opportunities for the organisation.

The specific inherent features of virtual teams, and particularly the dispersion of team members that necessitates this adaptation of behaviours, tends to make the leadership demands of such teams different and more complex than those faced by traditional teams (Kayworth and Leidner, 2002). Way back at the start of the century when an interest in virtual teams started to develop, researchers had acknowledged that virtual teams faced "*unique issues*" (Kayworth and Leidner, 2002, p.9) and required "*new way[s] of leading*" (Avolio and Kahai, 2003, p.327) and "*different strategies for leading*" (Jarvenpaa and Tanriverdi, 2003, p.403) given that team members and tasks are effectively managed through technological means in a technologically-

enabled working environment (Dinh et al, 2014). More recent studies confirm this. In fact, Ford et al (2017, p.25) posit that virtual team leadership is a "*far different challenge*" than the leadership of co-located teams and Malhotra et al (2007, p.68) specify that virtual leadership requires all the leadership skills necessary for leading a co-located team "*and more*". Cascio and Shurygailo (2003) already had argued that when organisations become virtual, and therefore because work and communication are carried out through electronic means, both work procedures (such as conducting team meetings) as well as leadership practices (such as administering performance management exercises) need to be adapted, changed or modified to suit this context. Gurr (2004) acknowledged that leading a virtual team is significantly different to leading a traditional team. The virtual team leader must create an appropriate social climate through continuous communication efforts and must also be able to transmit exemplary interpersonal skills through the communication channels and methods adopted.

Furthermore, when Chamakiotis et al (2021) compared virtual teams formed out of choice before the Covid-19 pandemic to virtual teams which emerged during the pandemic, they suggest that, in the latter case when virtual teams were incorporated to ensure organisational continuity and survival (Richter, 2020), virtual team leaders faced particular issues and challenges. This was because team members were unprepared both in terms of technology and also mentally. This posed new challenges for leaders and necessitated alternative leadership practices and focus (Feitosa and Salas, 2020).

2.9. <u>Leadership Styles in Virtual Settings</u>

Earlier in this thesis, leadership theory has been reviewed at an abstracted level and specific leadership styles have not been discussed. However, as far as the author is aware, studies related to virtual leadership and virtual teams generally focus more specifically on the relevance of particular leadership styles to virtual settings. Inspirational leadership, transactional leadership and transformational leadership are leadership styles perceived

by researchers (such as Joshi et al (2009), Huang et al (2010), Tworoger et al (2013) and Lauring and Jonasson (2018)) to have great applicability to virtual contexts. Shared/emergent leadership is also considered effective in virtual environments (researchers such as Hoch and Kozlowski (2014) and Robert and You (2018) share this view). These leadership styles are discussed hereunder.

2.9.1. <u>Inspirational, Transactional and Transformational Leadership in Virtual Teams</u>

Joshi et al (2009) propose inspirational leadership as particularly suited to virtual settings since such leadership style is especially relevant for the development of socialised relationships. Following a web survey involving 247 customer service employees in a Fortune 500 organisation, they concluded that, by adopting this style, leaders could create a collective orientation (such as trust among team members) and commitment to the team. Joshi et al's findings show that virtual contexts represent "*situational enhancers*" (p.249) for inspirational leaders within which they act as the "*missing link*" (p.249) for facilitating commitment and trust in such settings. Their specific set of behaviours can eventually enhance group members' engagement and improve overall group performance, thereby making inspirational leadership behaviours critical to virtual settings. Inspirational leaders can serve as the focal point of a virtual team and assume a pivotal role within the team encouraging and inspiring followers to work towards the accomplishment of the pre-set vision and mission (Joshi et al, 2009) of the team and organisation. Empirical research was conducted by Lauring and Jonasson (2018). A survey, involving 174 members from 33 virtual research and development teams, confirmed that by engaging in inspirational motivation leadership, the team leader prompts team members to collaborate to achieve the team's shared goal. This focus can distract them from attending to other issues which may be affecting the global virtual team in a negative way, such as language-related problems.

In a study with a virtual team within a multinational corporation, Tworoger et al (2013) identified the applicability of inspirational

leadership to virtual contexts. In this case these researchers, as well as Huang et al (2010), also posit that transactional leadership and transformational leadership are appropriate styles since these styles provide structure, motivate and engage team members, give consideration to the socio-emotional aspect of team members and are also conducive to increased learning within virtual teams (Chang and Lee, 2013). However, regardless of the particular leadership style adopted, what Tworoger et al (2013) consider vital, is that leaders ensure that the act of leading is relevant to the context/situation present at the time as well as to the team type (Purvanova and Bono, 2009). They suggest that virtual team leaders should address follower expectations about leadership. Such expectations may include demonstrating superior communication skills, being approachable and caring to foster trust development and relationship building, being goal-oriented and directing activities towards the accomplishment of shared goals, and being culturally sensitive.

Huang et al (2010) conducted a laboratory study with 485 undergraduate students. Their research concentrated on the effects of transactional leadership and transformational leadership behaviours on task cohesion and cooperative climate under various communication conditions (varying degrees of media richness[8]). It attempted to give a reason for the importance of these leadership styles to team performance in virtual settings. Huang et al declared that transactional leadership is supplemented by transformational leadership by making the team, teamwork and team tasks important for team members (since their importance and saliency tends to diminish in virtual settings). Displaying such behaviours becomes especially critical in situations where media richness is lacking – something this review will comment on in a later section.

In empirical work drawing upon transformational and transactional leadership, Hambley et al (2007) sought to compare the effects and outcomes of such leadership styles within teams communicating face-

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[8] Media richness refers to the ability of a communications medium to achieve a shared understanding in uncertain and ambiguous situations (Daft and Lengel, 1986). This is discussed in section 2.12.3.

to-face and virtually (through videoconference or chat). Their results, obtained following research conducted among 60 experimental teams who were given a structured problem-solving exercise to complete, stressed the importance of face-to-face communication as being most effective in maximising team members' constructive interactions. This is of significance to leaders operating in a virtual context where face-to-face meetings are not a regular occurrence because it highlights the importance of carefully selecting the medium that allows these leadership styles to emerge so that through communication and collaboration initiatives, team cohesion is developed and sustained. The ways in which virtual leaders communicate, and their level of participation, also determine whether they demonstrate (or not) transformational qualities irrespective of their personality traits.

Leaders who do not have the ability to communicate clearly and appropriately may not be regarded as exhibiting transformational behaviours by their followers. This was highlighted by Balthazard et al (2009), who studied leader personality both in a virtual setting as well as in a face-to-face setting. The study, which involved input from 262 undergraduate business students, was undertaken utilising the five-factor personality model (measuring extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, emotional stability and conscientiousness), which is a conventional measurement method. Utilising this method meant that in this specific study, personality did not influence the formation of transformational leadership behaviours in virtual settings.

When comparing leaders' transformational behaviours in virtual and face-to-face settings in a laboratory experiment involving 301 undergraduate students, Purvanova and Bono (2009) concluded that transformational leadership has a stronger effect on team performance in virtual settings than in co-located team settings. Therefore, as Huang et al (2010) propose, transformational leadership may be particularly relevant in ambiguous communication conditions as created by electronic communications media and therefore in contexts characterised by social and psychological uncertainty (as is characteristic of virtual teams). One could surmise that leaders who

appropriate technology effectively and ensure that media richness is not lacking, tend to successfully overcome the proposed challenges inherent in virtual communication and such leaders are more likely to lead virtual teams that are successful in achieving their pre-set tasks and objectives.

2.9.2. <u>Shared Leadership in Virtual Teams</u>

Zigurs (2003, p.342) suggests that leadership within virtual teams is a "*system*" and a "*process*" and such leadership, although it does not deny the appointment of a formal leader (Kerber and Buono, 2004; Cortellazzo et al, 2019), allows for leadership to shift laterally, upward or downward depending on task, expertise and influence of team members (Chamakiotis and Panteli, 2017). This means that under this approach, which is termed shared or emergent leadership, distributed or rotating leadership (Balthazard et al, 2009), leadership in virtual teams becomes a collective effort distributed within the team (Zigurs, 2003; Chamakiotis et al, 2021). This kind of leadership involves the contribution of both leaders and followers and is influenced from multiple directions within the team and organisation. For example, although leaders, through their behaviours and actions, attempt to align followers' norms, values and ethics to the organisation's culture (top-down influence and direction), followers' influence and interpersonal dynamics are bottom-up processes that not only influence the leader's behaviours, but they also have a bearing on the leader's desired outcomes. In their theoretical paper, Dinh et al (2014) have also acknowledged both a top-down as well as a bottom-up influence on leadership. This concept seems to challenge the stability and certainty that is typically found in leader-centric structures and organisational authority systems.

Shared leadership implies a mutual influence process and some degree of voluntary compliance to influence by team members (this concept was discussed in section 2.3.4.2.). Shared leadership is characterised by collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility. In teams where leadership is 'shared', there is more cohesion, a greater propensity to trust and an increased urge to show commitment (Hoch

and Kozlowski, 2014). Shared leadership is considered appropriate to virtual teams because, in such teams, communication is less formal and team members, who are generally experts in their field, work autonomously.

Boisot (2011) considers the ATLAS collaboration, one of the physics experiments conducted by CERN, a typical example of shared leadership since leadership is occurring from multiple sources within the team. This collaboration involves over 3,000 physicists working in 174 universities and laboratories and are based in over 38 countries. Although the collaboration has a project management team, it is generally managed and smoothly functions through consensus, agreement and autonomy rather than through formal authority. Each team member can influence the team's direction and performance. This setup may be critical to virtual team success only when a directive and administrative form of leadership is deemed unnecessary for the promotion of team identification. In addition, shared leadership works when team members are empowered to take decisions and work autonomously (Walvoord et al, 2008; Drouin and Bourgault, 2013) to remove obstacles and solve complex problems without managerial support (Kirkman et al, 2004). It is also important when there is little to no risk of dependency on the leader (Huettermann et al, 2014) since all team members possess relevant unique knowledge, skills and backgrounds and are capable of communicating amongst themselves without leader intervention (Al-Ani et al, 2011). This kind of leadership calls for the leader to be flexible and willing to let other team members take the lead when necessary (Powell et al, 2004). Shared leadership may be especially relevant in cultures with an orientation towards flexibility and equality (Symons and Stenzel, 2007). The example portrayed above clearly demonstrates that although a formal leader for the ATLAS collaboration does exist, team members still assume leadership duties as necessary and as required at different stages of the project.

While most of the work above suggests some relevance of existing leadership theories/styles, based on a case study involving a Fortune

500 organisation, Al-Ani et al (2011) conclude that traditional leadership styles may not be applicable to virtual teams. They suggest that virtual teams provide ideal opportunities for different types of leaders as well as different types of leadership to emerge. Traditional leadership styles risk becoming less critical or even irrelevant in virtual teams. Depending on what the team has to deliver and also depending on specific stages in the team's life cycle, as referred to above, team members may move between being a leader to being a follower (Avolio and Kahai, 2003) and team members "*may share or rotate leadership roles*" (Zimmermann et al, 2008, p.321; Chamakiotis et al, 2021). Such emergent leaders ensure focus throughout the team's life (Cascio and Shurygailo, 2003).

The effective design of information technology systems is critical to maximise the benefit that can be derived from such emergent/shared leadership (Walvoord et al, 2008). However, over time the emergent leader can become less consensual and as a charismatic and dominant character, they will become more significant to the team (Symons and Stenzel, 2007). This, the researcher believes, will happen at the expense of legitimately appointed leaders whose authority would not be recognised by other team members. Such formal leaders may gradually start losing their ability to influence team members as such emergent leaders' presence within the team becomes stronger and more dominant. Also, this dominant behaviour may dampen the efforts and initiative of other leaders that have not as yet 'emerged'.

Shared leadership also implies that team members should have the motivation to lead (Kim-Yin and Drasgow, 2001). An individual's motivation to lead, which can be high or low, determines whether that individual will accept leadership training and whether they want to assume the role and responsibility associated with such leadership. A person's motivation to lead also dictates an individual's effort and persistence to be a leader. According to Kim-Yin and Drasgow (2001), there are three factors underlying a person's motivation to lead: affective-identity (the person enjoys leading), social-normative (the person leads for a reason such as a sense of duty), and non-calculative

(the person is not interested in the costs associated to leading when compared to the benefits). Personality, socio-cultural values, leadership self-efficacy and past leadership experience were identified as antecedents to motivation to lead. This implies that a person's motivation to lead is not a static concept but is dynamic and may evolve through learning and experience.

Shared leadership, therefore, may only work if the team leader and team members are open to the idea. According to Hoegl and Muethel (2016) not all leaders are willing to share leadership and this may happen because of their traditional understanding of what leadership is and represents, because they feel over-confident in their role, and due to a fear of becoming dispensable. This may also happen because team leaders are generally held accountable and responsible for team outcomes and therefore seek to maintain control. However, as seen in the ATLAS collaboration, team members did not only possess technical skills, but many were leaders in their respective fields. Therefore, accepting and valuing team members as a source of leadership behaviour by redefining their roles and entrusting them with additional responsibilities, by granting them autonomy and enabling them to take the initiative and involving them in decision-making, means identifying the true potential of the team and bridging the gap between leader and follower.

According to Hoegl and Muethel (2016) team leaders who believe in the value of shared leadership do encourage team members to engage in leader behaviours. However, since, as mentioned above, team leaders are ultimately responsible for goal achievement, decision-making may remain leader-centric. As a reaction to these inconsistencies, team members will cease from practicing shared leadership even though it is encouraged by the leader. Hoegl and Muethel propose changing traditional leaders' attitudes towards sharing leader responsibilities since a change in this direction would stimulate shared leadership and ultimately lead to superior team performance and outcomes.

Robert and You (2018) conducted a survey with 44 teams made up of 163 graduate students. They suggest that shared leadership facilitates

trust and creates a team environment characterised by mutual respect, cooperation and collaboration. Virtual team performance also improves due to team member satisfaction resulting from such shared leadership.

Hoch and Kozlowski (2014) empirically investigated the impact of shared leadership on team performance. They focused on examining the relationships between hierarchical leadership (transformational leadership and LMX), structural supports (such as reward systems and communication and information management systems) and shared team leadership within virtual teams. They concluded that hierarchical leadership is less strongly related to team performance the more virtual the team is, structural supports are more strongly related to team performance the more virtual the team is, and shared leadership contributed to team performance irrespective of the degree of virtuality of the team. Therefore, shared leadership was recommended for leading virtual teams due to the positive impact it has on the performance of the team. This resonates with the researcher's view that when team members are empowered and given responsibility to directly impact team operations and activities, their commitment and motivation to the achievement of team goals will be stronger. In virtual teams, empowering individuals and giving them the opportunity to participate in the leadership of the team, may increase trust and cohesion within the team. Creating this sense of shared leadership within virtual teams may therefore compensate for the lack of face-to-face communication within these teams (Hoch and Kozlowski, 2014).

2.10. <u>Conclusion</u>

In the preceding sections, the applicability of various leadership styles to virtual teams has been discussed. Transformational, inspirational and transactional leadership styles have been put forward as leadership styles most appropriate to virtual teams. The concept of shared leadership, which may also be visible in virtual teams, has also been discussed. Reference has been made to studies that have acknowledged the

existence of multiple influences on a leader's behaviours and actions as well as on team outcomes.

However, although the above-mentioned leadership styles have been deemed most appropriate to virtual teams, researchers such as Salter et al (2010) and DeRue (2011), argue that the leadership style adopted by the leader, as well as the leader's behaviours and actions, should be targeted towards the fulfilment of their followers' needs and expectations. In this way it is more likely that the desired team outcomes are achieved. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

2.11. <u>Adapting Leadership Style to Address Follower Expectations in Virtual Teams</u>

Salter et al (2010) believe that if leaders knew what followers expected of them and of their behaviours (implicit leader schemas), they could adapt these behaviours, actions and language to address follower expectations, attitudes and perceptions and in this way enhance motivation and the engagement of followers. This links to the empirical work of Whitford and Moss (2009) that makes reference to the impact of transformational leadership in virtual teams. These researchers, who conducted a survey with 165 employees, posit that transformational leadership can be affected by the regulatory focus of followers and therefore by the extent to which followers pursue immediate obligations or future aspirations. Therefore, it could be suggested that if leaders are aware of followers' orientations, they can positively influence followers' feelings of engagement, job satisfaction, attitudes towards work, and so on, through their transformational leadership behaviours (Huang et al, 2010) since such actions and behaviours will be targeted directly to followers' needs and expectations.

Leaders should adapt their behaviours and change their styles to motivate their followers to higher productivity and optimum performance, ensuring that these styles, actions and behaviours "*fit*" within their followers' "*zones of acceptance*" (DeRue, 2011, p.129). If leaders adopt styles which their followers believe are effective styles, their chances of motivating and

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engaging these followers is higher (Salter et al, 2010). Although this proposition made by Salter et al (2010) may be regarded as an inference to situational leadership theory, it is essential to emphasise that these researchers may actually be referring to implicit followership theory. The difference between the two theories lies in the fact that, in the former it is the leader alone who determines and chooses the style and approach and followers hold a "*static*" (Malakyan, 2014, p.14) role throughout the process. However, in the latter theory, the role and status of the follower are accentuated and followers have a greater impact on the style and approach selected by the leader.

Salter et al (2010), following a survey involving 306 students, propose implicit followership theory as applicable to the virtual team environment. In this case followers are both drivers as well as inhibitors of leadership and leadership outcomes (Blom and Alvesson, 2014) since they may, for example, considerably influence team activities through their actions and behaviours. In such cases the leader would not be the primary driver of the leadership process (as in situational leadership theory).

Based on existing evidence, the author is therefore inclined to propose that in the virtual context, followers' actions, behaviours and reactions, as well as their beliefs, impressions and perceptions of an effective leader, should condition the leader's choice of approach, if the leader is to positively influence followers' feelings, impressions and judgment. As a result, therefore, the style and approach selected by leaders may not necessarily be the leaders' obvious choice had the decision been solely dependent on them.

2.12. <u>Leadership Challenges</u>

As mentioned above, most literature indicates that leading virtual teams is a challenge. Virtual leadership necessitates the adaptation of existing skills and the acquisition of additional supplementary ones, which together comprise a leader's portfolio necessary to enable effective performance in a virtual setting (Jawadi et al, 2013; Cowan, 2014; Lu et al, 2014). To ensure the most appropriate leadership style and technique is applied to

these "*unique entities*" (Zakaria et al, 2004, p.17), virtual team leaders or "*e-leaders*" (as referred to by Lilian, 2014, p.1252) should be aware of their leadership responsibilities.

Just like team leaders in co-located teams, virtual team leaders articulate a vision for their team, communicate their vision, establish a plan for its accomplishment and ensure commitment and alignment to this vision by creating the operating values and norms of behaviour necessary to achieve goals and targets. However, as mentioned in section 2.8., these responsibilities may be more complicated to exercise in a virtual setting. This may be due to a lack of physical presence (Malhotra et al, 2007), to the existence of uncertainty which may affect the understanding of the leader's intent and vision (Walvoord et al, 2008), and also to a lack of visibility. In virtual settings there is less opportunity for face-to-face communication and for the monitoring of activities in real time (Fan et al, 2014) and therefore there is a lack of physical contact and a lack of visual and non-verbal cues (Zimmermann et al, 2008) such as facial expressions, gestures and voice intonation (Walvoord et al, 2008). Arguably, the lack of access to these forms of communication, can make a leader's role more complex and challenging. To deal with this issue, leaders operating in a virtual context adapt their behaviour accordingly to ensure they create an electronic presence. They do this by dedicating additional effort to establishing superior communication strategies that can compensate for challenges arising as a result of not being able to rely on these cues.

Researchers such as Kayworth and Leidner (2002), Horwitz et al (2006), Malhotra et al (2007), Symons and Stenzel (2007), Wakefield et al (2008), Cowan (2014) and Huettermann et al (2014) have carried out empirical research and/or literature reviews with the objective of drawing up a 'position description' for an ideal virtual team leader. Such 'job description' would include an identification of the set of duties and responsibilities typical of a virtual leader, indicating which of these assume more importance and relevance in virtual contexts (such as the responsibility to be equally visible to all team members irrespective of their location). This exercise is essential as it cannot be assumed that the leadership skills and

attributes manifest in a traditional or offline context can be transferred to a virtual context without any adjustment (Lu et al, 2014). The situation in which leadership is developed (the virtual context) affects the specific leadership behaviours and actions.

As mentioned in section 2.7, research tends to suggest that a leader's roles remain the same irrespective of whether the leader is leading a co-located team or a virtual team. In addition, the responsibilities identified by researchers as relevant to virtual team leadership overlap with those conceived as relevant for team leaders in a more traditional setting. Consensus amongst researchers has also been reached with regard to specific leadership behaviours which necessitate adjustment when applied in a virtual context, this being necessary in order to overcome challenges imposed by team member dispersion. The major challenges, as consistently mentioned in the literature, have been identified by the author to include trust establishment, team cohesiveness, communication problems, knowledge sharing and culture-related issues. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, these challenges are not restricted to virtual teams alone, but they are more accentuated in virtual settings just because of the way in which virtual team members communicate and collaborate. They therefore warrant deeper discussion due to their relevance to virtual teams and also because they are likely to impact team interactions and team dynamics.

2.12.1. Establishing Trust

Virtual team leaders establish a presence through technology and use such technology to interact with followers, to provide feedback and recognition, to address concerns and to solve problems, and to create a common ground so that a shared meaning context can develop (Bjorn and Ngwenyama, 2009). Mayer et al (1995) define trust as a dyadic construct between a trusting party and a party to be trusted. According to Cummings and Bromiley (1995) trust is maintained when there is effort to act and behave in good faith on commitments made, when there is honesty, and when the parties do not take advantage of one another even when the opportunity to do so presents itself. Breuer et al (2016) make reference to 'shared

willingness', 'vulnerability to others' and 'an expectation to perform and deliver' as essential for trust to be present within a team. Team leaders have the responsibility to develop such trusting relationships with team members.

Trust is critical in all teams but especially in virtual teams (Jarvenpaa et al, 1998; Joshi et al, 2009; Ferrell and Kline, 2018). Given that work and relationships generally function through information technology, establishing trust is complicated (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002). Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1999) posit that within virtual teams, trust does not operate as it would within traditional teams. In a virtual team, trust is more temporary and must be established more swiftly. The team leader plays an important role in this.

Trust is established by different means: by setting expectations and delivering results that meet and exceed set expectations (Cascio and Shurygailo, 2003; Ferrell and Kline, 2018); by being culturally sensitive and ensuring diversity is harnessed to improve the team's output and effectiveness (Malhotra et al, 2007; Symons and Stenzel, 2007; Pinjani and Palvia, 2013; Lilian, 2014); by tending to the socio-emotional aspects of the team (Mulki and Jaramillo, 2011); and by actively interacting and communicating with all followers (Cowan, 2014; Lilian, 2014).

Deliberate efforts to practice considerate leadership (Mulki and Jaramillo, 2011), to build a trust-based virtual culture. cohesion and shared meaning (Malhotra et al, 2007; Symons and Stenzel, 2007), should be made. These efforts should be founded on mutual perceptions of reliability, dependability, availability, care and concern (Mulki and Jaramillo, 2011; Ferrell and Kline, 2018). This will result in higher creativity and superior idea generation (Fan et al, 2014) and it will lower turnover intentions and higher extra-role performance (Mulki and Jaramillo, 2011). It will also eradicate feelings of isolation, dispersion and confusion felt by team members (Huang et al, 2010). In addition, it may facilitate information flow and knowledge sharing and encourage involvement (Huettermann et al, 2014).

Ferrell and Kline (2018) identified factors that could lead to mistrust in virtual teams. These included: time zone differences, geographical distance, limited visibility of the work of team members, lack of face-to-face communication, and reduced possibilities for informal interaction.

Jarvenpaa et al (1998) conducted empirical research among virtual teams. Their objective was to explore the antecedents of trust in teams whose members interact by using technology. In these teams, given that physical interaction is generally absent due to the geographical dispersion of team members, trust is essential but difficult to build. As a result of their findings, they concluded that reinforcing trust may be possible by adopting strategies such as ensuring clarity of tasks, goals and roles, rotating team leadership, and ensuring frequent interaction among team members. They also pointed out that, apart from demonstrating initiative and integrity and being results-oriented to achieve team goals, more importantly, virtual team members must have a predisposition to trust.

Mayer et al (1995) suggested that trusting the team leader depends on: whether the leader demonstrates ability and expertise given that this impacts team performance; the extent of overlap between leader and follower values and on the propensity of the leader to support and work for the collective (benevolence and altruism); and, whether the leader is perceived to be honest and reliable when fulfilling duties and obligations (integrity and consistency). Greenberg et al (2007) also focused on three ingredients to trust building, namely, ability, integrity and benevolence. In their research they clearly distinguished between trust in traditional teams and trust in virtual teams. In the case of the former, trust is generally established over time through regular physical interaction whereas, in the latter case, trust is harder to develop due to the absence of physical interaction. If swift trust develops, and in order to sustain such trust for the entire life of the team, given its fragile nature, such trust must be nurtured and constantly looked after.

This reaffirms the importance of nurturing trust in virtual teams which was the focus of Kanawattanachai and Yoo's (2002) empirical work. These researchers conclude that, although the teams participating in their study started off with similar levels of trust, high-performing teams were more successful than low-performing teams in developing high levels of trust and in maintaining such levels throughout the life of the project.

Legood et al (2020) posited that trust is essential for leaders to be able to make an impact with their behaviours. Trust has both cognitive and affinitive dimensions. Legood et al (2020) suggested that, in the context of one's relationship with the leader, affective trust is generally more important as this facilitates exchanges and interactions. However, in less hierarchical teams where team members work more independently, as is the case in virtual teams, cognitive trust may be more critical. The competence and dependability on team members is increasingly important.

In an earlier study by Legood et al (2016), which concentrated on the importance of leaders demonstrating trustworthy behaviours, it was suggested that leaders should constantly monitor their relationships with their followers with the objective of identifying areas where trustworthiness perceptions need to be strengthened. This would facilitate trust in individual leaders as well as in the teams and/or organisations they lead. Building trust should be regarded as an "*ongoing process*" (Legood et al, 2016, p.683) and the organisation's policies and procedures should be developed around the premise of continuous and consistent trust-building efforts and trustworthiness demonstration. Legood et al (2016) also referred to leader-follower distance which could affect trustworthiness perceptions. They indicated that, how 'close' or 'distant' a leader was to a follower, is a factor that will affect the trustworthiness rating that followers would give to their leader.

The 'distance' concept as referred to above has been conceptualised in different ways (by, for example, Lewandowski and Lisk, 2013). Distance can be physical when it refers to location and geography for

example, and it is psychological when it is perceived in respect of, for example, affinity, ability or mood. Distance can also be organisational. Lewandowski and Lisk (2013) split organisational distance into distance in dyads (involving the relations between leaders and followers), distance in teams (which can be aided or hindered by technological innovation) and cultural distance. The objective of their research was to provide an overview of the historical evolution of the distance construct and to identify various perspectives of how distance functions.

Leader-follower distance was focused on by Antonakis and Atwater (2002). They posit that leader distance is a factor that impacts trust formation and trust retention within virtual teams. According to their model, distance in leadership can be manifest in three independent dimensions: perceived social distance (differences in status, power, authority, etc.), leader-follower physical distance (how far/close followers are located from their leaders), and perceived leader-follower interaction frequency (the extent to which leaders interact with their followers). The latter two dimensions are particularly applicable to virtual teams where leaders and followers are physically distant from one another. According to Antonakis and Atwater (2002, p.689), ideally, the three dimensions mentioned above will be aligned in that, leaders are "*virtually close*" to followers when physical distance and interaction frequency are high but social distance is low. Lewandowski and Lisk (2013) mention an additional dimension which they believe should be added to the dimensions proposed by Antonakis and Atwater (2002), namely normative distance. Normative distance refers to the strength of follower identification in that, the more the leader matches the team's prototype, the more influence they can exert over team members.

Pinjani and Palvia's research (2013) highlighted a relationship between mutual trust and knowledge sharing in virtual teams. They concluded that trust is essential for relationship building and team effectiveness. Within virtual teams, swift trust can develop 'quickly' (Greenberg et al, 2007), but it is fragile (Zigurs, 2003; Greenberg et

al, 2007; Daim et al, 2012) and needs to be nurtured and looked after (Florea and Stoica, 2019). If this is not possible, intentions and meanings can be distorted and/or misinterpreted (Fan et al, 2014), communication breakdowns can occur and team members' psychological safety will be threatened (Daim et al, 2012). When team members feel psychologically 'safe' they are more inclined to share ideas, offer constructive criticism and ask others for help and assistance (Rosen et al, 2007). Team cohesion also suffers if trust is superficial (Florea and Stoica, 2019).

Pullan (2016) proposed that technological tools are just enablers and it is working through technology to develop strong virtual teams that is ultimately important. Ford et al's (2017) theoretical paper speaks about using technological cues to build trust. They propose harnessing the best available technology, ensuring it is fully compatible among users. They recommend granting virtual team members access to supporting information systems and storage, as well as access to team documents, data and decisions. They highlight the importance of establishing communication norms to be followed by all team members and of having a back-up plan which should be activated when communication breakdowns occur. Their final recommendation for establishing trust, which, according to them is "*the glue that holds virtual teams together*" (p.34) and therefore is responsible for the cohesiveness of the team (as discussed hereunder), involves investing in conferencing capabilities that allow team members to meet and see each other regularly.

The discussion above highlighted the importance of trust in virtual teams. More importantly, the discussion was able to draw out that trust is not dependent on an 'either/or' of technology or human-relational work. On the contrary, trust establishment can be influenced by both; although technology may act as a facilitator rather than a determinant of trust in virtual teams.

2.12.2. <u>Cohesiveness in Virtual Teams</u>

A lack of physical proximity and less possibilities for team member "*natural*" interactions (Lauring and Jonasson, 2018, p.393) make virtual teams more susceptible to cohesion problems (Joshi et al, 2009; Orhan et al, 2016; Hahm, 2017). Hahm (2017, p.4109) posits that "*cohesiveness refers to individual members' being attracted to the team, or the tendency of a team to remain unified*". Although this is important for teams in general, in virtual teams, the creation of a collective identity orientation and the establishment of a shared social context is more problematic and difficult to achieve (Jawadi et al, 2013). Hahm (2017, p.4106) also points out that within virtual teams, team members may have a "*shallower relationship*" and this has an impact on team identification and cohesion. Over time, team cohesion also impacts team performance (Mathieu et al, 2015; Florea and Stoica, 2019) since team tasks and daily jobs will be affected (Orhan et al, 2016). Chad et al (2001) and Chamakiotis et al (2021) stress the importance of strong relationships and team cohesion within virtual teams given their impact on the effectiveness, performance and satisfaction of these teams. Communication is the tool that has a direct influence on the social dimensions of the team, that is, on relationship-building, on cohesion and on trust.

Leaders that use information technology to highlight commonalities and minimise differences are more successful in achieving team cohesion. Sivunen (2006) strengthened this argument by proposing that technology can be a tool proficiently used to promote identification, since, through its use, leaders can send messages demonstrating care and empathy, they can give feedback, and they can bring out common goals and tasks. According to Florea and Stoica (2019), technological tools can aid team members to get to know each other and interact in similar ways as they would face-to-face. Harnessing such tools becomes essential to foster cohesiveness within the team. Potter and Balthazard (2002) had concluded that the interactional styles of virtual teams affect both team performance as well as team outcomes. By extension,

therefore, the tools used to interact also affect performance and outcomes. Hence, the importance of using the right tools in the most effective way.

In addition, Hoch and Kozlowski (2014) indicate that systems which have an indirect effect on the motivation and behaviour of virtual team members should be introduced. They term such systems "*structural supports*" (p.392) and, rightly so, they posit that such systems may be effective in compensating for the ambiguity, turbulence and unpredictability that exists in virtual environments. An example of a structural support is a reward system which is fair and transparent. Another example is the implementation of communication and information management systems. These systems will facilitate connectivity, remove perceptions of distance, and facilitate information accessibility and exchange. They will also foster the creation of stronger bonds and increase cohesion by promoting the collective, reducing feelings of lack of trust and eliminating anonymity.

According to Lewandowski and Lisk (2013), although technology may obscure the individual at work, it still has the potential to be configured in ways that highlight what the individual is working on. In such cases, work outputs can act as a substitute for individual visibility. In addition, because team processes can also be obscured in the virtual environment, team products should be made more visible (Bradner and Mark, 2008). Ensuring visibility of individual and team tasks, outputs and results, apart from increasing team bonding and cohesion and decreasing the incidence of creating leader-team perceptual distance (Lewandowski and Lisk, 2013), will also assist in reducing social loafing within virtual teams. In addition, Avolio and Kahai (2003) posit that electronic media may also help in shifting group members' attention away from individual differences and therefore result in greater unity and bonding between team members. This may be possible since, in virtual settings, feelings of belonging and support exist based on shared norms, intents and values rather than on shared social characteristics.

Empirical research focusing on virtual team members' personal and working relationships conducted by Hart and McLeod (2003) highlighted the necessity of working on shared task-related problems and stressed the importance of communication in personal relationships to create shared meaning, which in turn promotes team cohesion and social identification with the team (Huettermann et al, 2014). A proposition which was made by Hart and McLeod (2003) surprised the researcher. They theorised that, personal relationships are strong when communication is free from personal content. This affirmation did not resonate with the researcher's experience given that this is not the case within the Maltese organisations where she practices and with whom she interacts. The researcher however still supports another proposition made by Hart and McLeod (2003) when they suggest that, when communication is frequent but short, team members are still able to gauge content and intent since a shared meaning, a shared language and mutual knowledge would have developed. When proactive interactions and problem-solving initiatives between team members are encouraged, shared meaning and team cohesion are also likely to increase.

Since visual and auditory cues may be absent in a virtual environment, Hamilton and Scandura (2003) propose that in order to foster the development of team cohesion, virtual team members (i.e. both leaders and followers) must seek to develop the ability to personalise and emotionalise the communications media they utilise so that "*electronic chemistry*" (p.394) can be established and the type of social interaction within a team that leads to innovation and success can be enabled (Daim et al, 2012). In this way, process losses in the form of, for example, low cohesion, a lack of shared understanding among team members, low satisfaction, and high insecurity, will be reduced given that their propensity to occur in geographically virtual teams is high (Zaccaro and Bader, 2003).

In a study carried out by Watson (2007) as cited in DasGupta (2011), it was established that co-located team members reported higher levels of satisfaction than physically distant team members. By

projecting telepresence (this referring to the extent to which team members experience the presence of others and of themselves) and attempting to replicate face-to-face communication by harnessing the interactivity and richness (Huang et al, 2010) of the media being used, team cohesion may be more achievable (Zigurs, 2003; Cowan, 2014). Feelings of isolation and dispersion of team members can be minimised and satisfaction increased. Leaders who adopt a 24 x 7 orientation with team members (Lilian, 2014), who engage in behaviours and communication initiatives to motivate and inspire virtual team members, and those who directly address physical, operational and cultural differences by reacting and responding to team members' needs in a timely manner (Cowan, 2014), may be more successful in minimising feelings of isolation (Cortellazzo et al, 2019). They may also enhance the feeling of togetherness and achieve cohesion which can lead to success and organisational value creation (Lilian, 2014). Communication must be constant and inclusive of all team members (Colfax et al, 2009) as it is the tool that directly drives and influences the social dimensions of the team (Chad et al, 2001).

Horwitz et al (2006) identified the clarification of roles, responsibilities and objectives by the leader as the main factor contributing to virtual team success. Tied to this point is the establishment of clear expectations and the explicit communication of ownership and responsibility for assigned tasks, which the leader should clearly transmit to all virtual team members irrespective of their location (Daim et al, 2012) to enhance feelings of cohesion and bonding. Terence (2006) identified isolation and confusion as the two major virtual challenges faced within such teams. In a study conducted by Zimmermann et al (2008) participants considered it more important in virtual settings than in face-to-face settings that leaders make a conscientious effort to build and sustain effective partnerships and that they emphasise shared values to actively address cohesion. Tying the followers' sense of self to the collective (Huettermann et al, 2014), which is especially relevant in collectivist cultures (Avolio et al,

2014), is also an effective means of strengthening the bond between the individual and the team.

Huang et al (2010) conducted quantitative research with 485 undergraduate students. Their objective was to examine how transactional and transformational leadership behaviours influence virtual group cohesion (task and social) and how these in turn influence the satisfaction of team members with communication activities they engage in, decision preferences and length of task. Given the importance attributed to the richness of a communications medium in a virtual setup, it was not surprising that results showed that such media richness affects leadership and has a bearing on the different ways by which leaders promote cohesion within virtual teams. Therefore, a lack of media richness increases the challenge for virtual team leaders. For example, as a result of their empirical work, Hambley et al (2007) concluded that, although task performance is not affected by the communication medium used, social interactions are affected. They suggest that desktop videoconference can, however, be a close substitute to face-to-face communication and can produce teams that are just as cohesive.

Evidence tends to support the notion that cohesion may also be dependent on the specific type of communications medium used by the team. The more vivid and interactive the medium is, the greater the capability to improve telepresence, and the easier it is to eradicate feelings of isolation and dispersion of team members (Zigurs, 2003).

From the above analysis it is evident that researchers, whether through theoretical analysis or following empirical work, believe that a virtual team is held together, and team members feel a sense of bonding and belonging to their team, as a result of the leader's actions and behaviours. This suggests that literature relating to cohesion in virtual teams, still places the leader as the causal agent and followers' input is not recognised.

A counter perspective, and one aligned to the notion that leadership and followership are part of the same process, is Boisot (2011) who rejects the notion that it is the sole role of the leader to hold a team together. Boisot (2011) concentrated on the ATLAS experiment conducted by CERN. This collaboration has a project management team but the project leader merely acts as a spokesperson for the collaboration and is not responsible for enhancing team cohesion and bonding. Boisot (2011) therefore argues that the leader does not seem to be acting as a reference point for team members and is neither acting as a facilitator nor as a promoter of team cohesion and bonding. What actually keeps the team together is a combination of various factors: the common focus of the team members (the ATLAS detector), which coordinates members' actions; the shared values and beliefs that maintain this focus; and the enabling role played by the global connectivity made possible through new information and communication technologies. Symons and Stenzel (2007, p.1) shared this view since they postulate that virtual team members are "*unified by the project*". Therefore, unlike in a traditional team setting where the leader continuously motivates team members to work together and to contribute to the achievement of the team's objectives, in the case of the CERN project (which is in effect a virtual team), the focus of team members seems to have been enough to ensure dedication and commitment without leader intervention. Following his analysis and research, Boisot (2011) also concluded that, had physical presence and face-to-face communication been inherent to this collaboration, they still would not have been factors that determined its success. What determined the success of the project was without doubt the possibility to tap on dispersed expertise. This came as a result of the virtual nature of the collaboration that did not need to rely on traditional methods of collaboration and/or on traditional organisational arrangements.

The following section discusses the importance of technology in enabling such virtual communication. It also focuses on media richness as a factor that may hinder or assist in the effectiveness and efficiency of virtual team communication.

2.12.3. Communication Technology

In and of itself technology creates distance (Lewandowski and Lisk, 2013) in that it reduces the incidence of face-to-face meetings and it creates new ways of communicating which users must learn and adapt to. In addition, technology has replaced individuals occupying various functions and roles. However, if hardware and software systems are designed and used as intended, technology will not create distance but reduce it.

Physical distance is known to create challenges for leaders and may affect team outcomes (Kerr and Jermier, 1978; Howell et al, 1997). Bass (1990) suggests that distance negatively affects the quality of leader-follower exchanges and it may also reduce leader influence. Yagil (1998) believes that distance makes it more difficult to directly observe follower behaviour and actions and it is therefore more challenging to monitor follower performance (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002). Notwithstanding that physical distance can create conditions that are not conducive for leadership (as referred to above), technology may be able to bridge the gap. Advances in communication technology 'reduce' the physical distance between team members as it facilitates leader-follower interactions and collaboration. Antonakis and Atwater (2002, p.699) conclude that leader-follower distance seems to be "*a defining element of the leadership influencing process*".

Virtual team leaders play a major role in reducing distance. They ensure the establishment of efficient communication practices taking into consideration structure, expectations and implementation of such systems (Walvoord et al, 2008). Selecting the right communications tool for the team will assist in this. The right communications tool will help to establish an environment that promotes and sustains the sharing of both explicit[9] and tacit[10] knowledge. It should also ensure

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[9] Explicit knowledge refers to knowledge that is objective (Gamble, 2020). Such knowledge is easily disseminated, transferred, transmitted and shared in the form of data, documents, tables, instructions, procedures, specifications, etc. (Sohrabi and Naghavi, 2014).
[10] Tacit knowledge is *""know-how" that exists solely in the minds of individuals"* (Gamble, 2020, p. 1123). Tacit knowledge is intangible and exists in the form of actions, experiences, values, etc. which cannot be formally and systematically transferred and shared amongst individuals (Sohrabi and Naghavi, 2014).

that virtual collaboration and teamwork are supported (Karpova et al, 2009). The tools used by the team have an important effect on team interaction styles and on team cohesion (Hambley et al, 2007). It is therefore imperative that virtual team members use the technology provided in a meaningful way, that they practice using the technology aiming to increase their proficiency in it and that, through such technology, they are able to communicate with people from different backgrounds and cultures and who are operating in different time-zones (Karpova et al, 2009). Roman et al (2019) identify the following criteria which are important when choosing such a tool: the richness of the tool, synchronicity, feedback speed, ease of use and understanding by non-tech savvy team members, and the reprocessing capability of the tool.

Walther and Bazarova (2008) refer to the Theory of Electronic Propinquity (TEP) which was originally presented by Korzenny (1978). TEP focuses on the relationships among factors related to media, users, task and setting, the combination of which affects the psychological feeling of closeness that people engaging in communication do experience when using different communication media (the electronic propinquity (EP) construct). This involves being functionally and not necessarily physically close to others. EP increases as a result of the communication medium's bandwidth, the mutual directionality of the communication channel, and it also depends on the communication skills of the users of the medium. EP decreases if the information being exchanged is complex, if multiple rules must be followed by the users, and if multiple communication media are made available for use. Therefore, this theory proposes that a combination of factors determine communication satisfaction and propinquity. Although this theory was introduced prior to computer-mediated communication, it can still be applied to modern settings.

TEP bears similarity to Daft and Lengel's (1986) theory of media richness. Media richness refers to the ability of a communications medium to enable the growth and sustainability of a shared

understanding in situations characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity (Daft and Lengel, 1986) as innate to virtual collaborations. According to Daft and Lengel (1986), a medium is of high richness if it scores high on bandwidth, mutual directionality, natural language and personalization. Daft and Lengel (1986), and more recently Ferrell and Kline (2018), identified face-to-face communication as the richest medium available, since in-person interaction provides for immediate feedback and multiple verbal and non-verbal cues. Virtual collaborations, however, may be considered of low richness and may therefore benefit from appropriate technological communication tools which promote visibility (as indicated by Ford et al, 2017) and enable team members to feel as if they are 'there'. The medium of information used (such as face-to-face, telephone, videoconference, etc.) affects the richness of the information. Therefore, when problems are highly complex in nature, it would be beneficial if a richer communications medium were to be used. A lack of media richness creates a challenge for virtual team leaders (Huang et al, 2010) since understanding team members' thoughts, feelings and behaviours becomes more problematic due to reduced visibility. Special attention is therefore necessary to maximise media richness through the technological tools selected for team use. Communication technologies that imitate more closely face-to-face communication, such as voice or video-based technologies, are richer than text-based communication technologies, such as email. Options, such as instant text, fall somewhere in between (Ferrell and Kline, 2018). In this digital age, teams are no longer only working with basic messaging and video-conferencing systems, but they must be proficient in the use of enterprise social media (such as Slack and GroupMe) and collaborative editing suites (such as Google Drive and Microsoft Teams) (Larson and DeChurch, 2020). Such tools make interactions more visual and, the more visual the interactions are, the more virtual team leaders have the possibility to replicate and adopt traditional leadership styles and behaviours in virtual teams (Pinar et al, 2014) and also the more cohesive the team will be (Cortellazzo et al, 2019). As a result, feelings of isolation, which may compromise

the mental wellbeing of team members (Eckhardt et al, 2019), are minimised.

Notwithstanding this, technology is only partly responsible for the richness of a communications medium. There are other factors (as mentioned hereunder) which may negatively affect media richness and which therefore necessitate consideration on the part of the leader.

In order to succeed in their intent, it is not only the leader who may need to be proficient in the use of technology (Avolio and Kahai, 2003; Huang et al, 2010; Lu et al, 2014), but also team members would benefit if properly trained to use the technology available. Team members' prior history, experiences and perceptions are all relevant factors that should be taken into consideration when choosing a specific information and communication technology (Walvoord et al, 2008) and they are also factors that affect the richness of the medium being used (Huang et al, 2010). The choice of communication media is important because it can impact the development and/or erosion of trust. In the initial stages of team formation, when a positive first impression is essential, such choice becomes all the more important.

Daim et al (2012) posit that no one single e-collaboration tool can effectively address the void left by a lack of face-to-face communication. Thus, it may be beneficial if each team member, and not only the leader, contributes thoughts about how the technology and tools available can be aligned to task characteristics to boost performance and relationship building (Zigurs, 2003). In this way, team members can be empowered and feel more autonomous, this making them feel capable of responding to challenges and of solving problems whilst being confident in their own abilities (Kirkman et al, 2004). They may also be able to regulate their own work and performance (Huang et al, 2010), whilst feeling a sense of interdependence and reliance on one another (Hart and McLeod, 2003; Sivunen, 2006). The team leader then monitors such progress and ensures that all team members are included, that they benefit

from their involvement in the virtual team, and that their contribution is recognised and appreciated (Malhotra et al, 2007).

Empirical research conducted by Olaisen and Revang (2017) confirmed that it is possible for trust, social interaction and knowledge sharing to be developed through online technological platforms even if physical interaction is absent. This has been made possible due to vast improvements in technology which allow virtual communication to be of high quality. Olaisen and Revang also mention that this advancement is reducing the need for travel, since innovations and solutions can be shared through online platforms.

Avolio and Kahai (2003) suggest that leaders are responsible for high-quality interactions both outside and inside the organisation. The way by which leaders leverage information technology and use the 'e' in their leadership affects their image, ethics, responsiveness, network-building initiatives and coalitions. It is important that leaders balance, as much as possible, the intents of all stakeholders and they should give serious thought to the impact of their actions on the entire value chain (Jarvenpaa and Tanriverdi, 2003).

In addition, Horwitz and Santillan (2012) believe that by investing in techniques and technologies which provide structure, facilitation and transferability, organisations would be providing virtual teams with a platform to help transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge (knowledge sharing is a challenge faced by virtual teams and is discussed below). This would bring them a step closer to ensuring that the diverse knowledge base possessed by team members is translated into competitive advantage for the organisation.

2.12.4. Knowledge Sharing and Knowledge Transfer

Virtual team leaders are faced with multiple challenges related to communication and knowledge diffusion (Lilian, 2014). Besides the ability to use technologies efficiently, and acknowledging the challenges surrounding trust and team cohesion, another major aspect for working in teams is knowledge sharing. Leaders play a major role in creating an environment and team culture conducive to

knowledge sharing. In such an environment, team members feel psychologically 'safe' to openly discuss and share their ideas and views (Rosen et al, 2007; Daim et al, 2012). The challenges associated with knowledge sharing tend to be felt stronger in virtual teams than in face-to-face teams (Horwitz and Santillan, 2012). In fact, Reed and Knight (2010) indicate that a higher risk is associated with virtual team projects than with traditional team projects due to insufficient knowledge transfer within virtual teams.

According to a study by Rosen et al (2007), barriers to knowledge sharing in virtual teams include a lack of trust among team members, cultural diversity, technological constraints, time constraints and tight deadlines, team leader constraints, and a failure to develop a collective knowledge base which team members can access and which is valuable to the team. This is also referred to as a "*transactive memory system*" (Rosen et al, 2007, p.261). To overcome these barriers, effective electronic communication is essential so that social interaction can develop, and knowledge, experiences and insights critical for accomplishing team goals can be shared. Effective knowledge sharing occurs when the team's knowledge base (both explicit as well as tacit knowledge) is effectively captured and shared with all team members. This, apart from leading to increased team cohesion, satisfaction, motivation and enhanced team and organisational performance, can also contribute to the creation of a more positive virtual experience, to the growth and development of team members, and to synergistic teamwork.

From a study carried out amongst 58 virtual teams, Pinjani and Palvia (2013) concluded that due to geographical dispersion of team members, and since information technology is the primary means of communication, virtual teams are susceptible to knowledge sharing and trust related issues. Through their empirical work they confirmed that a direct and positive relationship exists between knowledge sharing and mutual trust in virtual teams, trust being essential for relationship building. Hahm (2017) added that the more authentic the leadership is, the existence of a positive team climate and the

psychological empowerment of team members, all contribute to increasing information sharing. These will also boost creativity and diversity within the team. Therefore, virtual teams should concentrate on cultivating quality relationships with the team and among team members to encourage idea generation and exchange and thereby develop a sound knowledge base and information-sharing forum.

Leaders may initially stimulate and motivate the team by adopting an appropriate "*motivating language*" (Fan et al, 2014, p.422), a "*shared work language*" (Bjorn and Ngwenyama, 2009, p.250) or "*a common language*" (Cortellazzo et al, 2019, p.14) to share critical information and knowledge. They may then seek to develop a platform where tacit knowledge can be transformed into explicit knowledge and shared as value-laden knowledge which is well structured, understood and easily accessible by all team members. This knowledge base will continuously develop as team members' interdependence and reliance on one another increases. Achieving team-level rather than individual-level learning may be possible (Pinar et al, 2014). Through their behaviours and actions, leaders may be able to positively influence these exchanges and promote understanding and strong relationships (Hart and McLeod, 2003). By monitoring team member participation and interactions and ensuring team members are adequately rewarded for their contributions, leaders may be effective in balancing knowledge creation with reward distribution (Jarvenpaa and Tanriverdi, 2003). This collaborative approach will also ensure minimum conflict (Chang and Lee, 2013; Pinjani and Palvia, 2013) and less trust depletion (Zaccaro and Bader, 2003) and therefore less disruption to team performance and organisational outcomes (Wakefield et al, 2008).

Pithon et al (2006) investigated the task of communicating from a distance. They conclude that technological advancement will result in new ways of distributing and transferring knowledge. These innovations will also lead to the reinforcement and strengthening of cooperative work and collaboration within teams operating in the virtual space. Chen et al (2007), whose research focused on

collaboration technology to assist in virtual team dynamics, stressed the importance of installing specialised IT systems. These systems would make it easier for virtual team members who are engaged in different business processes to connect, collaborate and work together by sharing information. Knowledge sharing will enable team members to take decisions for the good of the collective.

2.12.5. <u>Culture</u>

The possibility of bringing together geographically dispersed individuals with different expertise, knowledge and specialisation is one of the major advantages of virtual collaboration (Cascio, 2000; Zaccaro and Bader, 2003; Rosen et al, 2007; Badrinarayanan and Arnett, 2008; Hunsaker and Hunsaker, 2008; Jawadi et al, 2013; Feitosa et al, 2018). However, this potential benefit may, if not effectively managed, be the cause of multiple problems for the virtual team.

Hofstede (1980, p.24) defined culture as "*the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another*". Multinational virtual teams bring with them "*cultural variations*" (Symons and Stenzel, 2007, p.4) and "*multiple cultures working at the same table*" (Al Zain et al, 2018, p.29). Apart from influencing behaviours, the norms and values specific to an individual's national culture influence the way knowledge is shared and learned (Zakaria et al, 2004). A limited acceptance of, and respect for, different cultures, for their norms, principles and values may be a cause of conflict and unrest (Al Zain et al, 2018). This can affect communication and team relations (Kelley and Sankeya, 2008), as well as trust and ultimately team performance (Chang et al, 2011).

A lack of regular reciprocal exchange of cultural issues, perspectives, and ideas (Zakaria et al, 2004) and the unwillingness to actively participate in such exchange by all team members, which would foster the development of cross-cultural competence and understanding, is another problem which is more pronounced in a

virtual setting. The absence of such exchange of views and ideas can negatively affect relationship-building and can have a bearing both on the establishment of a knowledge-sharing culture that should transcend cultural differences and on trust-building amongst team members. This exchange is also important to identify *"commonalities"* (Majchrzak et al, 2004, p.137) amongst team members, especially because individuals are more likely to feel comfortable interacting with others who are similar to them, this leading to "*interpersonal attraction*" (Chang et al, 2011, p.308). Au and Marks (2012, p.274) argue that "*cultural differences may influence how team members attach to, and identify with one another within their virtual teams*".

Through communication, people get to know each other and learn to appreciate each other's interests and differences (Symons and Stenzel, 2007), cultures and backgrounds, and decision-making styles (Malhotra et al, 2007). Since these differences affect the way people work, their approach to problem-solving (Majchrzak et al, 2004) and the way they interact with others, it is important to be aware of the cultural traits of team members. Understanding other cultures will ease communication and make it more effective (Al Zain et al, 2018).

Cultural barriers make it difficult to collaborate and coordinate virtual team activities and to integrate thought processes, expectations and work practices (Ale Ebrahim et al, 2009). Team leaders are responsible for overcoming these barriers ensuring diversity is harnessed, valued and appreciated (Malhotra et al, 2007). They should encourage the regular and reciprocal exchange of perspectives/opinions to find *"commonalities"* (Majchrzak et al, 2004, p.137) and then build on these commonalities and "*capitalise*" (Chang et al, 2011, p.308) on existing differences to ultimately achieve a "*common reality*" (Zakaria et al, 2004, p.23). By establishing a "*common language*" for the team (Majchrzak et al, 2004, p.136) and by 'visibly' appreciating and understanding diversity of work methods, of expertise and of opinions, the leader is "*sow[ing] the seeds for building competency-based trust*" (Malhotra et al, 2007,

p.63), which trust will eventually replace the trust initially created (Robert et al, 2009). This will lead to increased bonding (Malhotra et al, 2007), and therefore to cohesion and deep trust (Symons and Stenzel, 2007) whilst concurrently minimising conflict.

2.13. <u>Conclusion</u>

Virtual team literature has generally focused on the advantages and disadvantages of virtual teams, on the leadership styles most effective in those teams and on the challenges faced by virtual team leaders. This research was primarily carried out as far back as the early 2000. Various authors around that time highlighted that different strategies are needed to lead virtual teams (Avolio and Kahai, 2003; Jarvenpaa and Tanriverdi, 2003) and that virtual team leadership is a far different challenge than traditional leadership since virtual teams face unique challenges (Kayworth and Leidner, 2002). Some authors have aimed to investigate existing theories (see the earlier sections of this chapter) highlighting their applicability to virtual teams. However, it seems that debates on leadership and virtual teams have paused for some time and research into the subject is now focusing on topics related to, for example, increasing trust and cohesion by using technology, training individuals to form part of virtual teams, and harnessing the advantages of artificial intelligence to improve efficiency and team processes. This review therefore highlights the lack of more recent empirical work on the way in which leadership behaviours manifest themselves in virtual settings. Little, or no, research has looked at the way in which leadership and followership work in a time where technological advances are significant and when the predominance of virtual in today's organisations is increasing. This underlines the need to resume earlier debates to add empirical evidence.

