



Vaasan yliopisto  
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## **Case study: Navigating dual roles**

Balancing supervisory and expert responsibilities in knowledge-based organizations

School of Management  
Master's thesis in Public  
Management  
Administrative Sciences

Vaasa 2025

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**UNIVERSITY OF VAASA****School of Management**

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<b>Title of the thesis:</b>	Case study: Navigating dual roles : Balancing supervisory and expert responsibilities in knowledge-based organizations		
<b>Degree:</b>	Master of Administrative Sciences		
<b>Discipline:</b>	Public Management		
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<b>Year:</b>	2025	<b>Pages:</b> 88	88

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**ABSTRACT :**

Nykyisessä monimuotoisessa ja dynaamisessa työympäristössä asiantuntijaorganisaatioissa esihenkilöt kohtaavat kilpailevia vaatimuksia yhdistäessään asiantuntija- ja johtamisvastuunsa. Erityisesti asiantuntijaroolissa toimivat esihenkilöt tasapainoilevat usein eri roolien välillä, mikä voi vaikeutua, jos niiden rajat ovat epäselvät tai tehtävät menevät päällekkäin. Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan tekijöitä, jotka tukevat tai haastavat esihenkilöiden kykyä tasapainottaa asiantuntija- ja esihenkilörooleja.

Tutkimus perustuu laadulliseen tutkimusotteeseen ja teoreettisena viitekehyksenä on rooliteoria, joka käsittelee roolien muodostumista ja niiden vaikutuksia yksilön kokemuksiin. Viitekehyksen keskeisiä käsitteitä ovat rooli, persoonallisuus, rooliristiriita, roolin epäselvyys ja roolin ylikuormitus. Empiirinen osuus toteutettiin puolistrukturoitujen haastattelujen avulla Case-organisaatiossa, jossa esihenkilöt kertoivat omia kokemuksiaan asiantuntija- ja johtamisvastuiden yhdistämisestä.

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että roolien joustavuus, aiempi asiantuntijakokemus, itseohjautuvat tiimit ja tukiverkostot ovat keskeisiä tekijöitä, jotka tukevat roolien yhdistämistä. Lisäksi persoonallisuuspiirteet, kuten joustavuus ja sosiaaliset taidot, sekä tietyt henkilökohtaiset taidot, kuten priorisointi ja delegointi, helpottavat tasapainon löytämistä. Haasteet puolestaan liittyvät ajanhallintaan, työkuorman vaihteluihin, palautteen puutteeseen ja resurssien niukkuuteen. Myös rooliristiriidat ja delegointiin liittyvät haasteet nousevat esiin roolien tasapainottamisessa.

Tutkimuksen johtopäätöksenä voidaan todeta, että esihenkilöiden roolien yhdistämisen onnistuminen edellyttää organisaatioilta tukea ajanhallinnan, palautekulttuurin ja resurssienhallinnan alueilla. Esihenkilöiden ja asiantuntijoiden roolien selkeä erottelu voi joissain tapauksissa parantaa työhyvinvointia ja tehokkuutta, mutta toisaalta monet esihenkilöt arvostavat myös roolien joustavuutta. Mahdollisuus määritellä työtehtäviensä laajuus omien taitojen ja toimintaympäristön vaatimusten mukaan voi auttaa vastaamaan työn dynaamisiin tarpeisiin sekä edistää työtyytyväisyyttä ja suorituskykyä. Tulokset tarjoavat arvokasta tietoa organisaatioille, jotka haluavat kehittää tukirakenteita asiantuntija-esihenkilöiden roolien selkeyttämiseksi ja tasapainottamiseksi.

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**KEYWORDS:** Supervisory role, Expert role, Role balance, Role conflict, Role ambiguity, Role overload, Time management

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Motivation

People take on different roles in both their personal and professional lives. A person may simultaneously be a supervisor, a parent, a partner, and a friend. While managing multiple roles can be fulfilling, it can also lead to stress when the demands of these roles become overwhelming (Brunning, 2023, p. 298). In the workplace, individuals often choose roles that align with their self-concept, which contributes to their overall well-being (Diedericks & Rothmann, 2013, p. 227). Additionally, an individual's background, including previous experiences with supervisors, workplace culture, and employee expectations, shapes their role within an organization (Ahloth & Havunen, 2015, p. 17).

Katz & Kahn (1978, p. 187) argue that organizations thrive when individuals' attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and expectations align with the motivation and behaviors needed for success. This alignment is especially critical when considering dual roles, where individuals must balance multiple responsibilities, such as being both an expert and supervisor, within knowledge-based organizations. Each social role, such as a worker or a mother, involves behavioral expectations that shape an individual's self-perception as they respond to these role demands (Hall, 2001, p. 71).

However, in today's work environments, the boundaries between roles, departments, and organizations are often unclear, especially in team-based roles where responsibilities are shared among various members (Tubre & Collins, 2000, p. 157). These blurred boundaries can lead to confusion, role ambiguity, and role conflict, making it essential to develop strategies for managing multiple roles effectively. Research has highlighted a growing concern regarding the structuring of managerial roles, with practitioners reporting a low perceived relevance of their roles, indicating gaps in the proper definition of managerial requirements (Laud et al., 2019, p. 233).

In recent decades, the role of first-line managers has expanded to include tasks that once fell under middle management, increasing their workload and responsibilities. This shift has blurred the boundaries between the first-line and middle-management roles (Andersone et al., 2022, p. 3). As a result, expert-level frontline managers are often tasked with managing demanding and extensive workloads within their specialized fields (Viitala & Järilström, 2014, p. 152). People often want to take on multiple responsibilities but face resource limitations (Lušňáková et al., 2021, p. 3). This becomes even more central when balancing multiple roles and responsibilities.

According to Ahlroth & Havunen (2015, p. 14), when transitioning from an expert to a supervisory role, the primary responsibility becomes leading the team to high performance, with the expectation that subordinates understand the role of a top expert is no longer being fulfilled. Given these challenges, this research examines the dual roles of experts and supervisors, along with the responsibilities associated with each role. An expert is an individual with in-depth knowledge gained through training, experience, or research, and their insights are crucial for making informed decisions, particularly when empirical data is lacking (Martin et al., 2012, p. 30). Experts develop over time, advancing from novice to expert as they solve increasingly complex problems (Persky & Robinson, 2017, p.72).

Organizations often promote technical experts to frontline leadership positions based on their technical knowledge and experience (Lang & Thomas, 2013, p. 38). However, many technical experts struggle to balance their dual roles of being both subject-matter experts and a supervisor. In such cases, managerial support is crucial for helping technical experts become effective leaders by guiding them in the creation and implementation of a development plan (Lang & Thomas, 2013, p. 38). It is common for individuals in these roles to feel unprepared, lacking the necessary skills and confidence to navigate the shift from expert to supervisor (Patterson & Whincup, 2018, p. 415).

Leadership responsibilities further complicate this transition. Kotter (1999, p. 54-62) identifies three key responsibilities of leaders: setting direction, aligning people, and motivating and inspiring them. Abib-Pech (2013, p. 23) adds that leaders must also be effective in crises and leave a lasting legacy. In the digital age, managerial work has expanded beyond traditional office boundaries, with managers working more flexibly and outside typical hours due to technological advancements (Hassard & Morris, 2022, p. 1670). This “extensification” of managerial work is influenced by technological, strategic, and political factors.

At the case company, supervisors support team members’ skill development, fostering a positive and high-performing work environment (The supervisor’s role at the case company, [restricted availability]). They lead by example, guiding their team to achieve organizational goals while supporting individual growth. However, role conflicts and unclear boundaries remain common, particularly among expert-level frontline managers whose roles are not always well-defined. A lack of clarity and support between these roles can lead to stress and poor well-being at work. Therefore, it is essential to explore how organizations can reduce role conflicts and ambiguities, ensuring that expert-supervisors can successfully navigate their dual responsibilities. Given these challenges, it is essential to examine how individuals navigate and balance their dual roles in knowledge-based organizations. This study explores these dynamics by recognizing the key factors that support or challenge the balance between supervisory and expert responsibilities.

## **1.2 Research objective, questions, and scope**

This research is done by order of a global technology company. The case organization integrates technical expertise with supervisory responsibilities, making it an interesting context for exploring leadership dynamics in knowledge-intensive environments. It recognizes the importance of developing strategies to support expert supervisors in managing their roles efficiently while maintaining high performance and employee well-being.

Rather than redefining leadership structures, this study focuses on understanding the key challenges and success factors in balancing expert and supervisory roles. The findings aim to provide insights that can help organizations optimize leadership and expertise management within knowledge-intensive fields. The research seeks to answer the following questions:

**R1Q:** “What factors support the balance between supervisory and expert roles?”

**RQ2:** “What factors challenge the balance between supervisory and expert roles?”

The study is based on a case study approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with employees who simultaneously hold both supervisor and expert roles within the commissioning technology company. As the research focuses on a single organization, the findings provide in-depth insights into the experiences of these employees but may not be directly generalizable to other organizations or industries.

Knowledge-based organizations can be classified into professional service firms and R&D-based firms, the latter of which, such as engineering companies, rely heavily on scientific and technical knowledge (Alvesson, 2004, p. 18-19). The case company under consideration falls into this category, relying on technical expertise to drive its operations. This aligns with the broader trend in knowledge-based organizations, where specialized knowledge is central to problem-solving, innovation, and decision-making processes.

While the study provides valuable insights into the experiences of professionals balancing dual roles, it does not examine broader organizational structures or industry-wide trends in detail. Instead, the focus remains on individual experiences and internal organizational dynamics within the case company.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is structured into five chapters. The thesis will start with an introduction chapter, which consists of the background and the motivation of the study, research objectives, questions, scope and structure of the thesis.

The second chapter is the theoretical framework, which introduces role theory as the foundation of this research. It discusses key concepts such as role and personality, followed by an in-depth examination of role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload. These concepts provide a basis for understanding the challenges individuals face when balancing supervisory and expert roles.

The third chapter outlines the research approach and methods used in the study. It describes the use of semi-structured interviews for data collection, presents background information on the case company, explains the process of selecting participants, and describes the techniques employed for data analysis. Additionally, the chapter discusses the credibility and reliability of the study.

The fourth chapter presents the findings of the empirical study. It explores insights into how individuals combine supervisor and expert roles, examines role clarity and challenges, and discusses workload management strategies. Furthermore, the chapter addresses personal factors influencing role performance, as well as the impact of role combinations on work motivation and well-being.

Finally, the fifth chapter is a conclusion, which summarizes the key findings of the study based on the two research questions. Additionally, it discusses the practical implications of the study, acknowledges the limitations, and offers suggestions for future research in the field.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Introduction to Role Theory

Role theory is a theoretical perspective that has been used to analyze the way people behave in different roles and the processes that are associated with role behavior (Biddle, 1986, p. 4). It asserts that the roles people play are determined by the expectations of society and, in turn, affect how they behave in different settings. In organizations, employees' behavior is in line with the growth and meaning of the roles they perform (Matta et al., 2015, p. 1692). At a national level, role theory examines how social behaviour is organized in individuals and groups, that is, the meaning of individual actions is derived from the roles taken, and organizational work responsibilities reflect the dynamics of group performance and social relationships (Turner, 2001, p. 233).