In addition, developments in the field relating to virtual teams do not seem to be reflecting the developments in leadership and followership literature discussed in section 2.3. In fact, debates focusing on virtual teams remain primarily leader-centric. In the above analysis it is evident that, within virtual teams, leaders are positioned as the causal agents and followers

are not considered to be active contributors to team outcomes. The leader is at the centre of all debates within this field of research. For instance, literature refers to leadership styles, leader behaviours and leadership challenges. Building trust and cohesion, sharing knowledge, solving culture-related issues and leveraging the information technology available to the team, are responsibilities attributed to the leader. Debates are seemingly being restricted to the leader and leadership. The follower and followership lack recognition. This seems to indicate that virtual team literature has not adapted to and captured the developments in leadership and followership thought. Within this stream of literature, team members (followers) are generally positioned as passive recipients of the leader's actions. The premise that the follower and followership are part of leadership is, in so far as the researcher is aware, not reflected in current literature relating to virtual teams.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, teams may not exist as purely virtual (Purvanova and Bono, 2009; Al-Ani et al, 2011, Gibbs et al, 2017; Asatiani and Penttinen, 2019; Chamakiotis et al, 2021) but may have dispersed, as well as co-located members. Section 2.14. addresses the hybrid team, a subset of the virtual team. Literature specifically concentrating on hybrid teams is sparse. For this reason, this literature review has primarily focused on virtual teams and their leadership, and subsequently on challenges faced by such teams. In so doing, the researcher assumed that, given that hybrid teams also have a virtual component, it is likely that the same type of leadership and followership challenges are applicable to hybrid teams, that they face similar challenges, and that they are susceptible to similar problems as virtual teams. The following section will demonstrate this argument in more detail, while articulating more clearly the concept pivotal to this thesis, namely the Hybrid Team.

2.14. The Hybrid Team

As mentioned in section 2.2., teams exist on a "*continuum of virtuality*" (Zigurs, 2003, p.339; Hoch and Kozlowski, 2014; Chamakiotis et al, 2021). Teams can be traditional where team members are all co-located, totally

virtual where all team members are dispersed, or they can be composed of both co-located and dispersed members. Based on the literature surveyed, it is the author's view that research generally concentrates on the extreme ends of this continuum. What is evident is that such extremes may not be portraying a realistic picture of today's work settings (Purvanova and Bono, 2009; Al-Ani et al, 2011; Hoch and Kozlowski, 2014) because most teams are of a "*hybrid*" nature (Al-Ani et al, 2011, p. 225). In today's business environment different combinations exist (Gibbs et al, 2017; Asatiani and Penttinen, 2019; Chamakiotis et al, 2021), all operating at varying degrees of virtuality (Hertel et al, 2005). When teams are not purely virtual, some members may be spatially or geographically distributed and therefore rely on technology to communicate (Balthazard et al, 2009) and perform their tasks, whilst other members of the same team may be working in close proximity communicating face-to-face. Also, people can concurrently be members of different teams. They can be working in a traditional environment with ready and easy access to their team whilst at the same time working virtually as members of a virtual team. These combinations complicate matters for both a leader as well as for team members and therefore understanding how leaders and team members cope with this reality is becoming a priority. Endersby et al (2017, p.78) state that "*where the team is situated along the continuum has important considerations for leadership, for virtual leaders, and for the different ways leadership dimensions—such as social power and prestige, topic expertise, and adaptive facilitation—may be expressed*".

As discussed, given that hybrid teams are a subset of virtual teams, one can assume that the leadership debates relevant to virtual teams are also relevant to hybrid teams. It is also more likely that, because hybrid teams communicate using technology, they face similar challenges as virtual teams.

However, the 'hybrid' nature of these teams may mean that hybrid teams also face problems which are more prevalent when a team is made up of both co-located and virtual members. The literature specifically refers to a "*gap*" (Cascio and Shurygailo, 2003, p.367) that can be created and felt between groups. The leader should try to eradicate any 'us vs them'

tendencies if and as they arise. Based on the proximity of the leaders to the members of their team, in-groups and out-groups can form since leaders may interact more with team members who work in close proximity to them. Virtual team members may get the feeling that they have less opportunities than co-located team members and that their opinions carry less weight (Avolio and Kahai, 2003) as a result of them being "*out of sight*" (Mulki and Jaramillo, 2011, p.904). To avoid this from happening, it may be important for leaders to devise ways to reduce 'distance' between team members. It is essential to balance such relationships ensuring that they provide the same level of access to all team members irrespective of their location (Sivunen, 2006) and they also provide increased opportunities for social and emotional interaction (Mulki and Jaramillo, 2011).

Therefore, by encouraging interaction and involvement of all team members irrespective of their location, those who are distant from their leaders will not misjudge these leaders or misinterpret their actions. By giving regular updates of the team's position at different stages, by keeping team members continuously informed of project milestones reached and completed, and by indicating how each team member's work made this achievable, can help eradicate any feelings of confusion and isolation that may develop. Employees have a need for affiliation, and when this need is not satisfied, anxiety thrives (Mulki and Jaramillo, 2011).

Diversity is another factor that can hinder knowledge sharing and disrupt team processes by leading to the formation of sub-groups (Homan et al, 2008). The formation of sub-groups may more likely exist within a hybrid team due to the setup of these teams. The creation of sub-groups was investigated by Al-Ani et al (2011) who analysed team leadership in a Fortune 500 organisation operating in the computer technology and software development field. The teams in their study were generally hybrid and used collaborative technologies regularly, irrespective of whether they were co-located or distributed. Al-Ani et al's analysis indicates that, as a result of positive leadership behaviours and actions, no in/out group tensions were felt but rather a shared team identity prevailed. These positive leadership behaviours include, taking initiatives to develop trust

and respect amongst team members and facilitating team meetings and brainstorming sessions.

The lack of more substantive work, particularly more recently, indicates the lack of clarity on the way leadership and followership operate in such complex environments. Given the current state of the world, particularly focusing on the impacts of the pandemic, this offers an opportunity for further empirical insights.

2.15. <u>Defining Leadership and Followership – Reflecting on the Literature</u>

The review presented above demonstrates how leadership theory evolved and changed over the years. It aims to provide an overview of different thinking and empirical work that have contributed to the ongoing debates and development. From being a one-sided approach where the leader was fully responsible for leadership and its outcomes, leadership can now also be conceptualised as a process in which followers play an equally important role (DeRue, 2011; Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al, 2014). Recognition of this fuelled the development of followership theory which distributes responsibility for leadership to both leaders and followers. The lens was reversed and studying followers' perspectives as causal agents of leadership and its outcomes (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014) is being recognised by researchers as providing a more complete understanding of the leadership process.

As a result of these different conceptualisations of the leadership construct, multiple definitions of leadership can be found in the extant literature. Definitions vary depending on the cultural, historical and academic backgrounds of researchers (Malik and Azmat, 2019). Additionally, the time in history when they were conceptualised and the school of thought most prevalent at the time further shape the lens through which leadership is viewed and articulated. For example, Tannenbaum and Massarik (1957, p.3) define leadership as "*interpersonal influence, exercised in situation and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals*". Gardner (1990) defines leadership as a process through which a group of followers is persuaded

to work towards a common goal. For Northouse (2007), leadership involves an individual influencing a group with the intention of achieving an objective. These definitions were selected intentionally by the researcher to demonstrate that, although they were conceptualised by different researchers at different times in history, and they each have their own different characteristics and features, the definitions still share some similarity. Leaning on those three definitions[11], leadership involves three essential elements: an element of communication and interaction between leaders and followers, an element of influence and persuasion, and an ultimate goal or objective.

As can be inferred from the definitions above, leadership and followership exist in tandem. Andersen (2019) argues that defining 'followership' and a 'follower' is not an easy task given that they are notions that can be viewed from multiple perspectives and their definition is dependent on which perspective is taken. In fact, the definitions below, although having some elements in common, have been selected by the researcher because they exemplify multiple facets of the followership construct. Wortman (1982, p.373) views followership as "*the process of attaining one's individual goals by being influenced by a leader into participating in individual or group efforts toward organizational goals in a given situation*". In his work on followership, Kelley (1988, p.147) posits that followership involves "*see[ing] both the forest and the trees*", socially interacting with others, giving little to no importance to status, pursuing goals and working towards a common purpose with the team. Bjugstad et al (2006, p.304) consider followership to be "*the ability to effectively follow the directives and support the efforts of a leader to maximize a structured organization*". In Crossman and Crossman's (2011, p.484) definition, followership is "*a relational role in which followers have the ability to influence leaders and contribute to the improvement and attainment of group and organizational objectives. It is primarily a hierarchically upwards influence*". Followership is, for others, the "*mirror image of leadership*" (Yung and Tsai, 2013, p.48).

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[11] The purpose of this thesis is not to debate the definitional differences. The point of this comparison is to ensure a working definition is presented that reflects common debates and has relevance to the work undertaken in this study.

Followership seems to be often conceptualised in terms of how, as a concept, it relates to leadership (Crossman and Crossman, 2011).

Although multiple definitions of both leadership and followership exist in literature, no single definition captures the essence of what leadership and followership mean to the researcher. To capture the broad-based essence that forms the main perspective of the researcher's view on leadership, for the purposes of this study, leadership will be defined as;

"*A dynamic interactional process through which individuals are motivated and influenced to work towards the achievement of common team goals*".

By consequence, a leader is the individual who motivates and inspires others to attain common team targets and objectives.

With the belief that followership is part of the leadership process, followership is defined as;

"*A social process which necessitates the acceptance of individuals to be influenced and motivated to achieve common team goals*".

By consequence, a follower is therefore the individual who is influenced and motivated by others to reach a common team objective – but as an active participant in this influence and motivation process.

The definitions proposed by the researcher have been formulated at this stage of the literature review to consider the totality of debates within these areas of research. In these definitions, the researcher wanted to capture important aspects relating to both leadership and followership. It is the researcher's view that leadership is a dynamic process contributed to by both leaders and followers alike. As a result of this interactional process, leader and follower behaviours become "*inseparable*" (DeRue 2011, p.129) and, as such behaviours rotate and are exchanged (Blom and Alvesson, 2014), leaders and followers co-construct leadership, followership and outcomes. Leadership is therefore not an "*exclusive attribute of a prescribed role*" (Tannenbaum and Massarik, 1957, p.3) nor is it a position (Freifeld, 2014). It is, however, a skill that any individual

within a group can exhibit at different times and/or in different areas (Bass, 1990). This means that leadership can be assumed by different individuals at different times and every individual, irrespective of their position or level within an organisation, can be a leader (Freifeld, 2014) and act in a leader capacity. Therefore, within this thesis, and as implied by the researcher's definitions, the proposition is that leadership is not tied to formal position or hierarchy but to the responsibilities, behaviours and actions of individuals.

In her definition of followership, the researcher's intention is to suggest that, just like leadership, followership can be assumed at different times by different individuals within a group. Rost (1995, p.134) in fact acknowledges that "*leaders and collaborators may change places*". This is an inherent aspect in the researcher's definition since such changing of duties and responsibilities can occur if and when individuals are successful in 'influencing' and 'motivating' others.

In conclusion, the researcher supports the statements made by Crossman and Crossman (2011), Uhl-Bien et al (2014) and Howell and Costly (2006). These researchers posit that followership complements leadership (Crossman and Crossman, 2011), that followership is "*essential to leadership*" (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014, p.83) and therefore leadership cannot exist in the absence of followership (Uhl-Bien at al, 2014), and that both leadership and followership are equally important to achieve team goals (Howell and Costly, 2006).

The above working definitions, although applicable to leadership and followership in teams, do not relate specifically to virtual and hybrid teams, the type of team which has been selected as context to this study. DasGupta (2011, cited Shirberg, 2009), refers to virtual leadership as a complex act because it involves leading a team where team members are located in different countries and time-zones and who speak different languages. Avolio et al (2014, p.107) define this concept in a broad sense – their definition states that virtual leadership is "*a social influence process embedded in both proximal and distal contexts mediated by advanced information technology that can produce a change in attitudes, feelings, thinking, behaviour, and performance*". This definition views leadership as

a process occurring within complex social systems and their contexts and which is aided by technology. This definition bears similarity to the definition of leadership proposed by the researcher. Both definitions infer that leadership is a process involving social interaction and influence, these being two of the major points in the researcher's definition. However, although Avolio et al (2014) give their definition the virtual angle, it still omits an aspect relating to 'the achievement of common team goals' which features in the researcher's definition. Therefore, when combining both definitions to encompass all aspects of virtual leadership, the working definition of virtual leadership as adopted in this thesis is;

> *"Virtual leadership is a dynamic interactional process embedded in both proximal and distal contexts mediated by advanced information technology through which individuals are motivated and influenced to work towards the achievement of common team goals".*

This definition implies that leadership in virtual teams is a "*social system*" (Zigurs, 2003, p.348) expressed through the interplay of team members and technology.

Although, as mentioned earlier, followership is considered an essential aspect of leadership, the researcher has not encountered references to 'virtual followership' in the literature. For the purposes of this study, virtual followership will be defined as;

> *"A social process embedded in both proximal and distal contexts mediated by advanced information technology which necessitates the acceptance of individuals to be influenced and motivated to achieve common team goals".*

Once again, this definition reinforces the researcher's opinion that followership is part of the leadership process and that a follower position can be assumed by any individual who accepts to be influenced and motivated to work towards the achievement of a common objective. The only difference here is that this process occurs virtually and is mediated by information technology.

2.16. <u>Team Member Interactions in Hybrid Teams – a Summary</u>

As previously mentioned, this study focuses on team member interactions within hybrid teams and specifically on the movement of work tasks and responsibilities occurring within such teams. Therefore, summarising how researchers view the dynamics of leader-follower interactions within teams (as depicted in Figure 2) is pivotal in providing a sense of where the debates stand today.

Due to their inherent characteristics, and more specifically because hybrid teams rely on electronic media as the primary means of communication, these teams cannot be led and managed in the same way as co-located teams (Drouin and Bourgault, 2013; Chamakiotis et al, 2021). Since virtual team arrangements necessitate "*new way[s] of leading*" (Avolio and Kahai, 2003, p.327), different leadership strategies (Jarvenpaa and Tanriverdi, 2003) seemingly need to be applied. This may mean that hybrid teams may be "*leader-ful not leader-less*" (Lipnack and Stamps, 1997, p.120). The author supports the implications of this phrase in that she believes that in virtual teams, and consequently in hybrid teams, team members are required to work independently, autonomously and on their own initiative. To do so successfully, it follows that team members would need to possess certain qualities and traits and exhibit specific behaviours which enable them to take on different tasks and responsibilities as and when required to be effective in the virtual environment. This implies that a certain degree of adaptation and modification of duties, responsibilities and behaviours on the part of leaders and followers (Pinjani and Palvia, 2013) is essential to ensure common team objectives are achieved.

Based on the literature review presented above, therefore, it is suggested that leadership in virtual teams is a dynamic process to which both leaders and followers contribute to achieve common team goals (represented by the middle part of the diagram). Leaders, for example, may offer guidance and support, set direction and clarify tasks and responsibilities. Followers' input may involve demonstrating superior expertise and competence in specific aspects of the job. Although both leaders and followers occupy hierarchical positions and their formal roles are determined by such hierarchy, within hybrid teams it may be the case that team members take

on tasks and adopt responsibilities generally attributed to followers and leaders respectively (represented by the grey arrows). This may be necessary to overcome challenges and achieve the desired outcomes (large central arrow).

The ways in which both leaders and followers contribute to team outcomes and objectives, the factors that may impact this interactional process within virtual teams and the challenges they encounter along the way, are topics of debate within literature. The literature review has highlighted that leader and follower behaviours, including the ability and willingness of team members to adapt to the virtual environment, team culture (including trust and team cohesiveness as factors that may have an effect on team culture), organisational policies and procedures, team communication methods, and cultural background of team members are pertinent factors which can affect how individuals share knowledge, collaborate and interact within teams (Carsten et al, 2010; Blom and Alvesson, 2014; Hinojosa et al, 2014). Researchers such as Lewandowski and Lisk (2013) and Oc and Bashshur (2013) also make specific reference to distance from the leader (as is the case in virtual and hybrid teams), a factor that may possibly affect interactions between leaders and followers and successively team outcomes (these factors are depicted as dotted black arrows in Figure 2).

The Movement of Tasks and
Responsibilities in Hybrid Teams

Cultural Background
of Team Members

Team Culture

Leadership and Followership

- Relational interactions
- Exchanges and transactions
- Development of shared values, norms, intents
- Collective responsibility
- Reciprocal influence
- Movement of work tasks and responsibilities

Leader Input

Follower Input

Communication Methods

Organisational Policies and
Procedures

Leader/Follower Behaviours
and Adaptation to Virtual

Distance

- Goal accomplishment
- Team Efficiencies
- Idea generation
- Positive working environment
- Team/Organisational effectiveness
- Synergies
- Conflict
- Confusion
- Dispersion and isolation
- Process losses

Team
Outcomes

Notes

Factors affecting leader and follower interactions and team outcomes

Leader Input (examples)

- Support
- Comfort
- Expectations
- Competence
- Guidance
- Vision and direction setting
- Clarification of roles, responsibilities and duties
- Leadership behaviours, emotions, perceptions, prior experiences
- Cultural sensitivity

Follower Input (examples)

- Beliefs, needs, traits, abilities, behaviours, prior experiences
- Expertise and competence
- Cultural sensitivity

Figure 2 - Team Member Interactions in Hybrid Teams

Virtual teams therefore, and consequently hybrid teams (as a subset of the virtual team arrangement), offered a new and original context where leadership and followership could be observed and studied. The researcher conducted empirical research to study the dynamic interactions occurring between hybrid team members. She also sought to explore the factors which affect these interactions and which make virtual collaboration so complex. She focused on addressing the research questions that have evolved from the gaps identified in the extant literature. The section below details these gaps and the research questions emerging from such gaps, which were subsequently addressed through empirical research.

2.17. <u>Research Gaps and Research Questions</u>

This study focuses on an underexplored area in research – team dynamics in hybrid teams. Its objective is to understand interactions in teams made up of both co-located members and dispersed members. Due to advancements in communication technology and to the globalisation of business, teams have transitioned from 'traditional' teams where all team members were co-located, to 'virtual' teams where team members were dispersed. Today, organisations are increasing the flexibility inherent in their structures and have moved on to adopt hybrid arrangements, where because of the team's structure, communication remains primarily virtual. This shift from virtual to hybrid has been acknowledged by multiple researchers, such as, Zigurs (2003), Al-Ani et al (2011) and Hoch and Kozlowski (2014). However, studies still concentrate primarily on virtual teams, on the leadership styles, roles and behaviours prevalent in such teams (as discussed in sections 2.7., 2.8., and 2.9.), and on the challenges faced by these teams (as explained in section 2.12.). Research into hybrid teams therefore remains close to non-existent as a deliberate and articulate research setting. This gap in literature was addressed through this research.

As indicated in section 2.15. virtual leadership has been defined, for the purpose of this work, as a dynamic process involving both active leaders

and active followers. It is suggested that this conceptualisation applies equally to hybrid teams. Individuals within a hybrid team interact and may be required to take on tasks and responsibilities which are not necessarily tied to their formal roles but to the exigencies and needs of the team and/or project. This interactional process occurs mainly in the virtual space making it more complex. In addition, this process is affected by different factors which make working within hybrid teams additionally challenging. Such factors include the cultural background of team members, the team's culture, organisational policies and procedures, distance, communication methods and team member behaviours as they adapt to virtual collaboration (as depicted in Figure 2).

The researcher conducted an empirical study to address this lacuna in the literature. She wanted to understand how hybrid teams function and operate and essentially, how leadership and followership (as defined by the researcher) unfold in contexts where team members use mainly technology to communicate and interact. This is reflected in the principal research question that has guided this study:

How do leadership and followership unfold in contexts that are mediated by information technology?

To address this question, and fulfil the aims of this research, the researcher first reviewed leadership literature and subsequently virtual team literature, as seen earlier in this chapter. This review led to the identification of key points emerging from both streams of research (these key points are referred to below). However, these gaps were not immediately visible within the literature review itself, but they became only fully perceptible once the two bodies of literature were considered in combination rather than in isolation.

Given that the principal research question spans a very broad research area, it was essential to frame this larger question with the help of sub-questions that set meaningful parameters for the research. These sub-questions focus on specific key aspects which emanate from the literature review and which were brought together in Figure 2. As depicted in this figure, leadership is a dynamic process constructed through the input of

both leaders and followers. Within virtual teams, and presumably also within hybrid teams, this interactional process which is generally technology-mediated and is affected by multiple factors, involves the movement of tasks and responsibilities among team members. In order to uncover how this process unfolds within a hybrid setup, and to address current topics of debate as identified in the literature review, these sub-questions focused on; the behaviours, actions, feelings and emotions of team members when interacting to achieve common team goals and the coping mechanisms adopted to deal with changes in responsibilities and tasks; the visibility of team members' actions and behaviours as enabled by the technological medium used by the team; and the impact of different factors, such as team member perceptions, team culture and distance, on this process. Developing the research questioning in this way, supported a more focused and in-depth approach to the main areas of interest, allowing for a comprehensive answer to the principal research question.

2.17.1. <u>The Movement of Tasks and Responsibilities</u>

Developments in extant theory have shown that researchers are increasingly becoming aware that leadership processes and their outcomes are driven by both leaders and followers. Therefore, due consideration should not only be given to leader behaviours and actions (as postulated by earlier theories of leadership as discussed in section 2.3.), but follower expectations and behaviours have to be taken into account by leaders (Tworoger et al, 2013) if they want to influence follower behaviours, orientations, motivations and feelings (Huang et al, 2010). This would ensure actual leadership outcomes coincide with their (the leaders') desired outcomes. Emphasis is therefore being placed on the proposition that, as contributors to the leadership process, followers are both drivers and inhibitors of leadership outcomes (Blom and Alvesson, 2014). By consequence, recognition of followers' impressions of their leaders becomes relevant. Tied to this point is the acknowledgement of a bottom-up influence on leadership (Dinh et al, 2014) as may be present in virtual arrangements and which tends to challenge the typical

assumption of solely a top-down execution of leadership in teams and organisations.

Two significant points emerge from this: firstly, followers may have an impact on the leadership process and consequentially on leadership outcomes; and secondly, responsibilities and behaviours of team members can shift laterally, upward and downward[12], depending on tasks in hand and team member expertise and influence, irrespective of formal role and position. Leadership is therefore a two-way process influenced by both leaders and followers alike.

The literature suggests that such dynamic movement of responsibilities may especially be true in virtual team arrangements. The reason for this is that team members, in the absence of physical and social interaction due to team member dispersion, work independently and autonomously "*shar[ing] and rotat[ing] leadership*" (Zimmermann et al, 2008, p.321) tasks and behaviours as necessary (Chamakiotis et al, 2021). In virtual teams therefore, traditional methods of collaboration and supervision may not be applicable (Boisot, 2011). Hence, it can be suggested that traditional leadership behaviours as designated by formal hierarchy may become less relevant (Al-Ani et al, 2011; Chamakiotis et al, 2021) when leader and follower relations, actions and behaviours are not prescribed and/or determined by such formal hierarchy but are shifting as necessary among followers and leaders alike. With leadership research having not focused significantly on hybrid teams, and based on the proposition that the leadership process unfolds in different ways in different contexts, it is important to comprehend and appreciate how team members act and behave when tasks and responsibilities 'move' from one team member to another and therefore when team members are performing outside their formal role in the hybrid context. Understanding their perceived reasons for their behaviours, including their emotions, thoughts and feelings, both positive and negative, as they adjust and respond to changes in

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[12] Referring to traditional notions of role-based hierarchies.

their responsibilities and tasks, may provide important insight into interactions occurring in hybrid teams. This gap in the research was addressed through the following question:

How do team members experience the movement of tasks and responsibilities leading them to perform outside of their formally designated roles to achieve common team goals?

2.17.2. Communication Within the Hybrid Team

In virtual teams, work is primarily conducted through technology in an environment where physical face-to-face interaction is lacking. In such a context, the role of visual and auditory cues becomes increasingly important (Zimmermann et al, 2008). One of the factors that may affect team communication is the richness of the communications medium used. When the richness offered by the communications medium is high, shared understanding of content can develop and grow since any uncertainty and ambiguity present may be counteracted by the medium's richness (Daft and Lengel,1986; Ferrell and Kline, 2018).

Daft and Lengel (1986) and Ferrell and Kline (2018) posited that face-to-face communication is the richest medium available since it allows for physical contact. If that is accepted, the author proposes that at the other end of the spectrum are virtual collaboration methods. These may rank low on media richness especially if they do not allow members to be visible to each other and/or if team members do not endeavour to acquire and/or make optimum use of the appropriate technological tools. These tools, which should aim to fill the void left by a lack of face-to-face interaction (Daim et al,2012) by promoting visibility (Ford et al, 2017), can enhance such richness and assist in successfully overcoming challenges posed by virtual communication. By ensuring they are functionally close (Walther and Bazarova, 2008), team members can decrease the distance between them and also minimise feelings of isolation (Eckhardt et al,2019) resulting from such distance. Distance, which is inevitably created by technology (Lewandowski and Lisk, 2013), negatively affects

interactions (Bass, 1990) and by consequence, also the leadership process (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002). Ensuring that team members' actions and behaviours are 'clear', 'visible' and as much as possible 'visual', although more challenging in contexts where media richness is lacking, is actually more important. This seems to be indicating that in the virtual environment, the incidence of being misunderstood and misinterpreted may be greater, and this may negatively affect interactions between team members and thus the leadership process as propositioned earlier in this chapter.

As previously mentioned, hybrid teams offered an original and 'new' context in which leader-follower dynamics were studied. The objective was to provide insights and understanding as to how individuals enact leadership and followership processes in contexts characterised by lower levels of media richness for some of the members. In a hybrid team context, the technology used by the team (such as instant messaging and video conferencing) has an important effect on team interaction styles and on team cohesion (Hambley et al, 2007). The richness of the communications medium may have an effect on the development and evolution of leader-follower relationships which evidently determine leadership and followership outcomes. Research into this aspect of hybrid team working should help to understand how different individuals socially construct and process leader-follower interactions in virtual contexts where the achievement of a visual element may be challenging and how team members manage to feel 'functionally close' even though they are not 'physically close' (Walther and Bazarova, 2008). Answering the question below, and thereby addressing this gap in literature, is essential to acquire information which enables the understanding of how leader-follower interactions in a virtual context can be impacted by the communications medium/media used by the team.

> *How does the communications medium/media used by a hybrid team affect the movement of tasks and responsibilities between team members?*

2.17.3. Factors Affecting the Movement of Tasks and Responsibilities

An individual's impression of the ideal leader and follower is determined by past experiences and cultural norms and archetypes. Such prototypes and impressions are constructed through socialisation (Epitropaki et al, 2013) and influenced by context (Carsten et al, 2010). Individuals within teams hold different perceptions of what a leader and follower are and of how they should act and behave. This is an aspect that warrants specific mention, since, when individuals each with their own perceptions work together and interact, and especially where interactions are carried out in virtual settings, these differences may influence the dynamics of such interactions. While usually associated with role-based views of leadership, the social construction of leadership (and indeed followership) does resonate with conceptions of ILTs and IFTs as discussed in earlier sections. It is important to note that these theories are not used as lenses or definitional constructs, but as a means to highlight that team members approach leadership and followership from different perspectives, based on their background.

In virtual teams these differences in perspective may be more prevalent, because due to the geographic dispersion of team members, it may be more likely that the team is composed of individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures having very different features, values and norms. In addition to this, virtual teams offer settings where the visibility of team members may be limited and where the reliance on visual and auditory cues may be compromised. The increased incidence of *"cultural variations"* (Symons and Stenzel, 2007, p.4) and the potential of there being less *"commonalities"* (Majchrzak et al, 2014, p.137) among team members compounded by a lack of visibility and low media richness, may place a strain on interactions within such teams. This affects behaviours and team relations (Kelley and Sankeya, 2008) as well as knowledge-sharing (Zakaria et al, 2004) and trust (Chang et al, 2011). As a result, overall team performance may be impacted.

Apart from an individual's norms and values and the cultural background of team members, other institutional and/or social contextual factors, such as team culture (including for example trust and cohesion), organisational policies and procedures, distance, communication methods and the ability of team members to adapt to virtual, have an impact on the way in which team members act and behave within hybrid teams. The type of impact they have in hybrid teams and the magnitude of their impact, has, to the knowledge of the researcher, not been investigated so far. Therefore, observing the interactional processes by which team outcomes are produced and understanding how these situations unfold in a hybrid team setting, may be relevant to the study of leadership and followership in hybrid teams. The following question addresses this gap in research:

What are the factors that may affect the movement of tasks and responsibilities and thus leadership and followership in hybrid teams?

2.18. <u>Summary</u>

In order to achieve the study's objectives, to address the gaps in literature, and to provide a comprehensive answer to the principal research question, it was essential that the specific aspects detailed above were investigated. These aspects, which were in fact addressed through the set of sub-questions formulated, all contributed to answering the principal research question which guided this study. For ease of reference, the principal research question together with the sub-questions are reproduced below:

Principal Research Question:

How do leadership and followership unfold in contexts that are mediated by information technology?

Sub-Questions:

How do team members experience the movement of tasks and responsibilities leading them to perform outside of their formally designated roles to achieve common team goals?

How does the communications medium/media used by a hybrid team affect the movement of tasks and responsibilities between team members?

What are the factors that may affect the movement of tasks and responsibilities and thus leadership and followership in hybrid teams?

The researcher's objective was to study leadership and followership behaviours in a team context where communication and collaboration was predominantly virtual, this being her primary contribution to literature. Her intention was to explore the dynamic interactions around work tasks and responsibilities to understand behaviours, actions, reactions and emotions of hybrid team members. She wanted to understand relationships within such teams because these relationships affected interactions. She also wanted to identify the factors that had an effect on these interactions. Ensuring that the research covered multiple angles, in that the subject was tackled in a comprehensive manner, enabled the researcher to draw more accurate and robust conclusions. The research methodology, which is discussed in the following chapter, was key to achieving this.

3.0. <u>Methodology</u>

3.1. <u>Introduction</u>

The research methodology is detailed in this chapter. Initially, the research philosophy that informs the approach adopted in this study is introduced and the chapter proceeds by exploring the ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions of the researcher. The researcher operated within a specific paradigm and this delineated a way of thinking that influenced and informed the design and methodological choices throughout the study. Saunders et al (2016) compared the steps in research design and development to the multiple layers of an 'onion'. Although arguably a little trivial as a metaphor, the metaphor supports the idea of layers that articulate research design: choice of research philosophy, research methodology and strategy, data collection and analysis. By building up to these decisions and applying this stratified approach to this research study, the subsequent discussion will articulate the various choices and the way in which they have shaped the study.

3.2. <u>Research Philosophy</u>

The research philosophy adopted by a researcher indicates their "*set of basic beliefs*" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.107) and assumptions about the way they view the world, what constitutes "*acceptable knowledge*" (Saunders and Tosey, 2012, p.58) and how this knowledge is developed. A research philosophy defines the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts. It therefore informs the way in which a researcher frames and attempts to address the research questions, their choice of methodology, the research strategy selected, and the data collection and data analysis techniques adopted. It also lays out the criteria for examining and ascertaining the solidity and robustness of the research.

A researcher may be more successful in designing a research project which is coherent and meaningful (Saunders et al, 2016) if such research

is based and developed on a set of reasoned assumptions which guide the research project throughout.

The research philosophy is based on three types of assumptions, namely, ontological assumptions, epistemological assumptions and axiological assumptions. Assumptions of an ontological nature relate to how the researcher views reality (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) and therefore the research objects, and they determine the phenomena to be investigated. Burrell and Morgan (1979) also stated that these assumptions range from a position where reality is viewed as external to the individual imposing itself on the individual (objectivism and realism ontology) to a position where reality is regarded as the product of one's mind (individual cognition). In the latter case there are no real existing entities behind the names, concepts and labels used to structure such a reality (subjectivism and nominalism ontology).

Epistemological assumptions concern what constitutes "*acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge*" (Saunders et al, 2016, p.127) and how such knowledge can be communicated to others (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Burrell and Morgan (1979) posited that epistemological assumptions range from positivist to anti-positivist. A positivist epistemology focuses on the patterns and causal relationships in the social world and positivists believe that knowledge is a cumulative process that can be acquired by observing behaviour. Anti-positivists, however, reject this approach. They believe that knowledge can only be acquired through direct experience and can only be understood from the perspective of those individuals who are directly involved in the activities studied. The epistemological assumptions made will affect the choice of research methods, the strengths and limitations of the research findings and any conclusions drawn from such findings (Saunders et al, 2016).

Axiological assumptions are based on the researcher's view of the role of values (both those of the researcher as well as those of research participants) and ethics within the research process (Saunders et al, 2016). Axiological assumptions range from being value-free to value-bound. In the former case, the researcher remains detached and does not impose any value judgments on the research subject. In the latter,

however, value judgments are key to the project and researchers immerse themselves in what is being researched. The researcher's axiological position, values, experiences and moral code, will determine the choice of philosophy and data collection techniques and analysis procedures. It will also impact researcher-participant relations and will dictate how research participants are viewed in the research and "*how they are defined, conceptualized and constructed*" (Baguley et al, 2013, p.4). The researcher must demonstrate high ethical behaviour and be aware of the responsibility of valuing participants both in their own right as well as for their contribution to the research project.

Understanding the different philosophical positions and making the most appropriate ontological, epistemological and axiological choices that best serve the objectives of the research within a given research environment (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) is essential. The section below explains why critical realism was selected to guide this research project.

3.3. <u>Critical Realism – The Research Philosophy Guiding this Study</u>

The way in which the researcher views reality, their personal view of what constitutes suitable knowledge and how such knowledge should be gathered, analysed and used, and the researcher's values, all determine the research philosophy that will guide the researcher throughout the research project. More so, this has to be considered in relation to the requirements of the research question, which may warrant a particular perspective. The below discussion will highlight how the chosen philosophy is most appropriate.

The researcher is aware of the philosophical pluralism that exists in research and that multiple philosophies are available, all with a potential to guide this study. She believes, however, that two often-cited paradigms, positivism and interpretivism, represent extreme views and other approaches such as pragmatism, realism and post-modernism, fall somewhere in between these ends of a continuum. Critical realism is another such approach and this philosophy was selected to guide this research.

Critical realism emerged out of positivist and constructivist paradigm debates occurring in the 1980s (Morse, 2011; Fletcher 2017). Gorski (2013, p.659) proposed critical realism as a "*more internally consistent and philosophically developed framework*" than philosophies such as positivism and constructivism. Given the objectives of this study, the researcher supported this view and for the reasons outlined below, critical realism was the philosophy selected to guide this study.

Critical realism, owing its origins to Bhaskar (1979), views reality, which consists of structures and mechanisms that shape events, as objective and stratified (Tsang, 2014). However, such a reality is not fully accessible and therefore cannot be entirely observed or experienced (Saunders et al, 2016). A critical realist's ontology is "*stratified*" (Fairclough, 2005, p.922) into three domains: the empirical, the actual and the real. The 'empirical' domain is made up of "*partial regularities*" (Bechara and Van de Ven, 2011, p.349), events and mechanisms that have been activated and can be directly or indirectly observed and experienced (Fairclough, 2005; Gorski, 2013; Tsang, 2014; Saunders et al, 2016). The 'actual' domain consists of events, processes and structures whether or not they are observed. The 'real' refers to those structures and mechanisms that exist in the world together with their causal powers (Fairclough, 2005), such causal powers being the properties of both the different structures as well as of social actors (critical realists believe that facts are socially constructed). Therefore, given that according to this philosophy, the actual does not reflect the real, critical realists use backward reasoning, or retroduction, to study the different strata of social reality in an attempt to provide explanations as to the underlying factors, realities and mechanisms that may have shaped and caused particular events and experiences to occur. Often, the research process undertaken by critical realists involves moving back and forth from the collection of empirical data to interpretation and reflection until the mechanisms that have caused the events to happen are determined (Easton, 2010).

The research presented in this thesis focused on exploring interactions between hybrid team members to understand how leadership and followership unfold in teams where communication is predominantly

virtual. As posited by Fletcher (2017), for a researcher operating within a critical realist paradigm, the first step in the research project is conceptualising a research question based on existing theoretical approaches. This was the starting point for the researcher who ensured that the study's research questions were guided by the extant literature and numerous theoretical debates. The questions presented in the previous chapter set the overall aim of the research. This overall aim gave a direction to the research and, through the approach adopted, the researcher's intent was that of fulfilling a dual purpose; to generate rich and detailed insights, understandings and world views of the organisational phenomena that the research concentrated on (descriptive element) and to identify and understand the causal factors and realities that impacted the situations and experiences being studied (explanatory element).

Given the stratified and layered ontology that critical realism is based on, the research conducted, and the research approach and methodological choice made, ensured the desired outcomes were achieved. Research was conducted amongst social actors in their natural environment with the objective of building descriptions and explanations of events to uncover such interpretations and meanings (Gioia and Pitre, 1990). The objective was to uncover "*demi-regularities*" (Fletcher, 2017, p.185), 'unseen' realities and 'unobservable' aspects and causal mechanisms which had an effect on what was observed, perceived and experienced. The connectedness and causal mechanisms of events occurring was highlighted and to do so it was necessary to go beyond what was being immediately experienced and observed (the empirical) to uncover underlying mechanisms and complexities (the real) behind the structures and relationships being studied (the actual) (Saunders and Tosey, 2012). Therefore, by adopting a critical realist approach, sole reliance on what was perceived was avoided in order to explain complex social processes and events in terms of their causal powers to "*locate the factors lying between some critical cause and its purported effect*" (Tsang, 2014 cited Gerring, 2007). This ensured a more comprehensive picture of the reality being studied since interpretive understanding and explanation was combined with causal analysis. This aspect makes critical realism ideal for

"*analysing social problems and suggesting solutions for social change*"
(Fletcher, 2017, p.182).

Critical realists are aware that the research process is value-laden and
that researcher reflexivity would have to be addressed. This meant that
certain measures, such as, cross checking and comparing data, had to be
taken to safeguard the research from unconscious subjectivism and bias
to ensure that personal experiences, values and beliefs did not affect the
research at any stage. This is discussed in more detail in section 3.7.

Critical realists also venture beyond the observable to explain complex
social processes and events in terms of their causal powers. They
recognise that knowledge is "*historically situated*" (Saunders et al, 2016,
p.140) and explanations are "*provisional and fallible*" (Gorski, 2013, p.659)
since any knowledge is product and time specific and cannot be
generalised. The explanations put forward remain provisional and subject
to change and re-evaluation in the light of new knowledge which may
become available over time.

The researcher ensured that the methodology adopted in this research
allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon being studied,
given as mentioned above, critical realism's epistemological assumptions.
To increase the reliability of this study a triangulation strategy to collect the
necessary data was adopted. This helped ensure that the data collected
was more comprehensive and it also ensured more accuracy in the
interpretation of findings. Gioia and Pitre (1990, p.595) posited that a
"*multiple perspectives view becomes a necessity for achieving any sort of
comprehensive view*" and in accordance with this belief, this research was
framed.

3.4. <u>Summary</u>

This section has introduced the research philosophy adopted by the
researcher. Before deciding to operate within a critical realist paradigm,
the researcher also considered other paradigms adopted in management
research. However, it was determined that critical realism was the best fit

for this study and the most appropriate paradigm which should guide the project.

The following section focuses on the research approach and strategy which have been applied to this study. It also outlines the ethical considerations observed by the researcher as well as the quality criteria that have guided the research.

3.5. <u>Methodological Choices</u>

This section describes the research approach and research strategy adopted in this study. It also delineates the researcher's data collection and analysis strategy. These were based on the researcher's philosophical approach and on the objectives of the research. Ethical considerations and research quality criteria are also addressed.

3.5.1. <u>Research Approach</u>

A researcher can approach a research project inductively, deductively or abductively. Working inductively necessitates a certain degree of flexibility if the researcher is to be successful in understanding and appreciating fully the nature and meaning of the phenomenon being investigated in context. The objective here is to generate new theory and meanings from the data collected by identifying patterns and relationships within the data. The methodology adopted in this type of research design is generally qualitative involving small samples necessary to provide rich insight into human interactions and behaviour (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Deduction necessitates the adoption of a highly structured and rigid methodology aimed at explaining causal relationships between concepts and variables (Saunders et al, 2016). Usually, hypotheses are formulated and tested through, often quantitative, research to develop statistically meaningful law-like generalisations.

Abduction involves collecting data to study an organisational phenomenon. When adopting this approach, the researcher identifies

themes and patterns generating new theory or extending or modifying an existing theory which is subsequently tested by collecting additional data (Saunders et al, 2016).

The research presented in this thesis focused on studying leader-follower interactions in hybrid teams in order to understand how leadership and followership unfold in the virtual context. Virtual leadership is a relatively recent area of focus in the leadership literature and it is also an area which is constantly changing and evolving due to technological progress. Research initiatives are being undertaken to increase knowledge and understanding in this field. Saunders et al (2016) posited that in such cases, working inductively to generate data and understanding may be a more appropriate research technique.

Although there is merit in this recommendation, adopting a purely inductive approach would not have suited the aims of this research project. Given that the research questions and methodology were based on concepts in the extant literature, meant that existing studies formed the foundation of this and, up to this point, the approach adopted was more akin to deduction, albeit no hypotheses were proposed. The researcher's aim throughout the project was to work inductively during the collection and analysis of data to explore leader-follower interactions in a specific context (hybrid teams) to further develop this area of research. The researcher therefore, by combining both deduction and induction, worked using abduction. This approach, apart from befitting the study's aims and objectives, is a process that critical realists engage in when studying and developing theoretical concepts (Fletcher, 2017).

3.5.2. Qualitative Methodology

Approaching the research project from a critical realist stance meant that the researcher had the possibility to choose from a range of methods and data types (Saunders et al, 2016). The researcher could have opted for a methodology collecting quantitative data, qualitative data, or a combination of both. However, qualitative research was selected for this study.

Qualitative research aims at analysing processes and uncovering experience and meaning "*to develop an understanding of the research problem based on the ordinary experience of people and the worlds they inhabit*" (Gaskell, 2000, p.350 cited Sankar and Gubrium, 1994). This is done by generating narratives of events and processes (Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005) to provide more complete knowledge (Saunders et al, 2016). Adopting a qualitative approach is most suitable when attempting to understand interactions between behaviour, context and events (McNulty, 2012). In qualitative research, data is collected in the form of words and images from documents, observations and interviews. Research procedures are specific to context and/or participants. Analysis of data usually entails extracting themes and categorising data to present a coherent picture.

The researcher believed that a qualitative methodology was the most appropriate choice for her research since qualitative research methods are "*useful in answering questions on why employees behave the way they do in organizations*" (Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005, p.622). This tied in with the focus of the research - answering questions on how social interaction and experience are created and given meaning (Sivunen, 2006).

3.5.3. Research Strategy Selected

The research strategy was chosen within the confines of a critical realist paradigm and aligned with the research objectives and the research questions which guided the research.

This research was intended to provide understanding and explanation of interactions occurring within a hybrid team environment and therefore real-life situations occurring within such teams were explored in detail and processes analysed to give meaning (Sivunen, 2006; Toloie-eshlaghy et al, 2011). This was achieved by gathering, compiling and analysing experiential and in-depth data. Adopting a case study strategy was therefore thought most suitable.

Case study research is an in-depth inquiry into an organisational phenomenon studied in context. This approach offers flexibility to

design the case study in different ways and to use multiple methods of data collection. A case study can be intrinsic, instrumental or collective (Stake, 1994; Yin, 2014). An intrinsic case study involves a single case undertaken with the objective to discover something. An instrumental case plays a supportive role and is studied because it facilitates the understanding of something else external to the case itself. A collective case study involves concentrating on multiple cases chosen because studying them jointly will lead to better understanding and better theorising (Stake, 1994). Yin (2014) added that a case study can also be holistic, involving one single unit of analysis, or embedded, involving multiple units of analysis. Guba and Lincoln (1981) posited that case studies can be factual, interpretative or evaluative. According to Stake (1994, p.245), "*case studies are of value in refining theory*" and case study research is particularly relevant to business and management studies (Saunders et al, 2016). Eisenhardt (1989) also postulated that a case study strategy is especially appropriate when the topics being researched are relatively new and when research and theory are in their developmental stages. This fits particularly well with this study's topic as virtual leadership theory is relatively recent and, as set out earlier, aspects of it are also presently under-explored.

Another reason for adopting a case study strategy was that it fits well within a critical realist paradigm since critical realism "*is particularly well suited as a companion to case research*" (Easton, 2010, p.119) given that it enables the researcher to study complex phenomena in context in detail and comprehensively to understand "*why things are as they are*" (Easton, 2010, p.119). It is also conducive to the overall research aim and to the nature of the reality being investigated since it offers "*insights into the nature of the phenomenon*" (Easton, 2010, p.118).

Notwithstanding that case study was deemed most appropriate for this research, the researcher is aware that any research has limitations; within this study generalisations are unlikely due to the small samples involved in the study. Further reflections on the limitations and how those were addressed will be discussed later in the thesis.

The objective of this study was that of providing in-depth insight into a specific phenomenon and this could only be manageable if the research were based on a limited number of research subjects (Huettermann et al, 2014). The intention was that of providing in-depth understanding and detailed explanation rather than generalisations. Stake (1994, p.245) suggested that "*the purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case*". Sivunen (2006) cited Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p.163), considered the "*representativeness*" of the data as irrelevant in qualitative research since the research subjects are not considered a sample in the statistical sense. However, to partially counteract this limitation, this research sample was composed of participants who best represented and had thorough knowledge of the research topic being investigated (Bowen, 2008). The sample was therefore a purposive one composed of "*knowledgeable agents*" (Gioia et al, 2013, p.26) selected according to predetermined criteria identified by the researcher as relevant to the study's objectives (Guest et al, 2006; Lanka et al, 2019).

3.5.4. Data Collection and Analysis

3.5.4.1. Assumptions Made

This study's design, apart from being influenced by its aims and objectives and by the philosophical position adopted by the researcher, was also based on a series of assumptions that gave direction to the research. These assumptions, which were developed following the literature review, included:

- The dispersion of team members as characteristic of virtual/hybrid teams makes it more challenging to exercise certain leadership responsibilities and behaviours (Kayworth and Leidner, 2002; Malhotra et al, 2007; Lilian, 2014). A lack of physical presence and physical contact means less opportunity for face-to-face communication and for monitoring activities in real time (Fan et al, 2014).

- Effective virtual team leadership necessitates enhanced clarity and visibility of the leader's actions and behaviours (DeRue and Ashford,

2010). Therefore, adopting rich communications media is essential to ensure growth and sustainability of a shared understanding in uncertain and ambiguous environments (Daft and Lengel, 1986; Ferrell and Kline, 2018).

- In a hybrid team, responsibilities and tasks pertaining to different team members shift laterally, upward and downward depending on such tasks, expertise and team member influence (Dinh et al, 2014; Chamakiotis and Panteli, 2017). Therefore, leader and follower relations, actions and behaviours are not determined by formal hierarchy.

- The dynamics of interactions occurring between leaders and followers in hybrid teams are influenced by team/organisational contextual factors such as team culture, role expectations, relationships, etc. All these factors have a bearing on leadership outcomes (Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Blom and Alvesson, 2014).

3.5.4.2. Type of Case Study

A collective case study was undertaken. This was done to ensure a sufficient amount of in-depth data was collected and to enable meaningful comparisons between cases so that similarities and differences between cases could emerge. The research undertaken was cross-sectional, involving members from four teams (as a result of her experience with case study research, Eisenhardt (1989) recommends four to ten cases as ideal). Based on the above assumptions, the researcher strategically selected her case teams as per the following criteria:

- Teams had to be hybrid, meaning that some members were dispersed and others co-located. Since the researcher is based in Malta, it was essential that the teams had a Malta presence (this was especially important for the researcher to conduct the observations).
- Teams had similar leadership structures in that all teams had a hierarchically appointed leader who attended team meetings and gave their input to team functioning and performance.

- Teams had 3-7 members. This enabled the researcher to focus on a reasonable number of interactions and discussions to ensure sufficient data was collected.

- Teams were from different organisations to ensure diversity in factors such as organisational cultures, contexts and role expectations amongst others.

In addition to the above listed criteria, the researcher was also conditioned by practical considerations including the ability to gain access to teams and organisations.

3.5.4.3. Unit of Analysis

Information compiled related to team leaders' and members' interactions within hybrid teams. The researcher concentrated primarily on gaining insight into the way leadership and followership unfold in teams mediated by information technology. She focused on the behaviours and actions of participants when interacting within their teams. In addition, information concerning the influence of the communications medium on this interactional process and of other factors that may affect this process was also pertinent to answer the research questions and fulfil the aims of the study.

As can be seen, therefore, the main focus of this study were the interactions occurring between hybrid team members as they worked together to achieve common team goals. The interaction process occurring within the hybrid case teams is the unit of analysis of this research.

3.5.4.4. Data Collection Procedure

The methodology selected to answer the research questions involved analysing processes to give meaning (Sivunen, 2006; Toloie-Eshlaghy et al, 2011). This was achieved by gathering, compiling and analysing experiential and in-depth data in the form of behaviours, motivations, attitudes, feelings, opinions and perspectives of the research participants (Diefenbach, 2009).

Mathison (1988, p.13) advanced that "*good research practice obligates the researcher to triangulate*", triangulation being "*a validity procedure*" (Lub, 2015, p.4). A researcher may decide to triangulate to achieve a holistic understanding of a specific phenomenon. When phenomena are too complex and ambiguous to be adequately studied from a single perspective or by utilising a single approach, multiple viewpoints may be necessary to appreciate the various aspects and dimensions of such complexities (Bechara and Van de Ven, 2011). A comprehensive understanding of an organisational reality is more achievable if triangulation is applied since each single perspective addresses and uncovers specific aspects and tends to neglect others (Bradshaw-Camball and Murray, 1991). Triangulation therefore enhances the completeness of the research study (Lewis and Keleman, 2002) and emphasises the reliability of the research (convergence of information). It should also provide a holistic understanding of an organisational reality revealing unique findings to generate clear explanations and to generate different views and understanding of the events being investigated.

Given the presumed complexities and ambiguities present in leader-follower and follower-follower interactions occurring within hybrid teams, adopting a triangulation strategy was necessary to ensure this phenomenon was thoroughly and adequately explored and understood. To increase the depth and breadth of the research, the strategy adopted in this study involved triangulating sources of data (team leaders and members) and methods of collection (interviews and observations). Using "*multiple research instruments in a triangulated methodology*" (Gaskell, 2000, p.351) increased the study's validity, credibility and authenticity (Saunders et al, 2016). It also provided a series of perspectives that acted as a "*counterbalance to the subjective interpretation of data*" (Gaskell, 2000, p.350).

The research conducted for the purposes of investigating the process of leadership in hybrid teams involved a study that utilised two of the "*three main sources of data*" (Sivunen,2006, p.349 cited

Bryman,1989) which qualitative research is generally associated with; interviews and observations. Ehigie and Ehigie (2005) stressed the importance of gathering and using information from multiple sources to develop a sound knowledge base on which theory can be developed and/or refined. The data sources utilised in this study ensured the acquisition of explanatory knowledge and causal insight into the complex phenomenon being studied.

3.5.4.5. Sources of Data and Information

Data was collected through interviews and observations. It was the team leader of each case team who set the schedule of both the interviews and the observations.

Interviews:
As mentioned in section 3.5.3., the sample was a purposive one and case teams were selected according to predetermined criteria. Interviews were conducted with hybrid team leaders and members who could provide detailed first-hand information about their roles, behaviours, perceptions, attitudes, experiences and emotions. Data collected made it possible for the researcher to develop an insight into the process of leadership and followership as expressed in participants' own words. Interviews with individuals at different hierarchical levels within the team were necessary since this enabled the researcher to gather the perspectives of individuals occupying diverse formally assigned roles who may shed light on different angles of the phenomenon being investigated.

An interview guide (Appendix III) was prepared beforehand to establish the parameters of focus and to guide the interview. According to Gioia et al (2013), such a guide or protocol, which can be revised as the research progresses, should focus on the research questions, it should be thorough, and it should not contain questions that may lead the interviewee to answer in a particular way. The researcher based the interview guide on the main points emerging from the literature review, on the gaps in literature that this research aimed to address and on the research questions the research aimed

to answer (Appendix IV illustrates the relationship between the questions in the interviewing guide and each sub-question this research addressed). In drawing up these guidelines, and by ensuring that questions were appropriately and clearly phrased to avoid misinterpretation, the researcher wanted to collect relevant information that would benefit her research. To reach this end, the researcher started off the interview by asking questions related to the individual's tasks, responsibilities and position within the organisation and within the case team with specific focus on satisfaction, relationships, feelings and emotions, and image portrayed within the team. These questions were intended to put the interviewee at ease whilst providing background knowledge to the researcher. Focus then shifted to the behaviours and actions of the individual within the hybrid team. At this point the researcher concentrated on acquiring detailed information on the way in which tasks and responsibilities within the team were managed, on conflict, on communication, on any challenges encountered due to the virtual nature of the team, on factors affecting team member interactions, and on future changes the individual believed to be important and/or essential. As the research progressed, the interviewing points were revised and refined as necessary to focus on "*actual rather than theoretical imperatives*" (Gaskell, 2000, p.351).

Until the participants felt at ease, the interviews were semi-structured. This was done to give the researcher more flexibility in that questions asked were often open-ended and the researcher probed further when necessary. As participants started to feel more comfortable, they became more open and the semi-structured in-depth interviews took the form of narratives, becoming one-to-one conversations. This flexibility in approach facilitated information exchange. The researcher chose to allow the interviews to proceed as narratives because this approach had been applied in other studies focusing on feelings, emotions and behaviours of individuals (Croft et al, 2005; Wright et al, 2012; Brown and Toyoki, 2013). It was considered most appropriate in such studies since it encouraged

participants to speak freely when discussing their tasks, behaviours, attitudes, emotions, perceptions and experiences.

The researcher however, still focused on the main themes as set out in the interview protocol and made sure all themes were covered during all the interviews. Each interview differed between participants since conversations flowed freely and interviewees were encouraged to elaborate and/or explain answers provided (Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005) as well as to mention relevant details which did not feature in the interview guide. The researcher's approach was an investigative one and she probed for details and implications to construct meaning by acquiring explanatory knowledge of structures, mechanisms and events that she could not observe and experience directly. By doing so, the researcher did not only manage to gather information on the attitudes, emotions, thoughts and experiences of the interviewees, but she also gained insight into underlying conditions and processes that affected the reality being experienced by participants. This approach therefore ensured a comprehensive investigation of the subject area since the interview yielded insights into the causal factors affecting team member interactions in hybrid teams. The researcher's objective of acquiring knowledge on participants' reasoning, choices and motivations (Smith and Elger, 2012) was reached.

Interviews were carried out in English, this being the language used to conduct business in Malta. English is also widely spoken given that, in addition to the Maltese language, it is one of Malta's official languages. Although all participants were comfortable speaking in English, there were instances during the interviews (and the observations) where they opted to say specific phrases in Maltese and at times even in Italian. The researcher, who is fluent in all of the languages, ensured she maintained both content and context when translating text into the English language.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via communication technology, using Skype as a medium. Permission was sought and obtained to audio-record the interviews. Interview transcripts were

compiled by the researcher (the procedure followed by the researcher in regard to the transcription of data is outlined below).