Role theory is based on several basic propositions, which are the basis of the conceptual framework. However, there is not always a full agreement on all the aspects, for instance, the following five key tenets are generally agreed upon by scholars (Biddle, 1986, p. 8):

1. Some behaviors are predictable and characteristic of individuals in certain social settings and thus constitute roles.
2. Roles are usually associated with several people who are similar in some way and therefore occupy distinct social roles.
3. People are usually conscious of their roles and tend to act following the norms attached to the roles.
4. Roles are kept in place because they are useful and because they are part of larger social structures.
5. Roles are acquired through socialization and people may or may not derive pleasure or stress from playing the roles in line with the role expectations.

In the following sections, I will discuss the basic ideas of role theory, such as the concepts of role, personality, and some critical phenomena, including role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload. The theoretical framework will detail the relationships between these concepts, ending with a synthesis of the ideas presented in the section.

## 2.2 Key Concepts of Role Theory

### 2.2.1 Role

Definitions of “role” can differ significantly, resulting in various interpretations. For example, Levy (1952, p. 159) describes a role as “a position defined within a specific social structure”, while Parsons (1951, p. 25) defines it as “the actions and behaviors of an individual in their interactions with others”. More recently, Anglin et al. (2022, p. 1470) define a role as a fundamental set of behavioral expectations linked to a group or category, specifying the behaviors that are considered acceptable and permitted for its members. As shown, all three of these definitions describe a role as involving interaction with others. Biddle (1986, p. 58) highlights the complexity of the role concept, noting that researchers often emphasize different aspects – whether patterns of behavior, expectations, or context-dependent interactions. Despite these differences, each perspective provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of roles. Understanding these different views helps clarify how roles function within society and organizations.

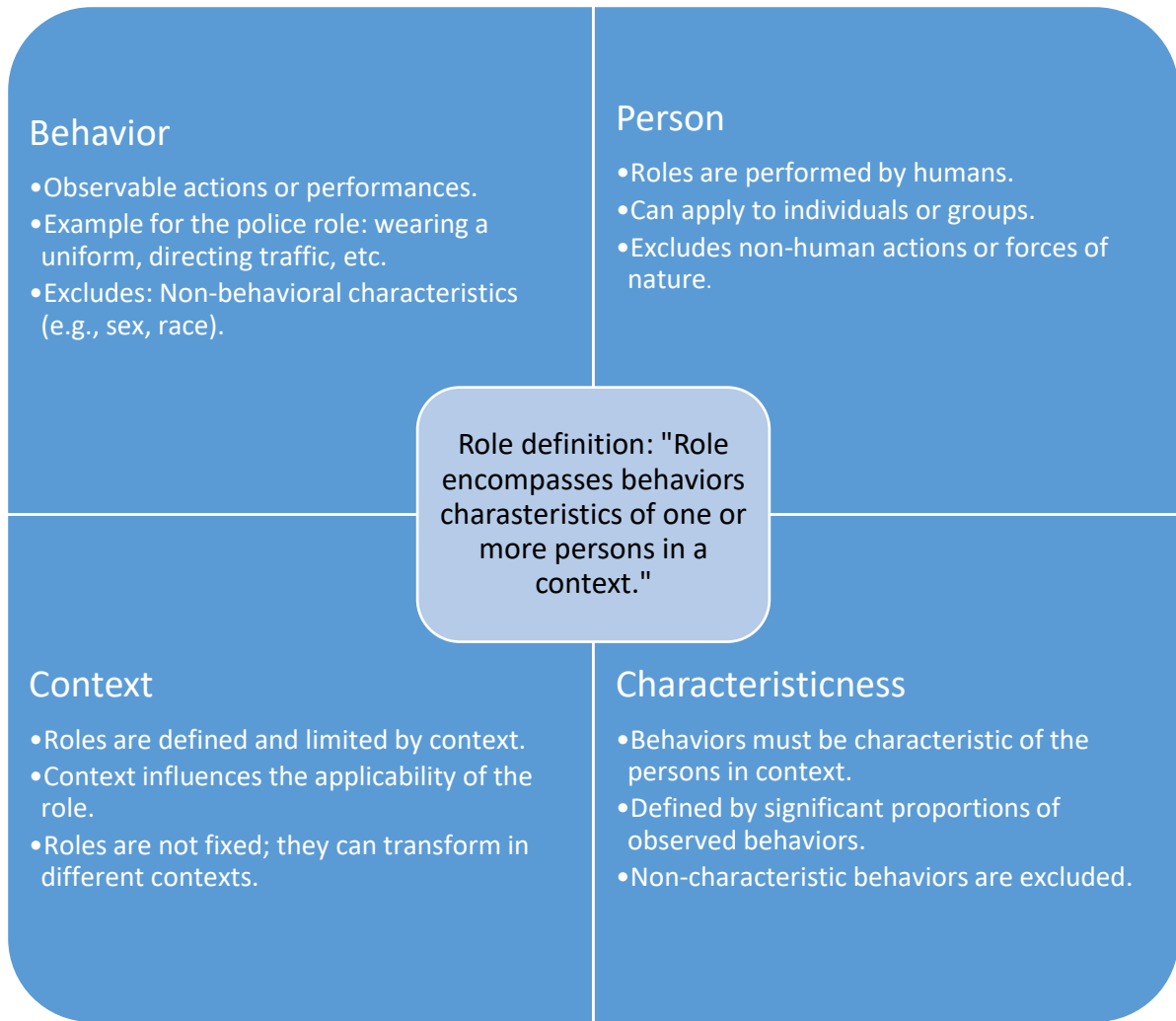
Roles play a crucial part in our daily lives, shaping how we interact with others and how we are perceived. Throughout our lives, we take on various roles, such as parent, employee, and friend. Each role comes with distinct expectations and influences our behavior and relationships (Biddle, 1986, p.7). In knowledge-based organizations, individuals often navigate dual roles, balancing their responsibilities as supervisors while also being recognized for their expertise. This dynamic is important for understanding how these roles influence interactions and effectiveness within the organization. Role expectations are not formed in isolation but within the context of a system of interconnected behaviors and mutual expectations that determine a social system (Floyd & Lane, 2000, p. 157). Work roles are typically defined by organizational duties and the specific requirements of the business (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991, as cited in Laud et al., 2019, p. 223).

Work roles provide organizational stability by defining expected behaviors, and ensuring continuity despite personnel changes (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 189).

Brunning (2023, p. 300) highlights an important distinction between roles and relationships. While roles, like 'manager' or 'doctor', can be assumed by various individuals over time, relationships – such as the connection between a specific manager and their team—are unique to those individuals and contexts. This difference underscores the complexity of roles, which are often fluid and can be adapted across different individuals, while relationships remain tied to specific people and situations.

A social role can be understood as a combination of behaviors, functions, relationships, privileges, duties, and responsibilities defined by societal norms and widely recognized within the community of a specific subgroup (Wolfensberger, 2012, p. 26). This role is typically expected of individuals occupying certain social structure positions.

Brunning (2023, p. 304) compares social roles to games because they shape our agency within social contexts and provide different modes of action. By assuming multiple roles, individuals can expand their autonomy and gain access to diverse agential options, which can enhance their ability to navigate various situations. Just as a seasoned game player has more strategic options, someone with multiple roles (e.g., a mother, a judge, and a musician) can draw upon different agential modes to handle tasks more effectively in each context. The increased variety of roles not only offers external benefits in terms of agency but also enriches performance within each specific role (Brunning, 2023, p. 304).



**Figure 1.** Role definition (Biddle, 1986, pp. 58-59).

Figure 1. presents an idea of a “role” and its types which are behavior, person, context, and characteristicness as suggested by Biddle (1986, pp. 58-60). A role is not just a job or position, it includes specific activities and actions that are typical of people or teams in a particular setting. Knowing these components helps to understand how roles are played in various settings. Because of the complexity of the role concept, as mentioned by Levy, Parsons, and Biddle, it is crucial to consider how these definitions can be applied to knowledge-based organizations.

The concept of behavior is defined as activities that are observable and are considered important in the execution of a role (Biddle, 1986, p. 58). In dual roles, people are expected to exhibit management behaviors, for instance, managing a team or giving feedback, and expert behaviors, for instance, providing technical advice or mentoring. The research shows that managers engage in interpersonal behaviors such as leadership and decisional behaviors such as entrepreneurship to some extent, but they also engage in other functions (Rüzgar & Kurt, 2013, p. 240). This result conforms with the behavioral theory of leadership which posits that leadership is based on actions and practices rather than on traits or qualities (Northouse, 2022, p. 107).

The second type, the person aspect, limits the discussion to the aspects of human behavior that can also be applied to groups (Biddle, 1986, p. 58). This is in concurrence with the proposition that roles are performed by individuals and are human behavior only, not encompassing non-human agents, natural forces, and divine acts. However, roles can be analyzed at different levels of aggregation, from single persons to the entire human population.

The third concept is context, which stresses the fact that any roles are determined and limited by particular environments (Biddle, 1986, p. 68). In the present world, knowledge is power, and competitive gaming has become the order of the day (Tamirat & Amentie, 2023, p.1). This dynamic environment demands that people shift their behaviors to suit the various aspects of the environment. For example, a supervisor may have to take a more aggressive stance during a crisis, while in group activities the same person will assume a more democratic position, integrating his or her knowledge. The importance of context can be discussed in two ways: some roles are linked to the context, while others are bounded by it (Biddle, 1986, p. 58).

Finally, the fourth type, the characteristicness component states that for behaviors to be considered typical of a role, they must reach a certain threshold (Biddle, 1986, p. 59). In practice, this means that people in a dual role must be seen as good supervisors and

experts. Their performance in these roles depends on the extent to which they are able to display behaviors that are consistent with the role expectations of both supervisor and expert and give adequate attention to both roles.

In role theory, the term “actor” refers to an individual, other than their personality or specific roles (Rizzo et al., 1970, p. 164). This concept allows for the study of behavior as a function of both roles and personality, implying that behavior is a function of both roles and personality (Getzels & Guba, 1954, p. 164).

Role expectations are a key factor in defining roles and are reciprocal, which means that the person in the role and the others involved with that person co-create the role expectations (Biddle, 1986, p. 69). These are quite extensive and can apply to almost any aspect of life, for instance, principles or guidelines (Biddle, 1986, p. 153).

According to Wolfensberger (2012, p. 60), all roles are assigned but some of them are also ‘competency-contingent’, that is, they are only available for people who have the necessary skills. The idea of competence can be explained in two ways: the first one is the organizational perspective, which focuses on the performance of the organization and the overall goals of the company, and the second one is the individual perspective, which is based on the characteristics of the person (Škrinjarić, 2022, p. 4). Both approaches are relevant in the dual roles of supervisor and expert. Managers are required to exhibit organizational competencies while experts must prove themselves to have the right individual competencies for the job.

According to Biddle (1986, p. 78), compatible roles facilitate role integration by cooperating to achieve the same function in a better way than when the roles are performed separately. These roles are closely related but dependent on each other and therefore can be combined without any problems. In the case of managing supervisory and expert roles, this means that when leadership and technical expertise are integrated rather than competing for attention, supervisors may be more likely to navigate their dual roles.

### 2.2.2 Personality

Defining personality is a complex task, much like defining a role. McCrae & Costa (2021, p. 6) propose that personality emerges from the interplay of multiple traits, suggesting that it cannot be understood solely through isolated characteristics. This view aligns with the Five-Factor Theory (McCrae & Costa, 2006), which sees personality as a combination of various components, including attitudes, values, roles, relationships, and abilities. To fully understand personality, it is essential to consider not just inherent traits but also contextual and situational factors (McCrae & Costa, 2021, p. 7). The five-factor model includes five core dimensions: neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (Macovei et al., 2023, p. 4). These traits reflect fundamental aspects of human behavior and are key to understanding individual differences in thoughts, emotions, and actions.

Assuming a particular occupational role often requires the development of traits commonly associated with that profession (Oakley & Cocking, 2001, p. 166). Personality is influenced not only by inherent traits but also by social environments and life experiences. The interactionist perspective underscores that personality evolves through external influences, highlighting its fluid nature (Michel, 2004, p. 2). Understanding personality involves recognizing traits that shape patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior (McCrae et al., 2006, p. 25). This framework is particularly useful for understanding how these traits affect performance in various roles.

While personality traits are generally stable, they can evolve, especially during major role transitions, such as moving from an employee to a leadership position (Li et al., 2021, p. 882). These transitions typically come with increased responsibilities and challenges, which can stimulate changes in key personality traits. For example, in both expert and supervisory roles, traits like conscientiousness, openness to experience, and extraversion is vital for success. Conscientiousness supports goal setting and task management

(de Jong et al., 2019, p. 9), which are essential for both expert and supervisory roles. Openness to experience, on the other hand, fosters adaptability and exploration of new ideas, key for success in expert positions (de Jong et al., 2019, p. 10). Additionally, extraversion enhances interpersonal leadership and communication, which are crucial for supervisory roles, while agreeableness promotes positive team relationships, essential for effective management (de Jong et al., 2019, p. 10).

Moreover, these same traits — openness to experience and conscientiousness — are strongly linked to career adaptability and role management. Zacher (2016, p. 107) found that individuals high in openness are more adaptable to changes and new roles. Conscientiousness enhances role management, enabling individuals to meet professional expectations, especially in dynamic work environments (Zacher, 2016, p. 107). Furthermore, research indicates that as individuals take on leadership roles, the increasing job demands they face often foster growth in traits such as conscientiousness (Li et al., 2021, p. 882).

While personality is often understood as a complex interplay of traits and situational factors (McCrae & Costa, 2021, p. 6), societal perceptions sometimes oversimplify or misinterpret personality based on physical characteristics. Biddle (1986, p. 99) notes that people are often categorized by visible traits such as age or race, leading to stereotypes, like assuming that "blondes have more fun" or "redheads are hot-tempered." These oversimplifications highlight the need for more comprehensive psychological theories, such as the Five-Factor Model, which provide a deeper and more accurate understanding of personality beyond superficial traits.

In work-family dynamics, personality traits like internal locus of control and neuroticism significantly impact how individuals manage competing roles (Michel et al., 2011, p. 659). Those with an internal locus of control—believing they can influence outcomes—tend to handle role conflicts better, feeling more empowered to manage stressors across both

domains. In contrast, individuals high in neuroticism, characterized by emotional instability, may struggle more with balancing work and family roles, as their anxiety and negative emotions intensify role conflict (Michel et al., 2011, p. 659).

## 2.3 Role Stressors

According to Eatough et al. (2011, p. 620), role stressors can be categorized into three distinct forms: role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload. The first chapter focuses on role conflict, the second on role ambiguity, and the third on role overload.

### 2.3.1 Role Conflict

Role conflict occurs when an individual encounters opposing demands or expectations within their work environment (Kahn et al., 1964, as cited in Kalra et al., 2023, p. 437).

Biddle (1986, p. 198) identifies two main types of role conflict:

1. **Intra-role conflict** arises from conflicting expectations within a single role.
2. **Inter-role conflict** occurs when demands from multiple roles — such as work and family, clash.

The blurring boundaries between work and family life, intensified by the shift to remote work, have increased inter-role conflict (Aftab et al., 2022, p. 4). Middle managers, for instance, often face this conflict as they balance organizational tasks, manage hierarchical pressures, and juggle multiple responsibilities (Harding et al., 2014, as cited in Azambuja & Islam, 2018, p. 535). Conflicting obligations can arise when professionals are required to fulfill opposing demands from multiple roles. For example, Hooker (2007, p. 106) describes a scenario where a CEO, who is also an engineer, faces a dilemma. Engineering standards require costly reinforcements for product safety, but as a manager, the CEO's corporate duty to stakeholders pressures her to omit the reinforcements to

maintain financial viability. This highlights how inter-role conflicts are often unavoidable and require careful navigation to balance competing professional obligations.

Tubre & Collins (2000, p. 157) argue that communication issues, such as inconsistent or missing information, can lead to contradictory expectations, thereby increasing role conflict. As employees navigate these conflicting demands, the complexity involved affects not only how they experience their work but also how they perceive themselves (Beech, 2011, as cited in Azambuja & Islam, 2018, p. 535).

When individuals effectively adopt and shape their roles, they experience positive emotions, whereas uncertainty about the roles of others or failure to define roles can trigger negative emotions (Turner, 2001, p. 369). Role conflict is often linked to lower morale, decreased productivity, and other negative consequences (Biddle, 1986, p. 323), highlighting the significant impact it can have not only on task management but also on an individual's overall well-being and job satisfaction.

Roles often evolve and are frequently redefined over time, sometimes due to top-down management decisions aimed at adjusting to changing circumstances (Kahn et al., 1964, as cited in Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017, p. 1345). However, when the boundaries of these roles are unclear, employees face the challenge of navigating and defining their responsibilities. This lack of clarity can lead to role conflict as employees try to balance shifting expectations and responsibilities within their work environment (Kahn et al., 1964, as cited in Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017, p. 1345). As the work role of an individual becomes more adaptable, with less rigid boundaries, it allows greater flexibility in managing and combining roles (Turner, 2001, p. 247-248). However, this increased freedom may lead to more frequent psychological transitions and potentially even physical ones.

Moderate role conflict can benefit employees by encouraging them to stretch their roles across different boundaries, allowing them to access diverse perspectives and information, while still conserving enough energy to manage these demands (Montani et al.,

2020, p. 623). This type of role conflict can foster creativity and adaptive problem-solving, ultimately leading to a more dynamic and productive work environment. However, environmental shifts, such as managers being asked to juggle multiple strategic responsibilities or deal with diminished trust among colleagues, can also lead to role conflict (Floyd & Lane, 2000, p. 171). To mitigate these challenges, organizations need to understand how external changes impact managerial behavior and implement controls that ensure role clarity, thereby fostering collaboration and supporting the necessary processes for strategic renewal.

Role conflict is not only an individual problem but also a system level one (Parsons, 1951, p. 281). When the role expectations from different sources of role set i.e., work and family are in conflict and these are institutionalized, then it only serves to intensify the role ambiguity and frustration. This is because the pressures that are usually put in place to avoid such deviant behavior are more likely to be justified as they are societal pressures. Thus, role conflict can be the cause of social change, challenging the existing motivations and behaviors (Parsons, 1951, p. 281).

Effectively managing role conflict requires support from both professional and personal networks. According to Michel et al. (2011, p. 659), supervisor, coworker, and family support serves as key protective factors that minimize the adverse impacts of role conflict arising from role demands. These support networks according to role theory help people manage the work-family role strain because they assist people in navigating the role demands between work and family.

Besides other forms of support (organizational or social), clear communication within the organization is also important to avoid role conflict. It is a fact that ambiguity or lack of clarity in information can result to role confusion and stress as pointed out by Tubre and Collins (2000, p. 157). It is important to set clear role expectations for job positions to ensure that stability within the organization is maintained especially when personnel

and structural changes are made within the organization (Katz & Kahn, 1978, as cited in Tubre & Collins, 2000, p. 157).

Negative work stress factors which include high job demands together with low job control and limited job support create this dynamic while shaping employee perceptions and impairing proactive behavior (Wong & Lin, 2007, p. 733). Additional factors, such as traffic jams and face-to-face meetings, can only add to role conflict as they are time and energy-consuming (Conzon & Huising, 2024, p. 2136-2137). This, in turn, affects the ability to undertake supervisory and expert roles efficiently. Remote work is a possibility that employees can use to address this challenge and manage their duties while reducing stress and improving the performance of their roles. Nevertheless, this change raises a problem between management roles that entail physical presence in the office and the position that entails a lot of concentration and a quiet environment.

### **2.3.2 Role Ambiguity**

Role ambiguity refers to uncertainty regarding the specific duties, objectives, and responsibilities required to effectively carry out one's role (Urien et al., 2017, p. 139). This lack of clarity is particularly evident during periods of technological advancements, changes in social dynamics, and evolving job responsibilities, which further complicate the understanding of expected roles (Urien et al., 2017, p. 139). This connection highlights how the evolving landscape of work can contribute to role ambiguity. As workplaces become more complex and decision-making demands increase, role ambiguity may even surpass role conflict in its prevalence (Tubre & Collins, 2000, p. 159).

Role theory suggests that role ambiguity, characterized by insufficient information about an organizational position, often leads individuals to adopt coping behaviors (Kahn et al., 1964, as cited in Rizzo et al., 1970, p. 151). These behaviors can manifest as stress responses or defense mechanisms, such as distorting reality to manage uncertainty. As a result, increased ambiguity is associated with greater dissatisfaction, anxiety, and reduced effectiveness in one's role (Kahn et al., 1964, as cited in Rizzo et al., 1970, p. 151).

This suggests that role ambiguity can significantly impact performance and overall job satisfaction in knowledge-based organizations, where individuals balance supervisory and expert responsibilities.

The adverse impacts of role ambiguity are further supported by Saha et al. (2019, p. 137), who found that discrepancies between employees' perceptions of their roles and the formal job descriptions provided by organizations contribute to significant well-being issues. These include elevated heart rates, disturbed sleep, heightened stress, and a general decline in health. Furthermore, role ambiguity has been linked to lower job performance, with employees exhibiting decreased organizational citizenship behaviors and reduced task performance. This highlights the significant impact of unclear role expectations, reinforcing the need for role clarity to ensure both employee well-being and organizational effectiveness (Saha et al., 2019, p. 137). Moreover, role ambiguity is not only a product of unclear roles but can also emerge during periods of organizational transition, as Goksoy (2012, p. 114) notes. This uncertainty, combined with employees perceiving change as a threat, frequently leads to resistance to change and skepticism about its benefits.

Organizations should strive to establish precise role definitions and recognize employee performance as a means to manage role ambiguity, even though absolute role clarity remains unattainable. Martínez-Díaz et al. (2020, p. 1) demonstrate that performance recognition mitigates the negative effects of role ambiguity by shifting its impact on employee engagement from negative to positive, thereby reducing its harmful influence on extra-role behaviors. While the modern workplace is characterized by overlapping responsibilities and evolving roles, organizations should still enhance role clarity whenever possible to strengthen employee engagement and support staff in managing their dual responsibilities more effectively. Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2011, p. 1456) emphasize that role clarity plays a crucial role in reducing employees' uncertainty about their responsibilities. Additionally, work overload and role clarity are significantly linked to psychological strain, with work overload increasing strain and role clarity alleviating it (Bliese

& Castro, 2000, p. 68). These findings suggest that, although complete role clarity may be unrealistic, improving role expectations remains essential for reducing the psychological strain caused by excessive workloads.