During the interviews the researcher preferred not to take notes. Doing so would have meant not maintaining constant eye contact with participants. Participants would be encouraged to speak more openly if, through the facial expressions and body language adopted by the researcher, they realised that they were being listened to, that they were being comprehended and that the information they were sharing was important. As soon as possible after the interview, the researcher recorded details and perceptions which would not have been captured by the audio-recording (such as facial expressions and body language manifested by participants at specific instances). In addition, personal thoughts and impressions which the researcher thought could be relevant were noted.

Contextual data was also recorded as soon as possible after each interview. Such data included the date, time, location and setting of each interview, as well as background information about each participant. Through the notes made after each interview, the researcher was careful to record content, and contextual and emotional aspects of each interview (McNulty, 2012) to ensure her interpretation and analysis were based on a comprehensive understanding of the setting in which the phenomenon being investigated occurred. In this way, achieving plausible explanations was more possible (McNulty, 2012).

As mentioned above, the researcher adopted different methods of data collection. One of the reasons for her decision to triangulate data sources thereby avoiding total reliance on one single data source (the interview) was that the researcher was aware of potential issues and challenges associated with interviewing. Interviewees may not have had total recall of events they were narrating during the interviews. They may have chosen to purposely omit certain details and information from their narratives due to, for example, certain biases they may have or because they may have been pursuing a hidden agenda. Although the researcher dedicated time and care to

build rapport with participants and to make them feel at ease during the interviews, their responses and reactions could still have been affected by their own preoccupations and self-interest and by other forces such as culture and their position within the organisation (Smith and Elger, 2012). These factors could compromise the authenticity of responses. Also, although the interview offered direct access to human thought, meaning and experience, taken in isolation it would not have provided an adequate basis for analysing the range of causal factors and processes that affect a multi-layered social reality (Smith and Elger, 2012). Operating within a critical realist paradigm meant that the researcher needed to give due consideration to the structures and processes that constrained and/or facilitated an individual's actions and behaviours. To ensure she did not present a partial picture of the interactive process occurring in hybrid teams and to uncover the real causes of action and the mechanisms affecting events occurring, in addition to interviewing, she conducted observations of team meetings. These aspects of her research are described further on in this chapter.

Treatment of Interview Data:

The researcher compiled interview transcripts at the earliest possible opportunity following each interview. In this way interview content was remembered and any gaps could be filled from memory (McNulty, 2012). Interviews were personally transcribed in full by the researcher so that she could familiarise herself with the data and could reflect on themes and ideas as they emerged at this early stage of the analysis.

Names of participants were removed from transcripts and to anonymise the data, each participant was assigned a reference code based on the case team they were a member of. Transcripts and notes made after each interview were read and examined multiple times. They were then transformed into "*meaningful statement[s]*" (Diefenbach, 2009, p.878) during a more in-depth analysis of their content (as described in section 3.5.4.8.). A transcript summary for each interview was drawn up in order to record key points and ideas

and this helped the researcher reflect on emerging themes and on connections between interviews (such as when multiple interviewees made reference to the same incident during their interview). Transcripts were not treated solely as narratives but, after being analysed individually, were "*contextualised in relation to other sources of data, assessed in terms of their comparative adequacy [and] completeness*" (Smith and Elger, 2012, p.15). Emerging themes were subsequently identified according to the goals of the study.

Observations:

Observations of all four case teams were conducted. During these observations, the researcher was visible to participants. She was allocated a free space on the boardroom table or office desk where the team meeting was being conducted. She assumed the role of 'passive independent observer' and observed "*events occurring in real-time*" (Cotton et al, 2010, p.465). During these team meetings and discussions, team members interacted as they managed the team's tasks, activities and responsibilities as leaders and followers. The aim was to observe these team processes and challenges whilst gauging the team atmosphere which prevailed during the observations. These observations were necessary on two fronts; to provide a "*sharper focus*" (Gaskell, 2000, p.351) to understanding participants' behaviours in context and to substantiate the information gathered during the interviews thereby providing a "*greater understanding of the situation*" (Cotton et al, 2010, p.465).

The researcher made all the necessary attempts to remain as unobtrusive as possible during the observations making it clear to participants that she would not intervene at any stage of the observation. However, although prior to starting each observation the reasons for her presence were specifically explained, she was aware that her presence may have still affected participants' behaviour and may have altered the behaviour and responses of certain team members (Cotton et al, 2010).

However, these observations, apart from complementing the information gathered through the interviews as mentioned above, also served as a means through which the researcher could calibrate if participants' actions and behaviours during observations did reflect (as much as possible) the responses given during the interviews since interviewee or response bias could have been noted and/or become more apparent. On the other hand, given that interviews were carried out before the observations, participants were more aware of the researcher's areas of focus and therefore they may have, knowingly or unknowingly, changed their behaviours during the meetings observed by the researcher. Although this could not be avoided given that the researcher was not involved in the scheduling of interviews and observations (dates were determined by the case team leaders), such priming may have created an element of participant bias.

Whenever possible, and therefore when she was not being intrusive, the researcher took brief notes during the observations. These notes, which were further substantiated with more detailed notes as soon as possible after each observation session, related to events observed and to any impressions and emotional responses perceived by the researcher. The researcher considered the observations a means to collect non-verbal data by focusing on team members' and leaders' actions and behaviours during interactions. Factors such as body language and tone of voice provided valuable information to the researcher since these unspoken elements of communication were signals, both conscious and unconscious, that could indicate the true feelings and emotions of participants.

As previously done in the case of the interviews, permission was sought and granted to audio record the observations. Contextual data was also noted. This data included the date, time, location and setting of each observation, as well as background information about participants present.

Treatment of Observation Data:

The observations were transcribed in full by the researcher as soon as possible after each observation. Transcripts were anonymised - names of participants were removed and the same reference code as used in the interview transcripts was also assigned to the same participant featuring in the observation transcript. Transcripts were read multiple times as were the corresponding notes taken during the observations. Observation data was analysed and coded separately from the interview data as detailed in section 3.5.4.8.

Additional resources - Company Documentation:

To add context and form a more informed picture of the organisations and the case teams, the researcher was granted permission to examine documents pertinent to the teams. The documents were emails, organisation/team policies, organisation charts and job descriptions. By reading through these documents, the researcher acquired background knowledge and became familiar with various policies, procedures, mechanisms and structures of the different organisations. However, all companies specified that these documents had to be reviewed on company premises and in the presence of a team member who was instructed by the team leader what documentation to make available to the researcher[13]. In addition, the researcher was not allowed to take copies of the documents nor could she take detailed transcriptions. She therefore had to rely, for detail, on memory and made detailed notes as soon as possible once she left the organisation. This was not ideal since the researcher's intention was to go through such company documentation in detail. However, certain elements recorded in these notes, and the ability to review such information in the first place, assisted her during the analysis phase of the study, in that for

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[13] Due to the choice organisations had in what to share with the researcher, the information reviewed on-site was not consistent. However, as the information was to provide context, rather than definite answers, this was not seen as a disadvantage.

example, when actual written policies and procedures did not align to interview accounts and observations made.

Research diary:
The researcher kept a research diary in which her ideas and reflections as they emerged from the research were documented and aggregated (extracts from this diary are found in Appendix IX). This enabled the researcher to be able to refine and keep track of ideas that developed as the research progressed (Bowen, 2008).

3.5.4.6. Sample Size and Data Saturation

In qualitative research "*there is no formula describing what a sufficient amount of interviews and data is*" (Diefenbach, 2009, p.883). While this may be the case, and indeed debated within the literature, the researcher attempted to ensure that the sample would enable data saturation to be reached. In this research, however, data saturation would not be achieved necessarily through sample size alone, but through the choice of data collection methods coupled with the study's design (Fusch and Ness, 2015). The researcher interviewed all members of all case teams and conducted observations of each team. All teams were composed of participants who best represented and had thorough knowledge of the research topic being investigated (Bowen, 2008). The sample selected was therefore a purposive one and the researcher chose to achieve data saturation by focusing on the adequacy of the sample (Bowen, 2008).

Guest et al (2006) referred to researchers such as Bertaux (1981), Kuzel (1992), Creswell (1998) and Bernard (2000) who gave their recommendations as to the ideal sample size in qualitative research. The researcher, however, in the absence of "*published guidelines or tests of adequacy*" (Morse, 1994, p.147) for estimating sample size, took the approach that "*saturation is the key to excellent qualitative work*" (Morse, 1994, p.147). By selecting a purposive sample and collecting data through multiple methods from multiple sources, she ensured the research questions were explored in detail.

Although Guest et al (2020) proposed a method for assessing saturation in qualitative research, this method was not adopted in this study. Guest et al's approach to defining saturation was based on three elements; base size, which referred to the minimum amount of data collection events that should be analysed to calculate the amount of information already gained; run length, which referred to the number of interviews within which new information is looked for and calculated; and, new information threshold, which referred to the level of information that represented acceptable evidence of saturation at a given point in data collection. Since this method is mainly adopted in purely inductive research using qualitative interviews, and the researcher's study followed an abductive approach, the researcher chose to reach saturation through sample selection and adequacy and by collecting and analysing data obtained from such purposive sample.

The sample was also dependent on constraints such as the level of access gained with the case teams (and the organisations they formed part of) and on time. Qualitative representation was not necessary since findings were not "*generalised by statistical means*" (Diefenbach, 2009, p.879) and, as mentioned above, the researcher concentrated on "*sampling adequacy*" (Bowen, 2008, p.140) rather than on sample size.

3.5.4.7. <u>Sample Description</u>

As mentioned in section 3.5.4.2., four case teams participated in this research. Table 1 provides an overview of the four case teams. Each team is described in further detail hereunder.

Table 1 - General Overview of the Case Teams

	Team T	Team M	Team D	Team SB
Team type	Ongoing	Project	Ongoing	Ongoing
Team members	6	6	3	5
Team purpose	Board management of subsidiary	Audit	Diversity and inclusion	IT support
Industry sector	Manufacturing	Professional services	Professional services	Gaming
Size of organisation (approx. number of employees)	400	70	440	78
Team members in a managerial post	5	2	2	1
Team members in a non-managerial post	1	4	1	4

Additional information about each case team together with background information on the interviews and observations conducted is presented below. The type of documentation made available to the researcher by each team is also indicated in the description; this documentary evidence was very useful to provide a sense of the organisations and some further context that may not be conveyed easily during interviews.

Team T

Team Selection:
Organisation T is a privately-owned business operating within the manufacturing industry[14]. Since its inception, Organisation T has expanded its business internationally and established a presence in various countries. Over the years it has invested heavily in manufacturing methods and in research and development, this

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[14] Due to confidentiality issues and since the organisation is easily identifiable in the Maltese context, no further details about the organisation and its product line can be disclosed.

resulting in the organisation being able to offer a high-quality diverse portfolio to its clients. Organisation T has established itself as one of the leading forward-looking manufacturing concerns in Malta.

The team selected for this study comprises the board management team of one of its subsidiaries. It was eligible to be included in this research as it is a hybrid team with team members that are co-located and others dispersed. It is an ongoing team which meets virtually every quarter to discuss specific aspects of the business such as finance, sales, and customer issues, and to take the necessary decisions to move the organisation forward and grow the business. Although the team in its entirety meets once every quarter, team members irrespective of whether they are co-located or dispersed, communicate amongst themselves daily or weekly as necessary.

Table 2 provides an overview of Team T. The team structure is portrayed in Figure 3. This pictorially demonstrates reporting relationships within the case team:

Table 2 - General Overview of Team T

	Formal Position in Organisation	Gender	Age Bracket	Nationality	Location of Team Member	Years with Organisation
T01	Chief Finance Officer	M	41-50	Maltese	Malta	3
T02	Finance Manager	M	31-40	Maltese	Malta	10
T03	Senior Accounts Clerk	F	41-50	Maltese	Malta	24
T04	Area Sales Manager	M	51-60	American	USA	1
T05	Chief Commercial Officer	M	51-60	Dutch	USA	16
T06	Chief Executive Officer	M	51-60	Maltese	Malta	25+

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                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │          T06            │
                        │  Chief Executive Officer │
                        └─────────────────────────┘
                                    │
                ┌───────────────────┴───────────────────┐
    ┌─────────────────────────┐           ┌─────────────────────────┐
    │          T01            │           │          T05            │
    │  Chief Finance Officer  │           │ Chief Commercial Officer │
    └─────────────────────────┘           └─────────────────────────┘
                │                                     │
    ┌─────────────────────────┐           ┌─────────────────────────┐
    │          T02            │           │          T04            │
    │     Finance Manager     │           │   Area Sales Manager    │
    └─────────────────────────┘           └─────────────────────────┘
                │
    ┌─────────────────────────┐
    │          T03            │
    │  Senior Accounts Clerk  │
    └─────────────────────────┘
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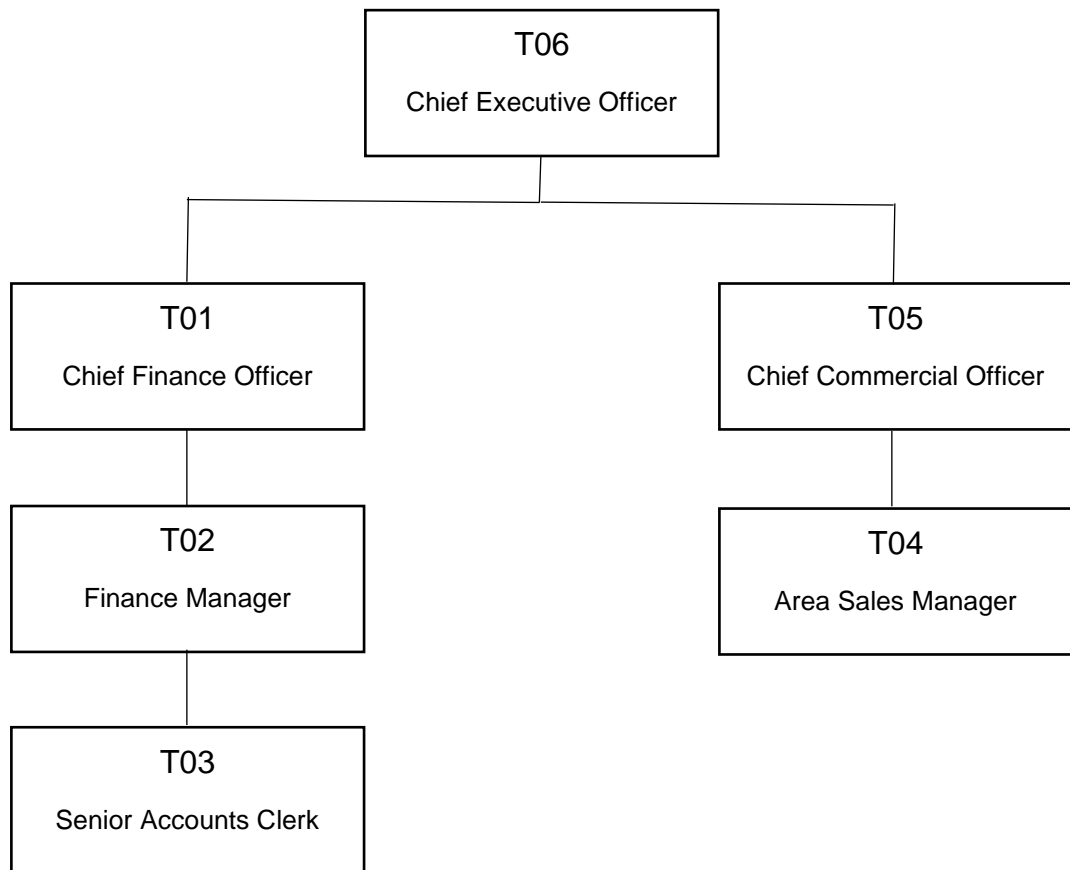
Figure 3 - Team T Structure

Interviews:

Interviews with all team members were conducted face-to-face and they lasted between 38 minutes and 74 minutes (Table 3). Four interviews were conducted on company premises, with three of them in a meeting room and one in the office of the team member being interviewed. The remaining two interviews were carried out in a hotel upon request by the team members themselves who happened to be in Malta to attend a corporate event. Conducting the interviews in a hotel lobby was problematic due to increased noise levels and other distractions beyond the control of both researcher and participants. Transcribing these interviews was also challenging primarily due to background noise in the audio recording. Interviews were conducted in English.

Table 3 - Duration of Interviews - Team T

Team Member	Duration of Interview (minutes)
T01	38:24
T02	39.19
T03	51:19
T04	49:38
T05	73:13
T06	50:00[15]

Observations:

Two team observations were conducted. The first meeting lasted 125 minutes and the second lasted 83 minutes. Five of the six team members attended the first meeting whereas the second meeting was attended by the entire team. The team leader's assistant was present for both meetings to take minutes. Permission was sought and obtained by the researcher to audio record both meetings.

Team T met on a pre-set date and time (each meeting is scheduled during the previous team meeting). The co-located team members met in a company boardroom and connected to the two physically distant team members via a video call facility.

During both observations, the team leader initiated the call and welcomed all team members, specifically mentioning those team members who were not 'visible' to physically distant members due to the positioning of the camera. Once the initial introductions were over, he went through the meeting's agenda, prompting specific team members to contribute and discuss when topics were of relevance to them. The meeting's agenda had been distributed to team members prior to the meeting so they were able to prepare themselves

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[15] The interview with T06 lasted around 50 minutes. For some reason, the recorder stopped recording at 40:23. The researcher took notes to capture the remaining 10 minutes of the interview.

beforehand. Finance was discussed first and, once discussions on this topic were concluded, T02 and T03, who were both co-located team members, left the meeting.

Documentation:

The documentation provided to the researcher by Team T included the minutes of the meetings attended, the job descriptions of the team members, company policies and procedures and Organisation T's organigram.

<u>Team M</u>

Team Selection:

Organisation M is an audit, accounting, tax, legal and business advisory firm employing 70+ professionals locally. It is part of a global firm present in approximately 90 countries and employing a total of 40,000 people throughout its network. The local organisation services both the public as well as the private sector providing expertise in multiple disciplines. Having started out as a local firm in the late 1990s, the organisation has grown and has established itself as a provider of high-quality specialised services.

The team selected to participate in this study is a project team that works on the audit of a gaming company. Team members are all based in Malta and they come together in the same location for all Team M meetings during which work is planned and tasks are distributed. After the initial team meeting, some of the team goes abroad for the duration of the project and others remain in Malta even though they would be working on the same project. Whilst away, for any problems, changes to plans, issues, etc., they communicate and discuss with their team members via phone or email. They do this individually and not as a group.

Four team members work outside Malta for the duration of the audit. The Tax Senior remains in Malta whilst the Partner travels with the team for the first two days of the audit and then returns. Table 4 provides additional information about team members:

Table 4 - General Overview of Team M

	Formal Position in Organisation	Gender	Age Bracket	Nationality	Location of Team Member	Years with Organisation
M01	Audit Supervisor	M	31-40	Maltese	Austria	4
M02	Audit Assistant	M	21-30	Maltese	Austria	3
M03	Tax Senior	M	21-30	Maltese	Malta	5
M04	Audit Assistant	M	21-30	Maltese	Austria	4
M05	Partner	M	41-50	Maltese	Malta/Austria	20
M06	Audit Senior	F	31-40	Maltese	Austria	4

The team structure is depicted in Figure 4:
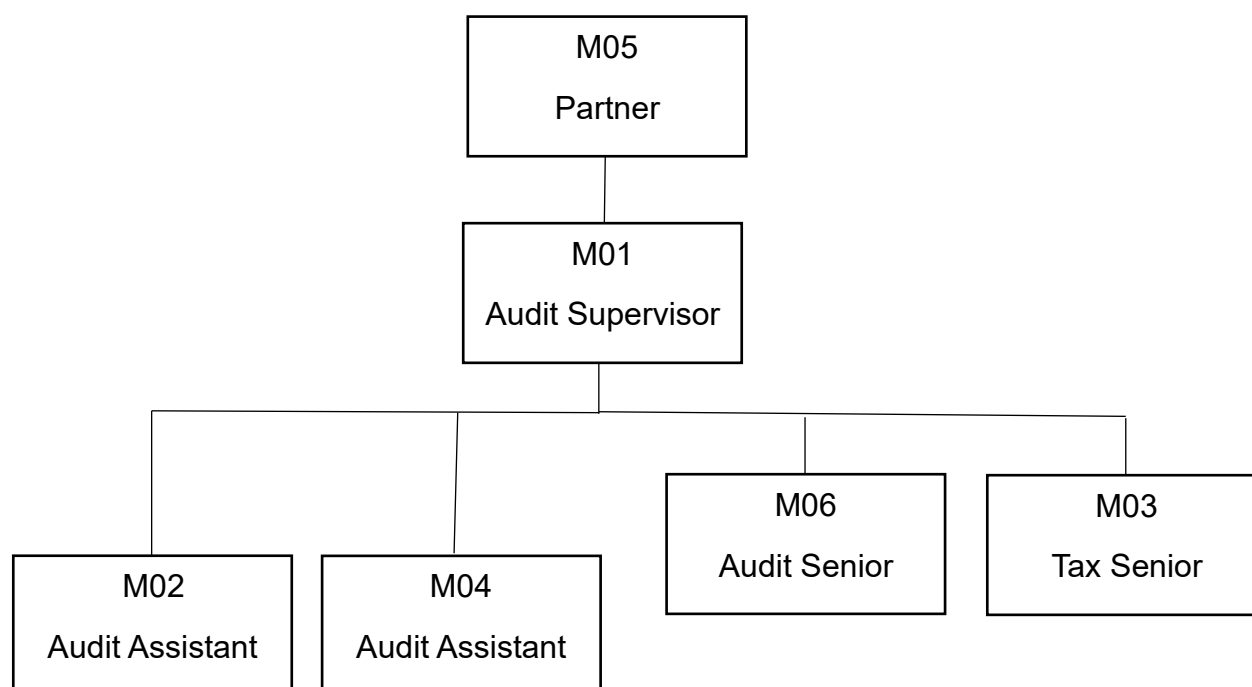
Figure 4 - Team M Structure

Interviews:

Interviews, which lasted between 32 and 64 minutes (as shown in Table 5), were all conducted face-to-face in a company boardroom. They were generally conducted in English. However, at times the interviewee felt more comfortable speaking Maltese and switched from English to Maltese as necessary. Transcribing these interviews was challenging as the researcher had to ensure that the transcription was made in the same context as that intended by the interviewee.

Table 5 - Duration of Interviews - Team M

Team Member	Duration of Interview (minutes)
M01	47:00
M02	31:44
M03	39:04
M04	63:59
M05	46:33
M06	54:00

Observations:

The two observations lasted 33 minutes and 34 minutes. Both meetings were audio recorded once permission was sought from and granted by all team members. One team member did not attend the first meeting and a different team member was missing from the second. The initial meeting was an information meeting where all team members were briefed on the project and on any developments/updates since the previous audit. During the second meeting, M05 assigned duties to the rest of the team. Since M03 was the only person responsible for tax and he was aware of his role and duties, it was not necessary for him to be present during the second meeting.

Both meetings were held in the company's boardroom. Team members were all physically present and none joined remotely.

Documentation:
Documentation included organisation charts and job descriptions as well as a selection of emails of team member correspondence.

Team D

Team Selection:
Organisation D is a professional services firm providing services in audit and assurance, consulting, financial advisory, risk advisory and tax. It is an international firm which is present in over 100 locations worldwide. The local member firm employs 440 employees and services both national and international clients.

Case team D is responsible for diversity and inclusion at the Malta practice. The team's objective is to ensure diversity is embraced and that an inclusive culture is promoted and upheld at all levels and across the organisation. The team meets every fortnight via a call facility. The scope of each meeting is to discuss ongoing projects and to set deadlines for future projects. It also serves as an information meeting where the team leader communicates developments in policy and any changes which must be implemented.

Team characteristics are portrayed in Table 6.

Table 6 - General Overview of Team D

	Formal Position in Organisation	Gender	Age Bracket	Nationality	Location of Team Member	Years with Organisation
D01	HR Senior	F	21-30	Maltese	Malta	2
D02	Partner	F	41-50	Maltese	Malta	20
D03	Senior Manager	F	41-50	French	Italy	2

The leader of the team is D03 and is based in Italy. Although she is not an employee of the Malta firm, she is responsible for diversity and inclusion at the Malta practice. She holds a Senior Manager role in the central talent office. D02, however, occupies a Partner position in the Malta office and is therefore hierarchically higher up in the organisation than D03 is. However, notwithstanding this, for the purposes of the Diversity and Inclusion Team, D02 is not the leader. The structure of Team D is portrayed in Figure 5:

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┌─────────────────────┐
│        D03          │
│   Senior Manager    │
└─────────────────────┘
           │
┌─────────────────────┐
│        D02          │
│ Partner (Talent     │
│   Leader – Malta)   │
└─────────────────────┘
           │
┌─────────────────────┐
│        D01          │
│     HR Senior       │
└─────────────────────┘
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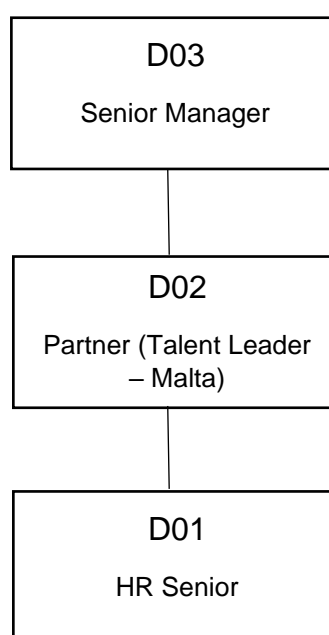
Figure 5 - Team D Structure

Interviews:

Interviews were carried out in English with all members of the team. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face in a company boardroom and one interview was carried out over a video call facility. Interviews were recorded. They lasted 45 minutes on average. The duration of the interviews was as per Table 7:

Table 7 - Duration of Interviews - Team D

Team Member	Duration of Interview (minutes)
D01	48:15
D02	54:35
D03	32:05

Observations:

Two observations were conducted, one lasting 33 minutes and a second of 22 minutes. D01 and D02 met in the same company boardroom and connected to D03 via a video conferencing facility. However, no camera was switched on during the meetings and therefore at no point did the team members see each other. D02 was the team member who always initiated the voice calls. She was the one who initially led each meeting, making sure that D03, who was not visible, could hear clearly so that communication was not hindered by the technology used to conduct the team meeting. During the meetings, progress was discussed as was the action plan for diversity and inclusion at the Malta office.

This team planned to meet every two weeks. However, they may decide to meet more frequently if something urgent or unexpected needed discussing. In that case, they message each other and schedule a call immediately. D02 and D03 also interacted separately outside the meeting forum as did D01 and D02 who work together on a daily basis in the HR function of the Malta office.

Documentation:

In order to gather background information and to better understand Team D dynamics, the researcher was given access to documents which included aspects of the diversity and inclusion action plan as well as surveys which were going to be launched as part of the diversity and inclusion initiative. The company's organisation chart was also shown to the researcher.

<u>Team SB</u>

Team Selection:

Team SB is responsible for supporting the retail platform of a European gaming company. This company, operating in the sports betting and gaming sector, has its head office in the UK. It has established a presence in 10 locations operating through 2,000 offices and branches. The Malta office is responsible for systems support and maintenance of the betting platform for various country offices. In addition, the development of software necessary for the smooth running of the company's operations is also carried out at the Malta office.

Table 8 portrays the team's structure as does the organigram in Figure 6.

Table 8 - General Overview of Team SB

	Formal Position in Organisation	Gender	Age Bracket	Nationality	Location of Team Member	Years with Organisation
SB01	Junior Software Developer	F	21-30	Maltese	Malta	1
SB02	Software Developer	M	31-40	British	UK	3
SB03	Programmer	M	21-30	Romanian	Malta	5
SB04	Applications Support	M	21-30	Romanian	Malta	3
SB05	Team Leader	M	41-50	Italian	Malta	9

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │      SB05       │
                    │   Team Leader   │
                    └─────────────────┘
        ┌──────────────────┼──────────────────┐
        │                  │                  │
┌───────────────┐          │          ┌───────────────┐
│     SB02      │          │          │     SB03      │
│Software       │          │          │  Programmer   │
│Developer      │          │          │               │
└───────────────┘          │          └───────────────┘
                   ┌───────────────┐  ┌───────────────┐
                   │     SB01      │  │     SB04      │
                   │Junior Software│  │Applications   │
                   │  Developer    │  │   Support     │
                   └───────────────┘  └───────────────┘
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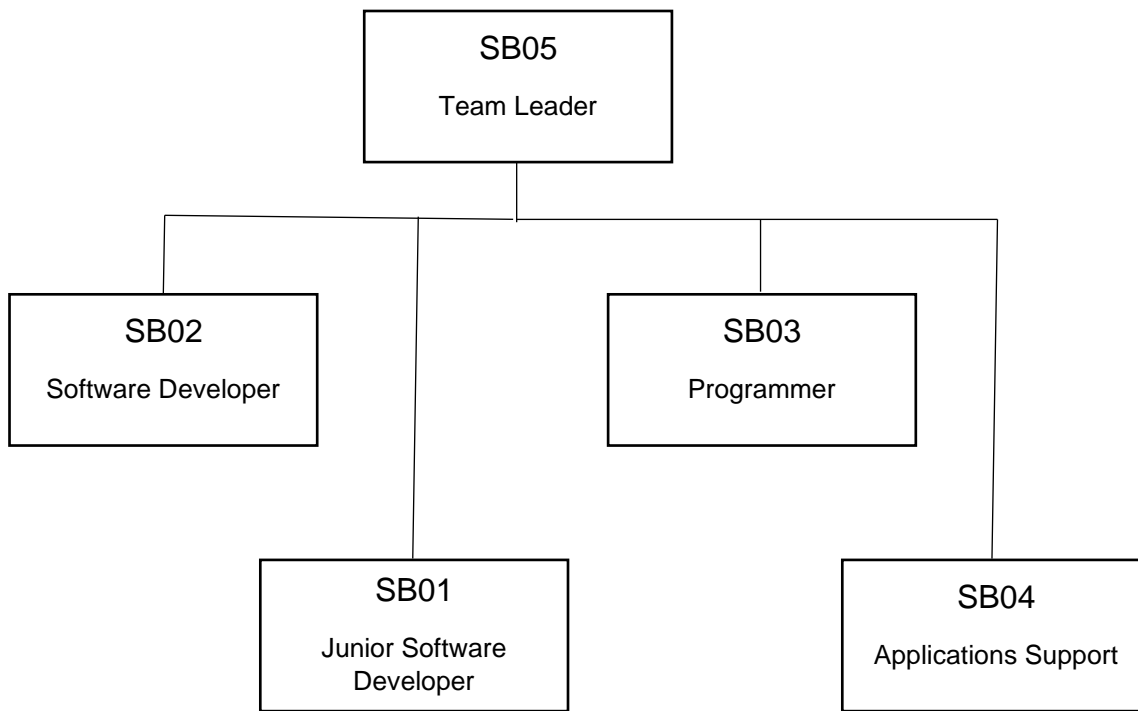
Figure 6 - Team SB Structure

Although the team does not have a fixed schedule for meetings but meets whenever the leader feels this is necessary, team members communicate constantly. Four team members also share an office.

Before each scheduled team meeting, an agenda is prepared by SB05 who sends it to all members five days prior to the meeting.

Interviews:

Interviews with all team members, which lasted between 24 and 50 minutes (as indicated in Table 9), were conducted face-to-face in a company boardroom or in an office. SB02 happened to be in Malta at the time of his interview and for this reason the interview was conducted face-to-face. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interviews were generally conducted in English. However, at times, the team leader found difficulty to express himself and on various occasions he preferred speaking Italian. In such cases, the researcher (who is fluent in the language) translated the text into English ensuring content and context were maintained.

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Table 9 - Duration of Interviews - Team SB

Team Member	Duration of Interview (minutes)
SB01	41:39
SB02	43:56
SB03	24:15
SB04	43:35
SB05	50:26

Observations:

Two team observations were conducted. The scope of the first meeting observed was to give information about new projects and developments in the organisation. It was also intended to be a forum where any issues the team was encountering could be discussed. This meeting lasted 62 minutes. The second meeting was called by the team leader for a different reason; it was intended to reprimand and criticise specific members of Team SB. It was a one-way meeting where team members never contributed nor spoke. Team members appeared to be embarrassed because of the researcher's presence. At that point the researcher stopped recording the meeting and refrained from taking notes. After the meeting she indicated to them that there would be no mention of this meeting's substance in the thesis.

The first meeting was attended by the entire team. The distant team member was contacted via a video call facility and all team members could see him on a screen purposely set up in the office where the meeting was taking place. Connecting was initially problematic but was then successful. However, the audio was too low and could not be adjusted.

Once the connection was established, SB05 went through the agenda and called for the rest of the team to contribute in areas relevant to them. Since the agenda was distributed to the team

ahead of the meeting, all team members had prepared themselves and could contribute as required.

Documentation:
The documentation made available to the researcher included the job descriptions of the team members and the organisation chart.

3.5.4.8. <u>Data Analysis and Coding</u>

Available literature on critical realism has generally failed to show how the ontology and epistemology of critical realism determine the way data analysis should be carried out (Fletcher, 2017). In the absence of such guidelines, the researcher opted for thematic analysis to organise and describe the data collected due to the flexibility of such an approach and also due to its applicability to various epistemologies and research questions. Data collected was analysed following a series of steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and recommended when carrying out thematic analysis. Each case team was analysed separately and interviews and observations were also analysed and treated separately before being brought together later in the analysis.

The first step involved becoming familiar with the data collected. At this initial stage of the analysis, the objective was to create a coding frame that best captured the analytically significant features of the data. According to O'Connor and Joffe (2020, p.2), "*coding is the first place where the analysis begins to move beyond the raw data into a more abstract conceptual framework*", hence the significance of this stage in the analysis process. The researcher began the analysis phase of this study by transcribing the interviews and observations herself. She read through the transcripts multiple times to be able to develop a thorough understanding of the data. To ensure accuracy, transcripts were checked against recordings and research participants were asked to read through the transcript corresponding to their interview to verify its content. An initial list of ideas was then created. Subsequently a set of codes was developed (data was coded both inductively and deductively as described hereunder).

As expected, and as suggested by Gioia et al (2013), a considerable number of codes emerged at this stage. The researcher wanted to ensure that the coding process adopted was thorough and comprehensive and that the data was organised into meaningful groups. For this reason, codes were re-named, re-grouped and structured as information continued to emerge from subsequent transcripts and once similarities and differences became more apparent. Codes were labelled with phrasal terms that the researcher thought best described the content of each. The coded data extracts were once again reviewed and refined. As a result, the number of codes was reduced and they became more manageable. Extracts from coded interviews and coded observations are found in Appendix VI.

Codes were combined into sub-themes. These sub-themes were useful in giving structure to large amounts of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The coded extracts forming each sub-theme were reread to ensure they formed a "*coherent pattern*" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.20) and to confirm that all coded extracts present within each sub-theme did fit within that specific sub-theme. Sub-themes were then grouped into themes. These themes were assessed to ensure the validity of each theme in relation to the entire data set. This meant that the researcher had to go back to the entire data collected to code and re-code the data as necessary to fine-tune the coding frame so that it accurately fitted the data collected. This was done until a final list of codes for each case team was developed (a copy of which can be found in Appendix VII). A separate list of codes for interviews and observations was drawn up for each case team.

Once the scope and focus of each theme was determined, themes were defined and named. At this point the researcher analysed each theme and identified the scope and content of each theme. Each theme was analysed individually and also in relation to the others. The researcher made sure that each theme captured "*something important in relation to the overall research question*" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.10). It was also ensured that the final set of themes

gave an accurate and complete picture of the data collected. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.11) advanced that this is especially important when an "*under-researched area*" is being investigated (as mentioned in section 2.14., hybrid teams and their leadership and followership is an under-explored research area).

Therefore, once the full set of codes, the sub-themes and the final set of themes were determined, a data structure could be built. In their research paper focusing on qualitative rigor in inductive research, Gioia et al (2013), recommend assembling a data structure based on the identification of 1st order concepts, 2nd order themes and aggregate dimensions. This proposed format is reflected in the researcher's study as codes, sub-themes and themes respectively. The pictorial representation of this data structure demonstrates how the analysis progressed from making sense of raw data to the identification of sub-themes and themes. The data structure of each theme is presented in Appendix V.

The thematic analysis was compiled in a report. The researcher ensured that the write-up coherently and accurately reported the story told by the data collected. This "*analytic narrative"* (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.23) was based on the themes and sub-themes identified.

Transcripts were compiled and data was analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12. This allowed the researcher to recognise important patterns and relationships. In this way explanation emerged through the research process and the key points that came to light guided subsequent interviews and observations.

As much as possible, the researcher tried to ensure that data collected was analysed and coded as soon as possible after its collection. She sought to avoid data overload which could have resulted if data was collected without analysing it as it was being collected. However, this was not always achievable because the schedule of interviews and observations was established by case

team leaders. The researcher, therefore, did not have the possibility to space them out for optimum data processing.

Data was coded both deductively as well as inductively. The research questions which guided this study and the research purpose and objectives of this study helped the researcher focus on and select the data to code. Coding was also guided by the study's theoretical framework. It focused on, for example, the effect of media richness on team interactions, on team and organisational culture, on role expectations and relationships (cohesion and trust), and on communication in hybrid teams. Such factors had been identified in the literature review as elements that may impact interactions and behaviours within virtual teams. When inductive coding was used, the technique was based on the principles set out by Corbin and Strauss (1990), an "*approach [which] has been employed throughout many works of qualitative research*" (Huettermann et al, 2014, p.419). Inductive coding allowed for codes that had not been predetermined to 'emerge' from the data. This happened when, for example, participants spoke about the image they tried to project within the team and when speaking about the changes they would like to see happening to their responsibilities, to their team (the hybrid team), and to their organisation.

Analysis was first carried out within cases. This enabled the researcher to become familiar with each case and with the unique features and aspects of each case. To address the research questions, the analysis procedure outlined above was carried out twice. Initially, analysis focused on the individual, on the interactions as experienced by the individual. Transcripts and notes were first explored for the way in which hybrid team leaders and non-leaders talked about their positions within the teams. They were coded for participants' experiences of managing tasks within their team and accepting to perform duties which were different to the ones formally assigned to them, for the way in which participants attempted to align their responsibilities, and for how they coped with conflict. The objective was to capture individual behaviours and emotions (the

demi-regularities referred to in section 3.3.) to enable understanding and explanation of the interaction process occurring within the case teams, the unit of analysis of this study. Once this was completed, the researcher focused on the team and organisational context. At this stage, the objective was to concentrate on factors affecting the movement of tasks and responsibilities as it unfolded in hybrid teams.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the researcher triangulated data collection methods (interviews and observations) and sources of information (team leaders and team members). This was necessary to ensure a sense of completeness (Lewis and Keleman, 2002) and reliability of the research. Methods and sources supplemented each other, each exposing a different aspect of the reality being studied.

Through the interviews, the personal viewpoints of participants were collected. These interviews also highlighted personal challenges participants faced when dealing with the complexities of adaptation and adjustment to virtual work. Interviews were supplemented by observations. Such triangulation helped capture multiple perspectives from multiple sources. Here, the researcher had access to observe participants interacting during live meetings and during these meetings she was able to directly observe a number of issues mentioned during the interviews, thus permitting cross-validation. The researcher was also given access to confidential corporate documents. By reading through these documents, she could develop a context to the case teams. This gave her additional information, such as the job descriptions of participants, which enabled a more accurate picture to be drawn.

By adopting this multi-level analysis, through the process of triangulation and through the process of retroduction, the researcher intended to understand and link the perceptions and views generated from the different strata; she sought to identify the conditions which enabled the causal mechanisms to result in what was observed and experienced. This enabled her to provide "*the most accurate explanation of reality*" (Fletcher, 2017, p.190). As a critical realist,

therefore, the researcher focused on the interplay of leader and follower actions, on organisational processes and methods, and on individual behaviours and expectations in seeking explanations for outcomes of leadership and followership in hybrid teams. Her intention was that of searching for and recognising meanings in the data collected and understanding the social context and perceptions of the team members and leaders participating in this study (Saunders et al, 2016).

When all case teams were analysed, the researcher compared teams to search for patterns, similarities and variations. This involved going back to the data on multiple occasions. The objective here was to allow unexpected meaningful elements to emerge. The write-up which followed brought together all aspects of the research and it formed the basis for any proposed extensions and contributions to the literature on leadership and followership in hybrid teams.

3.6. <u>Ethical Considerations</u>

The researcher sought approval for this research from the Ethics Committee of Southampton Business School. She took care to be "*honest, respectful and sensitive*" (Lin, 2009, p.136) throughout the research conducted and the management of data. She ensured that the study observed key ethical principles including quality, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and avoidance of material disadvantages.

The researcher sought to gain acceptance, consent and sufficient access to each organisation/team by formally approaching the organisation's management. She communicated the purpose of her research, and the level and type of access required. She also detailed the potential benefits that could be derived from the study.

The researcher was conscious of an issue regarding consent that could arise due to a potential breach of confidentiality of the case teams' clients. For example, during observations, participants may be discussing issues

relating to their clients in the presence of the researcher and as a result of this, they may be breaching client confidentiality. To ensure that this did not happen, before the observations could take place, participants were asked to seek consent from their clients if they believed this could occur. The researcher offered to give further information and clarifications to these clients regarding her research project and address any confidentiality issues if she were asked to do so.

Potential participants were informed of the study by a designated person from within their organisation. Once they were informed, the researcher contacted potential participants. They were told that their participation was voluntary and that their confidentiality would never be compromised. In fact, in order to "*maintain the security of the data*" (Lin, 2009, p.132), personal information was removed from notes taken, documentation was stored safely, and transcripts and notes filed electronically were password protected and were accessible solely by the researcher. Contextual data was also kept separate from the interview transcripts to ensure that the anonymity of participants was maintained.

An information sheet was handed to participants (Appendix X). This included a description of the study and it specified what would be requested from them. Participants were told that they would have the opportunity to ask questions to clarify difficulties and misunderstandings.

Participants were given the possibility to refuse participation without justification or reason. This was established prior to data collection to avoid future conflict and misunderstandings (Lin, 2009).

At the start of each interview/observation, the researcher requested permission to audio-record the session and/or to take notes.

Documentation, such as emails and job descriptions, were examined (under supervision) at the organisation's premises and they never left the company. Since the researcher was neither allowed to take copies of the documents nor take detailed notes on site, she recorded important points as discussed above.

The researcher was aware that during interviews participants may have felt the need to discuss sensitive matters and issues which may cause discomfort and distress. She showed sensitivity towards these participants by listening and she made it clear to them that they could terminate the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

3.7. <u>Quality Criteria</u>

According to Saunders et al (2016), the criteria appropriate to judge the quality of a quantitative research project, namely reliability and validity, may not be appropriate to qualitative research. They referred to Lincoln and Guba (1985) who formulated quality criteria for constructivist research. They recommended dependability to represent reliability, credibility for internal validity and transferability for external validity. The researcher addressed these criteria as follows:

Dependability:
The researcher ensured that the research design was consistent with the research questions. Methods and procedures adopted were discussed with supervisors and clearly described. Detailed notes and documentation were kept by the researcher in a research diary and changes made as the research progressed were also recorded. Findings and conclusions were based on data generated from multiple sources.

Credibility and authenticity:
The researcher ensured that accurate and fair representations of research participants' perspectives and realities were recorded and reported. This was achieved by triangulating sources of data to allow for cross-data comparison and to check for consistency. For each of the four cases in the study, the researcher spent considerable time on company premises to carry out interviews and observations. She therefore developed a relationship of trust and built rapport with participants. This enabled her to collect sufficient data and to revert back to participants when necessary to, for example, informally discuss data, interpretations and emerging findings directly with them (Saunders et al, 2016). The researcher contacted all participants and asked whether they were willing to read through the

interview transcripts so that they could verify and confirm content. 16 of the 20 participants accepted to do so. A summary of findings was presented to organisations participating in the research study.

The research project, the interpretation of data and any problems that arose along the way were the subject of various discussions the researcher had with her supervisory team.

Transferability:

The research project is described in detail, thus giving the possibility to other researchers to undertake such research in other contexts and settings. Since the research sample was not quantitatively representative, the results could not be generalised. Findings and conclusions are therefore general guides (Karami et al, 2006) limited to participant cases. To partially counteract this issue, the researcher adopted a triangulation strategy and collected data from multiple sources using multiple methods. She also aimed at data saturation, which was reached, so that there was sufficient information to replicate the study – "*replication verifies, and ensures comprehension and completeness*" (Morse et al, 2002, p.12).

Although qualitative research gathers deep descriptive data and was therefore deemed suitable for this study, it is widely recognised that such research can be vulnerable to subjectivity resulting from the influence of the human factor (Diefenbach, 2009). The researcher, being values aware and recognising the impossibility of total objectivity in qualitative research (McNulty, 2012), took the necessary steps to safeguard her research from unconscious subjectivism by implementing measures such as taking detailed notes and personally transcribing all interviews and observations, and cross-checking and comparing data. She ensured that her personal worldview did not mitigate or condition data collection and analysis and she therefore reported a "*valid description of what [was] investigated*" (Diefenbach, 2009, p.885) and of the behaviour and emotions of the research participants.

In qualitative research, the research timeframe is an issue since the research does not span over a timeframe long enough to account for and uncover changes and developments (Diefenbach, 2009). To limit the

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effects of this problem, interviews and observations of all teams were conducted over an eighteen-month period to achieve a better spread.

3.8. <u>Summary</u>

This chapter detailed the research methodology and strategy adopted in this study. The researcher operated within a critical realist paradigm, working abductively and adopting a qualitative methodology. She undertook a collective case study involving four case teams and her research was cross-sectional. She triangulated and collected data from multiple sources (team leaders and members) using multiple methods (interviews and observations). Data analysis and coding were structured and carried out in stages. The key ethical principles observed by the researcher as well as the way in which she addressed the quality criteria for constructivist research were also detailed in this chapter.

The following chapter will focus on describing the key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of data.

4.0. <u>Findings</u>

A description of the four case teams and of the research conducted with these teams was presented in the previous chapter. This chapter will concentrate on the themes emerging from the analysis of the data collected. Each theme will be discussed in detail for each individual case team. Interview and observation data were combined in this analysis.

4.1. <u>Interviews</u>

Based on the objectives of this research and as detailed in the literature chapter, the researcher developed a series of sub-questions through which she intended to answer the study's core research question. An interview guide based on the main points emerging from the literature review, on the gaps in literature that this research aimed to address, and on the research questions the research aimed to answer was drawn up. Interviews focused on gathering information on roles and responsibilities[16], participants' self-perceptions as leaders or followers, interactions and behaviours within the team environment, and communication and media richness in the virtual environment.

Once data collection was concluded, this data was analysed as detailed in section 3.5.4.8. Following the analysis of the data collected, three themes emerged (Appendix V):

- Team context

- The movement of tasks and responsibilities

- Communication and collaboration.

4.2. <u>Observations</u>

During observations, the researcher concentrated on observing team members interacting in a natural setting, focusing on their behaviours and

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[16] Although not directly pertinent to answering the research questions, information on participants' roles and responsibilities collected during interviews together with information derived from documentation made available by the organisation (such as job descriptions and organigrams) was a source of background data. Such data was relevant in support of the analysis as it provided contextual information about the organisation within which the case teams were operating as well as information about the individual team members forming each case team.

actions during the meetings. She sought to gauge the possible effects that the communications medium, or any other factors, could have had on such interactions.

The same three themes emerged from the analysis of the data (Appendix V):

- Team context

- The movement of tasks and responsibilities

- Communication and collaboration.

4.3. Presentation of Key Themes

Following the analysis of the data collected, three themes were identified from the interviews and observations. These themes overlap. Themes were derived from sub-themes as indicated in Table 10. Although the sub-themes were the same across teams, certain sub-themes emerged more strongly in specific case teams than in others.

Table 10 - Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
Team context	
	Team hierarchy
	Relationship building
	Job satisfaction
	Causes of dissatisfaction
The movement of tasks and responsibilities	
	Perception of self
	Self-perception vs hierarchical position
	Attitudes towards changing tasks and responsibilities
	Changes in tasks and responsibilities – behaviours and actions
Communication and collaboration	
	Communication within the team
	Coping with 'virtual'
	Changes proposed

This theme 'team context' comprises an analysis of the culture prevailing in the case teams. It brings together various aspects (such as work experience and educational background of team members, and work policies and procedures) which collectively enable the formation of a more complete picture of each case team. Participants' thoughts, perspectives and attitudes towards aspects of their jobs such as team hierarchy, relationships, job satisfaction, and causes of dissatisfaction, are integral to this theme. Trust and team cohesion, although not emerging as sub-themes, are also inherent in this theme given that they were intrinsic to the relationships developed within the team and to the team's culture.

A second theme emerged from the data. This theme was related to the movement of tasks and responsibilities among team members. This theme

was discussed in terms of team members' opinions, feelings and emotions with respect to the perception they have of themselves irrespective of their hierarchically assigned position (i.e. the perception associated with their formal role within the organisation and hybrid team). Other aspects that formed part of this theme included the image that team members tried to project to others at the workplace and any internal conflict they may have been experiencing within themselves when the perception they had of themselves (that of a leader or follower) did not align with the perception attributed to them by their formal role.

This theme also incorporated data relating to how and when team members reported (during interviews) or were seen (during observations) to have changed responsibilities whilst interacting with each other. It concentrated on the tasks and responsibilities assigned to or taken on by team members, such responsibilities not being part of their formal duties and therefore not featuring in their job descriptions. It also comprised their attitudes, reactions and thoughts when this happened and the reactions of other members of their team when tasks and responsibilities 'moved' from one person to another within the team. Data relating to the reasons for engaging in such behaviours as well as for not doing so fell within this theme.

Examples of tasks and responsibilities which 'moved' within the team context and which are referred to within this theme, were as reported by the team members themselves during interviews[17] or as visible during the observations conducted. However, since team members communicated amongst themselves outside the pre-set meetings, the researcher could not rule out the possibility that any movement in tasks and responsibilities was being made outside this forum. Such communications could not be observed because they occurred on an impromptu basis.

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[17] Tasks and responsibilities mentioned by participants and included in this theme may not have necessarily been related to participants' duties within the hybrid teams but to their formal duties within the organisation. The researcher still included these in her analysis since, at this stage, her primary focus was the participants' frame of mind when such movement occurred, their willingness to take on responsibilities outside their job description and their reasons for assuming these additional duties. These aspects, the researcher believed, may still have had an effect on the interactions and behaviours occurring within the hybrid case teams.

The last theme emerging from the data was 'communication and collaboration'. This theme focused specifically on the meeting's process, on the communications medium used, and on the adaptability of team members to virtual collaboration, these all having an impact on the dynamics of interactions occurring within the teams. Other aspects comprising this theme included problems encountered because of the virtual nature of the team, initiatives taken to resolve and, where possible, anticipate such problems, and changes team members would like to see happening to their hybrid team.

4.4. <u>Analysis of Themes</u>

Themes were analysed separately for each case team. They were then combined to achieve an encompassing view of each theme so that similarities, differences and patterns could be extracted.

An analysis of all themes and sub-themes for each case team is presented hereunder.

4.4.1. <u>The Analysis of Case Team T</u>

4.4.1.1. <u>Theme – Team Context</u>

Team Hierarchy:

The hierarchical structure of Team T was visible during the meetings observed and was also perceptible in participants' responses during interviews. Formal hierarchy was evident mostly with respect to the team leader in relation to the rest of the team. T06 was regarded as the 'leader' on two fronts; because of his seniority as he was "*the most senior person in the meeting"* (T01) and because he was greatly respected and admired. This was reflected in comments such as "*I enjoy working for him because I respect him and I trust him*" (T05).

Recognition that formal hierarchy was important within Team T was also visible in respect of T01 and T05, both individuals occupying top leadership roles within the case team. For example, T02 had the

following to say; "*because I know there is T06 and there is T01… I tend to keep my place*".

During the meetings, team members were seen to be listening attentively when the formal team leader, T06, spoke. Team members nodded to show their approval and commitment to what the leader proposed or suggested. T01, for example, turned to face the leader most of the time during the meetings. At all times, and this confirms what the researcher was told during the interviews, T06 was "*clearly in control and clearly leading the meeting*" (T01) as can be seen from the following extract:

> "*So, we start off with sales… Let's have a look at the sales figures for the first 6 months ... So ... new customers... So that's good. I like to see that. A lot of activity. Well done. Ok. We move to Finance…*" (T06).

Team members were encouraged to contribute to give their views. This was evident when T06 was heard uttering expressions, such as, "*So any questions from your side on banks, guys? …. Any other financial issues? T01? T02?*". T06 specifically identified individuals, by referring to them directly, who he knew had the necessary knowledge to respond to his queries.

Relationship Building:
Team T members occupying managerial positions within the organisation declared that they listened to their people and, when possible, took heed of their recommendations. Even though the team was hierarchically structured, top management "*empower people to make the decisions to run the business*" (T06), giving "*people great opportunities… a lot of leeway*" (T04), whilst offering them direction and support.

Team T attached great importance to collaborating as a coherent team. Team T, for example, engaged external consultants for support in the development and building of solid teams. At different levels of the organisation, staff participated in meetings, discussions and team building activities because "*to work as a team then you've got to*

open yourself up so people understand you and know how you tick"
(T06). As a result, staff learnt to be honest about their thoughts and
feelings and trained themselves to solve disagreements in a specially
designated forum. This way of operating resulted in the development
of solid relationships. Evidence of this are comments such as
"*because we have developed this relationship, we understand each
other*" (T06) and "*it's more like a very open relationship and we work
really well*" (T02). These strong bonds manifested themselves in the
collegial culture that is today enjoyed by the case team.

A relationship based on trust and reliance on one another was visible
from team member interactions during the meetings. Building a
strong sense of collaboration within the case team was generally
possible because members kept in touch regularly. They met both
virtually and in person outside the meeting forum. They exchanged
email correspondence and calls both one-to-one or as a group to
keep each other informed and to ensure visibility over what was
happening. This was evident from comments such as "*T04's helped
me quite a bit even in terms when I had issues to communicate*"
(T01).

Team members relied on one another and, especially when faced
with distressing situations, they gathered support from each other
demonstrating a sense of teamwork. A comment which clearly
demonstrated this was made by T05; "I *find the support from the
team is always there. I think everybody in Malta is working hard to
help us, support us*".

Team members, including the team leader, were open and receptive
to each other's suggestions and advice. On multiple occasions, the
leader was heard saying "*you've got to be careful because….*" and
"*my recommendation is…*" and "*I think we should plan that again
next year*". However, when it came to giving the leader advice, not all
team members were comfortable to offer it. It was generally the more
senior members such as T01 and T05 who had no problem doing so
as evidenced by the comment;

"*Can I give you my view which is going to cost you less money, less hassle and make your life easier and my life easier, everybody's life easier? And it's very simple, my solution*" (T05).

T05 very clearly expressed his point of view and concerns to the leader as and when the situation warranted his input.

Team members generally stated that they had developed a very good relationship with their superiors, their peers and their subordinates. For every team member, this 'good relationship' meant something different. For some, this meant being able to speak openly with a superior, knowing that the superior was always prepared to listen and give advice thereby not considering "*him to be kind of a boss*" (T02). T01 had the following to say about T06:

"*T06 is extremely receptive to different views and even more he would want that in most issues, especially in my area, what we think is the right thing and get on with it type of thing not I want to tell you what to do. It's the other way round. 'Ok I'm understanding. Ok. Go ahead'*" (T01).

This comment clearly demonstrates that T01 was very appreciative of T06's approach. T06 showed a willingness to listen and gave due consideration to other team members' advice. T01 adopted the same approach with his subordinates:

"*T01 really values my opinion because we have a couple of HR issues at the moment, and he's been asking me to come up with a really good proposal and then discussing it with him....*" (T02).

Especially for those team members who were physically distant from the team and for the younger members of the team, such a 'good relationship' was based on respect and admiration for their direct superior. This relationship was developed as a result of an open communication link between them that ensured "*communication [was] very fluid and very good*" (T04). For some, this meant developing a friendship type of bond and becoming that person who team members could confide in and speak to openly in cases where,

for example, "*one of the team members was crying in my office because she had an argument with her boyfriend*" (T02). Members of the case teams who were young and maybe lacked experience, believed that building bonds as friends was essential. The more mature and senior members of Team T, although acknowledging the importance of building solid bonds, were also aware that developing strong relationships with certain individuals was more important than with others. Consequently, they were selective as to who to build such relationships with as evidenced by a comment made by T06, the leader of Team T:

> "*T04 doesn't report to me. He reports to T05. So, I don't need to have that close a relationship with him. T05 needs to have that relationship with him*" (T06).

According to team members in management positions, building strong bonds with their direct subordinates was essential. This was done in different ways. Some strived to be perceived as "*a fair manager*" (T04) and as "*a leader and an example*" (T05) so that, when things were tough, team members still worked cohesively to achieve pre-set objectives. Others sought to "*make it as good virtually as it is face-to-face*" (T06) so that "w*hether he's sitting in the screen or sitting in the room, I don't think it makes much difference*" (T06).

However, team members were conscious that they felt closer to the co-located team members for the simple reason that they physically met them more often. Although T01 believed to be an exception to this because for him the relationship was the same irrespective of whether communication was virtual or face-to-face, he acknowledged that for the rest of the team "*the relationship is much stronger within themselves than within the people who they talk to virtually*" (T01). This showed that team members were generally aware that a difference existed between virtual and face-to-face working environments. T06, for example, tried to replicate the latter as much as possible when physical communication was absent. He was

however aware that, to do so successfully, strong relationships must be nurtured and developed.

For T03, managing to make physical contact with the team members she interacted with virtually was important. This is evidenced by her statement; "*But what helps me is that once a year the whole team comes to Malta. It's only once a year. But that helps a lot*" (T03).

T05 specifically stated that when operating in a virtual setting,

> "*it's virtual but it must be visual… virtual-visual is linked… the visual is the trust, the understanding, the temperature…not the financial temperature, but the human temperature*" (T05).

Through his statement T05 was referring to the importance of 'visual' as essential to secure good relationships, teamwork, efficiency and improved virtual team performance.

Job Satisfaction:
The culture prevalent within Team T, as well as the strong relationships between team members, contributed to the high level of job satisfaction reported by team members. Evidence of this are comments such as "*I'm really happy here. It's my second home*" (T02) and

> "*I think the culture at Organisation T is very welcoming. It's very much... they call it a family. I think it's a very nice friendly culture and I think that's very inviting… I think we give people great opportunities. We give people a lot of leeway. The expansiveness of the offering is great*" (T04).

This sense of satisfaction was also manifest when team members (with the exception of T03 whose views are discussed in the following section) stated that they were content with the roles they occupied and with the team they formed part of. T06 also believed that a sense of job satisfaction should also be felt because the organisation was prospering and people should be "*excited about the business. There's a lot of opportunity*" (T06). He believed that the

success enjoyed by Organisation T was the result of the combined efforts of his management team who had developed and implemented a strategy that worked.

Organisation T attached great importance to job satisfaction. This was visible when employees were reassigned different roles upon voicing their dissatisfaction with the positions they held. This happened with T03 who was assigned a different position by the team leader to address the dissatisfaction she was feeling.

Causes of Dissatisfaction:
During interviews team members did report that, at times, certain situations made them feel frustrated and caused them stress. These feelings may have been due to their formal positions as is the case when having to deal with "*sensitive*" issues (T01) and when a decision taken was overturned because it was the superior who "*would have the whole picture*" (T02).

T04 referred to a different cause of frustration - certain individuals who "*have a tendency to do what they call 'cya': cover your a***" (T04). It was the attitude of these individuals within the organisation which was annoying.

As a result of the collaborative culture enjoyed by the team, team members felt a sense of distress if they believed they were not contributing sufficiently to team performance. T04 mentioned that he would welcome "*more time to be more strategic*" and would like to be "*more engaged in making more suggestions on a company level*". From these statements it seemed that T04 was frustrated because his need to contribute and help was not being satisfied because of a lack of time or because he was not really 'empowered' to do so. In addition, the feelings of T04 may have been dictated by the fact that he was still settling into his role and adapting to his new position since he was a relatively new recruit. This may have still been hindering his performance and initiative, thereby affecting his ability to embrace the team culture and fully fit in as an integral member of the team.

Reasons for dissatisfaction varied depending on the hierarchical level of the individual. Senior members of Team T showed concern for the broader picture indicating that, although in their business opportunities were bountiful since it was an "*extremely dynamic*" (T01) business, it was however more stressful. They understood the dynamics of this growth and responded to this growth as necessary through initiatives which had to be deployed throughout the organisation. However, employees who did not form part of the management team (such as T03) may have not fully understood the reasons behind these necessary measures and were less likely to accept and embrace the resulting change. T03, for example, could not appreciate the reasons for changes being made to policies and structures that have, so far, worked so well for the organisation. The changes occurring within the broader organisation brought changes to her daily duties and this became a problem for her. She felt that she could not cope and asked to be transferred to another position which was less stressful and was more closely aligned to what she was used to.

Although the majority of Team T's members indicated that their jobs were satisfying and self-fulfilling, they still felt that certain changes would ease some of the frustrations and stress they felt. Desired changes included, for example, improvements in technology (as mentioned by T05), adopting a more structured approach to doing things (as mentioned by T04) and easing the workload by shedding certain tasks and responsibilities (as mentioned by T06).

Stress and conflict were dealt with in different ways by different team members; T01 believed in compromises; T02 chose to share his problems with his superiors; T03 opted to be reallocated and requested a transfer to a position with less responsibility; T04 accepted his stress as being part of settling in; and, T05 confronted those who interfered with his duties and those who took ownership of tasks he was responsible for. T06 considered himself fortunate because he managed to leave his work stresses and frustrations at his place of work; "*I work really hard but I try, when I go home, I'm*

able to switch off. So, I can sleep at night. Ehm... which I'm lucky as a lot of people can't" (T06).

4.4.1.2. <u>Theme – The Movement of Tasks and Responsibilities</u>

Perception of Self:

Five of the six members of Team T were convinced that they possessed the qualities of a leader and were born leaders. However, this opinion of themselves that they had developed and internalised, and therefore, the perception they had of themselves, was felt stronger by some individuals than by others. The team members who seemed personally convinced that they were leaders put forward comments such as "*I am a leader. I know I am … I feel I am a leader, yes … I like people telling me that I am. But I have to admit, I feel I am*" (T02) and "I'm *quite a dominant leader*" (T06).

However, recognition of this was not only based on how they felt about themselves but was also influenced by the perception they thought others had of them. This meant that their perception as leader had to be endorsed by others in the organisation for them to fully accept it. Evidence of this were statements such as:

> "*I've had appreciation from people, colleagues, and people I was leading who said I was ... the best coach they've ever had, the best boss they ever had, whatever. If I look at my direct staff I think they see me as a leader and an example*" (T05)

and, "*I think they perceive me as a fair manager… That's my perception*" (T04).

When the opinion they had of themselves was recognised by their team and endorsed by others in the organisation, at that point, these individuals realised that they were performing proficiently and accepted their personal perception as being the right one as in the following case:

> *"I could just move ahead. I could employ my person, I could open my office, decide where I want to be based"* (T05)*.*

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Although T02 indicated that he saw himself as a leader, he felt that since he was not in the managerial loop, many a time he did not have sufficient information to assume leadership responsibilities. As a result, he needed guidance, approval and confirmation to take certain decisions and therefore kept a step back to make sure he kept his place. The following statement is evidence of his approach:

"*I don't know the full picture because of the daily huddles and I don't know what's going on between the Chiefs, kind of I say 'Better to say nothing than to say something and it would have been the opposite of what … I would have wanted to say*" (T02).

The way in which a person projected their self-perception may have been dependent on certain factors. These included the broader social context which did not endorse the perception held by the individual or the organisation's policies and procedures that conditioned and limited the individual's expression of such a perception. Comments such as "*I tried to mention something last week but I didn't get a positive feedback as if they weren't happy that I am pointing this out*" (T03) and "*ultimately it depends on the level of the issue… certain decisions we actually present to the exec team…it depends if something is in budget and we know what it is...*" (T01) corroborated these reasons.

T03 was the only team member who felt she was a follower. Although in her personal life she felt she had the qualities of a leader, she believed that she could not manifest this aspect of her character within the case team.

Being a leader within the team and organisation and being perceived by others to have the skills and attributes of a leader meant that influencing others was easier. T06 admitted that he was "*quite a dominant leader and this company, Organisation T, is an extension of me*". T01 believed his character played a major role in 'how' he acted with his team and on the image he chose to project within the team. T01, rather than directly and openly showing his leadership traits, chose to operate in a less visible way. He mentioned certain

tactics he used to influence his superiors and colleagues when he was convinced of his argument and belief so that the potential resistance to his decisions and proposals would be minimal. He told the researcher that:

> "*I started influencing people talking about it, saying what's wrong and what can be done. And you start building on that…So, if I believe in something, I will, I will influence in advance and then present it at the right moment*" (T01).

Notwithstanding this approach however, T01 declared that he was ready to listen to his peers and understand their opinions. He was averse to conflict and gave in to the will of others if he believed their argument was valid. He believed in compromises and sought to resolve issues encountered. For him, and because of his character, refusing to tackle an issue and leaving it unresolved caused great frustration and distress.

Self-Perception vs Hierarchical Position:
When team members' self-perception did not align to the hierarchical position they occupied in the team and organisation, this may have caused conflict to the individual. Team members occupying the less senior positions, such as T02 and T03, were aware that their superiors had more visibility than they did on most aspects of the company's business and, as a result, they suppressed their initiative to take the lead in certain situations. Consequently, they felt internal frustration and distress because, although they felt that they were leaders (T03 said that she was a leader in her personal life), they could not act as leaders. T03 specifically stated; "*not in here… now I'm a follower. I have to be a follower otherwise I won't fit here anymore, unfortunately*". However, because of the relationship they developed with their direct superiors, members of Team T tended to react to these feelings by speaking openly to their superiors when possible.

For the individual whose self-perception coincided with the formal hierarchical position held and whose self-perception was also

endorsed by others across the organisation, the situation was somewhat different. T06, for example, believed to be "*definitely a leader in terms of vision"*. However, to fit in as a member of the hybrid team and to ensure he was not seen as a leader but as a team member at par with others, he had to adapt and modify his behaviour. He made the conscious decision to take a step back to give other team members a chance to manifest their leadership qualities, to shine and contribute. T06 embraced being a follower rather than constantly projecting himself as a leader, and

"*historically, I was excited and I'd talk first. Today, two years later, I let everybody else put their ideas on the table and I tend to talk last and try and wrap it up and pull it together*" (T06).

However, during meetings, T06 still sat at the centre of the boardroom table in front of the camera. He also asked the more senior employees to take their place right beside him. It appeared that, the further away from the leader team members sat, the less seniority within the team. Team members also seemed to acknowledge the hierarchical position of the leader by facing him most of the time during the meetings and by nodding to show concordance with what he was saying.

Attitudes Towards Changing Tasks and Responsibilities:
Most of the members of Team T willingly accepted to perform tasks and responsibilities which were generally performed by others in the team. They would agree to do so for different reasons; to become more important to the company, to be seen by peers as being more important, or as a means of demonstrating their leader/follower qualities and attributes. Team members also disclosed that being involved in more aspects of the business was a learning opportunity which may open the door to progress and advancement within the organisation. They also said that, at times, performing additional duties was something they 'had to do' due to a lack of manpower within their function. It was therefore in the interest of the organisation as they "*want our office to be successful so we'll do what has to be done*" (T04). They believed that this flexibility and

adaptability was necessary to fulfil team goals. Evidence of this was the comment;

> "*There are roles and responsibilities, however, sometimes you have to come out of those roles and responsibilities to sort of help the team to be successful*" (T04).

This attitude was not only felt within the case team itself, but "*across the organisation*" (T01).

One team member who was against this practice was T05. He strongly believed that if he were capable of performing such duties, they would be part of his job description and therefore if "*it's not part of my job description. I will not be able to construct it*" (T05). The comment below clearly delineates his thinking:

> "*But I'm a big believer that we all have skills, strengths and responsibilities and we should really focus on those. The danger you see … is that some people they tend to also like to do more than one role, or they think they are more than one thing and they lose the focus on what they should be doing… I am not the one who takes the initiative. I am the one who provokes for other people to do it*" (T05).

T05's reasoning was based on the premise that other members of the team who were generally assigned such responsibilities would be more capable to perform effectively and efficiently in such roles. He would therefore rather concentrate on what he could do best and what he was most qualified to do. In his opinion, the company stood to benefit if everyone stuck to their formal role. Another reason for not accepting to take on responsibilities outside his formal role was because he did not want to encroach on another person's area of responsibility just like he did not want others to encroach on his area. Therefore, although he had in his own way embraced the company's culture and concurred with the statement that "*being involved is fine, helping is fine*" (T05), however, "*taking ownership I don't like*" (T05). If a member of the team overstepped, even though this team member

had the best of intentions, this would be a significant cause of concern for him.

T03 was also not keen to perform tasks and responsibilities outside her formal role. Although she had no problem doing so in the past, nowadays she felt she could not keep up with changes occurring in the organisation. She therefore did not feel she had the necessary competence to perform different tasks. There was one instance during one of the meetings observed where T06 and T01 realised that T03 had taken on duties which were not part of her formal role, this having serious consequences on the organisation. T06 had the following to say about T03's behaviour; "*She shouldn't be making these decisions on the invoicing to the US. At least ask somebody*" (T06).

Team members reported that, at times, they may consciously choose not to perform outside their formal role because, due to the hierarchical position they occupied, they may not have enough information to make the right choices since they were not updated with developments and decisions taken by senior management. Therefore, they did not feel confident that they would be acting in the organisation's best interest and were afraid of potential consequences. They may have also been reluctant to do so because their technical knowledge in the subject may have been lacking. Evidence of this were comments such as "*he's got more power, more knowledge than I would have at that stage*" (T02) and "*it depends on the situation... and on the nature of the issue*" (T03). Anything non-routine especially, caused concern.

When team members were allocated responsibilities which fell outside the scope of their job description, this was generally done by certain team members to empower others lower in the team's hierarchy. T06 did this to change the organisation to "*team-centric*" (T06) and move away from being CEO-centric. Others decided to shed some of their responsibilities because of "*something that crops up that [the person] isn't interested in*" (T01) whilst other times it was intended to improve overall team performance and increase

efficiency. Team members such as T01 accepted additional work when it was necessary such as to "*resolve an issue*" (T01).

As can be deduced from the above, members of Team T did not consider their job descriptions to be fully comprehensive of their duties and responsibilities. However, irrespective of the way they felt about being flexible and helping one another within the organisation, taking on additional responsibilities willingly and not, did at times cause frustration and distress to some team members, especially to T04 and T03. T04 was a relatively new employee and found that occupying "*a multi-level role*" was stressful because time was being taken away from what he was engaged to do. T03, who was the longest-serving employee and who reported that she had fully embraced this aspect of the company culture in the past, now experiences frustration when she is granted additional responsibilities beyond her formal role and it is not explained to her how to do what she is assigned.

To avoid feelings of distress such as those felt by T03 and T04, T05 did not actively seek to assume additional responsibilities and if given to him, he refused to take on duties which did not fall within his job description.

T02 also mentioned that when other members of the team sought to perform tasks and responsibilities which were not part of their job description, or were assigned certain duties, the organisation could face problems because these individuals may not necessarily be respecting the boundaries attached to these duties. At times, such individuals, especially those in lower grades, may not have always realised that existing company policies and procedures should still be adhered to. They may also have failed to see the larger picture and this may have negatively impacted the company (as was the case with the incident involving T03 detailed hereunder). They may also have limited expertise and limited information which would be essential for them to take the right decisions and to effectively perform these tasks. T02 expressed his concern when he stated:

"*And at times they tend to get carried away. And then we get to know that they've been discussing crucial matters, credit terms with customers, and I mean, they are not empowered to do that, no. So although I try to give them as much as possible, like leeway and so that they feel empowered as well, at times they get carried away and so we try to control it as much as possible*" (T02).

A case in point was picked up during one of the meetings observed. T03 took on responsibilities which were of another individual and consequently, the organisation was facing a major issue. The extract below which is taken from the meeting's transcript, accentuates the above point made by T02 during his interview with the researcher:

T06: You can't have a customer placing the order and then invoicing another customer. Nobody would have paid that. I'm sure that didn't happen before. Correct?

T03: They want the supplier to be from France so they won't accept the invoices which I issued.

T06: Listen this is natural. If they place the order....

T03: But ....

T06: You have to invoice that person that pays the order.

T01: Why can't S issue the invoice, have the invoice issued from Organisation T France and then France and USA settle internally?

T03: That's what we did.

T06: That's what happened. But T03 decided to do it differently.

T03: It's not that I decided....

T01: They may have problems on tax.

T03: The thing is not because of tax, they don't want to create another vendor. But Organisation T USA is already a vendor for them because we received payments in Euro from S this year. This year not in the past, this year.

T06: But we need to invoice the person the order comes from. Correct?

T01: Yes.

T06: You can't invoice somebody when the order came from somebody else.

T01: No you can't.

T06: That's not the way.   (Team T Meeting 1)

For team members, however, willingly accepting these additional responsibilities was dependent on certain factors such as the risk associated with accepting the responsibilities and the reason perceived to be behind that individual's action to assign them. For example, if the team member was granted the task of writing a report to be presented during a meeting with one of the organisation's major clients, the acceptance or otherwise of such a responsibility may have been determined by what was perceived to be the intention behind this action. Therefore, if they felt that they were granted the task because the person did not have time or did not want to prepare the report, they may have been less inclined to accept it. However, if the person perceived the intention to be a learning experience or recognition of their superior report-writing skills, they may be more inclined to accept the responsibilities and to take the risk of preparing it. They knew that if they showed potential, it would be more likely that they would be assigned similar tasks in the future. The extract below is taken from one of the board meetings observed. It clearly shows T05 trying to give T04 the responsibility to negotiate payment terms with clients. However, T04 is implying that this responsibility was of T05 and it was something T05 was trying to avoid doing:

"T05: Yeah, thinking about it .... I was also thinking, T04, did you try to negotiate with X like this is our first order with them? We will accept 90 days but the policy is that normally the customers pay up front for their first order whoever it is. So, you have a very inflexible CFO and that you may manage to negotiate a 45 day for the first order with them and then you would go to 90 days with the next order.

T04: I can certainly try but, T05, you were in one of the initial meetings with Y. She made it pretty clear that it's not negotiable.

T05: Yeah. I know, I know."   (Team T Meeting 1)

Changes in Tasks and Responsibilities – Behaviours and Actions:
During the interviews with the researcher, most of the team members indicated that they were willing to change their tasks and responsibilities as necessary. Their willingness to do so was visible during the meetings observed. They adopted a very direct and straightforward approach when doing so as evidenced by remarks including "*I'll update it*" (T05) or "*I can restructure the action plan*" (T02) or *"I'll chase"* (T04) or "*I'll send them a note myself*" (T01) or:

"T01: I'll have to do that because T02 is going to be out on honeymoon as from tomorrow.

T06: Or one of us.

T01: So, I'll do that. What you can do is start the correspondence, put me on copy and say 'T01 will pick it up from here' or something like that".   (Team T Meeting 1)

The instance when T03 chose to assume increased responsibilities, as referred to in the previous section, deserves specific mention. During the course of her daily work, T03 took a decision which resulted in the organisation having to suffer the consequence of not receiving payment from one of its customers. Although T03 tried to justify her decision, her behaviour was evidently, and for multiple reasons, not considered acceptable by the other team members. According to T06, T03 acted inappropriately and beyond the scope of her role.

Within Team T, additional responsibilities were given to specific individuals as evident by comments such as "*I think it's good for you to give a presentation of the company, how we're set up, how we see the future, how we partner*" (T06). When these additional responsibilities were accepted by the person concerned, comments such as "*you read my mind. I was going to start doing that. Absolutely*" (T04) or "*I agree*" (T01) were made by team members.

And, when such changes were supported and endorsed by the rest of the team, comments such as "*I would say that's the way to do it*" (T05) and "*so that's the plan*" (T01) would be heard.

On one occasion, T06 referred to a particular job which was entrusted to other team members. T06 had the following to say;

> "*But those were too high for any customer to meet. I was leaving it to you guys because it was a very small niche business and they gave us a price target. But I mean here we put on a margin, ok, to cover something because of the price targets and you said, 'put on another 40%' or something. So, I think we had like 50% margins on those*" (T06).

In this case, T06 expressed concern that, although he left the job in the hands of a specific team member, he was not convinced that it was dealt with appropriately and in the same way he would have dealt with it himself.

T06 also added that passing on one's responsibilities to other team members may not be as easy as it seems and it was something one learnt how and when to do through experience. He mentioned that he had to adjust and train himself to be able to let go and entrust others with his duties and responsibilities.

Examples of duties and responsibilities which 'moved' amongst case team members, included, being involved in the commercial side of the business to attend meetings with customers even though operating within the finance department, interacting with clients forming part of another individual's portfolio, taking on the responsibility of the well-being of staff members, taking on directorships of companies, acting as trustee of specific company property, attending meetings and making presentations normally done by the individual's superior, and compiling management accounts for decision-making purposes.

<u>Theme – Communication and Collaboration</u>

Communication Within the Team:

Given that the case team formed part of a large organisation with operations in various countries outside Malta, team members were accustomed to the virtual environment. Virtual communication was a major component of their daily routines. As T01 stated, "*we talk on virtual meetings every single day*" and "*we have routine Skype meetings*". Notwithstanding this, team members mentioned that face-to-face meetings were preferred to virtual meetings since they were "*real meeting[s]*" (T01). Some believed that 'virtual' gave "*an added level of complication… it's not as good as when people are around a table*" (T01). Others gave great importance to facial expressions and gestures when communicating face-to-face since they got "*feedback, instant feedback*" (T02), whilst others believed that meeting physically "*just gives you a comfort zone… it just makes it more warm*" (T04).

T01 also mentioned that when communicating virtually with individuals from different cultures, getting the message across may prove to be more problematic. Words and phrases may have different meanings and connotations and this may lead to issues with understanding. In addition, certain individuals may not be proficient in the language used (for example, literal translations from one language to another may be an issue). These were the various reasons for preferring face-to-face communication over virtual communication. Team members however, also shared the opinion that technology was a very useful tool that had made a difference in the way business was being conducted.

Given that misunderstandings may be more common when communication is virtual, T06 made sure all team members met face-to-face at least twice a year to establish a good relationship. Evidence of the success of this approach is a comment made by T03; "*it doesn't bother me that they're not here*". She felt that the relationship built through occasional face-to-face meetings was a solid one.

T06 pointed out that, initially, when all team members were present for a meeting, there were instances when they talked all at once. This made understanding one another very difficult. To avoid this from happening, especially since virtual meetings were an integral part of every team member's role, T06 hired external consultants to train team members on how to behave and interact during virtual meetings. The intention was to prevent for example, team members speaking concurrently or to avoid excluding distant team members from discussions and debates. To be able to advise accordingly, these consultants sat in virtual meetings and observed team members as they interacted. They then gave their expert opinion as to what needed to be done to improve the virtual experience and ensure that each meeting flowed smoothly and met pre-set objectives.

According to team members, case team meetings, which were conducted every six months using Skype and which were generally attended by all team members, ran very smoothly. A camera was positioned in front of the boardroom table to capture as many of the co-located team members as possible. The distant team members were visible on a screen.

For T05, making sure the camera captured all team members was very important. The following were his views on the matter:

"*And I think when you do a virtual meeting you must see everybody in the room… For me VERY important. And I keep complaining about that because I'm the one who is away. I'm the one with my face on the screen. They see me. They seem my face, every expression and I see two people. And sometimes there's a joke and I don't know what's going on, and .... So those are the things which virtual leadership... I say to my teams 'I want everybody on camera'. And some say 'Oh, my camera doesn't work'. So, I think as a virtual leader maybe those are rules you need to establish. You MUST, MUST see each other. Eye contact is key*" (T05).

T04, the other distant team member shared T05's views. Not being able to see all co-located members made them feel 'isolated' from certain members of the case team. T06 stressed that he did consider "*having a wide-enough camera to be able to capture everybody*" (T06), however, it was most important that "*the main players we could see face-to-face*" (T06). He did not think it was essential for all team members to be visible and he did not believe that this conditioned the development of a sense of belonging to the team. Speaking about a specific team member, he said that he was sure that:

> "S*he feels part of the team because she's in the room with us seeing the two people there [pointing to screen]. They might feel that she's not part of the team because they can't see her*" (T06).

Therefore, although he was aware that the distant team members may not have considered 'invisible' team members part of the team, it was still not important enough that all members were visible. "A*sking her to contribute and talk a little bit*" (T06) was his way of making sure she was still 'visible' to all team members.

Members of Team T also mentioned that there were instances during the meetings when the camera was switched off. This was not ideal because ensuring constant visibility "*makes a big difference because there's a bit of a more personal link*" (T01). One of the reasons for turning off cameras included having to participate in a meeting whilst driving. Although this was avoided as much as possible, such situations still occurred because of the different time zones team members were in.

Another problem which affected the meetings of Team T occurred when team members were unaware that they were muted and therefore, the rest of the team could not hear them speaking. As soon as team members realised, they brought it to the person's attention and the situation was rectified.

During team meetings team members also engaged in conversations which were not related to the meeting itself. They joked amongst

themselves and picked on each other. This was reflective of the relationship they shared.

Coping with 'Virtual':

Team members mentioned that the success of the virtual team was dependent on the qualities and behaviours exhibited by their leader such as being entrepreneurial, hands-on, easily understood and flexible. T06 led the meetings which were based on a pre-prepared agenda, and asked team members to intervene and contribute as necessary. One of the case team members, T05, who had been led virtually throughout his career with Organisation T, considered his leader to be a good virtual leader and he enjoyed working for him *"because I respect him and I trust him"* (T05). This was made clear by T05 when he specified that, as a virtual leader, T06 *"makes people... WANT to do what must be done not make people DO what must be done"* (T05). T05 also recognised that although T06 empowered his people, he still exerted a level of control over operations and knew what was going on throughout the organisation, this being another quality of a good leader. However, as mentioned above, T06 distinguished between team members in that he made sure the senior members of the team were visible during case team meetings. He was not concerned that the less senior members could not be seen on the screen by their colleagues.

Speaking about Team T, T01 said that in the past when another team member was present during their meetings *"she was just throwing in a comment or attack … this used to create issues"* (T01). This person had since been replaced and, due to her replacement's behaviour whose objective was *"looking for compromises ... avoid conflict, get things done, move forward"* (T01), nowadays the virtual meeting was a *"completely different type of, type of meeting"* (T01). According to T04, Team T had reached an equilibrium and therefore *"I feel very comfortable in that environment"* (T04). This was also made possible because of the training and advice team members had received from the consultants engaged by T06.

Team T meetings were generally intended as information-sharing meetings and each one was scheduled during the previous meeting. In this way, team members would agree on a date when the probability of them participating from their workplace was high since establishing a viable internet connection from a hotel room or airport lounge or finding an appropriate 'quiet' location when on-the-go may be problematic. However, many times plans change, and team members had to connect and participate from a location which was not ideal for a meeting because of, for example, background noise. In such cases, the team member had to adjust to participate in the meeting irrespective of the inadequacy of their surroundings, for example, by putting oneself on mute voluntarily. This happened during one of the meetings of Team T where one team member was dialling in from an airport. To minimise the disruption resulting from the constant background noise, T05 chose to "*put myself on mute because it's a bit noisy here*". T05 found it difficult to follow what was being said during the meeting and this was evident given that he was constantly asking "*can you hear me?*" (T05) or "*shout please*" (T05). It was also difficult for the rest of the team to understand what he was saying when he had to speak. T06 specifically mentioned that these were "*the challenges of these calls when people are on the road".*

Team T members faced issues with time zone differences as distant team members were based in the United States (one on the East Coast and another on the West Coast). Team T was conscious that since they were based in different time zones, selecting a time suitable for all was hard but essential. This required adjustment and planning. In fact, T04 stated; "*I'll try to plan so I'm in my office. If I'm not in my office, at least I'm home*". At times, team members had to travel unexpectedly and, finding themselves in a time zone different to the one they thought they would be in when the meeting was originally set, meant that they may be participating at an inconvenient time such as at night. This happened to one team member during the first observation of a Team T meeting, and, given this, the team leader was careful to adapt, making sure the meeting did not last longer than necessary. When all topics on the agenda were covered,

he wrapped things up and told T04 "*to go to sleep. It's late. Thanks for staying up T04, I appreciate*" (T06). T04 mentioned that when they are "*in a weird time zone… makes it difficult to manage*". However, he believed that this was "*just a matter of adjustment*" (T04), not only on the part of who was in the "*tough zone*" (T04), but also on the part of all team members.

T03 pointed out that when something urgent cropped up, it was difficult to deal with it in a timely manner because the person who needed to take the decision and act upon the urgent matter was not easily contacted. This was further exacerbated because team members worked across different time zones. This was frustrating when something needed to be attended to immediately and, as T03 mentioned, adapting to such issues was paramount. In fact, T05 referred to the time barrier as "*a price to pay*" for such remote interaction.

Apart from the adaptation of team members to the virtual environment, having the right "*tools*" to be able to operate and function effectively was also considered necessary. Having tools, such as an IT system which supported high levels of virtual communication and having Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp and Kakaotalk to communicate as often as required, ensured that team members "*create a rhythm in our communication, in sharing of information*" (T05). Therefore, having the right tools also meant having fully functioning equipment to ensure that team members were visible to each other. It was the responsibility of the virtual team leader to ensure that all team members had the proper tools to perform their roles, knew how to use these tools and were using the right tools at the right time. T06 agreed with this - "*it's half-way to having that person in the room*" (T06) when the person you are virtually communicating with is 'visible'.

Apart from issues with the camera and its positioning, members of Team T also mentioned that at times, "*it's also more difficult to hear people. So sometimes a question will be asked and you don't really pick it up*" (T04). Therefore, hearing certain comments being

exchanged amongst the co-located team members was not always possible, this inhibiting the involvement of all team members and affecting their sense of belonging to the team.

Another problem prevalent in virtual team meetings was that when a team member was not interested in what was being discussed they 'muted' their audio and since their camera would still be on, the rest of the team could see them typing at their keyboard. This may have been very irritating and disrespectful towards the person giving their contribution at that time. This 'disinterest' was all the more annoying because, as indicated by T05, "*it's tiring to be on a screen, to keep your attention to a screen*". T05 wanted to stress the point that since in their very nature virtual meetings were tiring and concentrating for a long time when facing a screen was hard, certain actions (such as typing whilst others are speaking) caused unnecessary frustration.

T04 also mentioned that virtual meetings were tough especially for a team member entrusted to make a presentation to the rest of the team. Since the camera did not capture all the members of the virtual team and it was therefore not possible to see the entire audience, and also due to the fact that presentation notes also appeared on the individual's computer screen, engagement with the audience was problematic. This is clearly evidenced by the following comment he made;

"*I like presentations where I can see somebody. I can gauge your reaction. I can gauge your physical presence, your body language, your eyes. I can get an understanding about how I'm being perceived, where I may want to make adjustments, about how I want to change the topic. I think it's more difficult in a virtual world to do that. I think if you're Skyping one-on-one, it's ok. When you go one against many, it becomes a bit more difficult*" (T04).

Therefore "*virtual meetings in a group are tough, tougher to handle*" (T04) especially for team members who are distant from the co-located ones. This is because the co-located team members are sitting round a table and are therefore in a "*meeting forum*" (T04),

whereas the physically distant ones are generally alone in their location.

Changes Proposed:

T04 mentioned that within Team T there was too much "*structure*" and this was especially true with respect to team email communication. It was ingrained in the company's culture to 'copy' various individuals when sending an email. There were cases when the email sent was of no interest to the individual receiving it but, because of company policy, the person was on the recipients' list. Reading and processing these emails was time consuming and this was putting a strain on team members. T04 thought that the company's "*culture could change*" in this respect. He believed that the team would benefit overall - reducing the number of 'unnecessary' emails one had to go through daily, would give team members more time to focus on the more important tasks that featured on their agendas.

Team T members reported that meetings were rushed and too much was discussed in too little time; "*I'm not sure how well that works. I think it's a lot of sharing information ... we rush... There's so much information and we try to discuss every point*" (T05). As a result, therefore, these meetings are just an "*overview*" (T05) of the business and "*a real global look at the office*" (T04), whereas they should be a forum for detailed discussions. In fact, the majority of team members would have liked the team's quarterly meetings to last longer so that they would have more time to discuss important issues. To overcome this problem, the team leader tried "*to generate excitement to get things going faster*" (T06). However,

> "*there is never enough time and we have to rush certain things to make it within the stipulated time frame. But it's not easy. We are all very busy and so it is not possible to make it longer*" (T06).

The analysis of Team T was presented above. The next team which will be analysed is Team M. This team differs from Team T in both scope and composition. Unlike Team T which is an ongoing board

management team and whose members occupy mainly management positions, Team M is an audit project team whose members primarily hold non-managerial posts within the organisation's hierarchy. Also, Team T operates in the manufacturing sector, whereas Team M forms part of a professional services firm.

4.4.2. The Analysis of Case Team M

4.4.2.1. Theme – Team Context

Team Hierarchy:

Formal hierarchy within Team M was generally stronger with respect to the team leader vis-à-vis the rest of the team but virtually non-existent amongst team members. Although multiple hierarchical tiers amongst the team members themselves did exist, formal structure amongst Team M members was far less pronounced. As M02 stated: "*In this team I don't say to myself 'she's the senior and I'm the assistant. We have different roles, different experiences. In a way we are leading our kinds of jobs*" (M02).

M01 had recently been promoted to team supervisor but his new position was as yet not fully accepted by the other team members as there was no real visible change in his duties. Evidence of this is the comment made by M06: "*Our roles in the audit are quite similar, mine and M01. We're working on different companies but they do the same thing*" (M06). This opinion that team members had of M01 may have been further aggravated by the fact that M01 himself found it hard to detach himself from his previous role and therefore failed to assert himself and his authority with the other members of the team.

Therefore, a clear distinction between team leader and team member existed within this team. Participants generally adhered to their formal roles (as followers) and showed respect for their leader as is evident from comments such as "*everybody has a role model. My role model is M05*" (M04). Members of Team M looked up to their leader. He was their 'role model' when they were studying (M02 and M04 were still at this stage) and remained so even when they had

finished their studies (as was the case with M01, M03 and M06). They aspired to occupy the position of Partner within the firm, a position which is regarded very highly in Organisation M.

During the meetings observed, team members listened attentively to M05 and nodded to show approval to his suggestions and proposals. M05 was in full control. He led these meetings and clearly decided how to approach the meeting – in a very factual and direct way. The following extract demonstrates his approach:

"*So, basically guys the situation is the following... At the moment we have received the trial balances of, I believe two of the companies, not more than two. But we've received also the trial balances before tax of every other company. So, I already passed on the trial balances of the four companies to tax. M03 has worked on the tax…That work is all done. I asked M03 to send you the tax workings so all of you have these tax workings… List of appointments... now, division of work... division of work over there. So, I would understand that it is critical that you two focus on the gaming companies and you focus on…. You will work on the international…"* (M05).

Although M05 was clearly leading the meetings, he still constantly encouraged team members to contribute and give their views. M05 was often heard saying "*Questions?... Please feel free to intervene… Any other points?*". He also made it a point to face the team members he was referring to and always addressed each team member by name.

Relationship Building:
Team M felt they were a cohesive team who worked on building solid relationships amongst themselves. According to team members, they "*talked a lot, we helped each other a lot because we were quite a good team. Even M05 used to say a lot that we were one of the best teams that he sent abroad*" (M03) and "*we just discuss things together*" (M06).

As mentioned earlier, Team M worked on the audit of a gaming company. Twice a year it was necessary for certain members of the project team to travel overseas to conduct the audit. When all team members were in Malta, they met regularly outside work (not with the team leader). Team members (excluding the leader) also shared an office. M05, the team leader, strived to create a sense of teamwork by ensuring that everything was discussed as a team. He felt he was successful in developing a team of "*people who do care*" (M05) and this translated into the quality of work they did and their level of satisfaction at work. He had the following to say about Team M:

"*When they see me very busy, they stay with me, they don't do until they finish. If I work on Saturday, they come in, all of them, to help me. When I'm worried about a particular client they try to understand why, and they come*" (M05).

M04 felt that "*with M05 I have a very good relationship and I thank him...*". From the interviews conducted with Team M members, and this was confirmed by the actions of team members visible during the meetings observed, it seemed that other team members shared similar feelings about their leader.

M04 did not believe that strengthening teamwork was solely the responsibility of the leader. He took it upon himself to organise team activities every month. Such activities were well attended and, according to him, their objective was achieved. This he gauged from the feedback he got following the events organised.

Empowering employees and giving them leeway to operate independently was somewhat restricted in Team M. It was accepted that team members could only take specific project-related decisions whilst on-the-job, this generally happening when they worked remotely. M05 confirmed this with his comment:

"*They do take decisions as well. They do take decisions. In certain tests... how to design certain tests and how to meet certain people, they do. Which people to meet, they do. Only if it's something extremely complicated are they going to involve me*" (M05).

Giving advice was common within Team M, especially from team leader to team members. The leader's advice was aimed at developing his people as professionals in their chosen field preparing them for the additional responsibilities they would take on in the future. He took a long-term approach rather than a short-term view and this was appreciated by team members. M04 and M06 provided the following examples:

"*He always says 'think outside the box. Don't look at what the accounts are saying. That's not enough. Think about after - what are the consequences? Because we need to, we are going to sign the financial statements and ensure the shareholders that what directors are saying in the accounts does make sense and how it is going to be affected in the future'*" (M04).

And

"*So, I'm constantly being reminded… 'don't go in too much detail' or 'see the risks in it, what's going to change if you don't go into this detail?'*" (M06).

During her interview with the researcher, M06 disclosed that she felt a sense of discomfort when she had to approach the team leader with suggestions even though she had a very good relationship with him. She felt that although the leader operated an open-door policy, given that he was always so busy, she refrained from approaching him to give advice or propose her views. She also extended this feeling to other persons in the office. Evidence of this was her comment; "*I don't think managers and supervisors feel comfortable letting him know our views… he doesn't project to me that he has the time*" (M06).

Worth mentioning is the fact that, although M06 was the only team member to admit, during her interview with the researcher, that she felt uncomfortable offering advice to M05, during the meetings

observed, the only person observed giving advice to his leader was M03. No other team member engaged in this.

Job Satisfaction:

The sense of satisfaction felt by members of Team M was due to the culture that had been created within the team as well as because of the relationships they had developed amongst themselves. Team members felt comfortable and 'safe' as evidenced from comments such as "*We're lucky here. We're doing what we like most*" (M04) and "*I think as an organisation I'm quite happy to be in it to be honest, very, very happy to be in it*" (M02). This feeling extended to all members of Team M.

The leader of team M ensured that a high level of job satisfaction was maintained by "*give them what they need…. reward them…. give feedback…. train*" (M05). As a result, team members were happy and content.

M06 acknowledged that work may be boring at times because it tends to be repetitive. However, being fully aware of this, the organisation ensures that members of staff are given new clients periodically to counteract this issue.

Causes of Dissatisfaction:

Within Team M, dissatisfaction was felt for different reasons. Negative feelings were at times due to unrealistic demands from clients, to misunderstandings with clients, or because the work performed was "*boring and routine*" (M06). Sometimes it was felt because team members may have been experiencing feelings of not being able to cope because of "*too much work, deadlines, HR issues…*" (M05) or because of a "*lack of planning and coordinating between departments*" (M01) or because they had to perform "*things I hate doing*" (M05). Other times, team members were frustrated because, due to the multiple hierarchical levels within the organisation, and also because of the strict policies and procedures imposed, the organisation was too structured and inflexible.

M06 also mentioned the slow progression within the organisation as well as the fact that promotions were only given to 'special' members of staff in an attempt to retain them. This, in her opinion was not the right approach, as a person's entitlement to a promotion should be based on the quality of their work and on the skills and qualities they exhibit.

Members of Team M mentioned that, although they were satisfied with their jobs, changes which could address certain aspects would be welcome. Such changes included better work planning, more investment in technology, increased specialised training to improve the firm's offering to clients, and increased eminence and brand development. Changing aspects of his role and responsibilities to be able to devote more time to being more strategic and more involved in business development was also mentioned by M05. M06 made an interesting comment about her frustrations. She mentioned that, given that Team M was an audit team and therefore given the nature of the work the team engaged in, team members were not looked at too favourably by clients. To address this issue, the team tried to inform themselves of available benefits or schemes which they could propose to clients and which clients would find beneficial. This she hoped, may contribute to change the perception clients had of the audit team. Evidence of this was her comment:

"*Usually, audits are seen to be intrusive trying to pick the defects. We're perceived to be those people. People do not look forward to seeing us unfortunately. So sometimes to change the perception of us we try to see .... so, if there are, for example, any tax benefits or schemes that they can apply for…*" (M06).

Team members mentioned different ways by which they dealt with conflict when such conflict arose within the team. M04 indicated that he did not confront the issue or person who would have caused conflict and stress. M06 mentioned the issue to her superiors, not immediately, but during her performance review. M01 tried to reach a compromise or balance which would work for him. M05 took a different view as evidenced by his statement:

"*When there's a conflict I stop, I usually say 'listen it's not the time to discuss this' maybe I'll be a bit angry to discuss it and we move out of the room and we find the time to discuss it. The day after I make it a point to sit down with the person and to discuss it*" (M05).

M03 believed that his dissatisfaction and stress was due to his new role and as such this would ease when he gained more experience. He was aware that a new position brought with it both positive and negative emotions. Therefore, although he was satisfied in his new tax role given that he had long aspired to specialise and work in this area of the business, he was still adjusting to the new responsibilities and he still needed to build additional knowledge in the field.

4.4.2.2. <u>Theme – The Movement of Tasks and Responsibilities</u>

Perception of Self:

All members of Team M, with the exception of M01 and M06, felt that they were leaders. This was evident from comments such as "*I'm a leader in everything I do… I think it's natural that I try to lead people*" (M03) and

"*I think of myself as a leader. I think I am a leader. I always have to close training days. I always have to be the one to speak at events and do a motivational speech at the end. I always have to ... I am supposed to give the direction of the firm. I give direction to the teams. I'm involved in ... I think of myself as a leader*" (M05).

The way in which an individual projected themselves within the team was also dependent on their individual circumstances at that point in time. Stress, problems, pressure and deadlines encountered on the job tended to affect a person's manifestation of this image. In fact, the team leader, M05, when speaking about the opinion that his team members had of him said:

"*They think that I am a very moody person. They think that I am a bit arrogant and they think I am very busy… they probably know I work very hard but overall, I don't think they think too highly of me. Because of the fact that sometimes I don't talk to them or I'm too*

busy to understand what they're asking, I don't reply always immediately or I may go into the room and not say 'hello'" (M05).

He was aware that his attitude and approach were generally dictated by his daily mood and, as evident from comments made by members of his team, this attitude was perceived differently by team members. They all knew that he was a busy person and that he was constantly under pressure. However, although some admired him and looked at him as their role model, others chose to interact less with him so as not to disturb him. He was at times deemed unapproachable because of his attitude and because of the personality he projected. However, as he himself admitted, he did "*care about people*" (M05) and his attitude was only dictated by the fact that he expected

> "*that they understand that when you are very busy you can't at times listen to what they have to say, answer emails immediately, because there are another 190 emails to reply to…*" (M05).

About those people who understood him, he said; "*those are my key people*" (M05).

However, although convinced that they did have leader attributes and considered themselves able to exert influence on others, given their formal hierarchical position within the team, M02, M03 and M04 were still required to perform follower tasks and responsibilities. For M04, although assuming follower tasks and responsibilities and occupying a follower position within the team did not resonate with the opinion he had of himself (that of leader), this was not an issue because "*doing what I was looking for*" (M04) and being "*happy with the environment*" (M04) was satisfying in itself. However, M03 suppressed his self-perception because he did not feel "*100% confident that I can step up to the role*" (M03), especially since he had just been transferred to another department within the firm.

As mentioned above, not all participants felt that they were leaders. M01, although having been assigned a supervisory role within the team, was still trying to transition from follower to leader as "*up to a few months ago I more saw myself as a follower, but I'm trying to shift myself as a leader now*" (M01). He believed that he had not yet developed the character and self-esteem to assume the tasks and responsibilities of a leader. He also doubted whether he was ready to take decisions associated with his new duties especially when working remotely and physically distant from the formal team leader.

M06 was unsure of the perception she had of herself and mentioned "*I don't have leadership skills… I'm not a follower either*". Although not convinced of her self-perception, M06 still believed she had the ability to influence others and was successful in doing so. She was however not willing to take decisions when she was unsure.

There were times when team members were regarded as knowledgeable and experienced by their colleagues who asked them for advice and guidance. In fact, M01 and M06 respectively stated that team members "*tend to formulate a decision that I am more knowledgeable than them*" (M01) and that

"*fellow colleagues come to me to ask me questions, they request to be assigned to me on assignments. To me that is a sign that there could be potential on official leadership*" (M06).

However, acknowledgement of their expertise was not enough for them to feel they could assume leader duties within the team.

For others, the organisation structure and the bureaucracy present within the firm were the reasons behind them feeling and acting as followers rather than leaders (even in cases where they formally held leader responsibilities). This behaviour was evident through comments such as "*I would like to confirm…I need the approval… I'm not empowered to sign so he [M05] needs to take decisions*" (M04). When, however, faced with a situation that required team members to assume some form of leadership responsibilities when

working on the audit and in the absence of their team leader, members of Team M would;

> "*think of what M05 would do in such a moment… we sort of know how he would react in certain cases… I try to take the same approach that the firm would be oriented to do*" (M01).

Self-Perception vs Hierarchical Position:
When there was misalignment between an individual's self-perception and their formal role within the organisation, some degree of conflict was experienced. For example, M02, M03 and M04 believed they possessed leader qualities and traits. They were however aware that they had to keep such traits in check and control their initiative to respect the boundaries imposed by the formal position they occupied. In this instance, the strict policies and procedures enforced within the organisation which may not have allowed them the opportunity to engage in leadership behaviours was not an issue. In their case, a sense of acceptance of the status quo took over.

M01, who felt he was a follower but had been promoted to a leader position within the case team, also experienced frustration as a result of the misalignment between his self-perception and his formal position. The conflict he had was due to the fact that "*when I was an assistant I was a follower. Even when I started as a senior, I was a follower. But now that more workload and more responsibilities are put in your hands, you need to.... *" (M01). He felt the weight of the additional and different responsibilities he had been tasked with and was not convinced he was prepared for the new challenge. When asked by the researcher if he was trying to realign his mindset to the formal hierarchical position he now occupied, he responded by saying "*I try to do my best in such instances*" (M01).

In the case of M05 and M06 no dissonance was apparent, this may be because their self-perception aligned with their formal position in the team.

Attitudes Towards Changing Tasks and Responsibilities:

Team members took on additional responsibilities for different reasons. Some aspired to become more important to the company, others considered it a learning opportunity, and others performed such duties because it was essential for the team to progress. M06 mentioned that sometimes her colleagues asked to be assigned certain audits in specific areas, such as fund audits or audits of gaming companies, so that they could specialise and develop the expertise necessary, this making them more valuable to the organisation.

When accepting to perform duties which did not form part of their job descriptions, it was important for team members that their actions were supported and endorsed by the team leader. As reiterated by M01, the intention was always to please the leader. To ensure they were successful in this, team members would behave and take actions which they believed their leader would.

Team members were generally prepared to take on different tasks and responsibilities "*as a challenge*" (M02). However, having the necessary expertise to perform effectively when changing duties was a concern for all team members (apart from the leader). M03 and M01 had mixed reactions on the matter because, although they were both very willing to take on additional duties, when under pressure to meet other deadlines, these duties became "*extra*" (M03). However, M01 indicated that, assuming different tasks and responsibilities within the team is also beneficial to the individual – doing so adds to the person's knowledge and should therefore be regarded as a learning opportunity:

"*I believe that everything that you can learn from it you need to give it a try so if there's a task which is not part of your job but which will add to your knowledge and which will improve your skills in any way, yes I am willing to do it*" (M01).

Before accepting to take on additional duties, team members took into account the time needed to deal effectively with the

responsibilities ensuring that their daily responsibilities were seen to first. The time of year was another consideration (due to tight deadlines which generally accumulated around the same period). Another factor was the nature of the assignment itself. A person would decide whether or not to accept an additional assignment based on their assessment of whether they would have enjoyed or personally benefited from the additional work. This decision was also based on whether the individual thought they had the necessary training, guidance and experience to perform adequately. M04 pointed out that since he was a member of a hybrid team and his superiors were therefore not always physically close to him, it was essential that he understood exactly what was expected of him before accepting to take on different responsibilities. M04 would not want to disappoint the team leader nor give inadequate answers to any questions he would be asked. His comment is evidence of this mindset: "*when you come here and M05 starts reviewing the file, M05 needs answers*" (M04).

M04 also mentioned that when he was seen performing additional duties, he had the endorsement and support of his colleagues. The reason for this was that, when he took on these duties, he was avoiding the hassle, time and responsibility for others having to do them themselves. Other team members only had a problem with their colleagues taking on additional responsibilities if more work was created for them as a result.

Team members reported that, at times, they consciously chose not to look for opportunities to perform outside their job descriptions because of the hierarchical position they occupied or because they did not have sufficient knowledge to do so effectively. M06's comment, "*I feel I don't have the experience*" is evidence of this.

M06 also highlighted a different issue which at times determined her willingness to accept or actively assume other duties and responsibilities within the hybrid team. The following comment demonstrated her reasoning:

"*The problem is that I obviously have a charge-out rate of a senior. So, doing the job of an assistant, it won't bother me, but it would have an impact on the costings*" (M06).

M05, the leader, was very vocal of his frustration when performing tasks and responsibilities which did not form part of his portfolio of duties:

"*Very frustrating. Very frustrating because I have to get involved in these things too… that's what bugs me most - that I have to get involved in things that I shouldn't be getting involved in*" (M05).

M05 expressed himself unequivocally as to his position on performing additional duties outside his normal role. Given that he was a busy person with no work-life balance, he felt very frustrated when he was compelled to take on responsibilities which clearly belonged to others within the organisation. He was fully aware that as a result of taking on certain jobs, "*although I don't mind doing them*", he could not dedicate his time to his strategic role as he became more involved in the operational side of the business. This attitude was apparent from the comment;

"*A partner here… you have to do everything. You do your coffee… photocopies… clean the toilet… meet angry clients… meet angry staff… phone to collect money… I do everything… this is not my role*" (M05).

He openly manifested this attitude at team and organisation level. He made it a point to voice his dissatisfaction with the other team members even though he was aware that his reaction may be counterproductive and may not benefit team cohesion and overall team performance. However, since he would be very willing to shed some of his responsibilities to other team members, this implied a one-way movement of duties and responsibilities between M05 and the rest of the team. Although this was the case, during meetings, team members were still heard responding "*all right*" (M01 and M02) to confirm their acceptance of the movement in responsibilities proposed by the leader (maybe because they still felt compelled to

do so due to their hierarchical position within the team). M04 believed that, if different team members refused to take on additional tasks and responsibilities as necessary, team functioning would suffer. He also added that M05 expected the team to work as one cohesive unit.

M05 mentioned that when tasks and responsibilities were taken on by different team members, it was essential to recognise that duties may be handled differently to how one would have done them themselves. Although this may cause frustration, they must be "*ready to accept*" (M05) the consequences and give feedback to the individual to ensure a better outcome in the future. During one of the meetings, M05 referred to an instance when he had given team members specific responsibilities. When referring to this situation, it was evident that M05 was disappointed with the way it was approached. His comment is evidence of this: "*I would have tested it differently. Now, it's up to you… if you find it more comfortable like that*" (M05). In fact, M05 declared that entrusting others with his duties and responsibilities was not so straightforward. He spoke about the importance of choosing the right individual for the job and of making sure that the selected individual was trained and was fully conscious of the additional responsibility assigned to him. This was especially important because, although the person accepting the additional duties had automatically accepted responsibility for their actions, ultimate responsibility rests with M05. In fact, M05 chose which duties to assign very carefully and ensured that the individual chosen was not under too much pressure since the likelihood of making mistakes would increase. He therefore did not take risks especially when the work involved was commissioned by one of the organisation's major clients.

When team members performed tasks which did not fall within their portfolio of duties, having missing information and not knowing the whole picture meant that they were not well-equipped to perform these new tasks. This was another cause of frustration given that team members may not have been able to perform these tasks

independently and autonomously as they would have preferred. This seems to have been felt more strongly when team members worked remotely and were physically distant from their formal leader.

Changes in Tasks and Responsibilities – Behaviours and Actions: As visible during team meetings, the team leader encouraged the movement of tasks and responsibilities among team members. However, given that Team M was an audit team who worked on the audit of a specific company every year, responsibilities generally remained the same for team members. Team members did, at times, taken on different tasks and responsibilities, but this was not a regular occurrence. Comments such as "*we will do that*" (M03), "*this year M02 will do the controls testing. Controls testing is a crucial part of the audit*" (M05) and "*I said I'm going to do it*" (M05) and "*I am going to do it myself now*" (M05) were heard during team meetings when tasks were moving from one person to another. Although, as mentioned in the previous section, M05 was not very willing to take on additional responsibilities, he still engaged in such a practice when he believed it was essential for the team.

The brief vignette shows an instance where responsibilities 'moved' among team members:

M05: And what about bet verification testing?... This process should be checked… So, there is a process in place. And the second one is... a test that we often do at another gaming company...

M03: We do that test.

M05: You usually do it with the other tests...

M03: I do six, no seven others. You will find that test in the international section.

M05: Maybe you should not do it this time. M04 should do it.

M03: Basically, this test has changed over time. When I started doing it they were very risk averse. They were the lowest on a consistent basis. Now they are average.

M05: So, we will now see whether this thing, whether you will do the risk one or whether M04.

M03: I used to do it. It was part of controls.   (Team M Meeting 1)

Responsibilities which 'moved' amongst members of Team M included liaising with each other's clients, following-up with clients on aspects of the audit process, performing stock-takes, compiling tax computations, audit testing, and compiling and updating audit documents.

4.4.2.3. <u>Theme – Communication and Collaboration</u>

Communication Within the Team:

As previously mentioned, Team M was a hybrid team that worked on the audit of a gaming company. The team became hybrid when the audit was live. The researcher observed two meetings which were held in the boardroom of Organisation M. These meetings were called by the leader at audit planning stage to discuss the audit strategy and to distribute work. After these meetings, four team members travelled overseas to the audit client whilst the rest remained in Malta. At this point the hybrid team started to communicate and interact via email and voice calls for the duration of the project.