Furthermore, role clarity, according to Kundu et al. (2019, p. 467), has a direct relationship with innovative work behavior (IWB), yet attaining full role clarity in dynamic environments remains a challenge. Employees who have a clearer understanding of their roles are generally more likely to engage in innovative actions; however, fluctuating responsibilities and evolving job expectations can limit the extent to which role clarity can be established. Certain professions are often characterized by well-defined goals that are widely acknowledged and easier to navigate than roles with more fluid and ambiguous responsibilities (Oakley & Cocking, 2001, p. 3). While absolute role clarity may not always be achievable, organizations can still foster a work environment that reduces ambiguity by recognizing employee performance and improving role expectations, thereby supporting job satisfaction and performance.

In conclusion, role ambiguity is a significant challenge in modern workplaces, especially as roles become more complex and organizational change more frequent. By understanding the impact of role ambiguity on job satisfaction, well-being, and performance, organizations can take proactive steps to define roles clearly, manage workloads, and recognize employee contributions. Role clarity not only supports employee engagement but also enhances overall organizational effectiveness, making it a vital concept for managing roles in the workplace.

### **2.3.3 Role Overload**

Role overload has been identified by the American Psychological Association (2015) as a leading workplace stressor (Eissa & Lester, 2017, p. 310). It was originally described by Kahn et al. (1982, p. 324) as a type of role stress that occurs when the expectations of one or more roles surpass the time and energy needed to meet them adequately. Duxbury et al. (2018, p. 250) further note that factors such as the organizational environment,

personal characteristics, and relationships with others can also influence the experience of role overload. Among employees, role overload typically arises from two main factors: the inability to effectively meet job demands and the pressure of tight deadlines coupled with limited availability (Jiandog et al., 2022, p. 3). Organizations facing resource shortages and the threat of budget cuts often experience role overload, leading to higher burnout (Yip et al., 2008, p. 872). Since role overload is a stressor and burnout a related response, coping strategies may help mitigate burnout by weakening the link between role overload and stress reactions.

Leaders, managers, and others in positions of power often deal with many responsibilities and limited resources (Schmid et al., 2015, p. 2097). Yip et al. (2008, p. 879) established that rational problem-solving, which is based on analytical and problem-focused approaches to coping with stress, can buffer the effects of role overload on burnout. The study also showed that those professionals who employed rational problem-solving experienced a significantly weaker link between role overload and burnout than those who did not employ it effectively.

According to Rafique (2022, p. 494), supervisory roles in project-based work are particularly demanding, because they often require handling multiple tasks simultaneously. The study also highlights that time consciousness is crucial in moderating the effects of role overload. Supervisors who manage their time effectively are better equipped to balance their supervisory and expert responsibilities, reducing the risk of emotional exhaustion (Rafique, 2022, p. 494). According to Aeon et al. (2021, p. 14), time management is linked to reduced role overload, and participation in time management training programs has positively improved these skills. Expanding on this, role overload and work frustration seem to represent significant experiences for many supervisors in modern organizations, yet the specific effects of these factors on supervisors remain largely unexplored (Eissa & Lester, 2017, p. 310).

Knowledge work is often characterized by a significant amount of flexibility and permeability, which leads to role blurring and, increasingly, a condition referred to as "boundarylessness" (Albertsen et al., 2010, p. 161). Boundarylessness does not imply a total absence of boundaries between domains but refers to the weakening or near absence of clear distinctions between them (Ezzedeen & Zikic, 2017, p. 1547). Supervisors, particularly in knowledge-based and project-driven environments, frequently encounter this challenge as they manage both supervisory and expert responsibilities.

Boundary work involves individuals' efforts to create distinctions between their roles and the contexts in which they function, as well as the transitions they navigate when moving between roles (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 13). This process involves various strategies – physical, time-based, cognitive, and behavioral – that individuals employ to effectively manage their roles' demands (Kreiner et al., 2009, p. 704). Brunning (2023, p. 305) emphasizes that effectively managing this boundary work is essential for supervisors balancing multiple roles, particularly when these roles overlap and lead to role overload.

Brunning (2023, p. 305) identifies two primary styles of boundary work: integrating and compartmentalizing:

- **Integrators** manage the overlap between different roles and mindsets but struggle to create clear boundaries.
- **Compartmentalizers** establish more distinct boundaries between their roles and contexts, which can make transitioning between them more challenging, but helps preserve clear distinctions and reduce role conflict.

While integrators may find it easier to adapt to shifting demands, they risk losing clarity in their emotional responses and ethical engagement (Brunning, 2023, pp. 314–315). Without clear distinctions, they might find it harder to connect with the unique values of each role. According to MacIntyre (1999, p. 322) modern society is compartmentalized. However, this compartmentalization can lead to role overload, as individuals fail to recognize the connections of conflicts between their different roles. While the demands

of each role may seem separate, their cumulative burden can cause stress and difficulties in managing them, especially if the roles conflict with each other.

Tang and Vandenberghe (2021, p. 2) suggest that the quality of leader-member exchanges (LMX) plays a moderating role in the connection between role overload and psychological strain, which in turn influences work performance. According to LMX theory, leaders develop different relationships with each subordinate, leading to varying levels of trust, respect, and obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 223). This suggests that fostering strong LMX could mitigate the negative effects of role overload on employees' psychological well-being, thereby enhancing engagement and overall performance. Furthermore, Tang and Vandenberghe (2021, p. 11) highlight that positive supervisor-subordinate relationships can counteract the negative effect of role overload. Managers play a crucial role in fostering these relationships, which can improve work performance and contribute to organizational success.

While holding multiple roles can create challenges, it can also offer significant benefits. Brunning (2023, p. 300) highlights that managing multiple roles can provide individuals with greater access to resources and increased satisfaction, particularly when complexity is fulfilling. In addition to financial benefits and expanded social networks, adopting new roles fosters personal growth and professional opportunities (Brunning, 2023, p. 301). Furthermore, human energy does not appear to have strict limits, and people often take on additional roles that genuinely interest them (Biddle, 1986, p. 324). Conversely, when role expectations fail to meet an individual's perception of their capacity, role underload can occur (Mullins, 2007, p. 319). In such cases, individuals may feel their role lacks challenge or complexity, leading to boredom and disengagement. Those experiencing role underload often seek greater variety or additional responsibilities to maintain motivation and job satisfaction (Biddle, 1986, p. 324). While the benefits of holding multiple roles can be substantial, they may feel abstract or difficult to realize without a clear strategy for effectively managing them (Brunning, 2023, p. 305).

## 2.4 Integrating Key Concepts and Conclusion

It is important to understand the processes of role conflict, ambiguity, and balance to effectively navigate different positions. According to Maden-Eyiusta (2021, p. 2850-2851), role conflict may have a negative impact on people's willingness to take responsibility for certain functions, while role ambiguity may hinder creativity. This issue is also raised by Marks and MacDermid (1996, p. 421) who stress that role balance is crucial for the effective navigation of multiple roles. When roles are not well defined or are overwhelming, both the levels of employee engagement and organizational effectiveness are detrimental. According to Maden-Eyiusta (2021, p. 2850), these issues should be solved by specifying the role requirements through job design and training. This approach is in sync with the findings of Sluss et al. (2011) as cited in Ebbers and Wijnberg (2017, p. 1343) who have found that role definition leads people to modify their behaviors so that they are suitable for the role and the organization.

According to Khawaldeh (2023, p. 64183), role conflict and ambiguity make leadership complex because leaders have to work in an environment of role uncertainty and role ambiguity. In this context, personality is one of the most important factors that affects how people experience and deal with role conflict. Getzels and Guba (1954, pp. 165-166) suggest that individuals with more flexible personalities - those who are adaptable, open to change, and able to adjust their behaviors based on situational demands - are more likely to navigate role conflict effectively. In contrast, those with rigid personalities - who prefer stability, adhere strictly to rules, and struggle with ambiguity - may experience heightened stress and difficulty reconciling conflicting role expectations (Getzels & Guba, 1954, pp. 165-166). This view indicates that while Maden-Eyiusta's strategies are good, their success may depend on the personality of the individuals and hence should be taken into account when designing organizational interventions.

Furthermore, Sluss et al. (2011) bring forward the concept of role crafting, which is the process of employees trying to set the boundaries of their roles so that they can become more meaningful. Role conflict is not completely eliminated in the process, but role crafting helps employees deal with role demands more effectively by assuming control over their responsibilities. This approach is in line with the role balance model proposed by Marks and MacDermid (1996, p. 421), where people can allocate themselves to different life roles and actively engage in the management of their work and personal roles. In the negative role balance condition, the individuals may pull back, which leads to reduced engagement and poor performance in the role.

Efficient time managers may be able to use their time better than the rest, which may affect the negative relationship between non-task behaviors and work performance that is often witnessed in role overload (Bachrach et al., 2024, p. 11). Also, efficient time management is linked with lower role conflict, which assists people in the management of competing demands (Sarhaddi et al., 2019, p. 46). This increased capacity to allocate resources, and time enables people to perform their personal and work roles efficiently.

Thus, it is possible to summarize the above concepts that can help to understand how role theory can be applied in practice. The understanding of the role of personality in the management of these challenges, the possibility for people to design their roles and the solutions for role conflict and ambiguity provide a way of a better management of roles. This approach is especially relevant for knowledge-based organizations where people play the dual role of supervisors and experts. Consequently, role theory can be used as a good basis for understanding how people steer and equilibrate between different roles. Based on these key concepts, organizations can tell and help their employees when they need to manage their responsibilities for the employees to develop and for the organization to succeed.

### **3 Methodology**

This chapter covers the methodology process, and the key considerations involved. It explains the careful selection of research methods used to ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

#### **3.1 Research Method**

Research methods provide tools for data collection and analysis. These methods can be categorized into quantitative and qualitative methods or a combination of both (mixed methods). Quantitative research focuses on measurable variables, using statistical methods to generalize findings (Lincoln, 2021, pp. 4-5). In contrast, qualitative research values the richness of human experience, emphasizing detailed descriptions and themes derived from participants' narratives. As Barnham (2015, p. 837) notes, quantitative research addresses "what" questions — such as numerical data or percentages related to preferences or behaviors — while qualitative research explores "why" questions, uncovering deeper motivations and insights behind actions or choices.

Research philosophy is a significant aspect of the research process. It defines assumptions about knowledge and the nature of reality, guiding research strategy, methods, and practical decisions (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 101). Additionally, it encompasses core assumptions about how the world is perceived. In this study, an interpretive philosophy was adopted to align with the qualitative nature of the research. Interpretivism emphasizes understanding the subjective experiences and meanings individuals assign to their roles, concentrating on the complexities of the social world rather than seeking universal laws or generalizations (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 106-107). According to Saunders (2007 et al., p. 107), an interpretive perspective is particularly relevant in business and management research, especially in fields like organizational behavior, marketing, and human resource management. In interpretivism, researchers' prior experiences can influence

their interpretations, shaping the themes they focus on and their conclusions about participants or contexts (Creswell, 2023, p. 184). Therefore, reflecting on these experiences and maintaining transparency about their potential impact on the study is essential. This study follows an inductive research approach, meaning that theories and insights emerge from the collected data rather than being tested against predefined hypotheses (Saunders, 2007, p. 57).

To guide this study, the interview questions were constructed based on the theoretical framework of role theory, which was discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis. Role theory served as a foundation for identifying the key aspects of the supervisor role and its intersection with other responsibilities. The interview questions were designed to explore these areas, seeking participants' subjective experiences and perceptions of their roles. Using role theory as a guiding framework, the questions aimed to uncover themes related to role expectations, role conflicts, and role identity, ensuring a coherent and theory-driven approach to the data collection process.