Members of Team M mentioned that misunderstandings were more likely to occur in the initial stages of team formation when team members were adjusting to working together. These however begin to diminish when team members "*communicate so much virtually, that [they] will know what each other is meaning*" (M02). If such situations failed to resolve themselves, the result would be unintended frustration, conflict and animosity among team members.

When speaking about whether they had a preference for virtual communication or for face-to-face communication, team members favoured the latter. Reasons for this were promptness of response (M01), increased understanding of the intended message (M02 and M05), and the likelihood of being more able to gauge facial expressions (M03).

M03 clarified that "*we, as an office, are [not] that comfortable*" using a video call facility. When sometimes emails were not understood by the recipient, team members resorted to voice calls even though they were aware that if they were to utilise a communications medium that added a 'visual' element to the communication, efficiency would increase. M04 was the only team member (and the only participant) who did not agree with using a video call facility to communicate. He believed that an individual's proactivity and initiative would decrease and the experience at work would be less satisfying. His reasoning was that, since emails limit information exchange, it would be more likely that individuals tried to solve issues themselves rather than choosing to go back-and-forth with emails. If video conferencing were to be used on a regular basis, individuals would get answers from other members of the team rather than having to think of them themselves. In the long run, job satisfaction and initiative would be affected.

During the team meetings team members also spoke about matters not related to the scope of the meeting such as holiday plans and sports. They also exchanged office jokes.

Coping with 'Virtual':
The members of Team M were conscious that their leader behaved differently when the team was entirely co-located to when the team became virtual. In fact, M04 and M02 had the following to say about their leader; "*M05 is more helpful than usual… when we are abroad M05 is very helpful*" (M04) and "*M05 is very approachable… he will involve himself automatically*" (M02). It seemed that M05 willingly adapted to the needs of the audit team (especially when they were working remotely) and adjusted his behaviour according to their requirements despite still having a busy schedule.

Members of Team M had also adjusted to operating virtually. To assist with this adjustment M05 appointed a supervisor to oversee team operations when he (M05) was physically distant from team members. The person selected was one with many years' experience working on the audits of gaming companies. He had been a member

of this team ever since Organisation M worked on this audit. M01, therefore, was intended to become a point of contact for the team. Team members such as M04 discussed problems and issues with him but M06, for example, did not endorse M01's new leadership role referring to him as "*passive with certain things*" (M06). When team members discussed a particular issue and reached their own conclusions which they would still want to run by M05, they would adapt their approach and not "*ask M05 six questions in that email … we just focus on that one*" (M01).

Team M faced a problem related to the scheduling of meetings. Since the team worked on an audit which was live for a very short period (normally 4 days), they did not have the benefit of time to deal with issues arising, this meaning that issues had to be dealt with relatively quickly. Lining up times for all team members and scheduling meetings for the entire team at that point was generally not possible as the immediacy and timeliness of response was important and "*delay can cause some issues*" (M03). As a result, the team resorted to communication via email or phone. However, M06 believed that the back-and-forth nature of emails was also a "*longer process … has an impact when being a distance communication*" (M06).

Changes Proposed:
Team M held their team meetings face-to-face and once the project became live and team members did not remain co-located, the team resorted to email and phone calls to communicate. M01 and M05 believed that, when they were overseas and needed to communicate with other team members in Malta, they should use a video call facility because observing body language would have facilitated understanding, and interactions would be more fruitful. Something else which would benefit team dynamics would be undertaking additional training to become more knowledgeable so that they could initiate better procedures and also solve issues themselves with less involvement of the team leader. M05 was ready and willing to invest in team members by offering additional training and support and also

rewarding them for efforts made to increase efficiencies. M06 would welcome such changes.

M02, M03 and M04 could not think of anything they wanted different in the team.

The team analysed hereunder is Team D. Just like Team M, Team D is also part of a professional services firm. However, Team D differs from Team M in that it is an ongoing team responsible for diversity and inclusion at the Malta practice whereas Team M is an audit project team. One interesting aspect unique to Team D is that one team member occupies a higher hierarchical position within the organisation than the formal leader of the team.

4.4.3. The Analysis of Case Team D

4.4.3.1. Theme – Team Context

Team Hierarchy:

The three members of Team D were at different hierarchical levels within the organisation. Within this team, the formal positions held by the different members of the team, were somewhat particular. D03 was the team leader and was based in Italy. However, D02 (who was based in the Malta office) occupied a higher hierarchical position in the organisation than D03 did and, at times, this was manifesting itself as a problem during case team meetings. As a result of her hierarchical position within the organisation or maybe because she had worked with the organisation for a longer time than anyone else in the case team, D02 attempted to portray a stronger personality and lead the meetings herself. D03 would intervene but D02 persisted stating "*let's just maybe start with….*" (D02) and "*just to catch up with where we were last time….*" (D02). As a result, D03 felt she needed to assert herself as evidenced from statements such as "*I needed to speak to you about…*" and "*my goal was to work on…*" (D03). At that point, D02 was observed to retract temporarily. However, this behaviour persisted throughout the meetings.

During the one-to-one interview with the researcher, D03 was very clear about her role within the team. She unequivocally specified that

she "*give the direction… [and they] work together in the team*" (D03) to deliver on targets that she would have personally established. D02, on the other hand, seemed unaware of both her own behaviour as well as of the reasons behind D03's behaviour in that she did not make any link between D03's actions and anything she (D02) had said or done. D01 seemed to be accepting of the situation as implied by her comment "*it makes sense for me to be like that*" when she referred to the way D02 was behaving.

Relationship Building:

Team members generally stated that their team was a cohesive one. They worked together to develop strong bonds between themselves. For D01 it was important to feel she could speak openly to her superior, knowing that her superior was always prepared to listen and give advice. D02 believed that becoming that person who team members could discuss problems with, confide in and speak to openly in a way where they could have conversations "*not as your employer but as your friend*" (D02) was important. For D01, maybe because she was young and maybe also because she lacked experience, building bonds as friends was essential. When speaking about her relationship with D03, D02 declared that, because it was essential for her to perform her role within the case team and "*simply because we had a lot to do and a lot to get done*" (D02), she had to invest in the relationship. Her efforts paid off as the relationship between D02 and D03 was a strong one, based on cooperation and on a desire to help one another. Evidence of this is the following comment:

"*The intensity of my relationship with her is Monday to Sunday, you know. We speak a lot because we deal with everything to do with talent. And if I'm not on a call she'd send me a WhatsApp. If it's a 9 o'clock call we need to take, we'll take it*" (D02).

Reliance on one another and a sense of collaboration prevailed within Team D. Relationships were however not equally strong among all team members. D02, although aware that "*you have to be quite a tight team to work together because otherwise it doesn't*

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work" (D02), tried to create a bond between herself and D01 by meeting socially outside the work environment. This was facilitated because they both worked in the same location. D02 bonded with the distant team member (D03) by speaking to her regularly and travelling overseas to meet her whenever possible. By doing so, they developed "*a very close relationship very fast … we clicked*" (D02). Once again D02, maybe because her formal role within the organisation was of a higher hierarchical rank than that of the case team leader, seemed to be taking responsibility for fostering the creation of cohesion and bonding even within Team D. However, the relationship between D03 and D01 seemed to be rather shallow. Not only did it form solely as a result of virtual interaction as D03 and D01 never physically met, but, when the researcher asked D03 whether she had ever met D01 in person, D03 was not sure. She replied:

"*Yes. I think so. Honestly, I don't remember but I think so. I'm not sure. I don't know whether she's ever visited with D02. I don't know if she's ever come to Italy with D02. I don't know. Right now, I don't remember. I think she came but I'm not sure*" (D03).

D03 did acknowledge the importance of building solid bonds but she was also aware that developing strong relationships with certain individuals was more important than with others. Consequently, it seemed that she was selective as to who to build such relationships with as evidenced by the fact that she had never met D01 in person.

According to team members, building strong relationships with subordinates was essential. D02 and D03, the team members occupying managerial roles attempted to do so in different ways. D02 aimed to be "*encouraging… understanding*" (D01) so that, when things were tough, D01 still felt the need and desire to work with her to achieve pre-set objectives. D01 acknowledged that, as her superior, D02:

"*helps me to speak and helps me to basically learn to be myself. She's very encouraging and she's very.... You can be relaxed with her. She's not the type that if I do a mistake, she's going to make*

me feel very bad for example about it. She's very understanding so that helps me a lot. My superior does help me a lot" (D01).

D03 made a conscious effort to meet D02 and bond with her. However, she made no effort to build a relationship with D01.

Team D opted to keep the cameras turned off during their meetings because they said they felt very comfortable with each other. Team D did not give importance to the 'visual' element. This was evidenced by the statement "*I would never switch on the camera. I wouldn't need to see her*" (D02). However, given that D01 and D03 had never met and also given that D02 confirmed that there was a "*need that human interaction to happen on some level*" (D02), actions and words seemed not to be aligned fully.

When discussing whether team members were willing to offer each other advice, it appeared that D01 was not comfortable doing so. This was especially the case when offering advice to D03. It was generally the more senior member, D02, who had no problem doing so when the situation warranted her input.

Advice from team leader to team members was common. D03 was often heard saying *"I think it's useful to… "* and "*what I was proposing was to…*".

Job Satisfaction:
The co-located members of Team D, D01 and D02, said that they were satisfied at work because being part of a large organisation gave them experience and exposure to many opportunities. This allowed them to learn more and to achieve more. However, the team leader did not share this positivity as was apparent from the following comment: "*I would like to have maybe sometimes more credit… to go further in terms of grades*" (D03).

Causes of Dissatisfaction:

Team members referred to certain aspects of their jobs that made them feel frustrated and, at times, dissatisfied. These feelings were sometimes due to their formal positions as was the case when having to meet the demands of many and trying to "*please everyone*" (D02) whilst at the same time trying to abide by strict deadlines. Other times distress was felt because the organisation was too bureaucratic. A lack of flexibility in the organisation's policies and procedures and multiple hierarchical levels across the organisation were elements which, although accepted by case team members, still caused a certain degree of frustration. D03 pointed this out on various occasions:

> "*Here it's a very hierarchical organisation and… the decision process is very long…. until the decision is taken or approved, you cannot move forward. This is the frustrating part*" (D03).

Although empowerment was promoted as an inherent aspect of the team's culture and team members made it clear that they "*would like to take on more responsibility*" (D01), their requests were not being given consideration. Another cause of frustration for D01 was slow progression within the organisation which, at times, was not commensurate with the effort of the individual. D01 also mentioned some overlap of responsibilities which caused confusion and slowed work progress. Given that these were sources of frustration for her, she approached D02 to openly discuss any changes which could help improve the situation. D02 was receptive to D01's concerns.

Along with D01, even D03 was concerned with progression and career advancement. She wanted to go higher within the organisation so she could have a voice that would be heard. Presently, this was not the case as D03 felt that she was not getting credit and recognition for her work, effort and experience.

D02 mentioned that the organisation was growing and this transition was "*impacting people in different ways, which is not always positive*"

(D02). As a result of such change, the organisation experienced high staff turnover rates at the lower levels due to feelings of insecurity that were dissipating across the organisation. This translated into more pressure and higher intensity, and therefore more stress. Attempts to rectify the situation were being made through the recruitment of additional resources and training of existing employees.

4.4.3.2. Theme – The Movement of Tasks and Responsibilities

Perception of Self:

D02 distinguished between her professional and personal life when it came to her opinion as to whether she felt a leader or a follower. At work she occupied the position of Talent Leader, a role through which she contributed to giving direction to the firm in areas relating to HR and talent. She affirmed that;

> "*It's inside me… I would always end up in roles where I would be putting people to work together, collaborating, running it, pushing it, being the person pushing*" (D02).

This statement effectively mirrors the image she believed others had of her. D02 wanted to be considered part of the team. To ensure that other team members reacted positively to her leadership, especially since she was aware that she came across as being "*tough, in terms of demanding*" (D02), she made sure she actively contributed to the task or project "*because otherwise they won't buy into it*" (D02). She was aware that she was considered to be tough even in her interactions with her direct superior (the Senior Partner she reports to). However, in those cases she specifically stated; "*I choose my battles… I decide whether to fight it or not*" (D02), this demonstrating that she chose when to enact particular behaviours.

The way in which D02 behaved at work contrasted with the way she behaved in her personal life and how she felt in terms of leading and following. She specified that in her "*personal life I am very happy to follow, as a result of having to do so much leading in my professional life*" (D02).

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D03 believes she is an asset for her team. As a result of her background and experience, she can work with people from different cultures. She is a reliable and goal-oriented individual who understands that creating synergies is essential for effective team functioning. D03 considers herself a leader. However, the way in which Organisation D is structured and the bureaucracy present within the firm meant that she was restricted because "*If you are not a partner, they will not let you directly take decisions… I can't on my own*" (D03). D02, although higher up in the organisation's hierarchy than D03 felt very much the same and she "*wouldn't have that conversation without speaking to [my superior] … I don't just charge to the wind and do my own thing*" (D02).

D01's thought process as to why she felt that she was a follower was somewhat different. She compared herself to others who she believed possessed leadership qualities and traits. She felt she did not have such skills but aspired to have them to be able to occupy a leadership role in the future. This was evident in her comment:

"*I want to be a leader, but I do not consider myself as a leader… I believe he has those kinds of characteristics more than I do… He's good at influencing people and encouraging people*" (D01).

D01 is a shy and quiet person and was viewed as such by her peers. Her personality conditioned her behaviour and the image she tried to project within the case team.

Self-Perception vs Hierarchical Position:
D02 who felt that she was a leader in her professional life and was very willing to be a follower in her personal life, did not feel that it was a problem for her to shift from one mindset to another. Evidence of this was her statement; "*I am more about, what needs to get done, gets done, rather than making a big noise about it*" (D02). Testimonial to her approach was her comment:

"*We are driven by projects… ultimately the goal is to get the job done. So, for me, it's not about… it makes no difference if I'm*

leading or following… the goal remains the same. I don't need to be the one leading them all the time" (D02).

In fact, she also mentioned that the position descriptions drawn up for employees at Organisation D were loosely worded and duties and responsibilities were not clearly defined because "*your job might need you to do one thing today and something different tomorrow*" (D02).

As previously mentioned, Team D is in a very hierarchical organisation and this caused frustration and distress to D03 who felt that she could not manifest her leadership skills and qualities to the extent she would have wanted to. This necessitated a certain degree of adjustment and adaptation. The existence of multiple tiers within the organisation structure and the fact that Partners within the organisation approved all aspects of operations and client work were reasons for this.

D01 did not feel any internal conflict since her self-perception coincided with her hierarchical position within the team.

Attitudes Towards Changing Tasks and Responsibilities:
All members of Team D said that they willingly took on responsibilities outside their normal duties. Team members considered it the norm that they were granted additional responsibilities or that they performed outside their formal role:

"*The requirements of our job don't start or end with our job description. That's the firm we're in. So ... for that reason we don't have very clearly defined job descriptions*" (D02).

D02 mentioned that, when she realises that she has the necessary skills and knowledge to do a job, she actively takes it on, sometimes enjoying it more because it "*compensates for the very boring parts of my job*" (D02). D02 also made sure that when other team members were required to perform tasks which did not form part of their job description, they were sufficiently trained and guided to be able to do so effectively.

D03 valued taking on increased responsibilities because being asked to do them was proof that she was considered capable. However, for her, getting recognition was important:

"*Here I am on support. And here as support services I am not as considered as people on business in that typology of company… I think that here maybe what is lacking is we need recognition of what you are doing or what is asked for you to do*" (D03).

D03 not only mentioned salary increases and promotions as desirable forms of recognition, but also referred to the importance of ensuring superiors knew the exact contribution of each individual (who did what).

D01 felt that she had the support and encouragement of her colleagues and superiors when she herself asked to take on certain responsibilities to increase her knowledge in specific areas. However, she would accept to take on those duties only if they did not encroach on her spare time. Evidence of this was her comment:

"*I don't like to spend many extra hours here because I don't get paid. I don't get time in lieu. Maybe I do an hour…. But more than an hour I feel that it is too much*" (D01).

D01 also mentioned that she would not be willing to take on additional duties and responsibilities if she felt she did not have the necessary expertise to perform as expected. Her comment, "*D02 has more of an idea than I do*" (D01) reflects her thoughts.

Within the hybrid team, D02 encouraged the movement of tasks and responsibilities among team members. She did so to empower people and also because she knew that an individual "*can't do it all alone*" (D02) and may need support and assistance from team members. She referred to D01 and said that "*I'd like them to take more. I tell them like 'make that mistake, it's fine. Nobody is going to die. Fine, we'll live'*" (D02). This is evidence of her approach. However, although she was ready to give leeway, she was still conscious that she would be very frustrated if D01 did not perform to

the high standards imposed by the firm. She therefore tried to teach the consequences of wrong decisions, hoping that D01 would learn from these mistakes to avoid repeating them in the future. D02 also indicated that, to mitigate negative effects resulting from wrong decisions taken by 'empowered' individuals, close monitoring of their behaviours and actions was necessary. To avoid negative consequences altogether, therefore, changes of duties and responsibilities within the team may have been affected. D02's perspective is articulated in the extract below:

> "W*ould like to be more ... to give them more of that maybe leeway, but… we have the practice reviewers here, I can't tell them 'no it's ok, don't worry'... They drill us and if we're not ready... if we don't seem to have our stuff in place, all hell breaks loose*" (D02).

Changes in Tasks and Responsibilities – Behaviours and Actions: As previously mentioned, job descriptions within Organisation D were loosely worded. Most of the time, team members adhered to their formal responsibilities - maybe because of the strict hierarchical levels present within the firm or because they would not have the necessary expertise to perform effectively. However, when a movement in duties and responsibilities among team members occurred, and this was visible during the meetings observed, comments such as "*Ok, I'll write to her*" (D03) or "*I can restructure the action plan*" (D02) or "*I'll follow up with him*" (D02) or "*when do you schedule to launch it?*" (D03) were heard.

When such movement in tasks and responsibilities was supported by the rest of the team, comments such as "*agreed, yes it makes more sense*" (D02) and "*Ok, fine*" (D03) and "*OK. Very good. Super*" (D02) would be heard during meetings.

The movement of duties and responsibilities was not commonly practiced among members of Team D. An example of such an occurrence is presented hereunder:

> *D03: In fact, so it will be great to have L train from manager and up.*

D02: That's not a problem.

D03: Ok. So, I write to her and I put you in copy so we can try to organise that?

D02: We pay her flights and her hotel when she's here?

D03: Exactly that's it. And she's an eminence, you know.

D02: Ok then I'll speak to her. Maybe we'll plan it when she's visiting her son or when she's in Europe maybe. Like we did with you when we came to Milan.   (Team D Meeting 1)

During the subsequent meeting, D03 was seen following up with D02 on what had been agreed in the previous meeting. However, D02 had not yet fulfilled the commitment she had taken on:

D03: Do you remember that you had to reach out to L to organise training from manager and up?

D02: Yes.

D03: Did you have a chance to talk to her?

D02: I haven't spoken to her, but I'll drop her an email today because I've been out of the office. So, I'll call her and have a chat with her.

D03: Ok.

D02: Because I've been out. I've just come back in today. So I'll get in touch with her.   (Team D Meeting 2)

Compiling member firm standards, designing training programmes, preparing reports on HR and talent, preparing an action plan for the well-being aspect which the diversity and inclusion team were responsible for, and being given responsibility for the launch of a survey are examples of the tasks and responsibilities which generally 'moved' among Team D members.

4.4.3.3. <u>Theme – Communication and Collaboration</u>

Communication Within the Team:

For Team D, virtual communication was the norm. Virtual communication was not only adopted for case team meetings.

Individuals communicated virtually across the organisation. However, although accustomed to 'virtual', team members agreed that "*through Skype… sometimes it's hard to understand them*" (D01).

Members of Team D believed that when communication was face-to-face, gestures and facial expressions gave additional cues and it was more likely that misunderstandings were avoided. In fact, to minimise the probability of increased misunderstandings, D03 thought it was much better to develop a face-to-face relationship with an individual before taking the relationship virtual as "*you start to know the people and the person through contact and it is not really a problem at all… to work on through Skype*" (D03).

D03 however, although having made it a point to meet D02 when the team was initially being formed, did not do the same with D01. As a result, during the meetings observed, it was evident that D01's interactions with D03 were minimal. D01 believed that extra effort was needed when forming part of a virtual team as one had to be more committed to build relationships. D02 however, although conscious that the relationship would still have developed even if she did not have the opportunity to meet D03 face-to-face, still believed that, at some point, physical interaction should happen. In addition, D02 also confirmed that when comparing the relationship that she had formed with D03 (the physically distant team member) to the relationship that she had with D01 (the co-located team member), "*the relationship… is obviously not as intense because I don't speak to her every day*" (D02).

During team meetings, Team D did not switch on their cameras since being visible to one another was not considered important. This approach seems to have been widespread in the organisation as indicated by D03 and D02 respectively; "*I participate in different meetings… no one sees each other. So, no one has the video on*" (D03) and:

"*We would never put the cameras on for Skype calls like this. It's quite funny actually. And now we've removed our telephones so*

it's... we just use Skype for Business to call each other. But even when we had a phone... no I would never switch on the camera. I wouldn't need to see her" (D02).

In D01's opinion, being able to see each other during a call was only necessary when discussions involved "*something very serious or very important*" (D01).

D03 believed that, to be able to utilise a video call facility, the organisation would have to be physically configured to enable such interactions and provide appropriate spaces which would be easily accessible and available. Participating in a meeting from a shared office was not always ideal as any disruption could "*affect the quality of the exchange*" (D03). During one of the meetings of Team D, multiple voices could be heard in the background. D03 was participating in the virtual meeting from her office. Since she shared her office with others, this caused disruption which influenced the meeting's progress.

During the meetings observed, D01 and D02 answered emails whilst D03 spoke. D02 was certain that D03 was in her office doing "*likewise on her end*" (D02).

Setting up the calls for the meetings was prompt and timely, maybe because it was something the team was used to given the frequency of virtual meetings. However, at times, problems with the quality of the connection were experienced as evident from the following extract:

> "*D03: Sorry D02, the line is just a little chaotic. Your voice is sometimes interrupted. I don't know…*
>
> *D02: [After adjusting the phone set's position] Can you hear better like this?*
>
> *D03: Yes, it's better now.*"   (Team D Meeting 2)

This caused frustration to team members and slowed down the progress of the meetings. For example, there were instances when

an echo could be heard, this compromising the clarity of the dialogue and understanding the content of the conversations became difficult. As a result, the speaker had to repeat until the message was understood. When at times the connection was interrupted because the internet signal was not strong enough, reconnecting was occasionally problematic.

Coping with 'Virtual':

Team D meetings were scheduled during the previous meeting. Meetings took the form of discussions. They were organised to update team members on what was happening in the different geographies and to discuss new and ongoing projects. At times, connectivity issues affected the progress of case team meetings. Such issues with 'virtual' affected the understanding of what was being discussed. In those cases, team members would say: "*I know [D03] is always at the end of a line if I haven't understood her*" (D02). Team members coped and adapted to such problems by increasing the sense of reliance and dependence they (mainly D02 and D03) had on each other.

Members of Team D believed that the success or failure of a virtual team, apart from being dependent on the team leader, was also dependent on the character and attributes of the virtual team's members, on their disposition to adjust to the virtual environment, and on the importance they gave to the building of trusting virtual relationships from a distance. The following statement provides a sense of this:

> "*I knew I had to build a relationship with D03… where I could see that she needed the help, I offered it… so I think building that trust… I think showing that you are ready to support and work as a team really… creating the relationship in whichever way it works… collaborating when you can… sharing… we're as a team*" (D02).

As mentioned above, D03 did not make the effort to meet D01 and as a result the relationship may have suffered.

Changes Proposed:
Team members were generally in agreement that the case team was a smooth-running team. However, they still believed there was room for improvement. D03 mentioned that because of the organisation's structure, approval for specific projects and initiatives took too long. In fact, she disclosed that as a team they had already proposed certain adjustments to team-related procedures with the objective of becoming more autonomous and "*more independent on certain things… they would like something quicker in terms of approval especially for projects*" (D03).

D01 mentioned that organising team meetings more frequently would be ideal. She may have felt this way because she may not have been involved in the many regular conversations between D02 and D03.

D02 did not think any changes were necessary. If ever she felt there was a problem, she would travel to see D03 to sort it out.

The last case team to be analysed is Team SB. This team is an ongoing team responsible for the support and maintenance of the betting platform of a gaming company. Since its inception, this team has always been a hybrid team and different team members have worked remotely at different times. At present, four team members are co-located in the Malta office and one team member works remotely from the UK office.

4.4.4. The Analysis of Case Team SB

4.4.4.1. Theme – Team Context

Team Hierarchy:
As mentioned earlier, Team SB had five team members, four of which were located in Malta and one team member was based in the UK. Formal hierarchy was not strong within Team SB. The team leader's formal position was acknowledged and respected by team members. Among the team members themselves, however, hierarchy was less palpable. SB01's comment "*Yes, my boss is SB05 but the others are SB04, and SB02, and what's his name?*

SB03, are like the same level as I am" demonstrates what team members thought of each other's position within the case team.

Given the nature of the team's work, team members, especially when on night duty, generally worked alone having to shoulder responsibility for "*the servers with all the shops connected to place the bets. So, 2000 shops across Europe*" (SB02). SB05, given his position in the team hierarchy, took this very seriously and made it his objective to pass on to all team members the skills and knowledge he had accumulated over the years. He wanted to ensure they could work independently and autonomously as necessary even when he was absent or would leave the team in the future. His mindset is reflected in the following statement:

> "*Because in my role I think I don't need only to manage the team and take the responsibilities, but I know exactly that my team will fully work when I will not be part of the team anymore. This is my target because it means proper that I did a good job and so all of them could do my job in the same way*" (SB05).

During the meeting observed by the researcher, SB05 followed an agenda he had prepared himself. This agenda was circulated to team members prior to the meeting. Although he involved team members in the discussions and was open to their advice and suggestions, he asserted his position showing he was clearly in charge and led the meeting:

> "*So, we can pass to the second point… then we can go ahead…so we will discuss about this… but I would like to get some other information…*" (SB05).

Relationship Building:
Members of Team SB gave great importance to collaboration and teamwork. They shared a special bond based on trust, on a sense of reliance on one another, and on a willingness to help each other. Supporting each other also meant sharing knowledge for the overall benefit of the team. SB01 commented: "*I don't feel comfortable*

knowing something and keeping it to myself… I'm not alone in the group".

The team leader shared an office with co-located team members. He did this to create a sense of teamwork - "*try in every way to engage them*" (SB05), thereby aiming to achieve maximum collaboration among team members. As a result of this office configuration, the leader was successful in his intent as demonstrated by SB04 who stated that "*communication is the key and we have it in our team… we are a team, and we all rely on each other*". Although SB02 worked outside Malta, he still felt the sense of collaboration that SB05 tried to create as evident in his comment:

"*Yesterday we all sat down together and we all went through the issues and we divided them. So, it's not as.... you know.... it's not an anarchy. We do have set values and we work as a team. So, we put a list down, we split the issues*" (SB05).

The team members of Teams SB were young and met regularly outside work. SB02 visited Malta often and together with his team-mates he participated in social activities outside the office. This led to the creation of a "*family environment*" (SB02) within the team as SB03 acknowledges: "*besides the fact that we are colleagues, we are friends*".

As mentioned above, SB05, the team leader, to also feel part of this team, shared an office with the co-located members to be available for them "*for any issue…. it is the only way to manage a problem*" (SB05). However, notwithstanding this, SB05 still felt the need to find the right balance between being too friendly and being recognised as the team leader:

"*It's not easy because when you have more time to spend with the people, there is a different confidence as well. And when you need to be formal, probably some people could be confused in front of this. But as I was saying the target is this so 'hey guys, I am here. I am part of the team. But don't forget I have more responsibilities and you have to follow what I need from you*'" (SB05).

During interviews, team members told the researcher that they interacted daily. Communication between team members was spontaneous and team members engaged in conversations throughout the working day as necessary. The team leader made sure all team members were kept updated with developments, with decisions taken and with the progress of work projects. SB05 also made it a point to inform SB02 of any spontaneous discussions the co-located team members would have engaged in to ensure he shared as much as possible with the rest of the team. Team SB had realised that "*it's usually better to talk between us and maybe between us find a better solution than I have*" (SB03).

Team members relied on one another and, especially when faced with distressing situations, they gathered support from each other and worked together as a team. Comments which clearly demonstrated this were made by SB02 and SB03 respectively; "I*f we encounter an issue ourselves, we discuss it with others*" (SB02) and "*I seek help from others, and they give me help*" (SB03). They also claimed to welcome suggestions and advice from their co-workers. However, it seemed that they were more willing to accept advice rather than forward it. In fact, with the exclusion of the team leader, SB02 was the only team member who seemed willing and disposed to give suggestions and advice to his colleagues and to the team leader. His outgoing personality and his experience were what probably made him more confident and inclined to do so. SB05 was also very forthcoming with advice and suggestions. He knew he was highly regarded and respected. In addition, being in the same office as the co-located members made giving this advice easier and more regular. One of the suggestions made by SB05, and which team members seemingly took to heart (as was reported to the researcher during interviews with team members), was the following:

"*But my suggestion for all of you, when you get a call from them but it's really, really, important, so leave them always the sensation that you know what you are talking about. You never should say like 'I will ask to SB03, I will ask to SB05, I need to speak to SB04'. So*

let's explain the problem. Just if you have any concerns and if you need to ask then you can speak to me, to SB03, to SB04. So whatever will help you. And you will see that it will be useful for the future because they will feel more confident with you. Because if every time that they will ask and you will say 'I don't know. I have to check. I have to see. I have to speak', so they will start to think 'ok then it's not useful to speak with P or SB01'. This is just a tip. Then I don't care if you really don't know what they're talking about because then I will explain, SB03 can explain, SB04 can explain" (SB05).

Within Team SB, team members were given opportunities to work independently and autonomously. This was especially necessary because team members could be alone on duty during the night solving any issues that may arise. Team members were therefore "*given quite a lot of autonomy*" (SB02) in their role. Issues and problems, however, were still discussed as a team when possible.

All the members of Team SB said that the relationships they had with their superiors, their peers and their subordinates were solid. The leader's approach made them "*feel comfortable because I can ask him whatever I want*" (SB01). The team leader ensured he maintained "*personal contact*" (SB02) with the dispersed team member. However, although efforts were made to minimise any issues created by location and distance, team members were conscious that they felt closer to their co-located colleagues for the simple reason that they "*see them on a daily basis and talk to them on a daily basis*" (SB01). A difference between virtual and face-to-face working was acknowledged and felt by the entire team.

Job Satisfaction:
Apart from sharing an office with the co-located team members to be close to the team and be readily available to give advice and support as necessary, SB05 sought to boost job satisfaction in different ways. He encouraged SB03 to be trained and improve his abilities and attend specialised courses; he made sure SB04 did not have to engage in certain duties which he found boring and demotivating; he

made sure SB02 was feeling part of the team even though he was the only dispersed member; and he gave SB01 the time to ask questions and learn given that she was the most recent joiner. The intention of SB05 was "*in every way to engage them, to give them responsibilities*" (SB05) in such a way that team members were content and yearned "*to play a small contribution or a big one in any capacity*" (SB02). He also made team members feel that they could all be leaders within the team and that their efforts would be recognised by the management of the organisation. For team members such as SB02, this was important.

SB05 seemed to have been successful in creating a team environment which appealed to all team members. Team members reported a high level of job satisfaction and, as SB03 remarked; "*I don't think of any changes that will make things better*".

Causes of Dissatisfaction:
Although collaboration and commitment on the part of all team members characterised Team SB and was considered key to solving issues and problems, there was still mention of certain aspects which caused frustration and distress. SB03 mentioned that he would like "*to be involved in new technologies*" but, because of the existing organisation structure, this was being restricted. Although the organisation advocated the importance of empowering its employees, SB03 felt that he was not being 'empowered' to contribute as much as he thinks he could and wanted to.

SB01 mentioned a need for additional training to perform her role more effectively. Even though she was supported constantly by the other team members, and even though she acknowledged the constant presence of the team leader, she still felt that further training was essential for her development. She felt she depended too much on her colleagues and additional training would mean that she would be able to perform her tasks with limited guidance.

SB01 voiced another concern which was shared by SB04. Both commented on the office layout which, in their opinion, did not cater

for private conversations and for ad hoc virtual team meetings. Meetings had to be planned. There was a lack of meeting rooms and in addition, given that office doors were not kept closed, noise caused disruption and affected the performance and productivity of the case team.

SB05's main cause of frustration was the fact that, across the organisation, communication was poor. In fact, since he did not have clear communication channels with his direct superior, this dampened his initiative and slowed down work projects. To ensure that the case team did not experience the same problem, he made conscious efforts to create a sense of belonging amongst all team members both co-located and dispersed. His objective was to ensure they all felt engaged and to create a bond and a sense of teamwork. However, it seemed that he had only realised the importance of this after having experienced an issue with SB04. Strong feelings of isolation and the onset of anxiety attacks resulting from stress made SB04 request a transfer from overseas to the Malta office because being "*alone in the office every time, every day, that's not very pleasant*". SB02, the only team member who was still overseas, also said that he "*would be happy with at least another team member*". To partially counteract these feelings, SB05 encouraged SB02 to visit the Malta office frequently. In this way, he would be able to personally interact with all co-located team members.

4.4.4.2. <u>Theme – The Movement of Tasks and Responsibilities</u>

Perception of Self:
Most of the members of Team SB believed they were leaders. Many based their opinion on the fact that they worked independently and autonomously requiring minimum supervision and input from the team leader. SB05, the team leader was conscious that he had leadership skills and abilities and he continuously strived to improve his existing skills and acquire new ones. He was aware that "*to be a good leader you should have some skills and I know I have some skills but I know as well that I had to work on some other skills to be a better leader*" (SB05). One of the skills he had refined was the skill

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of influencing others. When presenting a project to the team, he would stress all the advantages and innovation it would bring. When the task seemed too complex and hard, he would break it down into smaller components so that team members would not be discouraged by its magnitude and would in this way be more accepting of it. He described this approach as trying:

> "… to prospect them the innovation, the advantages... so telling story, giving them some practical example where following the same line as we reach a target and when for example, when they think that the challenge is too high, I try to split just to give them a better view. So because you know if the ladder is really high it seems impossible to reach the top but if you think step by step, it's easy. So, to influence them and try to take the best from them" (SB05).

His target was for team members to "*recognise me like a manager, like a leader but as part of the team*" (SB05).

The perception team members had of themselves was not dependent solely on their personal feelings but it was reinforced by the perception other members of the team had of them. For example, SB03, who thought of himself as a follower, knew that within the team he was respected as a leader and was considered a leader. He thought this was the case "b*ecause I'm older in the team… I think because of my experience… someone who can guide people*" (SB03).

When the image they had of themselves coincided with the image held by their peers, it was then that team members felt worthy of assuming the responsibilities of a leader. When this happened, their involvement and contribution increased, they felt appreciated, and they were more confident in taking decisions. SB03 had the following to say:

> "*If I think I have a better idea, I'm free to say it… SB05 is actually cool with it… He actually encourages us to do it and he takes it well if someone from the team has a better idea*" (SB03).

The image team members tried to project within the case team was that they were hardworking (SB03), helpful (SB01) and good colleagues (SB04). SB02 chose to be a guide and example to other team members as he aspired to assume a formal leadership role in the future. In fact, he confirmed he acted in that way because he believed that "*there's leadership roles for all of us on the team*" (SB02). However, when it came to taking decisions, SB02 was conscious that he had to refer to SB05 because of his position within the team hierarchy.

Self-Perception vs Hierarchical Position:
There was no mention of internal conflict by members of Team SB.

Attitudes Towards Changing Tasks and Responsibilities:
The culture within Team SB was one where team members helped and supported each other. Although a certain element of pressure was felt when duties and responsibilities changed within the team, "*everybody does it… I think everybody does that so it's something normal*" (SB03). There was therefore no issue with the movement of tasks and responsibilities within Team SB especially when team members could gather support from their colleagues.

Tasks and responsibilities 'moved' from team member to team member for different reasons. For SB03, and this was also mentioned by SB04, this was necessary because of a lack of manpower within their team. SB04 would also take on different duties because he loved his job. SB02 believed that there would always be those responsibilities that fell outside an individual's job description, but which needed to get done for the benefit of the team. If not done, the work of others in the team would be affected as the team would not be able to function as an integrated unit. He added that being calm about these additional duties and not panicking when they needed to be done was important. It was also a way for him to introduce an element of variety to his job and to "*learn new skill sets and pick up new skills*" (SB02).

For SB01, being exposed to different jobs within her team was a learning opportunity. Her perspective was reinforced during the team meeting observed by the researcher:

SB01: SB05, is it possible if, I don't know if budget did it already, we'll assist SB03 and see what happens while migrating the server as an experience?

SB03: Of course, why not?

SB05: Why not? Yes, yes.

SB01: To be present here.

SB03: Yes. (Team SB Meeting 1)

SB01 was the most recent addition to the team and she still felt she had a lot to learn from her colleagues to minimise her dependency on them. For this reason, she actively sought opportunities to involve herself in different areas. By doing so, she would also be putting herself in a better position when encountering difficulties during night duty.

SB05 acknowledged the need to perform responsibilities which did not feature in his job description but was not keen to take them on. He would however do so to be supportive of other team members:

 "*But when there is to put my hand in the basic stuff, so it made a little bit angry me. But anyway, I try to do my best just to keep the self-control and help them. I don't like to be rude or blame the people. As I said before, all the people are the team and they probably just need the help. It probably did happen a couple of times that probably I lost my .... but I feel it's normal*" (SB05).

SB05 also believed that when team members took on different duties, apart from becoming more knowledgeable, they would develop a sense of appreciation for each other's position in the team. This was especially important as team members, especially during their night shift, may be required to perform the duties generally attributed to other individuals within the team. This was also

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important to build a sense of unity among team members and to enhance team cohesion.

SB01 mentioned that when team members were seen performing additional duties, they generally had the endorsement and support of their colleagues. The reason for this was that, when other team members were taking on these responsibilities, they were avoiding having to do them themselves. However, SB02 and SB03 pointed out that if more work was created for them as a result of their colleagues taking on additional responsibilities, they would not be pleased.

Changes in Tasks and Responsibilities – Behaviours and Actions:
Within Team SB, the movement of tasks and responsibilities was a regular occurrence. Comments such as "*I can take care of this…*" (SB03) or "*I'm fine to do this*" (SB03) or "*It's a good idea*" (SB05) and "*Yes, if I can have the support of somebody*" (SB02) were heard during the team meeting.

When tasks and responsibilities 'moved' from one team member to another, it was common practice within the team to inform other team members. As SB01 stated: "*we discuss it with the others to let them know that we are going to work on this*". In this way, and at all times, team members were aware of what their colleagues were working on.

Within Team SB, team members held similar roles and worked on a seven-day shift. As mentioned above, when working alone during a night shift, team members would be required to perform each other's duties. In addition, if one of the team members failed to complete a job and, according to his roster, he was due two days off work, it was very likely that somebody else would have to step in to complete the job in hand. Given that this could happen, SB05 wanted to make sure that Team SB still provided a seamless service to company offices. All team members therefore needed to feel comfortable and confident to perform the functions that would be necessary. The extract below illustrates this mindset:

SB05: I don't know, SB02, if you still feel confident to migrate Belgium? Do you want to do this experience SB02?

SB02: Yes, If I can have the support of somebody.

SB05: You don't have any support?

SB02: If I had support, that would be great.   (Team SB Meeting 1)

An instance where SB05 was seen to be encouraging the ownership of responsibilities within Team SB involved the preparation of the team's roster. Although he generally prepared it himself, his idea was to pass it on to the team to give them the opportunity to work together on something that was affecting the entire team. He explains his approach as follows:

"*I'm giving them the responsibility for the roster. They are doing their roster. I encounter a couple of issues, but I was being clear. I had a meeting last week with them, ok, so we are not at school, we are not children. 'I am really happy you are able to manage the roster yourself because it means that you are able to plan without issues, without problems, so don't come to me to say, 'this person is doing more afternoons than me, or this person is doing less weekends than me', because at that point I will start again to do the roster'. And I hope that this can make them confident and happy in the team where they are working. Because from my experience, anyway, it's not easy to find a positive environment where you are good in the office, where there aren't issues and all the people are agreeing with each other*" (SB05).

Another example of a movement in duties between SB03 and SB05 is evident in the extract below. SB03 accepted to perform a task generally performed by SB05 on condition that he got the necessary support from his team-mates. His comment also implies that anyone taking on additional duties and responsibilities, should show commitment and is accountable for their actions:

"*Or if you want I can take care of this SB05. If you want. But you guys have to send data like for example, send me an email with the*

problems that we had or something like this. Because ok I can extract the tickets from OTRS and see what slow response we had, what stops payments, because they sent a ticket for that. But you guys have to give me the additional details and if I'm going to go ask you, you cannot say 'I don't know because someone else sorted it' or something like this. You have to take responsibility about what you're doing. So, if SB05 agrees with it, I'm fine to do this" (SB03).

Examples of duties and responsibilities which 'moved' from one individual to another within Team SB included being entrusted with the changing of schedules and procedures intended to improve efficiency, working on the IT system to configure it to the needs of the team, and performing general maintenance on the system.

4.4.4.3. Theme – Communication and Collaboration

Communication Within the Team:
According to SB02, "*we talk on virtual meetings every single day*" and "*we have routine Skype meetings*". Team members, however, mentioned that they still preferred it when meetings were carried out face-to-face since communication is "*faster, easier and more efficient*" (SB01). Some believed that when communication is face-to-face, "*you can exchange a thought immediately*" (SB03) and "*hear [issues and comments] in real time*" (SB02). In addition, "*because the communication is not just verbal or written. The communication is the body language*" (SB05), virtual communication, especially if the 'visual' element is omitted, does not offer the same experience. For these reasons Team SB would opt for face-to-face communication over virtual communication.

Because case team members communicated daily among themselves, team meetings conducted via Skype were only scheduled when the team leader wanted to communicate something important to the entire team. Occasionally, team meetings took the form of information-sharing sessions. Other times they were a forum to brainstorm and discuss ideas.

Team members added that virtual communication was more difficult when the team was made up of individuals from different cultures since these attached different meanings to words and phrases and, at times, misinterpreted messages being conveyed. Evidence of this is the following comment;

"*Sometimes it can be hard to understand what each individual will want because everyone thinks differently and they might not know the language very well and they might not explain very well*" (SB01).

According to team members, virtual meetings ran very smoothly via Skype. SB02, the distant team member, was visible to all co-located members. However, the position of the camera did not allow for all co-located members to be seen by SB02.

SB03 pointed out that during a virtual meeting when all team members were present and talking all at once "*it can happen that you cannot follow all the points so maybe you miss something*" (SB03).

Coping with 'Virtual':
When team members were due to discuss important issues, the team leader organised a Skype meeting. SB03 mentioned that connecting to the dispersed team members was sometimes an issue and required multiple attempts from the team leader. Once connectivity was established, the meeting proceeded without problems. After each meeting, Team SB, sometimes over the phone and other times via email, went over specific points which were already discussed during the team meeting but which were not clearly understood by all.

SB05 made reference to a particular issue that troubled him;

"*Sometimes… we are in the same office and somehow we start to discuss about a particular stuff… in that moment it is not easy to involve SB02 because you cannot say [to] other people 'ok, stop guys, we are going to have an official meeting and we have to call SB02'. We continue to discuss about what we are discussing. Then obviously I care to call SB02 to say 'this afternoon we had this*

chat… if you have something to add, feel free, to contact [me] to speak about that'" (SB05).

For all other activities and planned meetings, however, SB02 was always involved but for anything ad hoc, because he was physically distant from the rest of the team, he was automatically 'excluded' and he was "*losing that information because he is not here with us*" (SB05). To partially solve this issue, when there was something important to be debated, team members called each other and discussed one-to-one. They then informed the rest of the team what was discussed and decided. At times, and this was especially done by the team leader, they also travelled overseas to meet the dispersed members when they believed that physical contact was necessary.

Team members, who at some point were dispersed, experienced strong feelings of isolation. Both SB04 and SB05 who were initially based overseas, requested to be transferred to the Malta office. SB05 specifically stated that when he was overseas, he "*was not involved in anything*" and felt 'invisible' to the rest of the team. Both SB04 and SB05 felt that since the transfer, they were in a better place. SB05 therefore took special care to ensure SB02, who was based in the UK, did not experience feelings of isolation. This was evidenced by his comment;

"*It's important to socialise a bit as you cannot be alone all the day with your team abroad. So, I am inviting him every three months to have a week with the team. When he's here usually all the team try to do their best to have time in the office and outside the office with him*" (SB05).

However, although SB05 tried hard to spare SB02 such feelings, SB02, even though he communicated with his team members every day, would still have liked to have at least one team member sharing the office with him.

Changes Proposed:

SB02, SB03 and SB04 felt that their team functioned well but would function better if more members could join. SB02 also wanted to improve the technology made available to the team. Such improvements would increase efficiency and avoid replication of work. SB01 also recommended a few changes to the current team procedures as evident in her comment;

> "M*aybe do more meetings through Skype calls because it would be better to talk through Skype. And maybe we take notes and we share them with each other… also, maybe in the future we can have more accessible gadgets where we can do Skype calls straight away, not having to book a meeting and conference*" (SB01).

SB05 would like team members to be trained further. He also expected them to show initiative and drive to increase their knowledge and capabilities. In order to achieve this, he approached team members and asked them what work-related topics they wanted to learn more about so they could improve their expertise.

The findings for each case study were presented above based on the individual analysis of each team. In the following chapter, the case-by-case findings were integrated to highlight emerging patterns, similarities and differences between case teams, as well as identifying why such differences may exist. These findings were then positioned within the literature. Answers to the research questions will also be suggested.

5.0. <u>Discussion</u>

5.1. <u>Introduction</u>

The objective of this research was to gain an insight into the way leadership and followership unfold within hybrid teams. As previously mentioned, within the virtual context, team members utilise communication and information technologies to communicate and collaborate to achieve common team goals. Due to the structure and inherent characteristics of these hybrid teams, members work 'differently', and leaders and followers actively contribute to the construction of leadership and followership. This research focused on the behaviours and actions of hybrid team members as they interacted and on the movement of tasks and responsibilities occurring in an environment where regular, traditional face-to-face communication is generally absent.

Within the previous chapter, the findings from the four case teams were presented based on the themes that emerged from the analysis. The analysis was carried out for each case team individually and was presented accordingly. A number of elements which tie in with the key points previously referred to in section 2.17. of this study have emerged from the analysis and will be discussed in depth in this chapter. The focus here is to draw conclusions, synthesise the findings across the teams, and to position the findings in the wider debates surrounding leadership and followership in hybrid teams.

5.2. <u>The Movement of Tasks and Responsibilities as Experienced by Hybrid Team Members</u>

Data has demonstrated that, within the hybrid case teams, a movement of tasks and responsibilities from one team member to another did occur. Shared leadership and shared followership processes unfolded within the case teams as team members engaged in such behaviours. This practice, which was generally encouraged by the team leaders themselves (according to Hoegl and Muethel (2016), this happens when leaders believe that such actions would create value), became ingrained in the

teams' culture. Team members engaged in such actions and behaviours as and when required by the team and/or organisation. However, the way in which individuals experienced the movement of tasks and responsibilities often was dependent on their self-perception.

Within the case teams, participants generally conveyed conviction of their self-perception irrespective of the position they occupied in the organisation's hierarchy. However, assuming a particular perception and the way in which they chose to project this self-perception within the team was dependent on different considerations. These included for example, the character of the individual, their level of confidence and experience, their concern with overstepping their role boundaries, a real or perceived lack of information to take the right decisions, the structure of the organisation, or concern that their self-perception was not endorsed by other members of the team.

Other team members, although occupying the position of leader as per their formal hierarchical role within their respective organisations, appeared hesitant to accept themselves as such. This may have been due to a misalignment between their self-perception and the hierarchical position they occupied (coping mechanisms adopted by team members to adjust to any misalignment are discussed later in this section). Although their self-perception seemed to be recognised and accepted by team members, it appeared that these individuals were not always ready to accept themselves as leaders. They admitted that their self-perception was not only based on how they felt about themselves but was also conditioned by what they thought of the perception other individuals had of them. They required approval for their actions and behaviours as well as endorsement of their self-perception and reassurance from their peers to feel comfortable with accepting their self-perception to the extent that they would, at that point, feel empowered to assume more 'leader-like' behaviours and take on tasks and responsibilities generally pertaining to a leader position. Rather than reinforcing their *"self-view"* (DeRue et al, 2009, p.228) and attempting to change the perception of others (as suggested by DeRue et al, 2009), they attached their self-perception to whether other team members believed they did exhibit leader-like

behaviours and actions. This seems to resonate with the 'looking glass self' proposed by Cooley (1902) who suggested that individuals see themselves as they perceive others see them. However, as Yeung and Martin (2003) suggested, it is still possible that over time, individuals manage to bring others around to align with their self-perception.

In some cases, however, and particularly in the case of SB03, the programmer within Team SB, and M01, the newly appointed supervisor within Team M, endorsement by the majority of the team (in the case of SB03) or organisation (in the case of M01), even repeated endorsement by the formal team leader himself, was still not enough for the individual to change their self-perception. Team SB members considered SB03 to be a leader within their team, this was because of his experience in the team. However, given that he did not occupy a leader position in the organisational hierarchy, and notwithstanding that he was respected as a leader by his team-mates, he continued to think of himself as a follower within the team. Data indicated that M01 was recognised as a leader by the organisation, and by his own reflections, was adjusting his self-perception to coincide with his hierarchical position. This resonates with DeRue and Ashford's (2010) leader identity construction theory. They argue that an identity, which is *"a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation defining what it means to be who one is"* (Zheng and Muir, 2015 cited Burke, 1991, p.837), is first internalised at the individual level, strengthened at the relational level and enforced at the collective level (Lanka et al, 2019). This process, which is developmental and sequential, will be unsuccessful if it does not occur on all three levels as there would be a "*failed construction*" (DeRue and Ashford, 2010, p.634) of a leader/follower identity. A leader or follower identity is a subcomponent of a person's identity that involves being a leader or a follower, or more importantly, how one perceives oneself as a leader or a follower, i.e. an individual's self-perception. Therefore, in the case of M01 presented above, it is evident that, although he was perceived to be a leader by team members and by the broader organisation also, it was only upon his appointment to this new role that he was beginning to change his self-perception and accept (and indeed perceive) a different aspect of his

identity. In the other case referred to above, SB03 retained his self-perception maybe because his hierarchical position did not change to reflect and support the sentiment of his team. This seems to be indicating that, for both M01 and SB03, the process outlined by DeRue and Ashford (2010) did not occur in the sequence proposed. Had the process followed the steps proposed by the theory, the internalisation of the identity would have happened first where the self-perception of both M01 and SB03 would be that of a leader, and then, through their actions and behaviours and through the tasks and responsibilities they would take on, their self-perception would subsequently have become relationally recognised and endorsed by the broader organisation. While this research did not focus on identity construction *per se,* but on the movement of tasks and responsibilities and on the factors which may affect such movement within hybrid teams, this finding seems to be suggesting that the process of identity construction does not necessarily happen in the sequence proposed by DeRue and Ashford (2010).

Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly (2014) suggest that it is very difficult to embrace a different self-perception especially when such a perception is not one that the individual is aspiring to assume. According to Croft et al (2015, p.115) individuals can experience conflict when there is a discrepancy between their self-concept and their desired identity and they therefore feel the need to re-establish "*a sense of coherence"* between competing perceptions.

Findings indicate that participants, such as D02, felt such a sense of coherence and felt comfortable assuming tasks and responsibilities of both a follower and a leader as required. They did not report experiencing conflict. This supports the statement made by Haslam et al (2011) who posited that an individual may possess the perception of both a leader as well as a follower. These two subcomponents of the person's role can coexist within a person and are manifest in different contexts and at different times. This was also referred to by Sy and McCoy (2014, p.122) when they suggested that individuals can have dual roles and they can activate different self-perceptions (or schemas) at different times. A dynamic process of "*Leader-Follower Switching*" can occur when

individuals 'switch' from leader to follower roles as dictated by circumstance and individual differences. Such a shift, which can be consciously controlled or automatic, occurs independently of hierarchically assigned roles.

For those who experience conflict because of a mismatch between their formal hierarchical position or self-perception and the nature of the additional responsibilities taken on, their objective becomes overcoming the negative emotions being experienced and finding an effective way to deal with such conflict. For example, if the individual's self-view is that of a leader and they are being required to perform tasks and responsibilities generally attributed to follower positions, the individual may reject follower associations and also reject assuming responsibilities which are not their own, even if doing so would benefit the team or organisation. According to Croft et al (2015) this measure is resorted to when an individual needs to protect oneself from negative emotions associated with identity conflict thereby distancing oneself from the undesired self-perception.

This approach was visible in the case of for example T05. T05 refused to assume duties and responsibilities which were not aligned with his self-view and, as he clearly pointed out, would not be "*part of my job description*". Although specifically stating that he would not be competent to perform outside his formal role, he may have, knowingly or unknowingly, also been concerned that if he did assume follower duties, this would negatively impact his hierarchical position as leader. He may have felt that being associated with such duties would undermine his formal position and therefore his authority and influence. This instance reinforces Alvesson and Blom's (2015, p.279) premise that followership is less attractive than leadership and it is therefore "*systematically or consciously avoided*" by some. On the other hand, in the case of M05 who also refused to take on additional tasks, and whose self-perception and formal position coincided, the reason for not willingly accepting to take on additional tasks and responsibilities was not a question of a loss of status (as indicated by the data for T05) or of emotional distress. However, he was aware that taking on such duties would put him under increased pressure since these duties would be additional to his actual

responsibilities. Given this, he would rather solely perform the tasks associated with his formal leader role and avoid taking on 'follower' duties of other team members.

Different members of participating case teams that occupied the less senior positions within their organisation mentioned that occasionally they experienced negative feelings as a result of the movement in tasks and responsibilities occurring within the team. Mentioned were reasons related to:

- their hierarchical position within the team/organisation as a result of which they were generally followers and not leaders;
- their lack of visibility on aspects of the company's business which meant that they felt they possessed limited information to for example, take certain decisions;
- competing deadlines;
- existing policies and procedures which they usually adhered to and which, as a result of their assigned duties, they would not be complying with;
- a lack of confidence in their abilities which was conditioning their willingness to change tasks and responsibilities;
- knowing that they would not be getting recognition for taking on such duties;
- and, recognition that others within the organisation would not endorse their action of taking on certain responsibilities.

A perception of conflict or a resistance to lead may also have stemmed from a lack of motivation to lead, this conditioning their disposition and willingness to assume such responsibilities. The necessity to have motivation to lead was referred to by Kim-Yin and Drasgow (2001) and may be a useful idea to explain the findings.

While found in different teams, individuals dealt with such emotions somewhat differently. In the case of certain members of Teams SB and T, instead of detaching themselves and rejecting responsibilities that were incompatible with their formally assigned position within the teams, they addressed this discrepancy by being open about it, by speaking about

their fears to their superiors and by seeking advice and support. Therefore, rather than disassociating themselves emotionally to cope with these emotions, these participants chose to overcome them by immersing themselves even further into their feelings, speaking openly about them and accepting such transitions as 'experiences', as 'means of acquiring new skill sets', as 'getting a taste of what is to come' and as 'a way to help'. Another individual, namely T03, however, maybe because of her character or maybe because she held the lowest hierarchical position in one of the case teams, could not cope. She was not able to come to terms with the 'new' tasks and responsibilities being assigned to her and she therefore asked to be transferred to a more 'static' role to distance herself from these duties.