## **3.2 Data Collection and Samples**

As previously mentioned, a qualitative research method was chosen for this study. Data can be collected from primary and secondary sources. This study relied on primary data, specifically collected through semi-structured interviews, to explore supervisors' experiences in balancing supervisory and expert roles. More details about the interview process and the participants are provided in the following sections.

### **3.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

There are several types of interviews, but they can be divided into four types based on the level of formality and structure: structured, semi-structured, unstructured, and in-depth interviews (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 311-312). Structured interviews are based on set questions and answer choices, while semi-structured interviews are more flexible;

participants can provide their responses in their own words. This approach lies between the focus on specific areas of interest and the discovery of new insights, which makes it suitable for qualitative research (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, Chapter 6). Semi-structured interviews are especially appropriate when the researcher has some idea of what is going to be talked about and can identify the main topics but cannot predict all the ways in which these topics will be expressed (Gubrium et al., 2012, p. 197). In this study, primarily open-ended questions were used to allow the participants to express themselves freely about how they have experienced and viewed the phenomenon.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. These interviews contained both the discipline of a set of questions and the ability to follow up on topics and participants' views. Individual interviews were applied for the purpose of the study because during individual interviews participants can express themselves more fully, give more detailed answers and provide individual views without the pressure of a group interview. This approach is in line with the research goals which include seeing into the specifics of people's experiences and views. As explained in the method section, the interview questions were derived from the role theory framework (see Chapter 2). Concepts such as roles, personality, role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload were used to develop the thematic areas to be explored in the interviews. This made sure that the data collection process was systematic and in line with the theoretical framework of the research, and for in-depth examination of the integration of supervisory and expert roles.

As the participants were located in different parts of Finland, the interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams to make it easy for everyone to join no matter where they were. All the participants were aware of Microsoft Teams because they used it at work. As noted by Hokka et al. (2022, p. 114-115), the interviewees mentioned that the online communication was direct, and the experience was more favorable when they were comfortable with the video tool. The interviews were conducted in Finnish from December 2024 to February 2025, as all the participants are native speakers of Finnish. A signi-

ficant risk would have been involved had the interviews been conducted in English because of possible problems in understanding the language, key terms, and the ability to convey the messages correctly. The length of the interviews was 18-52 minutes, with the average length of the interviews being 29 minutes. The first thing that was done in every interview was to explain the purpose of the study, the recording process, and the confidentiality of the study.

The interviews were recorded on both a phone and a laptop at the same time to guarantee the data and its quality. The Microsoft Teams application offered a way of transcribing the conversations held in the group. This was useful as a first attempt at the transcripts, but it was incomplete and quite inaccurate. Each transcript was edited immediately after each interview to guarantee accuracy by correcting errors and filling missing parts. It is better to transcribe the interview right after the interview especially when the researcher is both the interviewer and the transcriber (Hirsjärvi & Humre, 2022, chapter 8.1).

Patton (2015) highlights the broader value of interviewing skills:

*Thinking strategically, enhancing your powers of observation, becoming an ever more astute interviewer – these are not just research methods but life skills and competencies for more deeply experiencing and understanding the world and for engaging effectively in it. (p. 45)*

Patton (2015, p. 45) states that interviews are not only the tools of data collection but also the chance to gain some interpersonal skills which would improve the quality of the interaction and understanding in the process of research. Surveys are a more passive method of data collection as they involve less contact with the respondents and are less able to probe further in specific areas (McLeod, 2024). It should be noted that interviews are a type of research where interaction is present and the participants are always affecting each other during the process (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, chapter 6). This interaction adds richness to the data because it presents the complex, reciprocal influences of the dialogue.

Although semi-structured interviews are versatile and can generate a wealth of information, they are not without their limitations. Participants' responses are their views and not factual accounts, and the interview process may affect the answers (Creswell, 2023, p. 184). Furthermore, the presence of the researcher can bring bias into the study, and variation in expression can lead to varying response rates and quality. These factors cannot be overlooked when analyzing the results.

### **3.2.2 Case Organization**

The case organization in this study is a technology company that develops energy-efficient power generation and conversion solutions. It mainly operates in the renewable energy and marine industries, offering sophisticated electrical drivetrain systems for different uses.

The company is operating on a global scale with offices and factories in various parts of the world and has approximately 250 employees, making it a medium-sized company. It has a multicultural workforce of people, from white-collar to blue-collar workers, from engineers and technical specialists to management, all working towards offering sustainable energy solutions.

This organization was chosen as the case study due to its structure, where supervisors hold dual roles that combine technical expertise with supervisory responsibilities. These role combinations offer a suitable context for exploring the key themes of this thesis. As an employee of the organization, the understanding of the role dynamics within the company has given insight into the research context while ensuring the research is carried out with the right level of detachment and detail.

### **3.2.3 Participants**

This section overviews the individuals who participated in the study's semi-structured interviews. Their identities have been anonymized to ensure privacy and comply with

ethical guidelines. Only relevant details about the participants are provided to offer context and ensure the transparency of the research process.

The interview participants were selected based on their dual organizational roles, which involve balancing supervisory and expert responsibilities. Their experiences and perspectives provide valuable insights into the challenges and strategies associated with balancing these dual responsibilities. However, the experience of navigating these dual roles varies among participants, reflecting differences in individual approaches, organizational context, and role-specific demands.

Supervisors were informed about the upcoming research in November 2024 through a Teams channel, which included an overview of the study's objectives, its relevance to their work, and details about how the research would be conducted. According to Kuula-Luumi (2006, p. 102), effective research communication includes information on the researcher, research objectives, voluntary participation, data collection methods, data utilization, and a confidentiality note. The interview invitations, along with the interview questions as an attachment (Appendix 1), were sent at the beginning of December 2024 to 25 supervisors working in Finland, excluding management group members. This exclusion was due to differences in their employment contracts, as management group members do not have the same agreements as other employees, such as defined working hours. After receiving the invitation, supervisors could accept or decline it, depending on their willingness to participate. All 25 supervisors accepted the invitation to participate in the interviews.

Three different background information of the respondents have been gathered: (1.) the number of years each participant has spent in their current role, (2.) amount of people they supervise, (3.) whether they oversee white-collar employees, blue-collar employees, or a mix of both. The first two questions were asked at the beginning of the interviews, while the third piece of information was obtained from the company's organizational chart.

**Table 1.** Supervisory experience (years) in the company.

<b>Experience level</b>	<b>Respondents (n)</b>
Beginners (0-3 years)	11
Intermediate (3-10 years)	10
Experienced (> 10 years)	4

**Table 2.** Team size.

<b>Team size (Number of subordinates)</b>	<b>Respondents (n)</b>
0-4 subordinates	7
5-9 subordinates	16
Over 9 subordinates	2

**Table 3.** Type of employees supervised.

<b>Type of employees supervised</b>	<b>Respondents (n)</b>
White-collar employees	19
Blue-collar employees	3
Both (mixed)	3

Although background information regarding years of experience and team size were gathered, these factors were not found to influence the research findings significantly and therefore not considered in the findings chapters. However, it was observed that differences did exist between the experiences and perceptions of white-collar and blue-collar supervisors. These distinctions were particularly noted in areas such as the level of autonomy within teams and the hands-on nature of leadership. These differences will be discussed further in the findings section. In the findings section, references to individual supervisors will be anonymized, using identifiers such as 'Supervisor 1', 'Supervisor 2', etc., to protect the participants' confidentiality.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Each interview was recorded with the permission of the participant. Since the interviews were conducted and transcribed in Finnish, the initial coding and thematic analysis were also performed in Finnish to ensure a deeper and more accurate understanding of the nuances and context of the data.

Immediately after each interview, the recording was transcribed to capture details while the conversation was still in fresh memory. The transcribed data was then systematically organized in an Excel spreadsheet, where responses were categorized based on the interview questions. This structured approach allowed for efficient comparison of participants' answers and facilitated the identification of recurring themes and patterns. The process involved open coding, where key phrases and ideas were manually highlighted and grouped into initial themes.

After the analysis was completed, the findings were translated into English for the thesis. To maintain the integrity of the data, particular attention was paid to preserving the original meanings and nuances during the translation process. All identifying information was removed from the transcripts to protect participant confidentiality during the analysis process.

### **3.4 Credibility of the Study**

The credibility of the study can be evaluated through its reliability, validity, and ethical considerations (Puusa and Juuti, 2020, chapter 5). Reliability refers to obtaining a consistent result when the same individual is studied on two different occasions or when two evaluators reach the same conclusion (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 2022, chapter 8.2.1). Although this study did not involve repeating interviews or using multiple evaluators,

efforts were made to promote reliability by maintaining consistency in the interview process and thoroughly analyzing the data. This approach aimed to minimize bias and enhance the credibility of the findings.

Validity concerns whether the findings accurately reflect what they are intended to measure or represent (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 150). To support validity, the research approach, data collection, and analysis were carefully planned to ensure that the participants' experiences were represented as faithfully as possible. Furthermore, the interview questions were sent in advance, giving participants time to reflect on their answers. These questions were also carefully worded to ensure clarity and consistency in understanding among all participants.

Ethics means that the researcher follows ethical principles throughout the entire research process (Puusa and Juuti, 2020, chapter 8). The methods and analysis used in the study should meet the standards of any well-conducted research and aim to bring positive outcomes for the people involved. Since the study is conducted for a specific organization, the goal is to provide valuable insights that can be utilized by the organization to improve practices, ensuring that the research benefits both the participants and the organization.

Despite extensive debate, scholars have not agreed on universal criteria for trustworthy qualitative research (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2002, p. 2). This ongoing debate underscores the complexity of assessing qualitative studies and the importance of context-specific criteria.

## 4 Findings

This chapter examines the empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews and further explores the supervisors' thoughts and perspectives that emerged during the interviews. The findings are organized according to the themes of the interview framework.

### 4.1 Combining Supervisory and Expert Roles

#### 4.1.1 Supervisor Role

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to define what they think the tasks and responsibilities of a supervisor are. Although the supervisor role was seen as multifaceted, participants always pointed out the primary purpose: facilitating and enabling the team's work. It also entailed establishing the appropriate environment and offering the relevant resources so the team could work to the best of its ability.

In this case, blue-collar supervisors tended to stress practical management and the routine monitoring of business activities, whereas white-collar supervisors depicted their teams as more independent and self-directed. Furthermore, participants also stressed the significance of recognizing each team member's potential and establishing personal objectives as part of the supervisor's responsibilities. Hence, it is possible to state that supervisors generally understand the role of enabling and facilitating the work of the team in some way. At the same time, there is a consensus that this provides for a variety of different aspects of the team's work.

*"In my opinion, nowadays it's essential to consider the team's characteristics and the people within the group being led when thinking about leadership." – (Supervisor 3)*

*"It depends quite a lot on the team members, as everyone expects slightly different things. Some may need more support with technical issues, others may need help*

*with career development, and some may seek guidance with prioritization. For some, simply showing interest in their work may be enough.” – (Supervisor 19)*

While supervisors were considered to have necessary responsibilities like legal tasks, approving hours, and reviewing sick leaves, the role was also seen as supportive and approachable, where employees could go to with their problems. Many supervisors also explained that they serve as the mentors of the team members in their professional development, providing them advice on how to navigate their careers and how to perform their duties. In that sense, supervisors usually regarded themselves as coaches, inspiring people and helping them learn new skills.

#### **4.1.2 Experiences of Combining Roles**

The experiences of combining supervisory and expert roles varied among respondents, with factors such as team autonomy, workload balance, and personal preferences influencing how smoothly the roles were combined. The responses revealed a mix of positive aspects, challenges, and neutral or mixed observations.

The majority of participants felt that the combination of the two roles was smooth and natural. Many supervisors found the two roles complementary, with prior experience in the expert role enhancing their credibility and leadership. This made it easier for them to support and guide their teams. Those supervisors who worked with white-collar employees especially mentioned that their teams were quite autonomous, which lightened the supervisory burden and made it easier to combine roles.

However, this was not always the case for some participants who struggled with the challenge of balancing these roles, particularly when the expert role demanded a lot of time. As a result, some supervisors spent most of their time on expert duties, which left them with little time for supervision. This imbalance could sometimes cause stress and low self-efficacy as they felt they were not performing their leadership roles to the best of their abilities.

*“Both roles are enjoyable for me, but time management is always quite challenging. The tasks in an expert role that I’ve been doing alongside my supervisory work are quite time-consuming and require long periods of focused attention. When you’re also working as a supervisor, there are a lot of interruptions. I would say that even half an hour of uninterrupted work in a supervisory role is already quite a lot.” (Supervisor 16)*

Supervisors' ease of combining their roles also depended on their familiarity with their team's tasks. Those who were very well aware of the work of their subordinates were in a better position to switch between the two roles and offer more appropriate guidance and support. On the other hand, supervisors who were not very familiar with their team's tasks struggled to manage the requirements of both roles.

*“If you put a football coach in an ice hockey coaching position, it is unlikely to work well. You still need to understand the context in which you operate, so it will probably fit naturally that way.” (Supervisor 11)*

*“For me, it’s quite smooth because I’ve practically done all the tasks that my subordinates and their subordinates do. I know and understand the full range of tasks that my team members have, so it’s been clear for me to see the bigger picture and the kinds of areas to develop. Based on that, I’ve been able to build and develop my organization quite easily.” (Supervisor 6)*

#### **4.1.3 The Impact of Team Size on Combining Roles**

In this regard, the participants were asked whether team size affects the integration of supervisory and expert roles. The responses to the interviews revealed that team size is an important factor that influences the way these roles are addressed. Most of the respondents said that a big team needs more time for supervisory activities, which can decrease the time for expert activities. Nevertheless, many supervisors also noted that other factors also have a significant impact on the ability to perform these roles effectively, such as the role complexity in the team and the level of team members' autonomy.

A common theme in the responses was that as the number of subordinates grows, the time spent on supervisory responsibilities increases accordingly. Many participants found it challenging to balance both roles if they had larger teams. Some participants

mentioned that a team of around four to five people is manageable, whereas having 10 or more subordinates makes it difficult to maintain expert tasks.

*"If the team grows significantly, the amount of supervisory work naturally increases as well. Tasks like reviewing working hours and other administrative duties take up more time, which in turn reduces the time available for expert work." (Supervisor 16)*

However, some supervisors mentioned that larger teams also provide more opportunities for delegation. With more subordinates, they can delegate tasks more effectively, reducing their workload and creating space to focus on expert tasks. They also stressed that the team must have the necessary skills and competence to ensure tasks can be delegated properly. In contrast, smaller teams often require a more hands-on approach, where the team must be flexible and work together to cover for absent colleagues. One supervisor noted that team members need to be willing to do a broader job description.

One supervisor stated that despite the team size, long-term experience can mitigate the challenges of managing larger teams. This suggests that experience may lessen the impact of team size on role combination.

*"Now that there are more years of experience, it's no longer dependent on one person. Whether the team consists of 9 or 20 people, there's a solid enough foundation in place to handle even larger teams." (Supervisor 25)*

Some respondents emphasized that challenges arise when subordinates' roles are too distinct or specialized from the supervisor's work or experience. In these cases, it was not the team size that caused difficulties, but rather the context of the roles, which played a more significant role in the integration of supervisory and expert tasks.

*"The biggest challenge is that the subordinates should ideally be doing work in a similar context to what you're doing yourself, as that way it better supports each other." (Supervisor 11)*

#### 4.1.4 Distribution of Working Time

The responses regarding the distribution of time between supervisory and expert roles varied among supervisors. It is important to note that the percentages provided in the responses are evaluations and highly context dependent. The division of time between these roles can vary depending on team needs, specific tasks, and organizational priorities. This variability reflects the dynamic nature of supervisory and expert responsibilities and emphasizes that these roles are not static.

*"It's so dependent on the day that some days I don't do anything other than supervisory work, and other days there's very little of it. I try to prioritize it over other tasks whenever possible." (Supervisor 3)*

Among the responses, the most common division was 50/50, where supervisors equally balanced their time between expert tasks and supervisory responsibilities. However, a few supervisors reported a heavier emphasis on expert work, with divisions such as 70-90 % expert tasks and 10-20% supervisory tasks, particularly among supervisors with white-collar subordinates.

*"My team is self-directed, so I spend about 5-10% of my work time on supervisory tasks, with the rest dedicated to various expert tasks." (Supervisor 5)*

External factors, such as customer demands or urgent issues, were often cited as reasons for postponing supervisory tasks. This sometimes led supervisors to neglect their leadership responsibilities until they became critical. One supervisor highlighted the difficulty of separating supervisory and expert tasks, noting that many activities are carried out collaboratively with the team, which makes it challenging to distinguish between leadership and expert work.

*"The supervisory tasks usually get left until I realize that I need to do something about it, and in my opinion, by that time, it's already gone too far. However, if there's no time, it's because I must prioritize helping the customer first, and that's just the reality." (Supervisor 18)*

*“The goal is, of course, to be able to spend at least 50% of my time on development, thinking, and updating documents, etc., but right now, that’s just a dream.” (Supervisor 7)*

However, most supervisors felt that the balance between supervisory and expert tasks was good, although achieving an ideal balance remains a challenge due to varying demands and external factors. Many supervisors acknowledged that this balance is highly context-dependent and often requires constant adjustment. Some also expressed a desire for more resources or time allocation to better manage both roles.

#### **4.1.5 Key Factors for Successfully Combining Supervisor and Expert Roles**

The supervisors identified several key factors that led to the effective combination of supervisory and expert roles. Prioritization was one of the most frequently mentioned aspects, and time management and the ability to focus on critical tasks were highlighted. Social skills were also seen as essential in building trust-based relationships with employees and in avoiding a distant, top-down leadership approach.

Many of the respondents agreed that team autonomy is important. A self-managing team, where members work independently and are responsible for their tasks, makes it easier for a supervisor to balance both roles. Related to this, delegation and the ability to trust employees were important factors that were frequently mentioned.

*“Try to make yourself unnecessary, because I think that’s a good way to describe it. This way, you create time for yourself to be where you’re most needed. And there will never be a day when you’re truly unnecessary, so that shouldn’t be something to fear.” (Supervisor 11)*

Several participants pointed out that prior experience in an expert role helps supervisors understand the employees’ work and challenges from their perspective. One respondent pointed out that the balance between roles works best when they can leverage their expert knowledge to coach and guide the team, but this balance can be challenging in expert teams where subordinates might have deeper expertise in certain areas.

Flexibility and adaptability were also mentioned. Some respondents highlighted that stepping outside one's comfort zone, letting go of control, and allowing the team to take ownership were necessary for success in both roles. Some supervisors pointed out that they have had to learn over the years to get rid of the need for control.

*"A supervisor should perhaps generally be a bit outside their comfort zone so they can delegate tasks effectively, allowing team members to take ownership without constantly micromanaging." (Supervisor 23)*

One supervisor pointed out that it is crucial to have a diverse and experienced team to combine both roles effectively. The team should be diverse in terms of background and experience because this leads to knowledge and perspective balance. Other factors that respondents considered important were clear team structures where responsibilities and competencies are well-defined and making sure that the expert and supervisory tasks do not conflict but rather complement each other. One supervisor said that enjoying both roles helped in balancing the demands of each.

*"The team's competencies are well-balanced, and responsibilities within the team are clear. We have now divided the tasks, and we know exactly who is responsible for what. It has been extremely clear." (Supervisor 9)*

*"First, I would say you need to like both roles. So that it's not like the other one is a completely forced job, then it is easier to favor the more enjoyable role tasks. So, I'd start from the point where you like both tasks themselves." (Supervisor 16)*

## **4.2 Role Clarity and Challenges**

### **4.2.1 Conflicts between Roles**

Supervisors were asked whether they had encountered conflicts between their supervisory and expert roles. Most responded that they had not experienced any significant conflicts between the two. Many explained that their responsibilities are well integrated,

their teams are highly autonomous, or the organization has clearly defined role structures. Some mentioned that they do not even consciously separate the two roles in their daily work, as one naturally supports the other.

*"Of course, sometimes you have to wear one hat more than the other, but there has never really been a direct conflict between the two roles." (Supervisor 12)*

For those who encountered role conflicts, different challenges were described. One challenge was prioritization, where the supervisor felt pressure from above to delegate tasks to team members, even when the tasks seemed unnecessary from an expert perspective. Additionally, a few supervisors described struggle with role balance, noting that they sometimes remained too engaged in expert work when they should have focused on leadership responsibilities.

*"Sometimes, shifting from an expert mindset to a leadership role can be challenging. It is easy to stay in expert mode when the focus should be on leading and asking the right questions. – – The challenge is to prioritize developing the team's tools and processes rather than solving daily problems." (Supervisor 17)*

Decision-making was another area where conflicts arose. One respondent described situations where their role as an expert conflicted with their responsibility as a representative of the organization. For example, in technical and financial decisions, supervisors sometimes had to prioritize company strategy over purely fact-based expert decisions. The key to managing this challenge was finding compromise, even when decision-making was difficult. One supervisor noted that in these moments, the leadership role ultimately carries the responsibility.

One challenge was conflicting expectations and performance metrics. One supervisor pointed out that the key performance indicators (KPIs) for supervisor and expert roles often differ significantly, making it difficult to measure success in both areas simultaneously. To address this challenge, the supervisor has aimed to find a middle ground where neither role is neglected. By carefully prioritizing tasks, they strive to balance both sets of expectations and ensure that both supervisor and expert responsibilities are met.

One supervisor described a conflicting situation where, in their expert role, they might dictate the “right” way to complete tasks to ensure efficiency and accuracy. However, from a supervisory perspective, allowing team members to think through tasks independently and develop their solutions would be more beneficial. As a result, team members might perceive the supervisor as prioritizing their expert role over their leadership responsibilities.

#### **4.2.2 Clarity and Expectations**

When supervisors were asked about their understanding of their roles and the expectations that accompany them, the answers were rather mixed. For most supervisors, their roles were rather clear, especially regarding their leadership roles, which they knew well and had already developed themselves. One participant stated that defining the roles was the duty of a supervisor. Several supervisors indicated that there were no clear-cut definitions of their roles, but they did not think it was necessary. They argued that it could be almost impossible to have very specific definitions of the jobs because of the fluid and changing context of the work they do. Several supervisors pointed out that the expectations of an expert role are often vague, especially when there are external pressures or when the expectations do not fit well with what the supervisors do in their day-to-day activities.

*“Are they sufficient? Well, there’s always room for improvement. As for being clearly defined, not necessarily on paper with the exact wording, but more in the sense that you understand what is expected.” (Supervisor 18)*

*“I have had both good and bad supervisors in the past. I shape my approach to leadership based on those experiences.” (Supervisor 5)*

One supervisor suggested that the clarity of supervisor roles could be improved. It was proposed that HR could assist in defining clear levels for supervisory tasks, breaking them down into minimum and more demanding levels. This would make the role clearer and improve communication with the team.