Another issue which deserves specific mention was raised by M06. According to her, accepting to perform tasks and responsibilities associated with a different, a lower or higher, hierarchical level impacts project costing since different hierarchical levels within the organisation are assigned different charge-out rates. Therefore, taking her specific circumstances, her charge-out rate as an Audit Senior would be higher than if she were performing the duties of an Audit Assistant. This concern was affecting her readiness and disposition to assume duties, not necessarily pertaining to the hierarchical level she was at, but to the consequences (financial) for this organisation. This affected the movement of tasks and responsibilities within the hybrid case team.

Another consideration made by team members before taking on more tasks and responsibilities included the risk associated with performing such duties and of being held accountable for those duties. In addition, the intention perceived to be behind the individual's decision to assign tasks was also considered important. Acting in bad faith and taking advantage of others would be counterproductive to the formation and retention of trust among team members (Cummings and Bromiley, 1995), trust being an essential ingredient to virtual team interactions (Jarvenpaa et al, 1998; Joshi et al, 2009; Ferrell and Kline, 2018).

Nonetheless, however, within the case teams, it was still typical for team members to take on duties and responsibilities willingly as dictated by the

needs of the team especially when their actions were endorsed and supported by their colleagues. This practice, although visible in all case teams, was more regular in Teams SB and T and occurred less often in Teams D and M (the teams forming part of professional services firms). As a result, team members constantly shifted from follower to leader and vice versa. This meant that team leaders were followers sometimes and leaders most of the time whilst team members (non-leaders) were leaders sometimes and followers most of the time. This required a certain degree of adjustment especially because the individuals were not transitioning to something permanent. They had to deal with and accept that the shift was temporary and depended only on the tasks and responsibilities they were performing at the time. Any movement of tasks and responsibilities would not result in a permanent change in the hierarchical position they occupied.

At times it was difficult for these individuals to accept that the change was not a permanent one and they needed to be monitored to mitigate any negative consequences resulting from their actions. In addition, knowing that they would not be getting the desired recognition for assuming additional and 'different' responsibilities, meant that they may have refrained both from seeking such tasks and from willingly accepting to perform associated duties. Such behaviours may have affected the movement of tasks and responsibilities both within the team context as well as in other contexts.

It is also interesting to point out that, in the majority of cases (exceptions being T05 and M05 as referred to above), other participants (such as SB05 and T06) who occupied senior management positions and did experience the transition in reverse (thereby transitioning from performing 'leader' tasks to 'follower' tasks), did not seem to have any issues with internal conflict and their transition did not create any confusion and distress (even though it too was a temporary shift). They accepted these shifts as inherent aspects of their jobs since such transitions were dictated by project requirements and were necessary for the fulfilment of team and organisational outcomes. They showed no concern that their authority and influence would be affected if they accepted less 'leader-like'

responsibilities. Reasons for this may have been that they had established a strong presence within the 'leader' community and their identities as leaders were universally endorsed and accepted and therefore not disputed and dependent on particular tasks and responsibilities. It may also have been their intention to display such "*humble*" behaviours to facilitate and encourage shared leadership within their teams (Chiu et al, 2016, p.1708). SB05 also believed that when employees assumed duties which were not part of their job description, they learnt to appreciate the contribution of others within the team. He believed that this would increase team cohesion and bonding.

The data, therefore, seems to be indicating that the extent, if at all, of conflict experienced by an individual may be affected by the type of transition that they were required to make. Ironically, it seemed less of a problem to accept a shift from leader to follower than from follower to leader (barring M05 and T05 who, for reasons outlined above, were not willing to take on follower duties). This may be due to an individual's mind-set, to their willingness and disposition to attend to the needs of the team/organisation, and/or to the individual's self-confidence and self-view in relation to their expectation to effectively perform the additional tasks and responsibilities. In addition, the perceived level of confidence in the individual by the rest of the team or organisation also plays a part in an individual's readiness to perform tasks and responsibilities generally associated with different levels in the hierarchy. This concept seems to contrast with the work of Stewart et al (2017) who suggest that high-status leaders tend to hold on to their position in the hierarchy even though empowering team members will reduce their workload and positively affect productivity. In addition, Alvesson and Blom (2015) believe that leaders hold on to their hierarchical position because the "*leader's values, advice, directions, and meanings tend to carry much more weight compared with those of other followers*" (p.272) and therefore the position of a follower is "*less appealing for identity and self-esteem compared to being a leader*" (p.273). The results of this research indicate that this may not hold true universally and that the reasons for accepting or indeed not accepting such roles could be different in different organisational contexts.

Findings also indicate that when individuals who occupy a 'follower' role within the team are assigned or take on leader-like responsibilities, they may adjust their self-perception to reflect that movement. Failure to recognise that their 'new' self-perception is temporary given that it is directly linked to the duties being performed at that point in time, means that there could be times when these individuals project their newly-acquired self-perception in other contexts. This was observed within Team T when T03 was assigned 'leader' responsibilities within a team she formed part of (not the case team). She assumed that since she was given responsibilities generally attributed to a leader role, she was being regarded as a 'leader'. She projected this 'new' perception of herself within the hybrid case team but her self-perception was not endorsed by the rest of the hybrid team. Consequently, this team member was neither assigned 'leader' responsibilities within the hybrid team context nor within the broader organisational context.

In another instance, the behaviour of D02 who attempted to lead the case team even though she was not the formal team leader, clearly affected team dynamics. Her behaviour, and the team leader's response to regain control during meetings, seemed to hinder the meetings' progress and conditioned interventions and responses, this potentially affecting the movement of tasks and responsibilities within the hybrid team.

It is evident therefore that in both the cases described above, the individuals concerned did not, either purposely or inadvertently (and the researcher, based on her interactions with these specific team members and on observations conducted, supports the former), appreciate that although they were entrusted with different responsibilities, there were boundaries attached to such responsibilities. Neither their self-perception nor the hierarchical position they occupied should have conditioned their behaviour but their actions should have been appropriately 'adjusted' to the context they were executing them in.

It is also interesting to note that in both the cases described above, the self-perception transferred to the 'different' context was that of a leader. For the individuals concerned, choosing to project this self-view within contexts other than the ones where such self-perception was appropriate,

may have been their attempt towards self-enhancement in a specific social context (Jones and Pittman, 1982) for the purpose of consolidating a positive self-image within a different context. By presenting themselves as competent individuals, their intention may have been to receive positive social feedback and thereby increase their social status.

This aspect of behaviour potentially sits within a domain in the literature which, since related to social psychology, has not been covered in the literature review presented in this thesis. However, given that these behaviours have been encountered in this research, it is deemed important to point to Jones' and Pittman's seminal work (1982), where specific mention is made to self-presentation and self-promotion, both seemingly apparent in the cases described above. Research findings show that engaging in such behaviours has consequences on the legitimacy of an identity being carried forward from one context to another. In addition, these behaviours also visibly impacted the movement of tasks and responsibilities within the hybrid teams and, in the researcher's opinion, it is also likely that they will condition such movement in the future among the same individuals.

5.3. <u>Communication Within the Hybrid Teams</u>

The context within which leadership and followership have been investigated in this research is the virtual team, or more specifically the hybrid team. It was outlined in the literature that hybrid teams and their formal leaders likely face unique challenges (Lilian, 2014) and virtual leadership requires that a leader possesses all the leadership skills necessary to lead co-located teams "*and more*" (Malhotra et al, 2007, p.68). Success in the virtual environment involves a certain degree of adaptation and modification on the part of the leader (Kayworth and Leidner, 2002) and team members (Hamilton and Scandura, 2003; Drouin and Bourgault, 2013). Cultural differences need to be addressed and capitalised upon (Chang et al, 2011). Work procedures and practices need to be adapted, changed or modified (Cascio and Shurygailo, 2003) to

ensure they are relevant to both context (Tworoger et al, 2013) and team type (Purvanova and Bono, 2009).

Findings from this research suggest that both team leaders and team members recognise the importance of such adaptation in different ways. They took the necessary measures to ensure the virtual aspect of their team and the challenges inherent in such virtuality (such as problems created by time zone differences which necessitated additional planning and scheduling (more so within Teams M and T) and issues with connectivity), did not hinder the attainment of team objectives. The three readiness challenges proposed by Eckhardt et al (2019), namely mental readiness, technology readiness and relationship readiness seemed to have been addressed in different ways. For example, the challenges around scheduling faced by Team M due to the short timeframe when the project was live necessitated adjustment from all team members to ensure urgent matters were addressed in a timely manner. The leader of Team M made it a point to be more available for team member queries and problems during the audit. Team members, on the other hand, contacted their leader only when this was absolutely necessary and ensured that team emails were clearly articulated so as to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. Team D members (specifically D02 and D03) tried to socialise more to build a relationship and both D02 and D03 travelled to meet each other whenever possible. Within Team SB, there was also an increased effort to meet up outside work. In addition to increased socialisation, the leader of Team SB briefed the distant team member (SB02) of any ad hoc discussions and conversations held within the office with the intention of keeping him constantly informed and updated. The leader of Team T sought to create a team environment where team members were respectful towards each other and felt comfortable working together. He also engaged consultants to point out areas of improvement for better virtual workflow and for more effective technology-enabled communication. This way of operating seems to have resulted in the development of relationships based on trust and on a sense of reliance on one another. When faced with distressing situations, team members knew they could gather support from each other, this demonstrating a sense of teamwork. Consultants advised Team T members to avoid speaking

concurrently so that messages would be clear and unequivocal, to speak slowly to ensure understanding of content and meaning, and to ensure that when virtual meetings are carried out, all team members would be visible to one another.

Although this advice was generally followed, the latter factor was however overlooked by the team leader and this deserves specific mention. Notwithstanding that team members did point out to him that the position of the camera during meetings was not ideal since certain team members were not visible, no changes were made. In his opinion what was essential was that the 'most important' team members, who for him were those team members who were part of the organisation's management team, could be seen. It was the seating configuration advocated by the leader that determined who of the co-located members would be 'visible' to the distant team members.

The importance of 'visual' as essential to secure teamwork, efficiency and improved hybrid team performance was a sentiment very visible in Team T but least strong in Team D. The leader of Team T did not realise that such failure to adapt had an impact on the entire team and this was affecting team processes and interactions, whilst also increasing the distance created by technology itself (Lewandowski and Lisk, 2013). By choosing not to allow all team members to experience the presence of others and of themselves and also by failing to replicate face-to-face communication and making the most of the interactivity and richness (Huang et al, 2010) of the medium being used, relationships among team members may have been affected. In fact, these 'less important' members of Team T had to try harder to establish a presence within their team. Team cohesion (Zigurs, 2003; Cowan, 2014) and performance (Marlow et al, 2017) may also thus have suffered. Feelings of isolation and dispersion of these team members may have been elevated and this seemingly has affected their sense of belonging to the team and their sense of social inclusivity, their productivity, and their performance. This reinforces the position of Orhan et al (2016, p.119) who declared that "*increased face-to-face interaction is associated with lower degrees of isolation*", such feelings of isolation

negatively affecting the mental wellbeing of team members (Eckhardt et al, 2019).

Findings of this research show that team members consider face-to-face communication as critical and they expressed a strong preference for face-to-face meetings over virtual meetings. It was stressed on multiple occasions that, especially initially when the team is being formed and team members are new to each other, it is important that they first establish a face-to-face relationship and only subsequently could the relationship be taken virtual. Initial face-to-face communication is considered a prime determinant of team synergies and of team collaboration. Participants from all four case teams reported that they had reached the stage where it did not matter any longer if team communication was virtual or face-to-face - even though they tried to replicate the latter as much as possible when physical interaction was not possible. For Team M, in particular, given that team members were generally co-located and only interacted amongst themselves virtually when the project was live, using computer-mediated means to communicate required considerable adjustment on the part of all team members. Overall, however, all teams felt that they had been successful in ensuring that physical distance did not inhibit relationship-building and that they had effectively created a virtual forum where they felt comfortable interacting. They developed a common language and this reduced the incidence of misunderstandings and misinterpretation of actions, messages and gestures. At this stage therefore, the richness of the communications medium did not remain so essential to the effective functioning of the team. Nonetheless, however, particularly within Teams T and SB, when the team collectively or a team member individually encountered a major problem, face-to-face communication would resume great importance once again.

Hambley et al (2007) stressed the importance of face-to-face communication (non-mediated communication) as being most effective to ensure team member interactions yield the desired results. Participants generally confirmed that it was easier for them to build relationships with their co-located colleagues given that they physically interacted with them on a more regular basis, this implying that proximity builds relationships

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which physical distance may inhibit. Therefore, in virtual settings where teams face multiple challenges simply because of the team's virtual nature (Ferrell and Kline, 2018), face-to-face communication may be essential but not always possible. This absence of such regular face-to-face communication may be a significant issue. Working through technology (Pullan, 2016) and choosing the right communications medium for the team may therefore assume greater importance because the development of trust and cohesion among team members (Zigurs, 2003; Hambley et al, 2007; Ferrell and Kline, 2018) and also knowledge sharing (Pinjani and Pinjani, 2013) is dependent on the richness of this medium. This choice of medium is also important in virtual teams where the incidence of having team members from different cultures and backgrounds may potentially be high (hybrid teams may be hubs of such cultural differences). Effective communication may ease any cultural barriers existing within the team, leading to the establishment of a "*common language*" for the team (Majchrzak et al, 2004, p.136).

The existing relationship between D01 and D03 was proof of the importance of face-to-face communication especially in the initial stages of team formation. Even though the team met virtually on a regular basis and a relationship should have developed over time, to date D01 still kept her interaction with D03 to a minimum. One of the reasons for this may have been the fact that they never physically met. This was aggravated further because Team D did not activate the video option on their communication device and therefore, since team members never saw each other during team meetings, this impacted the quality of conversation and communication. One may suggest, therefore that since 'visual' was lacking from team communication and the face-to-face element had been omitted from the team's inception, technology was not being used effectively to bridge the gap between team members (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002) and this conditioned D01's relationship with the team leader. This implies that face-to-face communication may, at some point, become essential and a lack of it may affect team member interactions and team dynamics both in the immediate term as well as in the long term.

Therefore, this research shows that to build solid relationships within virtual teams, physical contact, and face-to-face communication (this being the richest communications medium as suggested by Ferrell and Kline (2018)) may be necessary especially initially. This reinforces the positions of Ford et al (2017) and Marlow et al (2017) who posit that relationships based on trust are more likely to develop if virtual team members meet face-to-face during the initial stages of the team. As the team develops and matures, such contact need not be face-to-face and regular virtual communication may be enough to ensure the attainment of team objectives. However, once major problems arise, communication through electronic means may not be sufficient to ensure that team operations and success are not compromised.

The success of such regular virtual interactions is generally dependent on the richness of the communications medium used by the team. Researchers such as Ferrell and Kline (2018) have suggested that shared understanding tends to increase when the richness of the communications medium is high since uncertainty and ambiguity would be counteracted by such richness. Although the findings of this research support this view, they also indicate that even if the communications medium does not offer such visibility, clarity and richness, individuals still manage to get their message through to the rest of the team (especially if these messages are direct and verbal) and the movement of tasks and responsibilities amongst team members can still be a successful practice. In such cases, instead of relying on the medium's richness, team members are seen to adapt to the situation by exercising a stronger personality and showing determination and perseverance. For example, during some of the meetings observed there were instances when connectivity was failing and therefore team members could not rely on the richness of the medium to make sure their messages were being received and understood as intended. At that point, the speaker would raise their voice, speak more slowly and clearly, and check multiple times whether they were being heard - "*Are you hearing me?*" (T05). Although a sense of agitation could be felt when this happened (and it was also noticeable that such agitation was worse when team members were not visible to each other), once they heard "*yeah, you're heard*" (T06) or "*yes, yes, he heard you*" (T01), the frustration

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present in the person's voice seemed to fade. Therefore, when duties 'moved' from one hybrid team member to another, having a communications medium that was 'rich' and that allowed visibility of team member actions and behaviours, although important was not essential.

This was especially true in teams M and D given that both teams did not utilise video calls to communicate. They communicated via email and phone calls in between team meetings, thereby utilising two media which are not as 'rich'. However, despite omitting the visual component from their communications, the movement of tasks and responsibilities was still successful and the team reached its objectives. In addition, there was no mention by the team leaders that the lack of richness inherent in the media used by the teams was causing additional problems for their leadership. This seems to be contradictory to what was posited by Huang et al (2010) as their views indicate that a lack of media richness, and therefore less visibility, poses a challenge to virtual team leaders. No specific factors could be identified that explain this and thus more research may be needed to develop a more discerning view of the role of media richness and its impact on leader success.

5.4. <u>Additional Factors[18] Impacting the Movement of Tasks and Responsibilities in Hybrid Teams</u>

As previously mentioned in this chapter, within hybrid teams, team members actively contribute to achieve team goals. During this interactional process, which is affected by multiple factors, tasks and responsibilities 'move' and duties change for individuals irrespective of one's hierarchical position. As a result, a certain culture is created within the team. This culture affects the movement of such tasks and responsibilities.

The hierarchical nature of Teams T, M and SB was apparent and formal hierarchy was generally evident with respect to the team leader vis-à-vis the rest of the team. Therefore, a clear differentiation between team leader

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[18] This section focuses on the factors that have been identified to affect team interactions and which have not been discussed in previous sections, hence the inclusion of 'additional' to the title.

and team member existed in these teams and great respect was shown by team members towards the formal leader. This was less so within Team D because D02 (who was not the case team leader) occupied a higher hierarchical position in the organisation than D03 did (the case team leader).

Even though there were multiple hierarchical tiers amongst the team members themselves, formal structure amongst the team members of case teams T and SB was less distinct and the distinction between their individual levels in the organisation's hierarchy was blurred. However, it is interesting to note that within professional services firms, such as Organisations M and D, a clear demarcation between the different levels in the organisation hierarchy was generally visible and palpable. However, within Team M, this seems to have been overcome in that there was not much distinction between the formal positions of team members (not including the leader). On the other hand, within Team D, being accustomed to such a rigid structure and occupying a higher position in the organisation's hierarchy than the case team leader, may have led to D02's attempts to portray and manifest a stronger personality and lead the team herself. Her refusal to accept that her actual position within the team was different to her hierarchical position was evident. As a result, during team meetings, D03 was seen to assert herself as team leader on multiple occasions to reclaim her formal position within the team. D02, seemed unaware that her behaviour was impacting both D03's leadership as well as the meetings' progress.

Within case teams, although hierarchical role differentiation within the teams did exist to varying degrees, a collegial culture was created. Team leaders made it a point to ensure that they were regarded as 'members' of their team and not just as 'leaders' of the team to the extent that for example, the team leader of Team SB shared an office with all co-located team members. Thus, by utilising technology and by working on developing relationships in creative ways, the teams were successful in creating a work style and culture conducive to workplace and team efficiencies, as referenced by Pinjani and Palvia (2013).

The culture prevailing within the teams was based on a sense of teamwork, synergies, collaboration and commitment from all team members alike and was contingent on a sense of 'wanting to help' and 'be useful'. Participants were aware that achieving desired outcomes necessitated the input, effort and contribution of the entire team. As posited by Mulki and Jaramillo (2011), such a culture is founded on mutual perceptions of reliability, dependability, availability, care and concern of all team members and is one characterised by trust (Malhotra et al, 2007; Symons and Stenzel, 2007), cohesion and shared meaning. Trust and cohesion were inherent in the culture of all four case teams. The former, although not explicitly mentioned by case team members (with the exception of T05 and D02), was apparent in the way team members spoke about their teams and in the relationships team members had formed among themselves. Team cohesion was also indirectly referred to by team members. By putting forward comments such as "*we work as a team*" (SB05) and "*we just discuss things together*" (M06) it is evident that team members shared a special bond and relationship. Given that the culture created within the case teams was based on trust and cohesion, knowledge sharing (which is a major challenge for virtual teams as discussed in section 2.12.4.) was also facilitated and, as a result, team members did not "*feel comfortable knowing something and keeping it to myself*" (SB01). Trust and cohesion are aspects of team culture that, as mentioned above, have an effect on cooperation and teamwork. By consequence, therefore, trust and cohesion are factors that may have an impact on the movement of tasks and responsibilities within hybrid teams.

Feelings of empowerment were strong in Teams T and SB but less so in Teams D and M. It seemed that, within such professional services firms (i.e. within Organisations D and M), empowerment and autonomy may have been restricted by the necessary strict adherence to the organisation's policies and procedures, by existing organisational hierarchies and by bureaucratic ways of operating. Cortellazzo et al (2019) posited that increased virtual working and increased communication via technology should break these boundaries to give employees the opportunity to more actively participate in adding value. Asatiani and Penttinen (2019) suggested that less rigid structures and less stringent

organisational policies and procedures should offer increased flexibility thereby facilitating virtual work. Kissler (2001) went a step further and argued that bureaucracy and virtual leadership may be incompatible. However, this research has indicated that this may not be the case because, despite all restrictions within their respective organisations, Teams M and D still reported success both in meeting their team objectives and in creating a team culture conducive to the creation of teamwork and workplace efficiencies. By consequence therefore, there may be no incentive for such organisations to amend work practices to provide more flexibility. However, as a result of this lack of adaptation to 'virtual' by these professional firms, members of virtual teams operating within such firms may feel constrained by the lack of adaptation on the part of these organisations and may not exhibit those characteristics and behaviours (such as showing initiative) necessary for informal leadership to emerge. This means that within such 'rigid' organisation structures, a non-leader (as per their formal hierarchical position) may be less willing to assume duties and responsibilities generally pertaining to formally appointed leaders. The movement of tasks and responsibilities in the case teams operating within such professional firms may have therefore been affected by this reluctance to assume leader duties and responsibilities. It is also interesting to point out that, within Team M in particular, such reluctance may also be due to the fact that team members occupied lower positions within the organisation's hierarchy, and therefore the opportunities for leading and the desire and preparedness to lead may be less.

Team members were open to each other's suggestions and advice; from leader to team members, from team members towards their leader, and team members amongst themselves. Team members seemed very receptive of their leader's advice. However, not all team members were comfortable to offer the leader advice. It was generally the more senior members such as T01, T05 and D02, and other strongly opinionated members such as SB02 and M03 who had no worry doing so. They all expressed their points of view and concerns to their leader as and when the situation warranted their input. Team members felt a sense of security within all case teams. As indicated by Rosen et al (2007), this encouraged

knowledge sharing, openness to constructive criticism and the willingness to ask others for help and assistance as necessary.

Job satisfaction levels were reported to be affected positively across all teams. The leaders of Team T and M especially, made specific attempts to create a 'good' feeling within their teams. However, participants still identified aspects which caused dissatisfaction, such causes of dissatisfaction depending on the hierarchical position occupied by the case team member. These causes included, for example, a lack of recognition for work done, feelings of isolation resulting from team member distance, and the organisation's rigid structure. Notwithstanding this, as a result of the team atmosphere that was created, most of the case team members were eager and disposed to assume duties which were not tied to their formal position within the team and/or organisation. They willingly engaged in the movement of tasks and responsibilities through their behaviours and interactions. This seemingly confirms what was advocated by Blom and Alvesson (2014), namely, that team culture directly impacts the leadership process.

The literature, and specifically researchers such as Zaccaro and Bader (2003), Zimmermann et al (2008) and Lilian (2014) attributed the responsibility of establishing team cohesion to the team leader. As mentioned above, the data has shown that case team leaders were generally effective in creating cohesion among the members of their teams. For example, SB05 encouraged the movement of tasks and responsibilities within the team believing that if team members engaged in such a practice, it would be more likely that they appreciated the input of others, this possibly benefitting team cohesion, the creation of trust and mutual respect. This behaviour supports the position of Lewandowski and Lisk (2013) who suggest that making individual tasks visible to the entire team increases team bonding and positively affects perpetual distance between team members. Robert and You (2018) support this perspective also.

However, within Teams D and T, team leaders took certain actions that may have negatively affected such cohesion. The first case involved Team D. The team leader was selective as to who to build a relationship with. As

a result of her choice to meet one team member and not another (even though she thought she had met both), together with the absence of a relationship with D01 that ensued, meant that team cohesion suffered. D01's reaction to this was a sense of indifference which she overcompensated for in her relationship with D02, the third member of the team with whom she shared a special bond.

The second case involved Team T. During team meetings the formal leader, T06, always positioned himself at the centre of the table to make sure he was visible to the distant team members. He also asked the more senior employees to take their place right beside him. It appeared that, the further away from the leader the team members sat, the less seniority within the team. The leader's approach seemed to be a way by which he was accentuating the hierarchical rank of team members within the team context, this perhaps increasing feelings of uneasiness felt by certain individuals. In addition, when T06 did not ensure the visibility of all team members and when he chose to focus on building and nurturing relationships with specific individuals and not with all team members, he also was, inadvertently or otherwise, affecting the sense of belonging to the team of certain team members and this was consequently affecting team cohesion. In this case, the team members affected the most by the leader's behaviour took it upon themselves to make their presence felt. They made a conscious effort to build bonds with team members to ensure they minimised such feelings of isolation and to ascertain that they were regarded as integral members of the team. Such efforts included making occasional 'unnecessary' phone calls to distant team members, organising activities when distant members came to visit, and offering to take on additional responsibilities which did not fall within their job description in an attempt to prove their worth. The manifestation of these behaviours showed that the responsibility of establishing team cohesion, although a responsibility generally attributed to the team leader, may be taken on by any team member. When feelings of isolation kick in, team members become creative in finding ways to achieve a sense of acceptance and belonging. In such cases, however, although the leader should recognise and reward such attempts which are made for the

benefit of the entire team, such actions, may be regarded as over-stepping and may not necessarily be supported by the leader.

As previously mentioned in section 4.4.4.1., the co-located members of Team SB shared an office with their team leader. The leader opted for this configuration to build relationships and strengthen bonds between team members and thereby foster team cohesion. He was successful in this and co-located team members had developed a sense of reliance on one another and a sense of belonging to the team. By consequence, as a result of this office layout, one team member, the physically distant team member, was excluded from this arrangement. Therefore, it is the author's opinion that, notwithstanding the benefits this office layout may have offered, it may have created an 'in-group' and 'out-group' feeling within the team making the distance factor an issue affecting both team cohesion and the sense of belonging intended by the team leader. In fact, the physically distant team member referred to feelings of isolation he was occasionally experiencing, these likely being exacerbated by emotions of being the only team member who did not share an office with the rest of the team (the team leader may have unknowingly increased physical distance between the distant team member and the co-located cohort). The team leader made conscious efforts to keep the distant team member constantly informed of all that went on in the office (an action recommended by Sivunen, 2006) and to ensure he visited the Malta office periodically. This allowed for increased social interaction with the co-located team members (as recommended by Mulki and Jaramillo, 2011). However, although the leader's efforts did help, they were probably not sufficient to completely eradicate the sense of isolation felt by this team member and to create an environment where team members felt "*virtually close*" to each other (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002, p. 689) at all times. Cascio and Shurygailo (2003, p.367) warn of this "*gap*" and of the creation of sub-groups within the same team, this potentially being the issue faced by Team SB and which may also be faced by other hybrid teams.

Another factor that has been identified by this research as having an effect on the way in which leadership and followership unfold in hybrid teams relates to the preconceptions that individuals have of what leaders and

followers should be like and of how they should act. These preconceptions tend to be based on an individual's ILTs and IFTs which are developed and shaped over time, constructed through socialisation (Epitropaki et al, 2013), and influenced by context (Carsten et al, 2010).

Various participants in this study benchmarked their self-perception to the opinion and perception their colleagues had of them. Their conviction of their self-perception was based on whether they felt they mirrored the attributes, behaviours and expectations of others (the looking glass self as referred to in section 5.2.). This means that the perception others had of them conditioned their self-perception. If their self-perception matched the opinion others had of them, they would feel they were leaders/followers. However, if there was a mismatch between their self-perception and the perception held by others, and even if this perception was broadly endorsed, the internalisation of that perception still did not happen (as in the case of M01 and SB03). In such cases, the movement of tasks and responsibilities within the team was affected.

Research findings have also indicated that when a person's self-perception as a leader/follower is determined by what may be considered ILTs and IFTs of others, there are times when the perception of others has a strong weighting on the individual's *"self-view"* (DeRue et al, 2009, p.228) as a leader or a follower (as was the case with T04). Rather than attempting to influence and change the opinions of others, data has shown that it may also happen that individuals frame their self-perception to comply with the schemas held by others (or maybe the expectations of others). These eventually became the perceptions they had of themselves. This contrasts with the proposition made by Humphreys et al (2015) who concluded that individuals attribute leadership and/or followership based on personal perception and they categorise themselves as ideal leaders or followers based on their understanding and expectations of the qualities and actions they themselves attribute to leaders and followers.

Since ILTs and IFTs function as identity construction triggers (Humphreys et al, 2015), the different perceptions held by team members may be highly significant as they may condition how team members approach leadership and followership within a team environment. This may be

especially visible within hybrid teams since it is more likely that team members come from diverse backgrounds and therefore it is also more likely that they hold different perspectives, cultural norms and archetypes. Team members seem to have been aware of this as evidenced when T02 commented that within virtual teams, team members *"have their characteristics of being foreign…But the probability of having Maltese people with those traits ... I think would be different"*. Coultas and Salas (2015) posited that ILTs and IFTs influence the construction and development of leader and follower relations and therefore in such hybrid teams, the effect that different impressions and perceptions may have on the leadership process, may be more pronounced.

In the above discussion, the research findings were presented. The data from all four case teams was brought together with the objective of identifying key points, similarities and differences between the hybrid case teams. All teams were analysed individually (in the previous chapter) and, once findings from all teams were brought together, conclusions drawn were positioned within the literature.

The next section will focus on answering the research questions of this study.

5.5. <u>Answering the Research Questions</u>

This study focused on hybrid teams and investigated how leadership and followership processes unfold as team members 'move' tasks and responsibilities within such contexts. The researcher concentrated on this under-explored area in research specifically focusing on the hybrid team, which due to its very nature, is a complex and challenging environment to operate in. To provide a clearer understanding of leadership and followership within such teams, the researcher focused on the experience of team members as tasks and responsibilities 'moved' within their teams. She also identified factors that had an impact on the movement of tasks and responsibilities within hybrid teams. She sought to link and make

sense of comments made and situations described and observed to establish the underlying reasons for behaviors and actions visible during the observations and interviews conducted.

As discussed in chapter 2, this study was guided by one principal research question. This research question is based on the assumption that leadership and followership in hybrid teams differ from leadership and followership in traditional teams. This assumption has been made on the premise that members of hybrid teams do not collaborate, operate and behave in the same way that a traditional team may (Al-Ani et al, 2011; Boisot, 2011) but they depend on information technology to do so. Therefore, their structure, the way in which they operate and function, and the problems and issues they are susceptible to, can affect how and by whom tasks and responsibilities are performed within such teams.

Apart from a principal research question, sub-questions were also formulated to set the study's framework and structure. These sub-questions will be answered first below given that answering them feeds into answering the principal research question. The following paragraphs, therefore, draw together the findings of this research and how they respond to the questions asked at the outset of the study.

How do team members experience the movement of tasks and responsibilities leading them to perform outside of their formally designated roles to achieve common team goals?

The movement of tasks and responsibilities occurring within hybrid teams is not always a straightforward process. An individual's self-perception, their emotions, their position in the organisation's hierarchy, and other personal considerations made, all affect an individual's behaviours and actions and how they experience the movement in tasks and responsibilities.

Within the case teams, assuming a particular perception and the way in which that perception was projected amongst team members varied between participants. When there was misalignment between the

individual's self-perception and their hierarchical position, team members behaved differently as discussed earlier in the thesis.

Team members occupying lower levels in the organisation's hierarchy were at times reluctant to assume responsibilities which generally pertained to individuals higher up in the organisation, maybe because the change in role was a temporary one reflecting the needs of the team at the time. They found it difficult to adjust for reasons such as a lack of confidence, being exposed to limited information, and knowing that their efforts would not be recognised and rewarded. They also dealt with their emotions by, for example, speaking openly about them or distancing themselves altogether from situations which caused distress. Before taking on additional tasks, some thought about the effects on a project's costings, on associated risks, and on the intention perceived to be behind team members' choice to give tasks to others. All these considerations affected the movement of tasks and responsibilities within the hybrid case teams.

Negative emotions were not felt in equal measure by all individuals as tasks and responsibilities 'moved' among team members. These emotions seemed to be stronger when individuals occupying follower roles transitioned to perform leader duties (as referred to in the preceding paragraph). In fact, team members who occupied leadership roles in the team/organisation generally found no problem to take on duties that pertained to lower positions in the hierarchy. No negative emotions were experienced. They appeared to understand the reasons behind such movement and actively supported the practice within the teams.

Within the hybrid case teams, there were situations where individuals who were followers as per their formal roles, accepted to perform leader duties. As a result, they changed their self-perception to align to the 'new' tasks and chose to carry the acquired self-perception to another context. When this happened, and irrespective of the reasons behind these behaviours, because the boundaries attached to the duties that were originally taken on were not respected, it was reported that the individual would not be assigned similar responsibilities in any context in the future.

In cases where an individual's self-perception changed according to context, and therefore the individual believed they had both leader as well as follower attributes and they chose to project each self-view as necessitated by context (a concept mentioned by Haslam et al, 2011), there did not seem to be any associated negative emotion when transitioning from one self-perception to the other.

How does the communications medium/media used by a hybrid team affect the movement of tasks and responsibilities between team members?

Researchers such as Daft and Lengel (1986) and Ferrell and Kline (2018), suggest that the richest form of communication is face-to-face communication. Within hybrid teams, face-to-face non-mediated communication is generally not the primary means of communication. Team members communicate principally through technology and therefore through a medium that may offer limited and/or reduced visibility. This poses a challenge to hybrid teams. However, the more closely the medium used replicates face-to-face communication, the richer is that medium and therefore the more it allows team members to behave virtually as they do face-to-face (Symons and Stenzel, 2007).

Participants were aware that to operate in the virtual environment, a certain degree of adaptation and adjustment was necessary. Failure to adjust to virtual may have negatively impacted team processes and interactions, team cohesion would suffer as the distance between team members would be felt more significantly, and feelings of isolation would increase. Therefore, by taking appropriate measures, such as making sure team members were constantly updated and informed of developments occurring and by meeting socially to encourage relationship building, the visibility of team members to one another was enhanced. This visibility was also improved when the communications medium used by the team enabled team members to see each other and when individual actions and behaviours were clearly visible to the entire team. When the richness of the communications medium was high, the understanding and correct

interpretation of any communication between team members was more likely to be accurate (Daft and Lengel, 1986; Ferrell and Kline, 2018). Therefore, in hybrid teams, choosing the right communications medium for the team assumes greater importance due to a lack of face-to-face communication within such teams. The richness enabled by the communications medium is likely to affect the clarity and visibility of team members' actions and behaviours.

However, this research also indicates that this may not always be the case. In fact, it was observed that irrespective of the medium's richness, when tasks and responsibilities 'move' from one person to another, team members compensated for a lack of visibility and clarity (which may be due to for example, connectivity problems) by speaking in a louder voice, by being more assertive and by repeating their request ensuring that they are heard and comprehended by all team members. Therefore, such an adjustment meant that the richness of the communications medium did not necessarily determine whether the movement of tasks and responsibilities was 'clear' and 'visible'. This means that the clarity and visibility of team members' actions and behaviours may not negatively impact leadership and followership in hybrid teams.

As previously mentioned, face-to-face communication is considered the richest communications medium available. In hybrid teams it is not always possible to communicate face-to-face and this can be a problem which affects team dynamics, team processes and synergies. Research findings demonstrate that face-to-face communication remains especially important at team formation stage when team members are trying to develop a common language which fosters future trust, cohesion and collaboration (Ford et al, 2017; Marlow et al, 2017). Once the team matures and team members manage to create a virtual space where they feel comfortable interacting with one another and sharing knowledge, physical interaction becomes less important and can be aided and/or replaced by regular virtual communication (the richness of the communications medium also loses importance at this stage). If and when problems arise, the team may revert back to face-to-face communication (or maybe increase the richness of the communications medium).

In cases where initial physical contact between team members was missing, team member interactions were affected for as long as the team functioned. Consequently, the movement of tasks and responsibilities within the team was conditioned because the relationships developed between team members were not strong enough for team members to feel comfortable and at ease in the team environment.

In conclusion, therefore, this research has indicated that in hybrid teams, the richness of the communications medium does not necessarily impact to the anticipated extent on the way leadership and followership unfold in the virtual environment. However, other factors may impact these processes. Sometimes, these factors are not directly dependent on the medium itself, but are exacerbated by it.

What are the factors that may affect the movement of tasks and responsibilities and thus leadership and followership in hybrid teams?

Various factors were identified as having an influence on the movement of tasks and responsibilities within hybrid teams. Factors, including the self-perception of team members, the adaptation of team members to the virtual environment and the communications medium used by the team, as discussed above all have an impact on this process. Another such factor is the culture created within the team.

Ensuring that a collegial culture existed within the team was important as was the creation of a work style and ethic conducive to virtual working. Each team's culture was based on collaboration and teamwork and on a sense of reliance on one another. Trust was an essential ingredient as it formed the basis for the cohesiveness and bonding of team members. Trust also set the foundation for the creation of an environment where team members felt 'safe' and comfortable to share knowledge and change tasks as required by their work. Although both the team leader and team members were responsible for the creation of this culture, the behaviours and actions of the leader are what set the scene for any movement of responsibilities that occurred within that hybrid team. From that point on, the character and personality of team members, their level of expertise

and confidence, and the requirements of the project in hand, all seemed to play a part in team dynamics.

Other factors that affected the movement of duties within these hybrid teams were the organisation's formal hierarchy and structure as well as the required strict adherence to organisational policies and procedures. Within the specific case teams where these factors were more pronounced, changes between team members appeared to be repressed. Team members felt constrained and were less likely to actively change tasks and responsibilities. Reduced flexibility and a lack of adjustment to 'virtual' was also stronger in these teams. Since the enforcement of rigid work practices and high degrees of bureaucracy are not conducive to virtual work (Kissler, 2001; Asatiani and Penttinen, 2019), it was more likely that the emergence of active leadership and active followership were stifled within these teams.

As mentioned above, team members hold different perceptions of what leaders and followers should be like and how they should act. These perceptions, which are determined by an individual's ILTs and IFTs, had an impact on leadership emergence within the case teams. Given that hybrid teams are composed of individuals potentially coming from different cultures and backgrounds and consequently the incidence of these members having different ILTs and IFTs is greater, the impact that such differences have on team interactions may also be greater. Within hybrid teams, therefore, the ILT and IFT factor may significantly impact the way in which leadership and followership unravel.

Other factors that conditioned the movement of tasks and responsibilities within the hybrid case teams were; time constraints and competing work deadlines; the impact on the project's profitability since project costings would not have accounted for any movement in tasks and responsibilities (as these rates would have been based on the charge-out rates attached to formal hierarchical roles); the perceived potential benefits and risks associated with accepting and/or rejecting such duties; the reasons behind any movement; the perceived 'distance' between team members; and, recognition for taking on additional work and responsibilities. In addition, when the boundaries attached to such additional work were not respected

by an individual, it was more likely that the individual would not be involved in future changes.

The answers to the sub-questions as detailed above give detail and context to the principal research question presented hereunder.

How do leadership and followership unfold in contexts that are mediated by information technology?

Findings have indicated that tasks and responsibilities 'move' among team members irrespective of the hierarchical position they occupy. This practice, which is generally encouraged by team leaders and is accepted as 'normal' within hybrid teams, is experienced differently by individual team members. Since this movement is mediated by technology, and therefore, it occurs through a medium that may offer limited richness and/or reduced visibility, it becomes increasingly complex. In addition, this movement is also affected by multiple factors such as an individual's character and self-perception, their hierarchical position, the policies and procedures of the organisation, and the communications medium used by the team (these factors, and others which have been identified in this research have been detailed in the previous section).

The following chapter concludes this thesis. The contributions of this study will be highlighted as will the study's limitations. Areas for future research will be proposed.

6.0. <u>Contributions, Limitations and Further Research</u>

In the previous chapter conclusions drawn from the discussion of the research findings were laid out and answers to the research questions were proposed. This chapter highlights the contributions of the research, contributions to knowledge, theory and practice. It describes the study's limitations and identifies areas for future research.

6.1. <u>Contributions to Theory and Knowledge</u>

This research contributes to theory and knowledge in a number of ways. It focused on studying team member interactions and relations within hybrid teams with the objective of adding understanding and insights to comprehend leadership and followership in a context mediated by information technology. Within this context, research is sparse. Literature has generally focused on studying leadership in traditional teams where all team members are co-located, or in virtual teams where team members are dispersed. Hybrid teams, due to the flexibility offered by their structure, are increasingly being adopted in organisations, especially nowadays as organisations navigate through changes brought about by Covid-19. Hybrid teams, therefore, offered an original and relevant context within which to study *if* work tasks and responsibilities 'move' within teams made up of both co-located and distant members, and subsequently to determine *how, why*, and *when* this is done. This research has also identified the factors likely to affect this movement. By applying a robust empirical research framework to understand how leadership and followership unfold in such contexts, this study has generated additional knowledge and has also expanded existing knowledge on the subject.

A call to conduct empirical research in the subject of leadership and virtual teams has also been forwarded by various researchers, such as Al-Ani et al (2011), Asatiani and Penttinen (2019), Chamakiotis et al (2021) and Henry et al (2021). This study answers this call for supplementary research.

One of the findings of this research builds on a theory proposed by DeRue and Ashford (2010). Their leader identity construction theory suggests that

identity construction is developmental and sequential; an identity is first internalised at the individual level, then relationally strengthened, and finally broadly endorsed by the organisation. This research, although not concentrating on leader identity construction theory per se, seems to be indicating that a person does not necessarily first internalise a self-perception, and at a second stage, through the individual's actions and behaviours, this self-perception becomes stronger and is subsequently recognised and endorsed by others in the organisation. This research has provided an indication that the process may not necessarily occur in the sequence proposed by DeRue and Ashford (2010), but may begin at any of these levels in no pre-established order. DeRue and Ashford (2010) had contemplated this possibility and had called for further research into this aspect of their theory.

Another contribution made by this study is related to an individual's ease of transition and the desirability to change from performing tasks and responsibilities generally associated to individuals occupying other positions in a team. This research has highlighted that, within a hybrid team context, an individual is less likely to feel conflicted when there is a shift from performing leader duties as per one's formal hierarchical role, to performing follower duties rather than vice versa. Therefore, it seems that team members are more willing to transition from performing leader to follower tasks than from follower to leader tasks. This finding contrasts with the proposition made by Stewart et al (2017) who posited that leaders tend to hold on to their leadership positions and are less inclined to take on the 'less attractive' follower role.

In addition, although previous studies have identified specific factors that have an effect on leadership in virtual teams (such as, the team's culture and the organisation's policies, procedures and structure), this research has unearthed additional factors which may potentially have an impact on the movement of tasks and responsibilities within hybrid teams. These include for example, an individual's self-perception, their ease of adaptation and adjustment to the virtual context, and time constraints and work deadlines. It has emerged from this research that the richness of the communications medium used by the team (this factor has been singled

out in literature as having significant impact on leadership in virtual teams) may not necessarily affect the movement of tasks and responsibilities occurring within hybrid teams especially when team members would have developed strong relationships between themselves. In fact, from this point stems the final contribution of this study; face-to-face non-mediated communication is important especially at team formation stage. Although the importance of non-mediated communication has already been acknowledged in literature, this finding further reinforces this argument. Findings have demonstrated that within hybrid teams, such face-to-face communication acts as a precursor for future team synergies and collaboration. Hence, the richness of the communications medium assumes less importance for the team once strong relationships are created at team formation stage.

6.2. <u>Practical Contributions</u>

A number of practical contributions may be suggested from this study. The insights provided have implications on both an organisational level as well as on an individual level. These insights are especially applicable in the current Covid-19 situation as organisations are increasingly operating virtually and are being required to swiftly adjust and adapt to survive in this new reality.

Findings suggested that team members may experience conflict when changing tasks and responsibilities. They manifest and seek to overcome this conflict in different ways. Recognising these ways of coping, understanding an individual's feelings, and providing team members with the necessary support and training to overcome negative emotions, may make team members more willing to perform duties and responsibilities which may not necessarily be tied to their positions in the hierarchy. This will encourage more active engagement in the practice of changing tasks and responsibilities as required by the team or organisation.

Hybrid teams principally use technology-mediated communication. The more 'visual' the communication tools used, especially at team formation stage, the more likely it is for relationships to form and trust to develop. Although as mentioned earlier, the movement of tasks and responsibilities

and the clarity and visibility of team members' actions and behaviours are not always conditioned by the richness of the communications medium used by the team but may be affected by other factors (for example, by the individual's self-perception), giving a visual element to team communications whenever possible remains important. This is evident given the importance team members attach to face-to-face communication and interaction especially when difficulties or problems arise.

The findings of this research suggest that a lack of face-to-face communication between team members, especially at team formation stage, affects team member interaction and also active leadership and active followership in the immediate term and potentially also in the long term. A lack of regular physical contact may affect the sense of belonging felt by team members, especially if physical distance between team members is felt strongly. Team leaders must ensure that their actions do not lead to the creation of 'ingroup' and 'outgroup' feelings amongst team members. This situation can be especially problematic in hybrid teams where the distinction between co-located and distant members may be perceived more strongly. Although mitigating feelings of isolation is typically the leader's responsibility, research findings have indicated that team members make conscious efforts to increase team cohesion when the leader fails to do so. By being aware of this, organisations may resolve to encourage and/or reward individuals who take an active role in fostering team cohesion given the importance that such cohesion has on the well-being of the team.

This research had also indicated that there are multiple factors which affect interactions occurring in hybrid teams, such as, the perception individuals have of themselves, the different backgrounds of team members, and the organisation's policies and procedures. By being aware of these factors and trying to mitigate any potential negative effects resulting from such factors, practitioners will be more successful when configuring hybrid teams, when selecting the communications medium for use by the team, and when setting out the parameters and boundaries within which hybrid teams and their members must function and operate. Where possible, the criteria used to select individuals as members of

hybrid teams needs to account for similarities and differences in the backgrounds and cultures of potential team members. Due to these similarities and differences, hybrid teams may experience problems with, for example, trust creation and knowledge sharing. Any mismatch between the backgrounds and schemas of different team members may also result in a failure to engage in changing tasks as necessary, this affecting team efficiency and possibly team outcomes. Organisations must ensure that differences between team members are harnessed and capitalised upon so that they are beneficial to the team.

The practice of moving tasks and responsibilities among different members of a hybrid team may be challenging for certain individuals. These challenges may be exacerbated by a requirement to strictly adhere to an organisation's policies and procedures and by the existence of bureaucratic systems within organisations. This research has shown that individuals working within professional services firms are more likely to experience this. Relaxing certain policies and procedures and introducing less rigid structures would mean offering increased flexibility which would facilitate virtual work (Kissler, 2001; Asatiani and Penttinen, 2019). This would promote and encourage the emergence of active leadership and active followership within hybrid teams.

Within these same professional services firms, and this can apply to organisations operating in other industry sectors, budgeting for potential projects was another factor that affected the movement of tasks and responsibilities. Given that team members are each assigned a different cost per labour hour depending on their formal grade, and these costs are taken into consideration when making projections and issuing quotations to clients, being required to operate within these budgets may be a limiting factor in the movement of duties.

6.3. <u>Limitations of the Study</u>

This study provides valuable theoretical and practical contributions, however, as with all research, there are limitations to be addressed.

Firstly, given the limited number of research subjects, the sample size is not representative and therefore any conclusions reached cannot be generalised. The researcher's intention was never to generalise but to opt for a purposive sample composed of participants who were knowledgeable in the research topic and therefore best represented the topic being investigated. The sample was selected according to specific criteria predetermined by the researcher because they were relevant to the objectives of the study (Guest et al, 2006; Lanka et al, 2019). The researcher's objective was to gather descriptive in-depth data which enabled meaningful conclusions to emerge. The steps taken to ensure this are detailed in section 3.5. of this thesis.

A second limitation of this study relates to the use of qualitative methodologies. It relies on the researcher's interpretations and on her ability to read into situations observed and comments made by participants. To ensure that this research was carried out in a way that would ensure its dependability and credibility, the researcher took specific measures. For example, she discussed all the steps of the research process with her supervisors, documented these steps in detail and adopted a triangulation strategy to ensure consistency and allow for cross-comparison of data. In addition, since the researcher relied on participant observations and data generated from interviews, it may have been the case that participants altered their behaviours and/or replied to the researcher's questions during the interviews in the way they thought reflected a better picture of themselves or of the situations they were describing. They may not have been fully sincere and/or may have omitted information from their responses so as not to compromise themselves in any way. To minimise the incidence of this occurring, the researcher explained the objectives of her research ensuring participants understood that all their responses would be kept confidential and anonymous. She also tried to put participants at ease during the interviews by listening to them showing empathy and understanding. During observations she tried to minimise the impact of her presence by being a passive observer throughout.

Another problem encountered by the researcher was related to the corporate documentation provided by the case teams. Given that the researcher had no control over the type and quantity of the documentation provided, she could not analyse such documentation and treat it as a source of data. She used such documentation as a source of contextual and background information.

Since all the case teams but one (Team M was a project team) were on-going teams, this research could not follow the teams' development and progress from their inception to their dissolution. If this were the case, it would have been more likely for the researcher to gain insights and understanding of team members interactions at different stages in the teams' life thereby potentially capturing differences in such interactions. In order to partly mitigate this issue, the research was conducted over an eighteen-month period to achieve a better spread of interviews and observations thereby ensuring contact with the teams over a longer time period.

The level of access to the organisations and case teams that the researcher managed to negotiate differed. Due to the sensitivity and confidentiality of team discussions and conversations, and of the corporate documentation made available, it was very difficult to gain access and ensure continued participation in the research. In fact, one of the organisations initially accepting to participate in the research dropped out before the commencement of data collection. However, by briefing the organisations in detail on the study's objectives and on the research process, by assuring them that data will be treated confidentially and anonymously, and by keeping communication open and constant, the researcher secured participation from four organisations.

One final limitation is the long-term relevance of the study. Since this study was conducted in hybrid teams, and team members communicate and collaborate through technological means, advancements in technology may alter such methods of collaboration. Such changes may impact the movement of tasks and responsibilities in hybrid teams and, as a consequence, also the leadership and followership processes unfolding within such teams. Although this a possibility, it is likely that the main

contributions of this research remain relevant since the factors impacting the movement of tasks and responsibilities within such teams as well as the challenges faced by these teams are not always dependent on and conditioned by the communications medium used by the team.

6.4. <u>Further Research</u>

Future research which builds on the findings of this study may provide additional insight into interactions occurring within hybrid teams. It would be interesting if longitudinal research were conducted so that teams can be followed from inception until they are dissolved. This would make it possible to track changes and developments as the hybrid team grows and matures with time, resulting in a better and more detailed understanding of how the movement of tasks and responsibilities develops and evolves within such teams.

Another interesting area for future research is the identification of different ways in which individuals can be prompted to assume a self-perception which was not internally recognised by that individual, but which had already been relationally recognised and/or broadly endorsed within the organisation. This research did not focus on leader identity construction theory as proposed by DeRue and Ashford (2010) wherein it is proposed that the identity construction process occurs in a specific sequence. However, since the findings of this research seem to be suggesting otherwise, it would therefore be opportune to investigate this aspect of DeRue and Ashford's theory.

Future studies can also focus on various aspects that have been briefly touched upon in this research. Possible research areas may include; the effect that demographic factors, such as the age and gender of team members, and other factors, such as prior experience as a virtual team member, may have on the movement of tasks and responsibilities within hybrid teams; the extent of influence that different/similar cultural traits and norms of hybrid team members may have on this movement; the impact that a medium's richness has on leader success; and, the approaches virtual team members adopt to succeed in making their actions and

behaviours clear and visible especially when the primary medium of communication used by the team is of low richness.

6.5. <u>Conclusion</u>

By providing insight into the movement of tasks and responsibilities team members engage in within hybrid teams, this research makes a number of contributions to knowledge, as well as to leadership and virtual team literature. The author also believes that, especially as a result of the current economic scenario, this research has great practical applicability - the hybrid team is likely to become the preferred working arrangement within and between organisations who are striving to cope and survive the impact of Covid-19. Whilst remote working is increasingly being encouraged and resorted to by certain organisations, others are returning to a modified form of work allowing the partial re-entry of their employees to office premises. This seems to be indicating that being part of a hybrid team has become the 'new normal' for today's workforce.

The findings of this research are therefore important, not only because they provide an understanding of the dynamic interactional processes of leadership and followership occurring within hybrid teams, but also because they highlight the factors, many of which are within the control of the team itself, that may condition an individual's ability and willingness to actively engage in the practice of moving tasks and responsibilities as necessary within these teams. This social process that leaders and followers collectively engage in determines leadership and followership outcomes and ultimately the achievement of common team goals.

<u>Appendix I – Databases Used for Searches</u>

EBSCO

ScienceDirect

Taylor & Francis online

Emerald insight

Scopus

Wiley

Springer

ResearchGate

Academia

Proquest

Semantic Scholar

IRMA-International

SAGE

OpenDepot

Sciendo

HeinOnline

Business Source Complete

EconLit

MEDLINE

APAPsycInfo

JSTOR

Google Scholar

Appendix II - Answering the Research Questions

Objectives	Research Questions	Information Needed
Exploring how leadership and followership unfold in hybrid teams	Core question: How do leadership and followership unfold in contexts that are mediated by information technology?	
To understand how an individual's self-perception affects the movement of tasks and responsibilities within hybrid teams and to understand the reactions, feelings and behaviours of team members as they adjust, adapt and cope with any conflict they may experience	Sub-question 1: How do team members experience the movement of tasks and responsibilities leading them to perform outside of their formally designated roles to achieve common team goals?	- Detailed descriptions of interactions made in contexts with varying degrees of media richness (where a medium's richness is associated with enabling clarity of actions and understanding of content). - Team members' and leaders' perceptions of themselves and their behaviours. - Team members' and leaders' thoughts on how colleagues perceive them and their behaviours. - Team members' perceptions of their colleagues' self-perceptions and behaviours. - Detailed description of the emotional experience of assuming tasks and responsibilities which are different to those generally performed as per one's position in the hierarchy (leader to follower and follower to leader). - Outcomes in cases of conflict.
To comprehend leader-follower relations and interactions in contexts where media richness is lacking and therefore where the visibility and clarity of actions and behaviours of team members may be compromised	Sub-question 2: How does the communications medium/media used by a hybrid team affect the movement of tasks and responsibilities between team members?	- Detailed descriptions of interactions made in contexts with varying degrees of media richness. - Problems occurring due to medium used. - Measures taken to improve outcomes.

To identify any contextual factors that may impact the movement of tasks and responsibilities in hybrid teams	Sub-question 3: What are the factors that may affect the movement of tasks and responsibilities and thus leadership and followership in hybrid teams?	• Team leaders' and members' thoughts on specific factors that may impact the interactions of team members (e.g. team culture, organisational culture, etc.). • Different ways of adapting to factors impacting the movement of tasks and responsibilities.

Appendix III - Interviewing Guide

- Tell me about yourself and your role within the team/organisation.

- Are you satisfied in your role?