The supervisors mentioned several factors that helped clarify the roles. One supervisor mentioned that having clear ground rules and guidelines at the organizational level makes it easier to navigate both roles. Another supervisor emphasized that having clear project scopes, with defined goals and timelines, would reduce role ambiguity and unnecessary second-guessing. At the beginning of each year, annual goals are set, requiring continuous prioritization and monitoring, which help clarify roles and expectations.

While clear supervisor expectations were generally agreed upon, the expert role often faced challenges. Supervisors noted that the lack of clearly defined expectations for the expert role could create role ambiguity, particularly when external pressures or responsibilities outside their typical scope arose. Additionally, when the responsibilities were shared with colleagues or across teams, some supervisors observed that unclear role boundaries led to confusion, especially in the division of tasks in larger projects.

*“Supervisor role is quite clearly defined. However, my expert role is so broad that no one could fully define it – otherwise, it would turn into a 10-page document that wouldn’t make much sense. So, I have to rely a lot on common sense. I completely understand that it’s impossible to define it straightforwardly.” (Supervisor 22)*

## **4.3 Workload and Time Management**

### **4.3.1 Challenges in Managing Tasks**

Supervisors were asked how challenging they found managing the tasks of both roles, particularly from a time management perspective. For many supervisors, a significant challenge was the varying nature of their workload. Their daily tasks were highly variable, with periods of intense work followed by calmer times. This variation often made it difficult to plan and allocate time efficiently. However, for some supervisors, managing time was not perceived as a significant challenge, as they were able to effectively navigate the changing demands of their roles.

*“The workload is so variable that no two days are the same.” (Supervisor 21)*

*“Well, for me, time management is a really difficult thing. Here’s the question: “Have you experienced situations where the workload is too much?”, So yes, all the time. – – And it’s kind of like I dive into it so fully; I’ve always been like that.” (Supervisor 9)*

One of the respondents mentioned that the supervisor role was added on top of the expert tasks, but previous tasks were not removed; instead, the role was added on top of everything else. Another supervisor had a similar situation but in reverse: the expert role was added alongside the supervisory duties, and the workload increased to the equivalent of one and a half people during regular weekly hours.

*“I don’t want to end up working overtime or accumulating extra hours almost every day. Sometimes, you just have to call it a day, and let’s take a new one tomorrow.” (Supervisor 18)*

Several supervisors highlighted challenges due to a shortage of resources and tools. One respondent pointed out that the lack of resources, paired with inadequate tools, further complicated time management. Similarly, some mentioned the difficulty of handling expert tasks when the workload accumulated unexpectedly, adding stress to their already full schedule. In some cases, supervisors shared that the workload could be unpredictable, with some days demanding intensive effort while others were less demanding. This inconsistency in workload made it harder for them to plan their time effectively. One supervisor mentioned that when the team was able to work independently, it allowed them to focus more on expert tasks and dedicate less time to the supervisory role, which eased the workload.

A recurring challenge was the need for better task planning and time allocation. Many supervisors mentioned the difficulty of planning and organizing their work, especially in the roles required juggling multiple responsibilities. One supervisor explained how new team members were being trained so that would lighten the workload, while another

noted that while they could not always predict the tasks, they would focus on whatever came up, even if it meant reorganizing priorities on the go.

Additionally, some noted the impact of external factors, such as working with clients across different time zones, which made managing tasks a bit more complex. For some, the constant demand for attention to unexpected issues, or “firefighting”, meant that they could not always maintain boundaries between work and personal time, even after learning to set limits. On the other hand, some supervisors mentioned that over the years, they have learned to compartmentalize their work and leave work-related concerns at the workplace, recognizing that worrying about them at home does not help and only adds stress.

#### **4.3.2 Strategies for Handling Workload and Time Management**

Supervisors employed various strategies to manage their workload and time effectively. A common approach was prioritization, which helped them focus on the most essential tasks and allocate their time effectively. Many also relied on structured meetings, such as weekly and monthly check-ins, to keep track of ongoing work and ensure alignment within the team. Utilizing tools, such as task lists, calendars, and digital management systems, played a crucial role in maintaining organization and reducing stress. Some supervisors emphasized the benefits of independent teams, as a self-sufficient team allowed them to dedicate more time to expert tasks without constant supervision.

*“Prioritization, you always must sometimes remind yourself what our number one thing is, why our organization exists, what our most important task is. That’s a one thing, and then simply that you write it down, it might sound a bit old-fashioned, but write things down on paper with bullet points, what needs to be done, and then start crossing them off.” (Supervisor 4)*

Others managed their workload based on intuition, adjusting their schedules as needed rather than following a rigid plan. Some found it helpful to schedule “quiet hours” in the morning for routine tasks, while others reserved calendar slots to remain unavailable for uninterrupted work. Techniques like the Pomodoro method, breaking work into focused

intervals, and maintaining clear boundaries between work and personal time were also mentioned as effective ways to enhance productivity.

Additionally, delegation was a strategy for balancing responsibilities. Supervisors who had learned to distribute tasks among their teams noted a significant reduction in workload pressure. Some also adapted by working longer hours when necessary, taking vacations in shorter segments, or periodically reviewing their priorities to stay on track.

For those who faced unpredictable and fluctuating workloads, flexibility was essential. Regular reflections on priorities, visualizing workload distribution, and keeping track of responsibilities through structured notes helped maintain clarity. One supervisor saw themselves as a “flexible resource”, stepping in where needed to ensure the team could function efficiently.

*“Let’s say that perhaps in this project business, it is natural for unexpected issues to arise, the real challenge is how much they are allowed to take control of the work.” (Supervisor 11)*

Additionally, one supervisor shared that it is important to clarify in advance which tasks to prioritize and which are most important. If these considerations are not made ahead of time, decision-making can become purely reactive, lacking strategic foresight. The supervisor suggested that taking the time for occasional self-reflection on priorities helps to force a conscious decision rather than reacting to situations as they come. Another supervisor emphasized the value of understanding the context and getting a sense of the bigger picture before reacting.

*“When you feel like you’re in an overwhelming rush, you shouldn’t do anything. You need to take a moment to step back and put your feet up, because the worst rush is if you go along with the fact that people are fussing about something.” (Supervisor 6)*

### 4.3.3 Support and Resources

Most supervisors stated that they receive sufficient support, guidance, and resources when they actively seek them out. Some mentioned that they know where to ask for help, but support is not proactively offered. Several supervisors highlighted that they get enough support from their supervisors, HR, or peer discussions.

Over half of the supervisors emphasized that feedback is often lacking. Some mentioned that they rarely receive feedback from their team members, making it difficult to assess their performance as supervisors. However, one supervisor pointed out that there is also personal responsibility in this matter. It is important to ask for feedback, as no one can read minds. Some stated that feedback from their supervisors is infrequent and must often be requested explicitly. Some supervisors pointed out that if no feedback is given, they assume that things are going well. Despite this, many expressed a desire for more feedback to help them improve their leadership skills.

*“Feedback could always be more frequent, but then again, if nothing is said, it usually means things are going well.” (Supervisor 1)*

Resource availability was a recurring topic, with many stating that additional resources are always needed to maintain efficiency and quality. One supervisor emphasized that understanding the workload balance between expert and supervisor roles is essential to ensure a realistic allocation of time and responsibilities.

*“Each department has a bit of a resource shortage. – – In our company, for example, our team does so much work that in some other company, there would be typically 3 or 4 teams handling these tasks.” (Supervisor 7)*

A few supervisors suggested improvements such as more structured discussions with their supervisors, clearer definitions of supervisory responsibilities, and better prioritization of tasks to allow them to focus on key responsibilities. One also mentioned that leadership training could be beneficial in helping to navigate dual roles. Some supervi-

sors felt that there was nothing to improve, as they were satisfied with the support, resources, and feedback they received. A few supervisors mentioned that they appreciate the ability to work independently and value the autonomy they have in their roles.

#### **4.3.4 Role Flexibility**

The question of which role to prioritize the supervisor or expert, when the workload is high was not a black-and-white issue. Supervisors emphasized that this decision is highly context dependent. They pointed out that the role they prioritize often depends on the immediate situation and the specific challenges they face at the time.

Ten supervisors mentioned that when the workload is high, they would prioritize their supervisor roles for several reasons. Some felt a strong sense of duty to their supervisor responsibilities and believed that the team would benefit from more active leadership, especially during busy times. Others highlighted the importance of delegating tasks to the team and ensuring that the team was functioning smoothly, which requires more focus on leadership.

*“Machines can wait, but people can't.” (Supervisor 21)*

Additionally, one supervisor said that when daily work is dependent on team members, it is important to ensure effective leadership so the team can keep progressing efficiently. A few noted that their role in overseeing the team was crucial to maintaining organizational success, with the belief that one person guiding the team was more effective than trying to manage everything at once. For others, ensuring that the team performs well is integral to their sense of accomplishment, and they felt it was crucial to maintain control of the supervisor role to ensure the team stays on track.

*“I prioritize the supervisory work, and the other tasks come after that. I think that since I'm currently leading eight people, if those eight people can do their work 100% because I invest a bit more in that area, then I think that's fine.” (Supervisor 3)*

Some supervisors also pointed out that if there are certain problems in the team, then it can affect the work efficiency and productivity, and thus, it was thought that it is necessary to stay within the supervisory positions to avoid possible disturbances. One supervisor stated that if there is an urgent matter in the supervisor position, it means that the matter is important and requires urgent attention. Furthermore, to sustain the production and the flow of work, leadership and management skills are needed at times more than technical skills. Lastly, some supervisors indicated that their objective was to enable the team to work independently as much as possible. In these cases, the supervisors found that stepping back from the expert role allowed them to encourage autonomy within the team and thus reduce the need for their involvement.

1 The majority of supervisors (12) stated that they would select the expert role for various reasons. A few pointed out that customer satisfaction is the number one priority for them, and when the workload increases, it is better to concentrate on the fact that customers are satisfied. One supervisor said that if there was a lot of pressure, then more attention would be paid to the expert role because it was considered to have more specific time frames and quantifiable outcomes. In this case, they believed that not paying enough attention to the supervisor role would not result in critical consequences in the short term, whereas not fulfilling the expert responsibilities could have more severe consequences.

*“Expert tasks are often concrete and urgent, with deadlines and such, which can lead to the result that, in the supervisory role, you end up doing just the minimum required, so to speak.” (Supervisor 10)*

Some supervisors mentioned that their team members were highly self-directed, making it easier to step back from the supervisor role. One supervisor noted that in such cases, some team members might perceive it as micromanagement if they were to check on every task being done. One supervisor also pointed out that the nature of the expert role meant that some problems or crises, often referred to as “burning fires”, were more likely to occur in expert-related tasks. These types of issues typically required immediate

attention and were thus a reason to focus on expert responsibilities when time was limited.

Others explained that prioritizing the expert role was a matter of practical necessity, as their team's function had tight schedules and needed expert input to maintain progress. They also mentioned that the supervisor role did not always present urgent matters, so it could be more flexible. For some, taking time for the supervisor role would not always be as time-sensitive, and if extra time was needed, it was easier to gain that within the supervisor tasks. Furthermore, some supervisors noted that, for them, the roles were not seen as entirely separate. They felt they could sometimes handle both roles simultaneously, but in cases of high stress or workload, they would lean toward fulfilling the more urgent expert tasks.