- How do you think you are perceived by others within the team and are you happy with the way you feel perceived?

- Do you feel empowered to take decisions and influence others?

- Do you think of yourself as a leader/follower?

- What image of yourself do you try to project to others and do you think you are being successful?

- Does anything cause you conflict and distress in your role?

- How do you try to overcome these conflicts?

- Have you ever been assigned a role different to the one you formally hold?

- Have you ever sought to assume a role different to the one you formally hold?

- How did such a change in identity make you feel?

- To what extent do you feel your team-mates and the organisation accepted you in your new role?

- Do you think that communicating virtually causes problems and may lead to situations of conflict? Why? Can you give examples from your experience?

- Are there any factors that you believe may have or may have had an impact on team interactions?

- Are there any factors that you believe may have or may have had an impact on the exchanging of roles within the team?

- Do you manage to align your background (formally assigned role) with the new role you are assuming?

- Are there any changes you would like to see happening in the future (for example to your role/position, to the team structure, to future teams, etc.)? Are you doing anything to make these changes happen? Why do you think such changes are essential/important?

Appendix IV – Interview Questions Addressing the Sub-Questions

Research Sub-Questions	Interview Questions Addressing the Sub-Questions
Sub-question 1: How do team members experience the movement of tasks and responsibilities leading them to perform outside of their formally designated roles to achieve common team goals?	- Tell me about yourself and your role within the team/organisation. - Are you satisfied in your role? - How do you think you are perceived by others within the team and are you happy with the way you feel perceived? - Do you feel empowered to take decisions and influence others? - Do you think of yourself as a leader/follower? - What image of yourself do you try to project to others and do you think you are being successful? - Does anything cause you conflict and distress in your role? - How do you try to overcome these conflicts? - Have you ever been assigned a role different to the one you formally hold? - Have you ever sought to assume a role different to the one you formally hold? - How did such a change in identity make you feel? - To what extent do you feel your team-mates and the organisation accepted you in your new role? - Do you manage to align your background (formally assigned role) with the new role you are assuming?
Sub-question 2: How does the communications medium/media used by a hybrid team affect the movement of tasks and responsibilities between team members?	- Do you think that communicating virtually causes problems and may lead to situations of conflict? Why? Can you give examples from your experience?
Sub-question 3: What are the factors that may affect the movement of tasks and responsibilities and thus leadership and followership in hybrid teams?	- Are there any factors that you believe may have or may have had an impact on team interactions? - Are there any factors that you believe may have or may have had an impact on the movement of roles within the team?
Sub-questions 1,2, and 3	- Are there any changes you would like to see happening in the future (for example to your role/position, to the team structure, to future teams, etc.)? Are you doing anything to make these changes happen? Why do you think such changes are essential/important?

Appendix V - Data Structure of Themes

Data Structure of Theme – Team Context

1st order concepts (codes)   2nd order themes (sub-themes)   Aggregate dimension (theme)

- Reporting relationships
- Responsibilities as per job description
- Work experience and educational background of case team members
- Policies and procedures – Work procedures
- The meaning of leadership
- Behaviour showing an individual's position in the team hierarchy

Team hierarchy

- Suggestions and advice – Team member to team member
- Suggestions and advice – Team leader to team member
- Suggestions and advice – Team member to team leader
- Establishing relationships with distant team members
- Initiatives taken to strengthen teamwork
- Policies and procedures – Decision making
- Relationships with colleagues
- Relationships with subordinates
- Relationships with superiors

Relationship building

- Initiatives taken to increase employee satisfaction
- Initiatives taken to achieve objectives
- Reasons for being satisfied on-the-job
- No changes wanted – to Organisation
- No changes wanted – to Tasks and responsibilities
- Leadership opportunities within the case team
- Recognition of staff efforts
- Corporate successes
- Policies and procedures – Employee performance

Job satisfaction

Team Context

- Causes of on-the-job dissatisfaction
- Causes of conflict
- Causes of on-the-job stress
- Changes wanted – to Organisation – Employee matters
- Changes wanted – to Organisation – Operational
- Changes wanted – to Organisation – Culture
- Changes wanted – to Organisation – Image
- Changes wanted – to Organisation – Office layout
- Changes wanted – to Tasks and responsibilities
- Changes wanted – to Team (not case team)
- Coping with conflict
- Coping with dissatisfaction
- Coping with stress
- Feelings of isolation
- Initiatives taken to avoid feelings of isolation among distant team members
- Initiatives taken to make changes – to Tasks and Responsibilities
- Initiatives taken to make changes – to Organisation
- Personal aspirations
- Progression within organisation
- Problems faced by the organisation
- Solving issues and problems

Causes of dissatisfaction

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Data Structure of Theme – The Movement of Tasks and Responsibilities

1st order concepts (codes) — rendered as: 1ˢᵗ order concepts (codes)

1st order concepts (codes)   **2nd order themes (sub-themes)**   **Aggregate dimension (theme)**

- Decision making – Reasons for referring upwards – Insecurity
- Decision making – Reasons for referring upwards – Non-routine decisions
- Decision making – Reasons for referring upwards – Position within organisation
- Image projected by individual
- Influencing others – Approach adopted
- Influencing others – Reasons for being successful
- Influencing others – Reasons for not being successful
- Opinion of self – Competent in specific areas
- Opinion of self – Follower
- Opinion of self – Leader
- Opinion of self – Neither leader nor follower
- Opinion of self – Being a follower but respected as a leader in the case team
- What I think others think of me
- Attitude of individual towards position held

→ **Perception of self**

- Individual's internal conflict – Feeling a leader but occupying a follower position in the case team
- Individual's internal conflict – Feeling a follower but occupying a leader position in the case team
- Individual's internal conflict – Occupying a leader position but performing follower tasks within the case team
- No internal conflict when performing tasks and responsibilities not in job description

→ **Self-perception vs hierarchical position**

- Attitude of colleagues when individual is assigned or takes on tasks and responsibilities not in job description
- Attitude of individual towards tasks and responsibilities assigned or taken on (not as per job description)
- Attitude of superiors when individual is assigned or takes on tasks and responsibilities not in job description
- Reasons for team members to change tasks and responsibilities
- Reasons for team members not to change tasks and responsibilities
- Justification of decision to take on tasks not in job description
- Reaction of team members to changes in their tasks and responsibilities
- Considerations made before taking on tasks and responsibilities not in job description
- Problems faced when changing tasks and responsibilities
- The individual's thought process when changing tasks and responsibilities

→ **Attitudes towards changing tasks and responsibilities**

- Tasks and responsibilities assigned to individual (not as per job description)
- Tasks and responsibilities taken on upon individual's initiative (not as per job description)
- Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)
- Frequency of changing tasks and responsibilities
- Problems faced if tasks and responsibilities do not change as necessary
- Decisions taken by individual team members (Examples)
- Initiatives taken to avoid problems

→ **Changes in tasks and responsibilities – behaviours and actions**

The Movement of Tasks and Responsibilities

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Data Structure of Theme – Communication and Collaboration

1st order concepts (codes)

2nd order themes (sub-themes)

Aggregate dimension (theme)

- Case team meetings – Communication method
- Case team meetings – Frequency and attendance
- Case team meetings – Being visible not important
- Virtual collaboration vs traditional collaboration
- Face-to-face meetings
- Making plans to communicate outside of case team meetings
- Team conversations – Not related to agenda and meeting
- Communication between colleagues
- Communication while project is live

Communication within the team

- Attitude and approach of formal case team leader
- Attitude and behaviour of case team members
- Problems due to virtuality
- Initiatives taken to solve problems created by virtuality
- No problems with virtuality
- Potential problems technology may create
- Process and procedures of case team meetings
- If you want to manage remotely…

Coping with virtual

Communication and Collaboration

- Changes wanted – to Case team – Communication
- Changes wanted – to Case Team - General
- Changes wanted – to Case team – Team and work procedures
- Initiatives taken to make changes – to Case team
- No changes wanted – to Case team

Changes proposed

Appendix VI - Extracts from Coded Interviews and Coded Observations

We were talking about you letting go of certain responsibilities.

For instance I used to sit in the factory in the production floor doing the planning of the factory. Today I almost don't touch the factory. I would go in, I have an operations meeting in the factory for 1 hour a week, ok. Whereas I used to spend my life there. Ehm.... I would get much more involved in finance meeting the banks, now I meet the banks generally once a year. We do a presentation. T01 with his team would do a quarterly. I don't get involved. We didn't have a marketing department, I used to get involved in marketing. Now D is Chief Marketing Officer and she's doing all of that. So as we've grown I've stopped taking.....

Yes, but out of the tasks that you do today, do you ever let go any of them, do you delegate them, do other people ask for them...?

Ehm... for example this morning we just started the last 2 weeks this Trello scrum and historically I would have probably tried lead that and I said 'T01, you get trained. You lead that. You drive the Exec team to do that every week'.

Would they still refer to you to take certain decisions or can they take the decisions themselves?

Ehm.... something like that there's no real decisions I would say because it's leading a meeting where there is a collective input. Ehm... I think people are more empowered to make decisions. So decisions of employing people I would have got much more involved in, now I only get involved in the very senior ones, General Manager level not below that. So they'll come to me and say 'We've done the interviews. I've found this person. I had one last night and he's a bit more than our budget but I think he's the right person'. I said 'employ great people. If it costs more than you planned, it doesn't matter. Just go ahead. I haven't seen them. I haven't seen the CV'. That's when they refer just as a check.

Coding Density

Corporate successes
Causes of on-the-job stress
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader
Changes in tasks and responsibilities [Examples]
Work experience and educational background of case team members

Changes wanted - to Organisation - Operational
Initiatives taken to increase employee satisfaction
Relationships with subordinates
Decisions taken by individual team members [Examples]
Case team meetings - Frequency and attendance
Case team meetings - Communication method
Opinion of self - Leader
The meaning of leadership
Face-to-face meetings
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team member
Initiatives taken to strengthen teamwork
Reasons for team members to change tasks and responsibilities

Responsibilities as per job description
Policies and procedures - Employee performance
If you want to manage remotely...
Virtual collaboration vs traditional collaboration
Changes wanted - to Case team - Team and work procedures
Reporting relationships
Coping with conflict
Initiatives taken to solve problems created by virtuality
Problems due to virtuality
Individual's internal conflict - Occupying a leader position but performing follower tasks within the case team
Changes wanted - to Tasks and responsibilities
Reasons for being satisfied on-the-job
Problems faced when changing tasks and responsibilities
Influencing others - Approach adopted

Process and procedures of case team meetings

Policies and procedures - Decision making

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Do you feel that the other members of the Management tean see you as their leader or as one of them?

Yes.

As the leader. Why?

Ehm... I'm quite a dominant leader and this company, T, is an extension of me. So ehm... I lead the company, ehm... I would say there are a few people that are really strategic in this business....ehm.... probably if people were more strategic they would have their own business. You can't get too many people in an organisation with vision because it then starts clashing. Ehm... so definitely a leader in terms of vision and as a leader of a team I would say I'm probably in a way a member of the team. I have quite a strong say so what we've done in some of the workshops for instance is when we go through a .... ehm... our weekly meeting, I always talk last. So I don't influence the meeting. So historically I was excited and I'd talk first. Today, 2 years later I let everybody else put their ideas on the table and I tend to talk last and try and wrap it up and pull it together.

Are you happy with the way you are percieved by the rest of the group, by the rest of the team, that you are a leader? Do you want to be perceived as the leader or would you prefer if you were one of them throughout?

I think it's a mix of both. I think if everybody is one of the team and there's no leader, an organisation doesn't go anywhere. So I think an organisation needs a leader and I think it needs one person to lead. You have organisations in Germany that have 2 Managing Directors, or 3 chiefs, and I think that is not very good practice but it seems to work in Germany. It doesn't work in a lot of countries though. So I think there needs to be a leader leading an organisation. I think successful organisations are led by leaders. But it's also a team so we do a lot of work like on vulnerability-based sharing because if you've got to work as a team then you've got to open yourself up so people understand you and how you tick.

Coding Density

Corporate successes
Causes of on-the-job stress
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader
Work experience and educational background of case team members
Process and procedures of case team meetings
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Operational
Initiatives taken to increase employee satisfaction
Relationships with subordinates
Decisions taken by individual team members (Examples)
Case team meetings - Frequency and attendance
Case team meetings - Communication method

Opinion of self - Leader

Face-to-face meetings
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team member

Policies and procedures - Decision making
Responsibilities as per job description
Policies and procedures - E employee performance
If you want to manage remotely...
Virtual collaboration vs traditional collaboration
Changes wanted - to Case team - Team and work procedures
Reporting relationships
Coping with conflict
Initiatives taken to solve problems created by virtuality
Problems due to virtuality

Changes wanted - to Tasks and responsibilities
Reasons for being satisfied on-the-job
Problems faced when changing tasks and responsibilities

Influencing others - Approach adopted

Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)

Reasons for team members to change tasks and responsibilities

The meaning of leadership

Initiatives taken to stre

Individual's internal conflict - Occupying a leader position but performing follower task

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Do you feel empowered to take decisions and to influence others in the role you occupy?

To a certain extent. Meaning that influencing different people I think I can. Taking decisions, here, how's the structure, it's difficult to take decisions, meaning that... depends on the level. Because here it's very hierarchical organisation and if you are not a partner, they will not let you directly take decisions. You have to make it taken by the partner that you have to convince.

Even if it has to do with the diversity and inclusion project that you are leading?
Yes. Yes. So what I... what happens completely is that I develop the action, I present something 'our action plan is ABCDEF' and we take and of course I need to have the approval of the D & I Committee and the talent leader. I can't by my own. And also about budgets and so on, I don't have any budgets of my own. So far, no.

Do you think of yourself as a leader or as a follower?
Leader.

Even though you do not take certain decisions yourself at work? Do you still consider yourself to be a leader?
Even if I do not.....?

At work you were telling me that you cannot take the decisions yourself. You need to refer to your superiors.
You can not....

Coding Density

Reasons for being satisfied on-the-job

Individual's internal conflict - Occupying a leader position but performing follower tasks within the case team

Image projected by individual

Initiatives taken to make changes - to Case team

Policies and procedures - Decision making

Initiatives taken to make changes - to Tasks and responsibilities

Personal aspirations

Changes wanted - to Case team - Team and work procedures

Attitude and approach of formal case team leader

Influencing others - Approach adopted

Problems due to virtuality

Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Position within organisation

Case team meetings - Being visible not important

Case team meetings - Communication method

Attitude of individual towards tasks and responsibilities assigned or taken on (not as per job description)

Changes wanted - to Organisation - Operational

Establishing relationships with distant team members

Virtual collaboration vs traditional collaboration

Tasks and responsibilities assigned to individual (not as per job description)

Work experience and educational background of case team members

What I think others think of me

Reporting relationships

Causes of on-the-job dissatisfaction

Responsibilities as per job description

Process and procedures of case team meetings

Opinion of self - Leader

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In that case, do you still consider yourself to be a leader?

Yes, so meaning that some decisions can be done. It depends on the level of the decision. Nevertheless I think that leading is not the capability of taking directly decisions... you know, to push people or to take the right decision and especially to believe in what you propose. Because you need people to be engaged. If you do not manage engagement... so this is a way of leading.

Ok. Is this the image you try to project to others in the organisation?

What.... as a leader?

Yes.

Yes it's not that I try, you know. I think that I have my point of view. There are things which I really believe so I just fight for them to happen.

And in your role is there anything that causes conflict or distress? Are you unhappy with anything in your position?

I would like to, yes. I would like to have maybe sometimes more credit. Ehm... and in fact I would like to go further in terms of grades which would help me to get more credit. Meaning here it's very hierarchical as I mentioned. Maybe your voice is not always considered as the one coming from a partner. So I would like at least to reach the level of director and I think that also my experience and seniority should be reflected as a director. This is also consequence of my personal life because I interrupted my career and I had a whole of 10 years, you know. I left in France as a senior manager and I started here again as a senior manager. The only difference was in France I worked on the business. Here I am on support. And here as support services I am not as considered as people on business in that typology of company.

Coding list (side panel):

- Reasons for being satisfied on-the-job
- Individual's internal conflict - Occupying a leader position but performing follower tasks within the case team
- Initiatives taken to make changes - to Case team
- Policies and procedures - Decision making
- Initiatives taken to make changes - to Tasks and responsibilities
- Image projected by individual
- Changes wanted - to Case team - Team and work procedures
- Attitude and approach of formal case team leader
- Problems due to virtuality
- Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Position within organisation
- Opinion of self - Leader
- Case team meetings - Being visible not important
- Case team meetings - Communication method
- Attitude of individual towards tasks and responsibilities assigned or taken on [not as per job description]
- Changes wanted - to Organisation - Operational
- Establishing relationships with distant team members
- Virtual collaboration vs traditional collaboration
- Tasks and responsibilities assigned to individual [not as per job description]
- Work experience and educational background of case team members
- Influencing others - Approach adopted
- Personal aspirations
- What I think others think of me
- Reporting relationships
- Responsibilities as per job description
- Process and procedures of case team meetings
- Coding Density
- Causes of on-the-job dissatisfaction

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M03: L-inactive nahseb jistghu jaqaw M05 bil-mod il-mod.

M05: Bil-mod il-mod...

M03: Ghax basikament l-inactive huwa kull account li jkun ilu ma jigi llogjat. Jekk naghmlu log in bizzejjed. Jekk ma nillogjax fi zmien sena ghandhom parti mit-terms and conditions li jistghu jaqtawli 5 Euro mil-kont tieghi. Dik bdiet fil-14, lejn l-ahhar tal-14. Issa ovvjament meta bdiet fil-14 kien hemm eluf ta' accounts li ma kienux illogjati zmien u kienu hadulhom 5 Euro fix-xahar. Imma aktar ma jmur qed jigu zero il-bilanci allura meta qed jigi zero issa ghandek mil-14 s'issa li mhux qed jigu logged in. in fatti l-ewwel darba kenna fuq 80, le kenna fuq 300 thousand income fl-ewwel xahar, it-tieni xahar kenna 80 thousand igifieri kein hemm drop. Ghax normalment meta tieqaf tilghab tieqaf meta jkollok 2 Euro fil-kont. Mhux ha tieqaf u thalli mija. Ghallinqas tigbidhom. Issa spiccajna f'sitwazzjoni fejn l-ahhar li tlajt jien xi 6 thousand kienet income f'xahar.

M05: A very important test which I think we won't manage to do this time but it's really important hija tal-vouchers. Il-vouchers hija l-iktar haga illi it is a very expensive cost and it's something that is very difficult and maybe maybe maybe we won't manage to test it. We need to see. Inti trid toqghod bil-qeghda ma' M03 issa biex within 3 days tara if you're going to manage... you've got a good document... M03 dak ikkrejah over time... 2015, 2016... he makes reference to things. He goes to meetings with me. I've attended meetings with him on the vouchers per ezempju hemmhekk ma' min jiehu hsieb il-vouchers in October and another meeting on another test in April... you'll find them. So the document is a large document, it's a good document, and the .... you will need to build up on this document. However, the vouchers is one of the most difficult parts of the audit. By November you need to test it. You need to test it. However, for the time
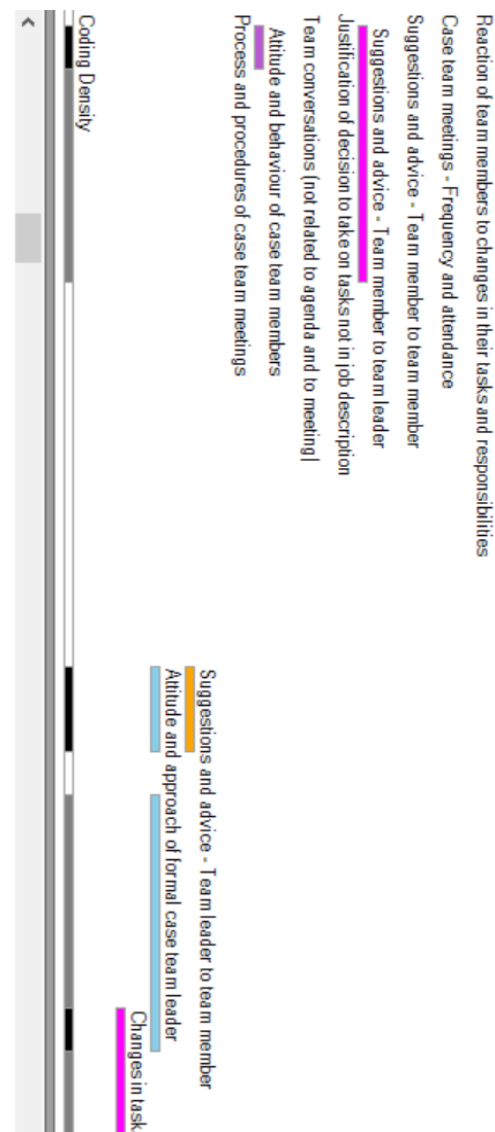
being, after you discuss with M03, we will see, if you have enough time... ghax dan kollu gdid ghalik M02 u jien ma rriedekx .... anki n-nies, dan jafhom u jkellimhom b'certu kunfidenza... inti toqghod bil-qeghda u tghid 'Hello'.... I don't want to put more pressure fuqek because you only have 3 and a half days over there this time round so maybe that is what I would pull out and we'll do it in January. All right. In January your role is going to be different. You'll do other controls tests and effective auditing. Affiliates huma importanti hafna. Affiliates, tafu x'inhuma affiliates? M02, inti tifihmni meta nghid affiliates? Affiliates huma per ezempju, forsi int mit-Trinity ma tantx ha tifimha. L-affiliate tat-T huma FG qisu l-agent. Issa in the internet world the...

M03: Kull min ghandu website bil-banner ta' B huwa affiliate.

M05: Hemm 45 thousand.

M03: Ezatt. Qisu intermediary. Jekk ghandi website tieghi u titlaghli B jew tkun qed tara film u qed tistreamja u meta taghfas il-link titlaghlek BT titla tlitt elef darba, dak affiliate. Jekk taghmel log in minn hemm tiehu persentagg tal-flus tieghek dak. Ghalhekk hemm hafna igifieri. M'hemmx hafna active. Igifieri veru hemm 45 thousand pero 98 percent minghalija kien qalilna, 98 percent ...

M05: 1500 biss hemm pero jew inqas.

M03: Ezatt. Hemm 1500 active u 98 percent tat-total cost l-ewwel ghaxra igifieri ftit ghandhom. Infatti it-top 10 ghandhom persuna fid-dipartiment assigned ma' kul wiehed minnhom biex dejjem ikollhom.

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SB03: I told you staging Italy in 2012 and we test it rigorously, we take data from the production, put it there and see what's happening.

SB05: Ok. Take a note and ask for a staging machine for Italy so Windows 2012. You will set the environment and we will start to test.

SB04: Have we confirmed from Cyprus that if we were to immigrate towards Cyprus it will be fine? All countries such as Cyprus require vigorous testing on the staging environment for 2012.

SB05: So we already immigrated Romania. So in theory we shouldn't have any kind of problems. So the problems that we encountered were related to bringing the internet account update. So Claudio reviewed that and it seems that it's working and I think we shouldn't test it for Italy as well...

SB04: No for Italy ..... I'm saying also for the other countries. Or else what we could possibly do to try and be a bit safer for the other countries.... we will just allocate one particular machine for the time being... like, let's say Cyprus. First we'll do Cyprus then after that when it's confirmed it's good, we'll deploy Cyprus and ok, then we try Denmark. So then you know we will commit a machine to Denmark for the countries with lesser volume.

SB05: It can be done but consider this so the environment should be figure exactly how we the environment in . So this is ....

SB04: You know, I'm trying to eliminate an element of risk or.....

Coding Density

Attitude and approach of formal case team leader

Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)

Attitude and behaviour of case team members

Process and procedures of case team meetings

Suggestions and advice - Team leader to team member

Suggestions and advice - Team member to team leader

Reaction of team members to changes in their tasks and responsibilities

Suggestions and advice - Team member to team member

Behaviour showing an individual's position in the team hierarchy

Making plans to communicate outside of case team meeting

Problems due to virtuality

SB05: So when you pass over a server, the elements of risk are related to the human error. Because about the US and the platform we should be able to manage the migration without problem. I don't know SB02 if you still feel confident to migrate Belgium? Do you want to do this experience SB02?

SB02: Yes, If I can have the support of somebody.

SB05: You don't have any support.

SB02: If I had support, that would be great.

SB05: So if you want we can do together or SB03 with you. Last time I did with C. They're the best couple so you would be you and SB03. And about the specific night I have a proposal so you can get the chance to clean all the specific gen file and show file on each acceptance server because there are files from 2012. It's the time to clean, to clean them a bit.

SB02: So for Belgium, have we set a date?

SB05: There is the IT following the process. I think at the end of the month we should do that.

SB02: Ok.

Problems due to virtuality
Making plans to communicate outside of case team meeting
Behaviour showing an individual's position in the team hierarchy
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team member
Reaction of team members to changes in their tasks and responsibilities
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team leader
Suggestions and advice - Team leader to team member
Process and procedures of case team meetings
Attitude and behaviour of case team members
Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader

Coding Density

Appendix VII - List of Codes for each Case Team

Team T - Interviews - List of Codes				
Name of Code	**Sources**	**References**	**Created On**	**Modified On**
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader	5	12	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Attitude and behaviour of case team members	5	23	29/05/2019	10/12/2021
Attitude of colleagues when individual is assigned or takes on tasks and responsibilities not in job description	3	3	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Attitude of individual towards tasks and responsibilities assigned or taken on (not as per job description)	5	25	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Case team meetings - Communication method	6	26	29/05/2019	13/01/2022
Case team meetings - Frequency and attendance	6	16	29/05/2019	06/12/2021
Causes of on-the-job dissatisfaction	5	22	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Causes of on-the-job stress	6	36	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)	4	15	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Changes wanted - to Case team - General	1	1	29/05/2019	24/11/2021
Changes wanted - to Case team - Team and work procedures	3	5	01/08/2019	13/01/2022
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Culture	1	6	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Operational	4	11	29/05/2019	24/11/2021
Changes wanted - to Tasks and responsibilities	4	7	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Changes wanted - to Team (not case team)	5	12	29/05/2019	24/11/2021
Communication between colleagues	1	2	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Considerations made before taking on tasks and responsibilities not in job description	1	2	11/01/2022	11/01/2022
Coping with conflict	2	4	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Coping with dissatisfaction	3	4	01/08/2019	01/08/2019
Corporate successes	1	5	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Insecurity	1	6	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Non-routine decisions	1	1	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Position within organisation	2	4	29/05/2019	02/08/2019

Decisions taken by individual team members (Examples)	6	24	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Effect of researcher on observation	1	1	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Face-to-face meetings	2	5	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
If you want to manage remotely...	3	5	29/05/2019	04/02/2022
Individual's internal conflict - Feeling a leader but occupying a follower position in the case team	2	5	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Individual's internal conflict - Occupying a leader position but performing follower tasks within the case team	1	1	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Influencing others - Approach adopted	4	7	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Initiatives taken to increase employee satisfaction	4	8	29/05/2019	26/11/2021
Initiatives taken to solve problems created by virtuality	6	11	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Initiatives taken to strengthen teamwork	1	3	29/05/2019	26/11/2021
No changes wanted - to Case team	3	5	29/05/2019	24/11/2021
No changes wanted - to Organisation	1	1	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
No changes wanted - to Tasks and responsibilities	2	3	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Opinion of self - Follower	1	3	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Opinion of self - Leader	4	12	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Personal aspirations	3	3	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Policies and procedures - Decision making	5	12	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Policies and procedures - Employee performance	1	2	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Problems due to virtuality	6	34	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Problems faced when changing tasks and responsibilities	2	3	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Process and procedures of case team meetings	6	23	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Progression within organisation	1	2	29/05/2019	10/01/2022
Reasons for being satisfied on-the-job	5	9	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Reasons for team members not to change tasks and responsibilities	3	12	29/05/2019	13/01/2022
Reasons for team members to change tasks and responsibilities	2	4	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Relationships with colleagues	5	18	29/05/2019	02/08/2019

Relationships with subordinates	4	12	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Relationships with superiors	5	22	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Reporting relationships	5	12	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Responsibilities as per job description	6	24	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Solving issues and problems	2	3	29/05/2019	01/08/2019
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team member	2	2	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Tasks and responsibilities assigned to individual (not as per job description)	3	3	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Tasks and responsibilities taken on upon individual's initiative (not as per job description)	3	8	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
The meaning of leadership	4	13	29/05/2019	01/08/2019
Virtual collaboration vs traditional collaboration	6	14	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
What I think others think of me	4	5	29/05/2019	14/02/2022
Work experience and educational background of case team members	7	17	29/05/2019	10/01/2022

Team T - Observations - List of Codes				
Name of Code	**Sources**	**References**	**Created On**	**Modified On**
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader	2	32	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Attitude and behaviour of case team members	2	27	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Behaviour showing an individual's position in the team hierarchy	1	18	05/01/2022	05/01/2022
Case team meetings - Frequency and attendance	2	4	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Causes of on-the job dissatisfaction	2	10	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)	2	43	29/05/2019	20/01/2022
Problems faced when changing tasks and responsibilities	2	4	29/05/2019	31/01/2022
Justification of decision to take on tasks not in job description	2	2	29/05/2019	03/12/2021
Problems due to virtuality	2	22	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Process and procedures of case team meetings	2	50	29/05/2019	09/12/2021
Reaction of team members to changes in their tasks and responsibilities	2	10	29/05/2019	20/01/2022
Suggestions and advice - Team leader to team member	2	11	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team leader	2	17	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team member	2	6	29/05/2019	02/08/2019
Team conversations (not related to agenda and to meeting)	1	6	29/05/2019	14/02/2022

Team M - Interviews - List of Codes				
Name of Code	**Sources**	**References**	**Created On**	**Modified On**
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader	3	4	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Attitude and behaviour of case team members	3	4	31/05/2019	21/12/2021
Attitude of colleagues when individual is assigned or takes on tasks and responsibilities not in job description	5	5	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Attitude of individual towards position held	1	1	14/06/2019	14/06/2019
Attitude of individual towards tasks and responsibilities assigned or taken on (not as per job description)	6	14	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Case team meetings - Frequency and attendance	1	1	15/06/2019	06/12/2021
Causes of conflict	1	1	15/06/2019	15/06/2019
Causes of on-the-job dissatisfaction	5	11	31/05/2019	01/08/2019
Causes of on-the-job stress	2	6	31/05/2019	15/06/2019
Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)	5	9	12/06/2019	03/12/2021
Changes wanted - to Case team - Communication	2	2	01/08/2019	24/11/2021
Changes wanted - to Case team - General	3	3	31/05/2019	24/11/2021
Changes wanted - to Case team - Team and work procedures	2	2	01/08/2019	06/12/2021
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Culture	1	1	31/05/2019	13/06/2019
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Image	2	2	15/06/2019	15/06/2019
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Operational	3	3	31/05/2019	15/06/2019
Changes wanted - to Tasks and responsibilities	3	3	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Communication between colleagues	1	3	31/05/2019	24/11/2021
Communication while project is live	5	8	31/05/2019	01/09/2019
Considerations made before taking on tasks and responsibilities not in job description	3	3	12/06/2019	03/12/2021
Coping with conflict	2	4	01/08/2019	01/08/2019
Coping with dissatisfaction	2	3	10/06/2019	01/08/2019
Coping with stress	2	5	10/06/2019	01/08/2019
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Insecurity	3	6	31/05/2019	09/12/2021

Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Non-routine decisions	2	2	31/05/2019	01/08/2019
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Position within organisation	3	5	31/05/2019	01/08/2019
Decisions taken by individual team members (Examples)	4	4	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Frequency of changing tasks and responsibilities	1	1	12/06/2019	03/12/2021
Image projected by individual	5	5	10/06/2019	01/08/2019
Individual's internal conflict - Feeling a follower but occupying a leader position in the case team	1	1	10/06/2019	03/12/2021
Individual's internal conflict - Feeling a leader but occupying a follower position in the case team	2	2	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Influencing others - Approach adopted	3	6	31/05/2019	17/06/2019
Influencing others - Reasons for being successful	1	1	13/06/2019	13/06/2019
Influencing others - Reasons for not being successful	1	2	13/06/2019	13/06/2019
Initiatives taken to increase employee satisfaction	1	1	31/05/2019	26/11/2021
Initiatives taken to make changes - to Case team	1	1	01/08/2019	09/12/2021
Initiatives taken to make changes - to Organisation	2	2	01/08/2019	09/12/2021
Initiatives taken to make changes - to Tasks and responsibilities	5	14	13/06/2019	09/12/2021
Initiatives taken to solve problems created by virtuality	6	10	31/05/2019	01/09/2019
Initiatives taken to strengthen teamwork	1	1	31/05/2019	26/11/2021
No changes wanted - to Case team	1	1	31/05/2019	24/11/2021
No changes wanted - to Organisation	2	2	31/05/2019	17/06/2019
No changes wanted - to Tasks and responsibilities	1	1	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
No problems with virtuality	1	2	15/06/2019	10/12/2021
Opinion of self - Competent in specific areas	2	2	13/06/2019	01/08/2019
Opinion of self - Leader	5	10	31/05/2019	15/06/2019
Opinion of self - Neither leader nor follower	1	1	17/06/2019	01/08/2019
Personal aspirations	4	6	31/05/2019	17/06/2019
Policies and procedures - Decision making	2	2	31/05/2019	15/06/2019
Policies and procedures - Work procedures	4	10	12/06/2019	17/06/2019
Potential problems technology may create	1	1	15/06/2019	01/09/2019

Problems due to virtuality	6	8	31/05/2019	01/09/2019
Problems faced if tasks and responsibilities do not change as necessary	1	1	15/06/2019	03/12/2021
Problems faced when changing tasks and responsibilities	1	1	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Process and procedures of case team meetings	6	17	12/06/2019	09/12/2021
Progression within organisation	2	2	31/05/2019	10/01/2022
Reasons for being satisfied on-the-job	5	17	12/06/2019	02/08/2019
Reasons for team members not to change tasks and responsibilities	6	11	31/05/2019	13/01/2022
Reasons for team members to change tasks and responsibilities	4	11	12/06/2019	03/12/2021
Relationships with colleagues	3	5	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Relationships with subordinates	1	2	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Relationships with superiors	4	12	31/05/2019	21/08/2019
Reporting relationships	4	6	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Responsibilities as per job description	6	17	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team member	2	4	31/05/2019	09/12/2021
Tasks and responsibilities assigned to individual (not as per job description)	1	1	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Tasks and responsibilities taken on upon individual's initiative (not as per job description)	2	3	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
The individual's thought process when changing tasks and responsibilities	1	2	10/06/2019	13/01/2022
The meaning of leadership	1	1	17/06/2019	01/08/2019
Virtual collaboration vs traditional collaboration	5	6	31/05/2019	17/06/2019
What I think others think of me	6	15	31/05/2019	17/06/2019
Work experience and educational background of case team members	6	8	31/05/2019	03/12/2021

Team M - Observations - List of Codes				
Name of Code	**Sources**	**References**	**Created On**	**Modified On**
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader	2	24	31/05/2019	20/12/2021
Attitude and behaviour of case team members	2	15	31/05/2019	20/12/2021
Behaviour showing an individual's position in the team hierarchy	1	1	05/01/2022	05/01/2022
Case team meetings - Frequency and attendance	1	1	31/05/2019	20/12/2021
Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)	2	19	31/05/2019	20/01/2022
Justification of decision to take on tasks not in job description	2	3	31/05/2019	20/12/2021
Making plans to communicate outside of case team meeting	1	4	31/05/2019	20/12/2021
Process and procedures of case team meetings	2	15	31/05/2019	20/12/2021
Reaction of team members to changes in their tasks and responsibilities	2	3	31/05/2019	20/12/2021
Suggestions and advice - Team leader to team member	2	21	31/05/2019	20/12/2021
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team leader	1	3	31/05/2019	20/12/2021
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team member	1	2	31/05/2019	20/12/2021
Team conversations (not related to agenda and to meeting)	2	6	31/05/2019	14/02/2022

Team D - Interviews - List of Codes				
Name of Code	**Sources**	**References**	**Created On**	**Modified On**
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader	1	2	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Attitude and behaviour of case team members	2	4	31/05/2019	10/12/2021
Attitude of colleagues when individual is assigned or takes on tasks and responsibilities not in job description	1	2	31/05/2019	26/11/2021
Attitude of individual towards tasks and responsibilities assigned or taken on (not as per job description)	2	4	31/05/2019	26/11/2021
Attitude of superiors when individual is assigned or takes on tasks and responsibilities not in job description	1	1	03/06/2019	26/11/2021
Case team meetings - Being visible not important	2	3	07/06/2019	24/11/2021
Case team meetings - Communication method	3	4	31/05/2019	24/11/2021
Case team meetings - Frequency and attendance	2	2	31/05/2019	06/12/2021
Causes of on-the-job dissatisfaction	3	9	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Causes of on-the-job stress	1	2	31/05/2019	06/06/2019
Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)	2	8	03/06/2019	26/11/2021
Changes wanted - to Case team - Communication	1	1	01/08/2019	24/11/2021
Changes wanted - to Case team - Team and work procedures	1	1	01/08/2019	24/11/2021
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Employee Matters	2	3	03/06/2019	06/06/2019
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Operational	1	1	31/05/2019	07/06/2019
Changes wanted - to Tasks and responsibilities	2	3	31/05/2019	02/12/2021
Changes wanted - to Team (not case team)	1	1	31/05/2019	24/11/2021
Coping with conflict	1	2	03/06/2019	01/08/2019
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Insecurity	1	1	31/05/2019	04/12/2021
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Non-routine decisions	1	1	31/05/2019	07/06/2019
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Position within organisation	3	3	31/05/2019	07/06/2019
Decisions taken by individual team members (Examples)	1	1	01/08/2019	03/12/2021
Establishing relationships with distant team members	2	6	05/06/2019	01/08/2019
Image projected by individual	2	2	04/06/2019	01/08/2019

Individual's internal conflict - Occupying a leader position but performing follower tasks within the case team	2	2	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Influencing others - Approach adopted	2	4	31/05/2019	07/06/2019
Initiatives taken to avoid problems	1	1	06/06/2019	13/01/2022
Initiatives taken to increase employee satisfaction	1	2	31/05/2019	26/11/2021
Initiatives taken to make changes - to Case team	1	1	07/06/2019	09/12/2021
Initiatives taken to make changes - to Tasks and responsibilities	3	5	03/06/2019	09/12/2021
Initiatives taken to solve problems created by virtuality	2	2	31/05/2019	09/12/2021
Initiatives taken to strengthen teamwork	1	3	31/05/2019	26/11/2021
No changes wanted - to Case team	1	1	31/05/2019	24/11/2021
No internal conflict when performing tasks and responsibilities not in job description	1	2	04/06/2019	11/01/2022
Opinion of self - Competent in specific areas	1	1	06/06/2019	02/08/2019
Opinion of self - Follower	1	1	31/05/2019	03/06/2019
Opinion of self - Leader	2	2	31/05/2019	07/06/2019
Personal aspirations	3	5	31/05/2019	11/01/2022
Policies and procedures - Decision making	3	3	31/05/2019	07/06/2019
Problems due to virtuality	3	5	31/05/2019	09/12/2021
Problems faced by the organisation	1	2	06/06/2019	13/01/2022
Problems faced when changing tasks and responsibilities	1	2	31/05/2019	19/01/2022
Process and procedures of case team meetings	3	4	31/05/2019	09/12/2021
Progression within organisation	2	2	31/05/2019	10/01/2022
Reasons for being satisfied on-the-job	3	8	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Reasons for team members not to change tasks and responsibilities	2	3	11/01/2022	13/01/2022
Reasons for team members to change tasks and responsibilities	2	4	04/06/2019	26/11/2021
Relationships with colleagues	2	3	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Relationships with subordinates	1	6	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Relationships with superiors	2	5	31/05/2019	02/08/2019

Reporting relationships	3	9	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Responsibilities as per job description	3	8	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Solving issues and problems	1	1	31/05/2019	01/08/2019
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team member	1	5	31/05/2019	09/12/2021
Tasks and responsibilities assigned to individual (not as per job description)	3	4	31/05/2019	26/11/2021
Tasks and responsibilities taken on upon individual's initiative (not as per job description)	2	2	31/05/2019	26/11/2021
Virtual collaboration vs traditional collaboration	3	10	31/05/2019	24/11/2021
What I think others think of me	3	7	31/05/2019	07/06/2019
Work experience and educational background of case team members	3	4	31/05/2019	03/12/2021

Team D - Observations - List of Codes				
Name	**Sources**	**References**	**Created On**	**Modified On**
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader	1	9	31/05/2019	09/12/2021
Attitude and behaviour of case team members	2	7	31/05/2019	09/12/2021
Behaviour showing an individual's position in the team hierarchy	1	2	05/01/2022	05/01/2022
Case team meetings - Frequency and attendance	1	1	31/05/2019	09/12/2021
Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)	2	33	31/05/2019	20/01/2022
Justification of decision to take on tasks not in job description	1	1	31/05/2019	02/12/2021
Making plans to communicate outside of case team meeting	1	1	09/08/2019	24/11/2021
Problems due to virtuality	2	3	31/05/2019	09/12/2021
Process and procedures of case team meetings	2	21	31/05/2019	09/12/2021
Reaction of team members to changes in their tasks and responsibilities	1	3	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Suggestions and advice - Team leader to team member	2	14	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team leader	2	5	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Team conversations (not related to agenda and to meeting)	2	3	31/05/2019	14/02/2022

Team SB - Interviews - List of Codes				
Name of Code	**Sources**	**References**	**Created On**	**Modified On**
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader	2	2	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Attitude and behaviour of case team members	2	2	31/05/2019	10/12/2021
Attitude of colleagues when individual is assigned or takes on tasks and responsibilities not in job description	5	10	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Attitude of individual towards tasks and responsibilities assigned or taken on (not as per job description)	5	11	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Case team meetings - Communication method	5	12	31/05/2019	24/11/2021
Case team meetings - Frequency and attendance	4	6	31/05/2019	06/12/2021
Causes of on-the-job dissatisfaction	4	6	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Causes of on-the-job stress	4	7	31/05/2019	20/06/2019
Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)	4	5	19/06/2019	03/12/2021
Changes wanted - to Case team - Communication	1	2	01/08/2019	24/11/2021
Changes wanted - to Case team - General	3	3	31/05/2019	24/11/2021
Changes wanted - to Case team - Team and work procedures	1	1	01/08/2019	24/11/2021
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Culture	1	1	31/05/2019	20/06/2019
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Office layout	2	2	17/06/2019	19/06/2019
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Operational	1	3	31/05/2019	19/06/2019
Changes wanted - to Tasks and responsibilities	3	3	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Communication between colleagues	2	3	31/05/2019	19/06/2019
Coping with stress	4	4	19/06/2019	01/08/2019
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Non-routine decisions	1	1	31/05/2019	01/08/2019
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Position within organisation	1	1	31/05/2019	19/06/2019
Decisions taken by individual team members (Examples)	4	6	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Feelings of isolation	3	6	19/06/2019	20/06/2019
Image projected by individual	3	3	19/06/2019	01/08/2019
Influencing others - Approach adopted	2	2	31/05/2019	20/06/2019

Influencing others - Reasons for being successful	1	2	19/06/2019	19/06/2019
Influencing others - Reasons for not being successful	1	1	19/06/2019	19/06/2019
Initiatives taken to achieve objectives	5	7	17/06/2019	01/08/2019
Initiatives taken to avoid feelings of isolation among distant team members	1	1	20/06/2019	26/11/2021
Initiatives taken to increase employee satisfaction	2	4	31/05/2019	26/11/2021
Initiatives taken to solve problems created by virtuality	3	6	31/05/2019	13/01/2022
Initiatives taken to strengthen teamwork	3	5	31/05/2019	26/11/2021
Leadership opportunities within the case team	1	1	19/06/2019	03/12/2021
No changes wanted - to Case team	3	3	31/05/2019	24/11/2021
No changes wanted - to Organisation	1	1	31/05/2019	19/06/2019
No changes wanted - to Tasks and responsibilities	1	1	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
No problems with virtuality	2	2	19/06/2019	10/12/2021
Opinion of self - Being a follower but respected as a leader in the case team	1	1	19/06/2019	10/12/2021
Opinion of self - Leader	5	5	31/05/2019	11/01/2022
Personal aspirations	2	3	31/05/2019	20/06/2019
Policies and procedures - Employee performance	1	1	31/05/2019	19/06/2019
Policies and procedures - Work procedures	4	13	17/06/2019	20/06/2019
Problems due to virtuality	4	10	31/05/2019	09/12/2021
Problems faced if tasks and responsibilities do not change as necessary	1	1	19/06/2019	03/12/2021
Problems faced when changing tasks and responsibilities	1	1	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Process and procedures of case team meetings	2	2	31/05/2019	10/12/2021
Reasons for being satisfied on-the-job	5	9	19/06/2019	02/08/2019
Reasons for team members not to change tasks and responsibilities	5	5	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
Reasons for team members to change tasks and responsibilities	5	12	17/06/2019	03/12/2021
Recognition of staff efforts	1	1	19/06/2019	19/06/2019
Relationships with colleagues	5	23	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Relationships with subordinates	1	3	31/05/2019	02/08/2019

Relationships with superiors	3	6	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Reporting relationships	1	1	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Responsibilities as per job description	5	12	31/05/2019	02/08/2019
Solving issues and problems	3	4	18/06/2019	01/08/2019
Tasks and responsibilities assigned to individual (not as per job description)	1	1	31/05/2019	03/12/2021
The meaning of leadership	2	2	19/06/2019	01/08/2019
Virtual collaboration vs traditional collaboration	5	13	31/05/2019	01/08/2019
What I think others think of me	3	3	31/05/2019	19/06/2019
Work experience and educational background of case team members	4	7	31/05/2019	03/12/2021

Team SB - Observations - List of Codes	Sources	References	Created On	Modified On
Name of Code	**Sources**	**References**	**Created On**	**Modified On**
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader	1	37	31/05/2019	19/01/2022
Attitude and behaviour of case team members	1	15	31/05/2019	19/01/2022
Behaviour showing an individual's position in the team hierarchy	1	7	05/01/2022	19/01/2022
Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)	1	14	31/05/2019	19/01/2022
Making plans to communicate outside of case team meeting	1	2	09/08/2019	19/01/2022
Problems due to virtuality	1	3	31/05/2019	19/01/2022
Process and procedures of case team meetings	1	10	31/05/2019	19/01/2022
Reaction of team members to changes in their tasks and responsibilities	1	4	31/05/2019	19/01/2022
Suggestions and advice - Team leader to team member	1	3	31/05/2019	19/01/2022
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team leader	1	6	31/05/2019	19/01/2022
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team member	1	3	31/05/2019	19/01/2022

<u>Appendix VIII - Sample Quotes from Interviews and Observations</u>

<u>Name of Code</u>	<u>Sample Quotes taken from Interviews</u>
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader	M05 is very approachable. Jekk ha jkun in the team dak il-hin hemmhekk, he will involve himself automatically. (M02) As manager and as leader I try, I always try to give them more solutions, to discuss the solutions and then start to build something good. (SB05)
Attitude and behaviour of case team members	I knew I had to build a relationship with this woman. One, I think I am an easy person to work with because I'm not a very difficult person. I'm demanding but I'm not difficult. Ehm... but where I could see that she needed the help, I offered it… I think showing that you are ready to support and work as a team really. And I think that's virtual or not. (D02) So, I think virtual is ehm.... it's good. It's something we have today, we didn't have in the past. So you can actually hold a number of meetings virtually and operate the way we operate. So thank God for virtual. Is it the same as a real meeting? No, definitely…So we're talking about virtual meetings.... so they're very good so we've got everyone from all over the world, T06 and D in Paris..... And it works. (T01)
Attitude of colleagues when individual is assigned or takes on tasks and responsibilities not in job description	Well, I guess SB05 is not quite happy…Because it raises new work for him. (SB02) I'll do what has to be done. Because in my mind I want my office to be successful so I'll do what has to be done to get that done. I think they see that I'm doing more than I probably should as the General Manager of the office but they also see that it's the nature of where we are right now. (T04)
Attitude of individual towards position held	We're busy, we're busy, we're busy, but let's say it, we're working, we are doing what we like most. (M04)

Attitude of individual towards tasks and responsibilities assigned or taken on (not as per job description)	When I got more responsibility sometimes it's ok, meaning that it makes you feel you are considered capable. That is why they gave you the responsibilities, it's a good thing. But on the other side I think it is important also that sometimes it is correctly assessed whether the resources are enough and especially, to get recognition of the responsibilities that are given... (D03) Happy to do it because it was a challenge and a challenge you enjoy doing it. When you finish in the deadline, it's great satisfaction. Ehm, zejda because it was in the middle of the VAT deadline so in order to reach one deadline, mort il-bahar in another. It was a little bit of a mixed reaction. (M03)
Attitude of superiors when individual is assigned or takes on tasks and responsibilities not in job description	There are a lot of things that take up most of the time so I have very, very little time to do these new things at my own initiative. But I know that if I find the time and if I do them, D02 will support me. So, if I have maybe sometime when I can stay here very late or I'll stay late every day and I'll manage to come up with something, I know D02 will support me and will encourage me. (D01)
Case team meetings - Being visible not important	It's really funny because we have that system now. They removed our phones. We just use Skype for business to call each other. But even when we had a phone... no I would never switch on the camera. I wouldn't need to see her. (D02)
Case team meetings - Communication method	We speak by phone every day. We have messenger apps, email, we have other tools that we use so information is shared…Even though I'm alone physically, the technology we have allows us to still be very much a functioning team. (SB02) If the video is off because many a times the video is off because they're either driving. So, it's not always on. So, at times you won't see but only hear the voice. It's not always the same, you know. There are times when the video is on and not. When we've got T05, for example, when we had this discussion with the Chiefs, he wasn't on video at all. So, he was driving around in the car, you know that

	he's driving so I know that he's not giving me full attention, so it's not exactly the best way of doing this…Obviously if he's in the office and he can put the video on, which they always do, there in the office, it's ideal. (T02)
Case team meetings - Frequency and attendance	If you are not present at the introductory meetings, it's already a problem because that is what M05 wants from you. If you're not there it's already a problem. (M04) On calls, once a week. On WhatsApp... like this week, this is my third call with her. But in general… Then there's a week that I don't speak to her. So I'd say once a week and then on WhatsApp. (D02)
Causes of conflict	Conflict as I understand it is misunderstandings with clients, with staff. Misunderstandings cause conflict. (M05)
Causes of on-the-job dissatisfaction	Because here it's very hierarchical organisation and if you are not a partner, they will not let you directly take decisions. (D03) At times there are moments when you say something and you feel they are ignoring me.... I said this several times but no one sort of listened. (M01)
Causes of on-the-job stress	I think what's tiring is, not the conflict, but the fact that possibly the firm is transitioning through a period where at the leadership level it was people who own the business calling the shots, deciding what is happening and being responsible for everything from the colour of the curtains in the boardroom to the type of coffee we ordered. There was a lot of partner involvement. To suddenly.... I spend a lot of time arguing with them and telling them to back off and they have to. So there's a shift. I've spent most of my years reporting to these people then suddenly I had to tell them 'you know what, you can't do it. Stop bugging me and go away. And you're not going to do it'. And that is sometimes stressful. (D02) Stress is caused by too much work, deadlines, HR issues which are very stressful, issues, people arriving and I have to get involved, people are presenting to so there are more issues, cash flow issues

	cause a lot of stress in the office although we have people to handle it now... deadlines I said... the need to meet client demands even though but the clients are expecting a certain quality and you must ensure that that quality is always maintained. (M05)
Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)	So sometimes it might be something that crops up that he isn't interested in. So T05 and myself will take it up. (T01) So, for example, to care about the shift as well. So, for example, something that I am doing for the team, I'm giving them the responsibility for the roster. They are doing their roster. (SB05)
Changes wanted - to Case team - Communication	I think if we're at the client and we spend a quarter of an hour or half an hour maybe even through a Skype conversation with some others at the office and we give them an update, discuss verbally rather than writing the email, I think it will be.... Yes, it will help. (M01) Maybe do more meetings through Skype calls because it would be better to talk through Skype, and maybe we take notes and we share them with each other. I think that would help a lot…Also, maybe in the future we can have more accessible gadgets where we can do Skype calls straight away not having to book a meeting and conference. (SB01)
Changes wanted - to Case team - General	My only change is, I can think of, is not the team because I get along with everyone very well, but there has to be that person who has the knowledge…Yes, that intermediate person who can take on the internal control procedures I'm trying to, I'd like to see happening with the audit. Currently the team we are, I don't think there is the knowledge between us. (M06) Well, we need to expand. We're too small a team. We need to have more focus on development but at the same time have more focus on support. So that means growing the team numerically in both of those areas and splitting out the team to focus on .....To focus on development and we could have a team to focus on support. I think that would make us much better. (SB02)

Changes wanted - to Case team - Team and work procedures	We need to implement better source control for the code…So, all the programs, we have say, 50 programs across all of our architecture, on our software architecture. So, when someone's editing one thing, that's called source control. So, they're editing that bit of software at that point in time. So, somebody else wants to edit it and wants to know what they're doing, what they've edited and why so that we're not going to conflict. So that is where, if we sit in the office, we can say what you're working on and we can see what they're working on. (SB02) The problem with the USA board meeting is time. I try to generate excitement to get things going faster but there is never enough time and we have to rush certain things to make it within the stipulated time frame. But it's not easy. We are all very busy and so it is not possible to make it longer. (T06)
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Culture	We are now a medium sized company, but we have grown so fast over the years that the partners in their mind it's still a small micro company in their mind. So certain ways of how to think need to change from the top up I think…. What I'm saying is a change in the company culture which cannot happen overnight because we'll be in shock. So I think we're moving there.... slowly. (M03) One of the things where I think that the T culture could change is I think we're all, all too used to copying people. And then when we reply, we reply to all. Not everybody has to see the responses all the time. I think that's a cultural thing that I think every company goes through. I think every company goes through too many emails so I think there's have to come to a better place and maybe culturally how to manage that internally. (T04)
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Employee Matters	And something that for me I feel we need to address but I don't know how. Ehm... the ability to give people a better balance of work. And not just females but across. It cannot be that it's Monday to Sunday and it's so intense. It can't ... it's not good for people. It's not good at any level. (D02)

Changes wanted - to Organisation - Image	I would like the organisation also to publish more. So to publish more articles, to publish more reviews, to publish more...and it's also part of the brand development. Maybe as an organisation we can have some better clients too to change a bit of the portfolio. (M05)
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Office layout	It's not that comfortable. I think there should be more conference rooms where you can do your Skype call, for example, for 2 minutes or 3, not for long meetings. If there's a day with a lot of meetings, you cannot come here. You will end up on your desk and you have to make the call. It's not comfortable, neither for one nor for the other. (SB01)
Changes wanted - to Organisation - Operational	When the decision process is very long you feel frustrated because you can go quicker because you are ready but until the decision is not taken or approved, you cannot move forward. This is the frustrating part. (D03) With regards to technology, I think we need to, we need to move forward as a company as a whole. I see... when I was in audit especially, even in tax, but in audit it was more prevailed, there are people who lack skills in Excel for example and in Word. So most of the time is being wasted on mundane activities which can be automated. (M03)
Changes wanted - to Tasks and responsibilities	As a consequence of not having a manager, the team is coming to me too much which is good but not good because it means I don't get to do the more strategic maybe. (D02) I would like to have more time to be more strategic in how I want to think, maybe be more engaged in making more suggestions on a company level because of my experience in larger companies, in smaller companies. I'm seeing the evolution going on here. I think there's some other value that I could bring. But frankly I don't have time to think about that or consider any of that because I'm so inundated with my own. (T04)

Changes wanted - to Team (not case team)	It's very hard to keep structure within our team. So, I do want more structure. Ehm..being clear on what our duties are and being clear who needs to help where or who. (D01)
	We've just interviewed this morning for direct replacement of a clerical person who left on Tuesday and we're thinking of moving people around because we've got a really good employee down at the factory in the finance department and he is in his last stages of ACCA. He's doing a really basic job of inputting only, basically, and we want to push him up. So, we are thinking of moving people around especially the clerical people who are in charge of doing the accounts of a complete company, putting these clerical people down there and getting this guy up and stepping him up in the organisation. (T02)
Communication between colleagues	We approach each other to talk. It's no problem. (M02)
	Usually, I solve it myself but if I cannot solve it myself or I don't know how to solve it, then yes, I seek help from others, and they give me help. Or for example, if it's a complex problem and I know how to solve it, but it's usually better to talk between us and maybe between us find a better solution than I have. (SB03)
Communication while project is live	Be email usually and sometimes by phone. But usually by email. So qisu every evening the supervisor, or maybe twice or three times in the week when I'm not there, I'm there for the first one and a half days, would send me an update where they've arrived, the issues they've found, send some working papers over, difficult ones for me to start to see and before they leave they make it a point to send all the summary memorandums to me and the audit adjustments if any, etc. (M05)
Considerations made before taking on tasks and responsibilities not in job description	Ovvjament if you're gaining experience in something, you can't lead it, ifihmni. You lack experience in some things you can't lead them. So you follow, see the procedures. If you see a procedure which maybe can be done in another way in your mind it's more efficient, you titkellem mat-team members li ghandek, they might agree, they might

	not. That's why we're gaining experience. I'm still at the beginning of my career so ... experience is important as well. (M02)
Coping with conflict	When there's a conflict I stop, I usually say 'isma it's not the time to discuss this' maybe I'll be a bit angry to discuss it and we move out of the room and we find the time to discuss it. The day after I make it a point to sit down with the person and to discuss it. (M05) I like compromises. I don't like conflict. It's probably a negative and a positive I would say. I try and avoid conflict. Sometimes I do. When I strongly believe in something I just say I'm really strong about it, that I really believe it's the right thing ehm... but ultimately I want a solution. I don't like unresolved issues. I want to work with the person to find a solution. So that's me. I don't like things which are untackled and left under the carpet. I just...Inside myself I just can't live with that. So, to me things have to be resolved and you have to move forward and get better…I would talk to that person. I would understand. I will explain and, invariably I can't really think of a situation where it was not resolved. It's always resolved. So I don't see and these are generally....ehm.... I would say pettyish issues... (T01)
Coping with dissatisfaction	I think I would mention it in my next review. (M06) He would have the whole picture so many a times he comes up with really a sensible answer why he would have overturned my decision, ok. So, it's not like something he does it not to agree with me, you know, so I feel frustrated. (T02)
Coping with stress	You need to take ... you need to prioritise. (M01) I try for example if I see a ticket which I do not know how to solve or someone calls and I don't know how to solve the problem, I ask them right away and ehm.... I either go watch them solve it or else I tell them to come near my PC and I ask them how they do it and take notes. (SB01)

Corporate successes	The Group has grown a lot. When I started ..... it's difficult to say.... I'd say we are about an X to Y million Euro business when my father died 26 years ago. I say it is difficult to calculate because there were Sterling, Deutsche Marks and Dollars. There was no Euro. What would those exchange rates have been to the Euro? So, I kind of estimated it like that. Last year we hit Z million Euros as a business, so we've grown tenfold. (T06)
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Insecurity	I try and push them to take, but they always like a second 'is it ok?'. I'd like them to take more. I tell them like 'make that mistake, it's fine. Nobody is going to die. Fine, we'll live'. (D02) So yes, I'm going to take decisions but I would like to confirm. Before I take the final decision, I will tell M01 'I took this, this and this decision, do you agree?'. (M04)
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Non-routine decisions	If I don't know how to fix it, of course I ask. But if I know how to fix it but there's something that I might not be sure of, I can ask them as well. (SB01) It depends if something is in budget and we know what it is and we'd have presented it then those are decisions that I would take. If it's not a major cost or whatever I would take that. If it's going to be a big thing, I would advise T06 but T06 would normally leave it, especially if it's financially related, he would leave it in my hands. Then if it's a new factory, not even the exec team, it went up to the Board. (T01)
Decision making - Reasons for referring upwards - Position within organisation	There's been projects kicking off and I work pretty closely at the start of a project with SB05 our team leader. And if of course big decisions which is going to affect things for the team going forward how we support with our software, then of course I'll be working closely with SB05. (SB02) But no, I cannot take decisions. I need to ask for permissions. (T03)

Decisions taken by individual team members (Examples)	For example in the type of testing that we are going to carry out during the audit. At times we discuss during the meeting that we need to do this and that and then when you're at the client, he gives you another completely different report from what you were expecting to receive, for example. In that case you need to take a decision, tell your assistant, the other senior, 'listen we need to use this report, we were thinking that we were going to receive another sort of report. So, we need to see how we're going to go around this now'…So that is a decision because you need to complete your work and the documentation. (M01) So we are remote sales offices all over the globe and I think each office has a General Manager just like myself and we are empowered to make those decisions for our region that we are covering. (T04)
Effect of researcher on observation	I'm going to be prepared a little bit differently and look at it a little bit differently because I know we had this discussion and I'm starting to understand the importance of this board meeting and to make it more valuable maybe we should find a way to present it differently…The next one because you are going to be on the call we are going to be more cautious how we do it. I think we are going to be trying to be more professional. There's going to be maybe a slight change although we are quite ourselves. I think we are going to try to be... (T05)
Establishing relationships with distant team members	I know her because we've met so I know her office, I know where she's phoning, I know the desk, I know that level, I know her well. So, it's not someone I've never seen to even visually. I've actually been to Milan 3 or 4 times so I've worked with her in her own office (D02).
Face-to-face meetings	Because Monday mornings for me are my office days where I have my whole group there and we do reviews. We review customers, we review projects. (T04)
Feelings of isolation	90% of me it's not an issue because we speak by phone every day. We have messenger apps, email, we have other tools that we use so

	information is shared. So 90%, 95%, it's not an issue. But yet there's a small percentage that would like at least one team member to be .... that's human nature I suppose. (SB02)
Frequency of changing tasks and responsibilities	One-offs mhumiex. Mhux ha nghid 'isma dejjem' laqqas. Jiddependi ukoll fuq il-perjodu tas-sena. (M02)
If you want to manage remotely...	If you want to manage remotely, it's even like when you have a family and kids. I have 3 boys, and each boy will act differently. And I don't have tools to control them. The only tool you can have with children is your children to respect you, to trust you, and for me to trust them. And they will do certain things but they will do it the right way because you trained them properly, you educated them and they are in the right environment and they trust you and they communicate with you. So there are many, many rules…Again, a rule. Do you want to have a good virtual leadership? Follow up every strategic leadership-related call with a report. 'We agreed you're going to investigate this. We agreed you would call me back then.' That's the only, and I'm not that good at that, but every call should be followed up with some kind of report. (T05)
Image projected by individual	I think I'm seen to be quite positive with respect to work, you know. Sometimes people tend to huff and puff about clients and .... you know I try to explain that you have to work around it. You can't really scrap a client just because he has a difficult character. So try to see the positive thing in it. (M06) Like, I don't know.... like a hardworking guy but also who has fun from time to time. I don't forget that we have a life beside work so that's the image I try to like. I'm working on whatever I have to do, hard, but also besides that, I'm trying to relax as well, so... (SB03)
Individual's internal conflict - Feeling a follower but occupying a leader position in the case team	Up to a few months ago I more saw myself as a follower but I'm trying to shift myself as a leader now… Sort of when I was an assistant I was a follower. Even when I started as a senior, I was a follower. But now that more workload and more responsibilities are put in your hands, you need to... (M01)

Individual's internal conflict - Feeling a leader but occupying a follower position in the case team	I see myself as a leader pero at the current role ma nghidx 'I'm a follower' imma I need to follow more. F'liema sens? Ma nistax immur fuq managers u nghidilhom 'isma, ghamlu hekk'. I mean, if I see a point of improvement, I go and tell them, no problem. Imma they need to decide on certain things which at the moment I can't … (M02) I like people telling me that I'm a leader not that I want to show that I am a leader. For me it comes natural. So I won't be like walking around 'I'm the leader'. I like people telling me that I am. Imma I have to admit, I feel I am. (T02)
Individual's internal conflict - Occupying a leader position but performing follower tasks within the case team	Because here it's very hierarchical organisation and if you are not a partner, they will not let you directly take decisions. (D03) So historically I was excited and I'd talk first. Today, 2 years later I let everybody else put their ideas on the table and I tend to talk last and try and wrap it up and pull it together. (T06)
Influencing others - Approach adopted	I try to prospect them the innovation, the advantages... so telling story, giving them some practical example where following the same line as we reach a target and when for example, when they think that the challenge is too high, I try to split just to give them a better view. So because you know if the ladder is really high it seems impossible to reach the top but if you think step by step, it's easy. So, to influence them and try to take the best from them. (SB05) If I believe in something I'm going to continue working on it. Ehm... I don't think you just go with a decision and get this decision and do it. So the IT project started probably from when I started. I could see there was a major issue within the organisation, and with the growth plans I saw it even bigger. We were still living in the middle ages, I call it, and I started influencing people talking about it saying what's wrong and what can be done. And you start building on that and then ultimately people when you're presenting, they have a background to it. They're not just listening to it the first time. You're not going 'I want to spend X thousand Euro to do this' and someone ... if you build to it, you break it up in pieces, people are understanding where you're coming from and they've been warming up to it, I think it makes a big

	difference. To me, that's how you go about it. So if I believe in something I will, I will influence in advance and then present it at the right moment. (T01)
Influencing others - Reasons for being successful	Because I am an easy-going guy.... If I'm talking to a partner, my language will adapt to talking to a partner. But when I'm talking to someone who is at a lower level, I can adapt to his level. So naturally there is that form of informal comfort with the staff so they can feel easy.... even asking something, it's not something going to someone who is superior but going to a friend. So that I think helps… (M03)

Because he's new and he doesn't know. (SB04) |
| Influencing others - Reasons for not being successful | However, I'm still not very sure of my work, so even naturally I try to stay a little bit back…Even the team, even the characters are very different. The tax team, they're all very strong, very strong-willed. So, they're not easily influenced. (M03)

SB03, he's very handy with what he's doing and I for sure cannot influence him, not because of what he's doing but because of his personality. I know him very well for years and I know I cannot ever influence him in work stuff. (SB04) |
Initiatives taken to achieve objectives	Well, I'm improving my background knowledge of everything. Ehm, I hope I'm showing day by day that I'm working well, that I'm able to make decisions, that I'm able to represent the organisation across, you know, on a higher level. (SB02)
Initiatives taken to avoid problems	Give them more training with me. In fact, sometimes I tell them, like, I have them round here and I tell them 'sit with me and we'll work together because the only way I can teach you is by showing you'. (D02)
Initiatives taken to avoid feelings of isolation among distant team	So, for example, such as today after SB04 moved here in Malta, because SB04 was in Liverpool, SB02 remained alone in his office in

members	Liverpool, I asked the IT director if he could be moved in another office with another team just because it's important to socialise a bit as you cannot be alone all the day with your team abroad. And I am inviting him every 3 months to have a week with the team. When he's here usually all the team try to do their best to have time in the office and outside the office with him. I think that for now there aren't issues on this. (SB02)
Initiatives taken to increase employee satisfaction	We introduced elements like... we're introducing like flexible work. (D02) I try in every way to engage them, to give them responsibilities. I try always to encourage them to study, for example. I push a lot SB03 in order to start a university course in IT development because he's still young and I recognise that he has the skill to be a proper a good developer. Potentially he could have more good opportunity and for this I push him a lot. (SB05)
Initiatives taken to make changes - to Case team	So we were in fact thinking of raising the issue of the approval process to understand the role of the D & I committee and the talent leader. To understand who can really decide. We raised it already one, two, three times, but we would like to propose something maybe now to get things approved quicker. (D03) So, what I should do is meet them after the assignment which is something which at times I do and at times don't do, and explain what went right and what went wrong so I'd give feedback. And when it's right, I have to emphasise that it is so they gain a bit of confidence. (M05)
Initiatives taken to make changes - to Organisation	We've got the strategic managers' meeting to discuss these things, we've got the monthly meetings with the business development manager to get certain other things in place like how to promote the brand, how to promote the tax brand, with my managers and my supervisor in tax to see what to publish continuously on new updates, continuously and continuously... Accountancy journals, Times of Malta website, international in journals, on those mainly. On those....

	so that is a question of continuous meetings. Then there is also the question of networking…There are events which you have to go to. (M05)
Initiatives taken to make changes - to Tasks and responsibilities	First of all I have convinced my talent leader to get that nomination of diversity and inclusion leader. That's one first step. I have tried to talk to him to organise something else. For now, I have not succeeded. (D03) For example, last time kont tkellimt ma' funds manager u qeghtilha, 'isma I like... fejn hemm funds u gaming I would like to further my experience into it'. Anka jkollna r-reviews, performance reviews ecc. illi it's 2-way communication apparti jghidulna kif morna ecc. ahna fuq xiex nixtiequ to develop ourselves. (M02)
Initiatives taken to solve problems created by virtuality	Usually after the meeting we have a phone call or an email if there is some points that we had to discuss and we didn't understand each other…Usually if it's a meeting with a lot of people and everybody starts talking... yeah it can happen that you cannot follow all the points so maybe you miss something. (SB03) If I have a particular problem, I call the person on Skype and we chat for half an hour. Or I visit the person, even in the US if necessary. But as a team it is hard for all of us to find the time to meet more often or for longer. (T06)
Initiatives taken to strengthen teamwork	But I typically would participate with them unless it is something where I just simply can't, you know, either because I'm stuck with other people.... but.... I usually do it with them. (D02) But it's also a team so we do a lot of work like on vulnerability-based sharing because if you've got to work as a team then you've got to open yourself up so people understand you and how you tick. When we do these exercises we would do them together at the same level. So we do a lot of stuff like that. (T06)

Leadership opportunities within the case team	I think there's leadership roles for all of us on the team….Ehm... well, when you work on a project, it's a lot of responsibility. So, if you take on a project you are the leader for that project and it's not just within the team. You've got the information, so you support all the people across the organisation. (SB02)
No changes wanted - to Case team	I won't say it's perfect but it's ok, it's good the way we are…Nothing's perfect, ok. I don't know what to say exactly.... I wouldn't like anything to change now. I mean it's ok... Yeah, for me it's ok everything. (SB04)
	I think the US board meetings go very smoothly and I think they're ok to stay virtual…You know, I've been through so many of them and I've never walked away and said 'you know what, this should happen or this should be done'. I think they're managed well. It's very well organised. Like I said everything is prepared prior, it comes out to T05 and I, we see it every time, we know the time of the call so you're prepared, you know exactly when it's going to be. As the meeting is going on, the communication is very fluid and it's very, very easy. And after the meeting, T releases the notes. So, you have I think it's full circles, full loop. I think it's well organised. That meeting is very well organised. (T04)
No changes wanted - to Organisation	No I can't think of anything, no. (M06)
	No, I don't think of any changes that will make things better. (SB03)
No changes wanted - to Tasks and responsibilities	I'm not a fan of change even though I've moved countries 2 times. But for me that's nothing moving countries. But in the job, I don't really like changes so I think I'm happy the way I am right now. Everything is ok for me. (SB04)
	My role, definitely not. (T01)
No internal conflict when performing tasks and responsibilities not	So for me it's not about ... it makes no difference if I'm leading or following. I mean the goal remains the same. I don't need to be the

in job description	one leading them all the time. (D02)
No problems with virtuality	Between me and the team who is there, not a problem. With M05 neither. We never found any problems. Corresponding with emails, no it was never a problem. (M04)
	So far it never happened. We had no misunderstandings. So far, it's all good. (SB03)
Opinion of self - Being a follower but respected as a leader in the case team	Because I'm older in the team. I'm not older as age…Yes but I don't actually lead and I don't tell the guys what to do. Only if they need help….I want to think because of my experience. I'm not bossy with anybody. Yes... (SB03)
Opinion of self - Competent in specific areas	And the truth is I have a responsibility to make sure, one I feel that I head a very key, I think it's a key function. Although it's not client facing, it is our most important asset. I know every decision I take carries a risk and every day I have to make calculated decisions sometimes with no warning, you know, it's on the spot. And I also understand the pressures of the business. (D02)
	I am the super expert here on stock-takes. (M04)
Opinion of self - Follower	I want to be the leader but I do not consider myself as a leader (D01)
	Now I'm a follower. I have to be a follower otherwise I won't fit here anymore, unfortunately. (T03)
Opinion of self - Leader	No. it's inside me. I think even before I was in this position, I was still... I would always end up in roles where I would be putting people to work together, collaborating, running it, pushing it, being the person pushing. (D02)
	I'm quite a dominant leader and this company, T is an extension of me. So ehm... I lead the company, ehm... I would say there are a few people that are really strategic in this business....ehm.... probably if

	people were more strategic they would have their own business. You can't get too many people in an organisation with vision because it then starts clashing. Ehm... so definitely a leader in terms of vision and as a leader of a team I would say I'm probably in a way a member of the team. (T06)
Opinion of self - Neither leader nor follower	No, I don't have leadership skills. Ehm... not a follower, I'm not a follower either, I think. (M06)
Personal aspirations	I would like to go further in terms of grades which would help me to get more credit. Meaning here it's very hierarchical as I mentioned. Maybe your voice is not always considered as the one coming from a partner. So, I would like at least to reach the level of director and I think that also my experience and seniority should be reflected as a director. (D03) I aspire to become a supervisor but to become that ...Exams, get experience… So I think by time I'm hoping to get there. But by time. I'm not expecting this to come in one year's time because it doesn't make sense. (M04)
Policies and procedures - Decision making	They do take decisions. In certain tests... how to design certain tests and how to meet certain people, they do. Which people to meet, they do. Only if it's something extremely complicated are they going to involve me…Probably they will involve me. Because they know this is very important and the client has a very close relationship with me. So if there's something which is worrying them, they will involve me. (M05) So we agreed to set up the office. So, I had kind of, with T01, agreed on kind of a budget and I could just move ahead. I could employ my person, I could open my office, decide where I want to be based. All that I was very free to decide. (T05)
Policies and procedures - Employee performance	They seem very good at rewarding the staff what I've seen while I've been here so I thought that they'd continue in the future. (SB02)

	So you'd follow the procedure because they're not competent. But I think what we try and do is we've even told the person 'you've got lots of things, we'll find another position for you which you'd be happy with' or whatever.... (T06)
Policies and procedures - Work procedures	Basically, I believe the supervisors and the managers and the audit partners meet every 2 months I believe. They get hold of a list of pending audits from the staff and they allocate the number of days which the staff have requested to close off an audit which was originally planned to take 2 weeks but which due to some mishaps or hiccups or something cropped up, it's going to delay it by 2 or 3 days. So we send an email to the supervisors and the managers and the partners that we need 3 days to close off ABC Limited and it's usually taken into consideration and they allocate an extra amount of days to close off. Generally, I think from my 4 and a half years here, they try to keep the same audit team for the same clients so that we can follow up easily, we know the client already. (M06) Yes I can do it the way we want but I would have to follow also the procedure because, not the procedure itself, but we have to follow the structure of the company. We cannot change the structure of the programs, the way they work. When I program a new component, let's say, yes I can do it the way I want because I'm doing it. If it works, it works. It's fine for the company. But in the same way we have to follow the structure of the betting platform that we have. We cannot change that. (SB03)
Potential problems technology may create	I think technology will not be that helpful to improve your personal experience at work... to be proactive. (M04)
Problems due to virtuality	The problem at times is the frequency of response. For example, if I need a reply now and M05 is sitting next to me, I just ask him and he gives me the reply I need immediately. But if he's in Malta, I send him an email, he's in a meeting and he cannot see it, it may take a while until he replies back to me. And apart from that there's also the timing I think also. What I want to mean is that when M05 is abroad with us he's focused on the same job that we are doing at the clients so…

	he's working on the same client so he knows what I am telling him. But if he's here in Malta, what lacks is that he's not working on that client so he needs to go back, look, check for... it will take time. (M01)
	And also other problems that we have, so connectivity also sometimes the line, there's no connectivity, also we don't have a good line, we don't hear well the person. Also, the location of the phone, meaning for example here, we don't have a specific room for calls so we are maybe two people in an office so maybe to call someone and then there's your colleague over there talking to another one. So, there's quite disruption, you know, which can affect the quality of your exchange. (D03)
Problems faced by the organisation	I think is that the firm is currently in a situation where the level and pace of change is quite high so the intensity with which, not just myself, but we are all working is quite high which means it becomes a bit stressful at a point. (D02)
Problems faced if tasks and responsibilities do not change as necessary	Because when we come here we need to give M05 the final result. We can't go back to the client to the UK to get the final result. So that's why when you're abroad it is important that you understand, you assess and discuss with you who is taking the leadership role and understand exactly what M05 needs. Because when you come here and M05 starts reviewing the file, M05 needs answers. (M04)
Problems faced when changing tasks and responsibilities	One has to ... there is always the idea or I think there is the idea that nobody can do your job as good as you. That is the idea that maybe everybody has. And consequently one gets disappointed when he delegates and that happens but I think honestly when you delegate you have to be ready to accept, if you decided to delegate you have to be ready to accept the consequences of delegation and therefore show where things could have been done better, show where you think things could have been done better, understand why they were done in a different way. But then once you delegate, you delegate responsibilities also. They're also responsible for their actions. (M05)
	So, we tried to give them some also, kind of power to take decisions and at times it worked against us especially when we've been telling

	them, for example, a number of times 'put us always on copy even if we are inundated with emails we still need to know what's going on'. And at times they tend to get carried away. And then we get to know that they've been discussing crucial matters, credit terms with customers, and I mean, they are not empowered to do that, no. So although I try to give them as much as possible, like leeway and so that they feel empowered as well, at times they get carried away and so we try to control it as much as possible. (T02)
Process and procedures of case team meetings	It is set by M05. We go to a meeting first with him. He sort of formulates a timetable because the hours do not always depend on, they are not always the same from one time to another. There may be new people on the team, we maybe try to include a number of tests that are different from the ones that were done before so in that case we have to allocate new times for that work. But it's usually M05 who sets the agenda. Then we all obviously give our feedback and amend where necessary. (M01)

T06 is the person who actually has the minutes in front of him. He goes through the minutes of the last meeting. He has then the report with a number of topics. I'm obviously only there for the financial bit. T06 is the one who presents them. In case of difficulty, ehm.... I'm there to support, myself and T01, because it's T06 or T01 who presents them and in case they need to question something there and then, I've got my laptop, I've got my notes... and I'm there to support basically. (T02) |
| Progression within organisation | Basically, I started here as an HR assistant almost 2 years ago and recently now I went up to HR senior. (D01)

At Organisation T, I was a group accountant. My role was.... I used to share the same role with another person who had then left and then I was kind of running the team all by myself until a Group Accountant joined a month ago. So, like the toughest part of the year, the audit period, and the consolidation period and what not, I was kind of all by myself and T01 only doing all the stuff. Imma, a month ago we had N joining us who is the other Group Accountant and I was then promoted to Group Finance Manager since. (T02) |

Reasons for being satisfied on-the-job	For me it's the reason why I've always stayed in this job because I'm always learning. For me that's why I have been here so long, one has been the variety in my work and the other is that you're always learning and the power of the brand we represent is huge; the tools, the resources, the knowledge, the networking. (D02) Are you satisfied? Definitely. It's an extremely dynamic company. We're doing a lot of things at the moment so ehm... so it's extremely interesting. (T01)
Reasons for team members not to change tasks and responsibilities	I don't have the expertise. (M02) Knowing that I don't know the full picture because of the daily huddles and I don't know what's going on between the Chiefs, kind of I say 'isma ahjar ma nghidx xejn milli I say something umbadd it would have been the opposite of what T06 would have wanted to say'. (T02)
Reasons for team members to change tasks and responsibilities	So I'd say 'listen give it to me and I'll run with it'. Because the skill set is there. The knowledge is there. It would be like a ... and sometimes I also do it inadvertently to compensate for the very boring parts of my job. (D02) Well, I believe that everything that you can learn from it you need to give it a try so if there's a task which is not part of your job but which will add to your knowledge and which will improve your skills in any way, yes I am willing to do it, to do such things. (M01)
Recognition of staff efforts	They seem very good at rewarding the staff what I've seen while I've been here so I thought that they'd continue in the future. (SB02)
Relationships with colleagues	So we are friends, I would say that. Besides the fact that we are colleagues, we are friends… We meet outside. We go for a beer. We talk or something. Yes when they have a problem they ask me for help. Yes, yes. I help them and we have no problem with it. (SB03) But what helps me is that once a year the whole team comes to Malta. It's only once a year. But that helps a lot. I meet the others of

	the US. For example when they came last January we organised an event for them. We spent the whole Sunday out and we took them to places. It was nice. We hired a mini-van so we were all in the same minivan. So you're trying to do, you're trying to create ehm... how do you say it.... a relationship, a friendly relationship rather than just colleagues. I prefer to work with friends. I prefer to say friends rather than colleagues. Because you .... I think when I establish a working relationship, I feel more comfortable in asking questions, for example. Or if I have a problem, I can ask them. (T03)
Relationships with subordinates	I still have a very good relationship with them all. We agreed that we have to be open to work together. (D02) When they see me very busy, they stay with me, they don't do until they finish. If I work on Saturday they come in all of them to help me. When I'm worried about a particular client they try to understand why and they come... I think I perform that role and I think at times I get the respect which the staff may have for me. (M05)
Relationships with superiors	Even with our manager SB05, we discuss a lot of things. We are more like in a friendly zone, like....'not I'm the boss, I give you orders and you have to obey them'. No, he asks 'do you think you're capable of doing this?'. Even if he's working on something, and he's not sure of something he asks 'what do you think? Shall I do it this way? What is your idea of doing this? How?' There's this bond between us. It's not just you're the boss and I'm the programmer and I have to do whatever you tell me. (SB01) And with Organisation T I always had virtual leadership because T06 has been managing me. I've always been reporting to T06 and T06's always been in Malta and I always been abroad. I have always worked for T06 from a virtual office because I wanted to work for him and because I enjoy working for him because I respect him and I trust him. (T05)
Reporting relationships	Yes, my boss is SB05 but the others are SB04, and SB02, and what's his name? SB03, are like the same level as I am. (SB01)

	I report to T06… The people reporting directly to me sit here. At the moment directly directly I have 4 people. So, I have 2 people in finance, group finance manager, group accountant, IT manager and corporate services officer who reports also. So, he takes care of the factory and is responsible for this building. And then within the IT team there are another 2 people reporting to the IT Manager who reports into me and within the financial team there's another, apart from the 2 here, there's another 4 people who sit in the office here. And then there's somebody in Hong Kong, Paris, UK and 3 people in the factory. (T01)
Responsibilities as per job description	I am an HR Senior. Basically I started here as an HR assistant almost 2 years ago and recently now I went up to HR senior. I have multiple roles within HR. But mostly I do all work permits, Visas, student contracts, onboarding of employees, events and other than that there are everyday HR duties like meeting with people, queries and the day-to-day stuff. (D01)

Software Developer…So .... analysing the software, seeing if there's ways we can improve on it…Part of my role is support. So one week out of four I'm at the support desk out of hours. (SB02) |
| Solving issues and problems | They know they can sit here, we chat and I'm close to them all and if any of them have a problem they come. (D02)

I always try to bounce things off with my direct superior…I tend to bounce it off with T01 when we're in an informal setting, over lunch or something. (T02) |
| Suggestions and advice – Team member to team member | He always says 'think outside the box. Don't look at what the accounts are saying. That's not enough. Think about after - what are the consequences? (M04)

T01 he's always saying, 'let's stick to the facts'. Always, always. Igifieri, even emails which people tend to ehm.... across, across the organisation they tend to put a bit of emotions in them, he always |

	stresses to me 'listen, stick to facts which you can back up. Put emotions aside and we're accountants, we need to always stick to the facts'. (T02)
Tasks and responsibilities assigned to individual (not as per job description)	It would be at, for example, like if we have an event happening that would be client facing or we'd have something that is happening that is not an HR event but because I have the skill set or experience... or it would be for example, the member firm standards, I ended up doing 3 even though I had 1. The other 2 were not mine. (D02)

They give us stuff which I'm not aware of, I don't know what I'm going to do. I go on the internet and look for some details myself. Ehm... that way, that way, yes. Even the management accounts. In my opinion it's not my responsibility. I'm not a graduate person to do the management accounts. (T03) |
| Tasks and responsibilities taken on upon individual's initiative (not as per job description) | For example, they never asked me to do interviews and I wanted to do interviews. So, I asked them if I can do them myself. So, it was at my own initiative and not D02 gave me that job. (D01)

I'm very successful because I'm a very good salesman but it shouldn't be my role. My role should be that my experience helps others and we can do this for a while. So, I'm willing to do this for another year but I must be careful that I don't lose the...the...the link with my East Coast market. (T05) |
| The individual's thought process when changing tasks and responsibilities | I think of what M05 would do in such a moment because since we had worked with M05 a number of times we sort of know how he would react in certain cases…I try to take the same approach that the firm would be oriented to do. (M01) |
| The meaning of leadership | I think leadership is ehm... my opinion right, most of it is gaining your fellow colleagues' respect and the role of a leader just comes naturally. (M06)

Besides being just oh ...'he's my leader because he tells me what to do', that's not the leadership. The leadership is, these people want to |

	work for you like I have always worked for T06 from a virtual office because I wanted to work for him and because I enjoy working for him because I respect him and I trust him. If you end up with a leader or you have a team that works for you that doesn't respect you, that doesn't trust you and you don't have tools to control those people.....So, for me the leadership has to be you're trusted. When I give an opinion or something they trust what I'm saying. They must respect me. But respect me because of who I am and not because I am hierarchy higher and the most important for me as a leader is make people what needs to be done. Make people... make your people WANT to do what must be done not make people DO what must be done. The wrong leader is the one who makes people DO what must be done. I want to be a leader who makes people WANT to do. Very important thing I learnt last year…T06 is a hands-on leader. (T05)
Virtual collaboration vs traditional collaboration	When you're communicating face-to-face, you have, even in terms of looking at someone face-to-face, looking at their expressions, facial expressions, the sound ... I mean, you can hear them much better. Because through Skype, even now we had this meeting, sometimes it's hard to understand them even more. So no, meeting someone face-to-face is always better but for the purpose of most of our meetings I think it is a very useful tool, technology, Skype and being able to speak to someone virtually because we have become so fast-paced that I think it's a very useful tool. (D01) First of all facial expressions. We communicate mainly through email so you lose the facial expression part. Secondly the real time communication. (M03)
What I think others think of me	I think they know I am very transparent and if I'm annoyed with them I will tell them and they will tell me. So, for me, I think they know, I think they recognise that the being tough doesn't come in as yelling. It's more… demanding. (D02) Yes overall, yes. I mean... In all my four years here I think I worked very very hard to build an image of someone who does his work well and on time. And I think it's the picture people have of me. Even through reviews we do, annual and interim reviews, that's the

	feedback I get from both partners and managers in both departments. That was the feedback I was getting in audit... (M03) I think they perceive me as a fair manager. I can be tough when necessary but fair. Very structured. Organised. Have a good sense of the business. So I think there's a respect level there. That's my perception. They might tell me something different. That's my perception. (T04)
Work experience and educational background of case team members	I had started university then I dropped out. Then I started working full time with a foreign firm but who had a back office in Malta. And then I decided to start studying ACCA and I needed something which backs up my study. That's why I decided to opt for an audit firm and I ended up here, 4 and a half years now. My ACCA is over so ...(M06) I have background in a number of different areas. Sales is one of them. I'm an Engineer by trade, Packaging Engineer with an MBA out of Rutgers University. My career has gone through different paths. I was doing engineering work for a while, the customer side of that. I came to the supplier side through my career. I handled operations in sales and I kind of went back to those two and I also did innovation for a company called Avon for a period of time. So, I've sort of handled different aspects of the industry over my career. Sales is something that I've done throughout my career and something that I do enjoy doing. (T04)

Name of Code	Sample Quotes taken from Observations
Attitude and approach of formal case team leader	SB05: So if you want we can do this together or SB03 with you. D03: So that's why I wanted to, maybe, set another call with you to have an idea of the advancement work in progress for the different action we put in our action plan…as soon as I have the feedback from communication department we will send it to you so that you can use it if it's ok for you, you can use it and you can update it. M05: I don't want to put more pressure fuqek because you only have 3 and a half days over there this time round so maybe that is what I would pull out and we'll do it in January. All right. In January your role is going to be different. You'll do other controls tests and effective auditing.
Attitude and behaviour of case team members	D02: All right. So we'll keep in touch. So we're going to wait for some stuff from you. We'll speak again before you go out on leave? We'll catch up maybe, sometime this week? D03: Yes I will try. D02: Ok. Maybe in the evening. I'll check if you're online and we'll just have a quick catch up. SB03: Yes but usually we close the ticket after 2 hours so that doesn't really reflect what it did because I don't think that any of us is going to close the ticket like minutes or seconds after he solved the issue. Most probably he's going to solve the issue and leave the tickets for later when he is looking up all of them and he is going to look up all of them altogether. Correct me if I'm not right. SB02: Claudio, what you're saying is exactly right. T05: So just to help T02, T01. We have no problem to send out an email to our contacts in purchasing which you've seen. If we get just the factual things about them, really give us the details because they question us afterwards.

	T02: No worries T05. I'll take a note. I'll be speaking to T03. I'll drop her an email and she'll do the work and keep you in the loop obviously.
	T05: Thank you very much. Thank you.
Behaviour showing an individual's position in the team hierarchy	M05: So basically guys is-sitwazzjoni hija din... At the moment we have received the trial balances of, I believe 2 of the companies, not more than 2. But we've received also the trial balances before tax of every other company. So jien diga ghaddejt the trial balances of the 4 companies to tax. Matthew and Elaine have worked on the tax. They have communicated with the client what the pre-tax profit is illi bhala group qieghed xi 25 million fl-ewwel disa xhur li huwa hafna inqas mis-sena li ghaddiet. This is the first thing to point out that it is much lower than last year and we need to confirm and understand why. And we've also gone into the tax charges. Dak ix-xoghol lest.

T06: Ok. So... new customers.....we had last week Company P to be confirmed. I guess we can put that in there because now we've got the skin food. So we'll put Company P here. We've got Company H. Now we've got Company M…

T06: Ok Good. So that's good. I like to see that. A lot of activity. Well done. Ok. We move to Finance. |
| Case team meetings - Frequency and attendance | D02: Thank you. So we will speak maybe in 2 to 3 weeks' time? Is that good for you? On this?

D03: 2 to 3 weeks' time. I will go on holiday by the end of the month.

D02: When do you go on holiday?

D03: For a month.

D02:. Ok, so let's speak before you go.

D03: The week before.

D02: Yes, yes, yes. Ok so let's speak...

D03: So I send you an invitation for Tuesday.... I don't know.

D02: Eh....

D03: I'll send an invitation.

D02: Shall we try and speak the week of the 23rd?

D03: July? |

	D02: Yes. Is that ok for you?
	D03: Ok. When? The call of the.... we've got a call on the 21st?
	D02: Yes but that we'll keep for a generic Malta update.... maybe we'll do one specifically on diversity and inclusion.... maybe on the Thursday?
	D03: On Thursday, you mean? 26th?
	D02: Yes. Is that ok for you?
	D03: For me it's fine.
	T06: Next meeting T05.
	T01: I probably can on the 20th.
	T05: We can do this next, maybe when you're in New York Andy?
	T06: In 3 months. Normally we do it in 3 months.
	T05: Do you want to do it when you're in the US?
	T06: No.
	T01: It doesn't make sense.
	T06: So what day is best for you guys? T04, any particular day?
	T04: No, I'll just schedule around it. Whatever works for you guys.
Causes of on-the-job dissatisfaction	T05: I find developments very challenging T06 I must say I really struggle. Even T is struggling. I find the support from the team is always there. I think everybody in Malta is working hard to help us, support us. But I find some of the development just take long, long, long. And there seems to be a lot of ping pong you know. A question going one way, another way. I feel at one end when you have a development going, the brief is pretty clear what the customer expects and customers expect the supply to then you know, deliver. And there's too many things that just could be answered by the development team directly and there's too much going back to the customer trying to get the customer to do something he doesn't want to do. I think it's something we'll discuss when you're over here also. I'll have some examples for you. But it's nice to win new business but the hard when you see you win these new businesses there are issues that we spend a lot of time dealing with the issues. And I don't want sales to be spending so much time on chasing, chasing, chasing, replying, giving excuses, things like that. And I have examples of that.

Changes in tasks and responsibilities (Examples)	M05: You will need to build up on this document. However, the vouchers is one of the most difficult parts of the audit. By November you need to test it. You need to test it. However, for the time being, after you discuss with M03, we will see, if you have enough time... ghax dan kollu gdid ghalik M02.
	SB03: Or if you want I can take care of this SB05 if you want but you guys have to send data like for example, send me an email with the problems that we had or something like this. Because ok I can extract the tickets from OTRS and see what slow response we had, what stops payments, because they sent a ticket for that. But you guys have to give me the additional details and if I'm going to go ask you, you cannot say 'I don't know because someone else sorted it' or something like this. You have to take responsibility about what you're doing. So if SB05 agrees with it, I'm fine to do this.
	T01: I'll have to do that because T02 is going to be out on honeymoon as from tomorrow. T06: Or one of us. T01: So I'll do that. What you can do is start the correspondence, put me on copy and say 'T01 will pick it up from here' or something like that.
Justification of decision to take on tasks not in job description	T03: Yes. So I thought it won't be a problem if I invoice them instead of doing the extra job of SY issuing the invoice on behalf of Organisation T USA, then she issues the credit note to Organisation T USA. So to avoid all this hassle I thought that since they paid in the USD-Euro account, it won't be a problem to pay for these invoices.
	M05: I don't want to put more pressure fuqek because you only have 3 and a half days over there this time round so maybe that is what I would pull out and we'll do it in January.
Making plans to communicate outside of	D02: We'll catch up maybe, sometime this week? D03: Yes I will try.

case team meetings	D02: Ok. Maybe in the evening. I'll check if you're online and we'll just have a quick catch up. M05: Jiena tlabt lil Matthew biex jibghatilkom it-tax workings halli kulhadd minnkom ikollu t-tax workings. Has this been done or no? M01: Ma rcevejthomx jien. M05: Ghadek ma rcevejthomx mela follow up and talk to Matthew to send the tax workings.
Problems due to virtuality	D03: Yes. Sorry Caroline, the line is just a little chaotic. Your voice is sometimes interrupted. I don't know... D02: Can you hear better like this? D03: Yes, it's better now. Ok. SB05: So there's me, SB01 and SB04. We are all around. You can see just me. So we are here all together. T05: I'm going to switch from my head set because it's a little echoey so hold on a second. You guys hear me? T01: Yes. T06: OK that's fine. It's probably echoey because of T05. You're on silent T05? T05: Let me just adjust here. T06: That might help. T04: OK. You guys Ok? T06: Yeah. Yeah. OK. Your feedback. We're OK now.
Problems faced when changing tasks and responsibilities	T06: You can't have a customer placing the order and then invoicing another customer. Nobody would have paid that. I'm sure that didn't happen before. Correct? T03: They want the supplier to be from France so they won't accept the invoices which I issued. T06: Listen this is natural. If they place the order.... T03: But .... T06: You have to invoice that person that pays the order.

	T01: Why can't S issue the invoice, have the invoice issued from Organisation T France and then France and USA settle internally? T03: That's what we did. T06: That's what happened. But T03 decided to do it differently. T03: It's not that I decided.... T01: They may have problems on tax. T03: The thing is not because of tax, they don't want to create another vendor. But Organisation T USA is already a vendor for them because we received payments in Euro from S this year. This year not in the past, this year. T06: But we need to invoice the person the order comes from. Correct? T01: Yes. T06: You can't invoice somebody when the order came from somebody else. T01: No you can't. T06: That's not the way.
Process and procedures of case team meetings	SB05: Just to start... the main purpose of this meeting, just to review some points and eventually we assign some priority related to the actual tasks. Ehm... so first of all I sent you guys just a small agenda with some points. So we will discuss about this but I would like to get some other information so I just approach some other points with you. First of all, what I am really interested is to understand some points are outstanding. Like with SB01 I would like to discuss the Italian authorisation and where we are stuck, what needs to be finalised, which are the difficulties. T06: Great. Ok. Let's start on our...... sorry, I thought you wanted to share a little bit about the last 2 days, so now we can start on the board meeting, on the minutes. Ehm... so we start off with sales. Our last meeting was in March. Let's have a look at the sales figures for the first 6 months. Orders received. So we are at......
Reaction of team members to changes in their tasks and responsibilities	D02: Agreed. Yes it makes more sense. Ok.

	T05: I would say that's the way to do it Andy.
Suggestions and advice - Team leader to team member	M05: In my opinion, in my opinion we should focus on the following tests; SB05: But my suggestion for all of you, when you get a call from them but it's really, really, important, so leave them always the sensation that you know what you are talking about. You never should say like 'I will ask to SB03, I will ask to SB05, I need to speak to SB04'. So let's explain the problem. Just if you have any concerns and if you need to ask then you can speak to me, to SB03, to SB04. So whatever will help you. And you will see that it will be useful for the future because they will feel more confident with you. Because if every time that they will ask and you will say 'I don't know. I have to check. I have to see. I have to speak', so they will start to think 'ok then it's not useful to speak with P or SB01'. This is just a tip. Then I don't care if you really don't know what they're talking about because then I will explain, SB03 can explain, SB04 can explain.
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team leader	D02: I think we should limit, we should limit the amount of surveys because it can be a bit overwhelming in our office. M03: L-inactive nahseb jistghu jaqaw Paul bil-mod il-mod. M05: Bil-mod il-mod... M03: Ghax basikament l-inactive huwa kull account li jkun ilu ma jigi llogjat. Jekk naghmlu log in bizzejjed.
Suggestions and advice - Team member to team member	M03: Nifthu account minn hawn. Nippruvaw intuh pajjiz differenti ha naraw izommuhx, nippruvaw nifthuh malajr biex tahdem hemm malli titla. T05: Yeah, thinking about it .... I was also thinking, T04, did you try to negotiate with NW like this is our first order with them, we will accept 90 days but the policy is that normally the customers pay up front for their first order whoever it is. So you have a very inflexible CFO and

	that you may manage to negotiate a 45 day for the first order with them and then you would go to 90 days with the next order.
	T04: I can certainly try but T05 you were in one of the initial meetings with HB. She made it pretty clear that it's not negotiable.
Team conversations (not related to agenda and meeting)	D02: When are you out on holiday till, D03? D03: I finish my week on Friday and then I am on holiday. D02: For how long? D03: Well at least surely until the 20, 22, 23... I'm not sure but I think till that date. D02: Ok. So we'll make sure we don't bug you. T05: And you drive an electric car T06. T06: An electric Bentley, yeah. T01: And you don't know.... I'm getting a Tesla. It's coming in next week. T05: All private Teslas are good. T06: We wish... for Malta it's perfect. Malta's perfect for electric cars.

Appendix IX - Extracts from the Researcher's Reflective Diary

Team M - It impressed me how many times M05 asked for the opinion of his team members. Team members willingly and enthusiastically gave their views, M03 most of all. M03 seemed to have a superiority complex – he knows it all. At times, the rest of the team seemed intimidated by his confidence and his propensity to be so outspoken. M05 did nothing about this.

Team M - M05 consistently explained his approach and seemed to feel the need to justify his decisions and actions. He was also receptive to advice and comments made by team members. I could see this through his words and body language. He made sure team members knew that he was paying attention to whatever was being said. He leaned forward towards the person speaking and he maintained eye contact with team members and it was like he was telling them 'Tell me, I am interested in what you have to say'. He also nodded and smiled when others spoke.

Team T - T03 took a wrong decision which was picked up during the team meeting. She did not follow procedures and did not ask her direct superior (T02) how she should solve the issue she had. The decision-making procedure which should have been applied in such a case was clearly stipulated in the policy documentation shown to me by the team leader. T03 did not follow procedure.

Team T – T03 was so upset during the interview. She cried. She was in distress. She seemed pleased she could speak to someone and vent her frustrations. I felt sorry for her. I listened and showed her that I cared. At the end of the interview, she thanked me. This made me feel good.

Team T – T06 made it very clear who he considered as important members of the team. Apart from him voicing this during his interview, his opinion was further

reinforced when he said that these 'less important' team members were the ones not visible to the dispersed team members. The camera was not positioned in a way to capture all the co-located members of the team. I wonder how this was perceived by the 'invisible' team members and also by other members of Team T.

Team SB - Connectivity problems were not helping the progress of the meeting. The meeting was also interrupted with phone calls and people entering and leaving the meeting room. This appeared to be the norm as nobody complained during the meeting. But during the interview with SB01, this was pointed out as very distracting for her.

Team SB - Parallel conversations did not help the meeting. SB02 (the dispersed member) looked 'lost' and did not appreciate the fact that he was being ignored and left out because he wasn't in the room (I remember discussing this with SB02 during his interview).

Team D – Just voice and no camera! As a result, the co-located team members could be seen whispering and speaking to each other about things which had nothing to do with the meeting they were participating in. Maybe D03 was doing the same. I could not see whether this was happening as there was no visual. However, during interviews, I was told that this was quite normal and an accepted practice.

Appendix X - Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: *Leadership Dynamics in Virtual Teams – The Acts of Claiming and Granting in Leader-Follower Interactions*

Researcher: Anna Maria Alden   **Ethics number**: 26573

Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

My name is Anna Maria Alden and I am currently reading for a PhD at the University of Southampton. The research which you have been asked to participate in, is being conducted for the purposes of my study which will be investigating leadership behaviours in virtual teams. This study will specifically concentrate on studying leader-follower interactions and actions in teams where, due to a lack of physical contact amongst team members and also due to the need to communicate electronically, the leadership process may be challenging. I am particularly interested in understanding the feelings and emotions of participants as experienced when interacting with other team members, in the way participants behave and adjust to assume roles and responsibilities different to the ones they are formally assigned, in the effect that the clarity and visibility of interactions and exchanges within the team may have on leader-follower relationships in virtual settings and in the potential impact that factors, such as team culture and company policies and procedures may have on such interactions and on the behaviours and actions of team members.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been invited to participate because you are an active member of a virtual team and your role requires you to communicate, collaborate and build work relationships with team members who work both in close physical proximity to you as well as those who operate from a distance. The way you engage with colleagues to perform your work duties and responsibilities, requires you to communicate both face-to-face as well as through the use of electronic communications media, which made you eligible to participate in this study.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you give your consent to take part, you will have a one-to-one interview with the researcher. The interview will last around 1 hour and will focus on a set of ideas from the researcher. Although these ideas are intended to give the interview some structure, discussions will not be restricted to covering these points, but will evolve as the interview progresses. The interview will take place at your workplace or at another convenient location which will be agreed upon together with the researcher. Interviews with participants who are not based in Malta will be conducted via Skype. The interview will allow the researcher to gather information about your role and experiences working in the virtual team you are a member of. The data collected during the interview will be transcribed and then analysed as part of the study. The researcher may contact you again if clarifications are necessary and you may also wish to contact her if you have any questions.

The researcher will also carry out observations during team meetings. The researcher will be a passive observer and will not interfere at any time during the meetings. Following these observations, and only if necessary to clarify her interpretations of what she had observed, the researcher may ask for another meeting with you which will either be conducted at your workplace or at another mutually convenient location.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

The researcher hopes that you will find your involvement in the research beneficial. It should help you reflect on your role and behaviour within the team. It will also give you the possibility to express your views and experiences of being part of a virtual team. Emerging findings, which will be communicated to yourself and to the organisation you are part of at the end of the study, should enhance the understanding of the dynamics of leadership in virtual teams.

Are there any risks involved?

There are no risks involved in this research.

Will my participation be confidential?

The research will comply with the Data Protection Act, the University of Southampton's Data Protection Policy, the University of Southampton's Research Integrity and the University of Southampton Research Ethics Policy.

All the data collected will be kept strictly confidential. Only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to the data.

Memory cards and transcripts of recorded interviews as well as written notes taken during or immediately after the observations will be stored in a lockable filing cabinet. All computer files related to this research will be password protected.

Pseudonyms will be used in interview transcripts and in the analysis of notes taken during observations. No reference to specific participants and organisations will be made at any point in the PhD thesis and in any other documentation quoting this study. In this way the research participants' identities and anonymity will be protected at all times.

What happens if I change my mind?

You have the right to withdraw from this study at any point and at any time without reason. This will not affect your legal rights.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you may wish to contact the Research Support Officer, Dr Jennifer Sarha (risethic@soton.ac.uk) or the Head of Research Governance (02380 595058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk)

Where can I get more information?

If you would like further information about this research, please feel free to contact me, Anna Maria Alden, at ama3g14@soton.ac.uk. Alternatively, you may contact any one of my research supervisors, Edgar Meyer (e.meyer@soton.ac.uk) or Alex Wang (j.k.wang@soton.ac.uk).

CONSENT FORM

Study title: *Leadership Dynamics in Virtual Teams – The Acts of Claiming and Granting in Leader-Follower Interactions*

Researcher name: Anna Maria Alden   **Ethics reference**: 26573

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (Version 1 - February 2017 of participant information sheet) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purposes of this study.

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected.

I am happy for the interview to be audio recorded.

I am happy to be contacted regarding other unspecified research projects. I therefore consent to the University retaining my personal details on a database, kept separately from the research data detailed above. The 'validity' of my consent is conditional upon the University complying with the Data Protection Act and I understand that I can request my details be removed from this database at any time.

Data Protection

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purposes of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name) …………………………………………………

Signature of participant …………………………………………………………...

Date …………………………………………………………………………………

<u>**Appendix XII - Participant Debriefing Form**</u>

Study Title: *Leadership Dynamics in Virtual Teams – The Acts of Claiming and Granting in Leader-Follower Interactions*

Researcher: Anna Maria Alden   **Ethics number**: 26573

Thank you so much for participating in this study. Your participation was very valuable. It has been acknowledged that you are very busy and I very much appreciate the time you devoted to participating in this study. There was some information about the study that could not be discussed with you prior to the study, because doing so probably would have impacted your actions and thus skewed the study results. This form explains these things to you now.

What is the research about?

The overall aim of the research is to gain a comprehensive insight and understanding of the claiming and granting process of leadership in contexts characterised by a lack of media richness as prevalent in virtual teams. The objectives of the research are to explore:

- The feelings and emotions of team leaders and members when engaging in claiming and/or granting behaviours and the mechanisms they adopt to deal with identity conflict.

- How the clarity and visibility of claims and grants affect leader-follower relations in virtual teams.

- The impact that different factors such as, team culture, company policies/procedures and follower/leader schema, may have on claiming and granting in virtual settings.

The main research question that the researcher seeks to answer is: *How does a lack of media richness affect leadership dynamics in virtual teams?*

Background to the study

As a result of the decentralisation and globalisation of business, organisations have had to introduce new working arrangements, which necessitated the pioneering of new working and leadership practices. The rapid advancements in technology have facilitated the creation of new mechanisms for coordinating work and this has led to the inception of innovative work forms, business models and working practices. One such organisational arrangement is the virtual team. Virtual teams, utilise communication and information technologies to communicate, interact and collaborate across geographical, temporal, organisational and cultural boundaries to achieve common goals, tasks and objectives.

Virtual team arrangements offer multiple advantages and tremendous opportunities, such as, the possibility to draw on dispersed knowledge and expertise. As a result of their structure and characteristics, however, and specifically due to the lack of physical and social interaction of team members, virtual teams also present their leader with multiple challenges, thereby making certain leadership responsibilities and behaviours more difficult to exercise. These challenges may be related to, for example, the development of trust and the establishment of team cohesion. If not effectively handled, these challenges may compromise team success and hinder the accomplishment of the team's objectives.

Effective virtual team functioning also necessitates enhanced clarity and visibility of the team leader's and members' actions and behaviours. Therefore, adopting rich communications media is essential to ensure growth and sustainability of a shared understanding in uncertain and ambiguous environments.

As leadership theory continues to progress and evolve, it is becoming increasingly apparent that leadership is no longer seen to be a top-down process dependent on and driven by a hierarchical leader. It is however a two-way process where leader and follower relations, actions, behaviours and identities are dynamically claimed and granted as necessary by followers and leaders alike and are not dependant on or prescribed by formal hierarchy. This is especially the case in a virtual team environment where leader identities and behaviours shift laterally, upward and downward depending on task, expertise and team member influence. Individuals

therefore claim and grant the identity of a leader as required by the organisation's processes and objectives. The dynamics of such a process are influenced by team/organisational contextual factors such as team members' leader and follower schemas, team culture, role expectations, relationships, etc. All these factors have a bearing on the process of leadership and on the construction of leadership outcomes.

The Research Findings

This study aims to shed light on this claiming and granting process in order to understand leadership dynamics in virtual teams. The results of this research have important practical implications for both individuals and organisations. For individuals who want to be seen as leaders and who want to prove themselves as effective in a leadership position, this study will show that one's own actions may not be sufficient to be regarded as a leader. In fact, it is essential to appreciate that how one is perceived by the other members of the group and organisation, together with contextual factors such as the leader/follower schemas of team members, all play a part in developing a leader identity and having it acknowledged and endorsed by others. For organisations and decision-takers, this study would be beneficial in that it could assist in leader identification for promotion and advancement purposes, in leader selection for future teams and projects, in identifying the training needs of specific members of staff, and in determining the suitability of individuals to form part of a virtual team. It could also assist in managers' understanding of how different identities work together in a virtual team context to achieve workplace effectiveness and desired organisational goals.

I did not use active deception in this study.

We hope this clarifies the purpose of the research, and the reason why we could not tell you all of the details about the study prior to your participation.

Additional Information

If you would like further information about the research, you may wish to read the following:

Al-Ani, B., Horspool, A. and Bligh, M.C. (2011) Collaborating with "virtual strangers": Towards developing a framework for leadership in distributed teams. *Leadership*, 7(3), 219–249.

Blom, M. and Alvesson, M. (2014) Leadership On Demand: Followers as initiators and inhibitors of managerial leadership. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 30(3), p.344–357.

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Zimmermann, P., Wit, A. and Gill, R. (2008) The Relative Importance of Leadership Behaviours in Virtual and Face-to-Face Communication Settings. *Leadership*, 4(3), p.321–337.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact me:

Anna Maria Alden

Email: ama3g14@soton.ac.uk

Mobile no.: +356 79438358

It is very important that you do not discuss this study with anyone else until the study is complete. Our efforts will be greatly compromised if participants come into this study knowing what it is about and how the ideas are being tested. Once again results of this study will not include your name or any other identifying characteristics.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel that you have been placed at risk, you may contact the research support officer, Dr Jennifer Sarha (risethic@soton.ac.uk) or Head of Research Governance, Research Governance Office, University of Southampton, Southampton, SO17 1BJ. Phone: 02380 595058, Email: rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk

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