*"If it's about something personal or truly important for the team member, that comes first. If it's more about regular work matters, then customers and delivery projects take priority." (Supervisor 18)*

One supervisor who could not prioritize one role over the other explained that they considered both customer satisfaction and team well-being important and would adjust depending on the situation, potentially working longer hours to manage both roles effectively.

#### **4.3.5 Delegation and Prioritization of Tasks**

Supervisors were asked if they clearly understood which tasks they could potentially let go of or delegate to focus on the most important tasks at hand. Many of them highlighted the importance of having a clear understanding of what tasks they could delegate or let go of to focus on more critical responsibilities. However, many admitted that delegating tasks is an area of ongoing development.

*"Delegating is probably the skill that one could always improve on." (Supervisor 11)*

*“I have a very clear understanding that there are tasks that could be delegated to others, but the issue is that I haven’t gotten around to delegating them. I think the problem lies in the fact that I tend to want to keep many things in my own hands.” (Supervisor 20)*

Several supervisors expressed that while they know what can be delegated, they often struggle with it, especially in the expert role, where they tend to take tasks on themselves rather than pass them on to team members. One supervisor noted that the challenge lies in the fact that delegating tasks does not necessarily resolve the problem but simply shifts the responsibility to someone else. One supervisor mentioned that while there are areas that could be developed and improved, they sometimes take on tasks outside their official role, driven by a desire to improve the overall situation. However, this tendency can occasionally overload their responsibilities, taking focus away from more critical tasks.

*“The supervisor role can’t be shared. Of course, you can tell someone else to go and tell the others to do something at the factory if you’re busy yourself. But expert tasks are easier to delegate, especially when there are team members who have been with the company for a long time and are familiar with the system, rather than someone new.” (Supervisor 21)*

While some supervisors felt confident in their ability to delegate, particularly tasks related to their expert role, others indicated that they struggle with delegation, either because of the desire to maintain control or because of a lack of appropriate team members to take on certain responsibilities. One supervisor mentioned that delegating is often challenging in technical areas, especially when they are unsure about the desired outcome or the capabilities of the person taking over the task.

*“It quickly gives the feeling that I’m throwing someone under the bus, giving them a task they’re not capable of handling.” (Supervisor 10)*

A few supervisors shared that they have learned to delegate over time but noted that it requires guidance, and at times, they do not have the time to provide the necessary direction before delegating.

*“I noticed during this fiscal year that I had delegated a task, and it didn’t go as expected. I assumed it had been understood, but it turned out it wasn’t. Then we had to fix it – a lot. That led to the question: What exactly went wrong here? Well, in the end, I took the blame myself because I realized that I hadn’t explained the task thoroughly enough. We hadn’t gone through it properly, and I should have recognized that it might not have been fully understood. This ties into the issue of competence.” (Supervisor 9)*

Some supervisors felt they were in a position where they did not need to delegate now but still recognized the importance of understanding what can be transferred to others. For some, the decision to delegate often comes with a sense of unease, as they fear that delegating too many tasks might overwhelm their team members who are already managing their workload. Some supervisors pointed out that they have given up on certain daily planning tasks and can rely on their team members to take over certain responsibilities, acknowledging that many team members are more skilled than they are in specific areas. Some supervisors, on the other hand, shared that letting go of control can be difficult because they worry about overloading their team or feel as if they are neglecting their own responsibilities.

#### **4.4 Personal Factors**

The interviewees were asked to reflect on which personality traits or skills support them in combining their supervisory and expert roles. The first chapter focuses on personality traits and the second one to skills.

##### **4.4.1 Personality Traits**

Many supervisors pointed out the importance of social skills, emphasizing how being sociable and approachable helps build strong relationships with team members. This ability to connect with others was viewed as crucial in maintaining trust and communication. In addition to social skills, several supervisors stressed the value of a people-

oriented leadership style, highlighting traits such as empathy and warmth. These qualities help create a supportive and motivating environment, enabling supervisors to lead their teams.

Calmness and analytical thinking were also commonly mentioned. Supervisors noted that remaining composed under pressure, paired with the ability to analyze situations critically, is key to balancing both roles. This sense of calm allows for more thoughtful decision-making, particularly when facing high-stress situations. Along with this, a practical and down-to-earth attitude was seen as beneficial for managing tasks in a grounded and efficient manner, while a good sense of humor helped in maintaining a positive and relaxed atmosphere within the team.

Moreover, openness and honesty were frequently highlighted as essential for effective leadership. Supervisors noted that being genuine and transparent fosters trust and creates an open communication environment. Self-confidence and the courage to ask questions were also emphasized, as these traits allow supervisors to make decisions with clarity and confidence. Other notable traits included flexibility and adaptability, with supervisors recognizing that their roles require balancing multiple priorities and tasks. Being able to adjust to changing demands while remaining organized and structured was seen as beneficial. Ambition and determination also emerged as key characteristics, as supervisors with these traits are driven to push projects forward, even in the face of challenges.

*“I might be better at the initial stages of a project. When there is a blank paper and we need to figure out what to do, I don’t hesitate but act right away. In a team of experts, this can create a good balance where some take a more forward-driving approach while others focus on refining and finalizing things later.” (Supervisor 11)*

#### **4.4.2 Key Skills**

Supervisors highlighted several key skills that support them in balancing both supervisory and expert role. Decision-making and prioritization were frequently mentioned as

essential skills, helping them manage their workload effectively and focus on the most critical tasks. The ability to work independently was also emphasized, as many supervisors operate autonomously and take initiative in their responsibilities.

*“I’m quite good at making conclusions quickly, especially when it comes to prioritization – determining what is important and what can be delayed. I believe I have the confidence and ability to make such decisions independently without needing to consult others on everything.” (Supervisor 8)*

Strong interpersonal skills, including teamwork, motivation, and communication, were widely recognized as crucial in managing both roles. Many supervisors stressed the importance of active listening and delegation, ensuring that tasks are distributed efficiently while maintaining trust within the team. One supervisor emphasized a discussion-oriented and consensus-seeking approach in their interactions with team members. Many supervisors also emphasized the importance of accountability, ensuring that they take ownership of their tasks and decisions in both roles. Stress management and the ability to remain calm under pressure were also seen as vital, allowing supervisors to handle high workloads and unexpected challenges without becoming overwhelmed.

*“The ability to recognize the right moment to address certain matters with the team is important. For example, when giving negative feedback, it is essential to sense when the timing is most productive rather than delivering it in a way that feels sudden or poorly timed.” (Supervisor 25)*

Several supervisors pointed out that problem-solving and collaboration are key in their daily work, as they often need to find solutions quickly and work closely with various stakeholders. The ability to transition between roles and responsibilities smoothly was also considered important, as was maintaining a clear structure approach to communication and task management.

Additionally, skills such as risk assessment, proactive thinking, and the ability to see the bigger picture were seen as valuable in making informed decisions and anticipating potential changes. Supervisors also noted that maintaining consistency in their work and ensuring clarity in their communication helps them perform effectively in both roles.

*“Perhaps, overall, what supports this the most is the genuine desire to work as a supervisor.” (Supervisor 4)*

## **4.5 Work Motivation and Well-Being**

### **4.5.1 Impact of Role Combination on Motivation and Well-Being**

Supervisors expressed a generally positive outlook on the combination of expert and supervisor roles, highlighting both motivational benefits and challenges related to well-being. Many found that the combination of responsibilities keeps their work meaningful and engaging. The ability to switch between roles was seen as a source of variety, preventing monotony and maintaining motivation. Some emphasized that balancing perspective, technical, and leadership enhances their professional growth and allows them to develop a broader skill set.

For many supervisors, the expert role provided a sense of confidence and satisfaction, particularly when their knowledge was sought after by colleagues. Others appreciated the social and coaching aspects of leadership, enjoying the opportunity to support their team and contribute to its success. Some supervisors noted that the leadership role brings a fresh challenge, motivating them to improve their performance and navigate new situations.

*“I have always enjoyed working in a way that allows me to achieve something as part of a team. That is what makes leadership work appealing to me, the opportunity to accomplish things together. It always feels much more rewarding to achieve results as a team rather than alone.” (Supervisor 11)*

However, the combination of roles also brought challenges, particularly in terms of workload and stress management. Some supervisors mentioned that high demands and tight targets occasionally took a toll on their well-being, affecting their free time. The struggle to balance both roles, especially when leadership duties interrupted technical work, was a common concern. While many valued the ability to shape their workdays, a few supervisors admitted that they sometimes felt overwhelmed when they were unable to delegate tasks effectively.

*“Of course, it can be quite overwhelming at times, and as I mentioned, the feeling of underperforming can arise easily if I can’t dedicate as much effort to either role as I feel I should.” (Supervisor 19)*

Despite these challenges, most supervisors agreed that having both roles provided a valuable dynamic. Some even stated that if one of the roles were removed, their work motivation would decrease significantly. While role combination can be demanding, it also offers a fulfilling combination of expertise, leadership, and professional growth.

#### **4.5.2 Tools and Practices**

Supervisors highlighted various ways they manage stress and maintain their well-being, both during and outside of working hours. A common approach was engaging in casual conversations with colleagues about non-work-related topics, often over coffee breaks or while playing cards. Many found these moments essential for mental recovery, as they provided an opportunity to disconnect from work-related pressures. One supervisor mentioned that discussing work issues with colleagues can be an effective way to relieve stress. By casually talking through problems, they sometimes receive valuable perspectives that help them to see situations in a new light, making it easier to find solutions and reduce tension.

Physical activity also played a significant role in well-being. Several supervisors mentioned engaging in sports or other forms of exercise during their free time, with some even participating in activities with their colleagues.

Some supervisors emphasized the importance of setting clear boundaries between work and personal life. They mentioned strategies such as avoiding taking work home, mentally “switching off” after work, or engaging hobbies that require full concentration, like technical projects or reading about leadership and professional development. One supervisor shared a personal approach of writing down lingering thoughts before bedtime to prevent work-related concerns from disrupting sleep.

*“I think it is important to be able to let go of things and get used to it so that you can keep going. Also, not working overtime is essential because the work will never be truly finished. Even if something is left unfinished today, there is always time to continue it tomorrow.” (Supervisor 7)*

One supervisor described how they have created a clear boundary between work and personal life by physically separating the two. They have a dedicated home office, and once they step out of it, they make a conscious effort to leave work behind. This physical division helps reinforce the distinction between their professional and personal roles. On one side of the door, they are at work, and on the other, they are fully present as a parent.

Despite these efforts, several supervisors admitted that they struggle to take breaks during busy periods. Some described how back-to-back meetings left little room for mental rest, making it difficult to transition between different tasks effectively. Others acknowledged the need to improve their recovery habits, recognizing that small pauses throughout the day could enhance their well-being, especially since skipping breaks was particularly common during remote work.

Overall, supervisors employed a mix of informal social interactions, physical activities, and personal time management techniques to maintain motivation and well-being. However, many admitted that it is challenging to consistently prioritize recovery due to their demanding schedules.

## 4.6 Final Reflections on Role Combination

At the end of each interview, respondents were asked to share a situation or lesson related to combining dual roles. Below are some of the comments that reflect the insights and experiences shared by the participants.

*“It may be helpful to clarify yourself which role you want to prioritize, and which is more important. If you never considered this in advance, occasionally reflecting on such questions can be beneficial. It forces you to think about your priorities rather than just reacting to everything as it comes. If you are only reacting, you lose the ability to anticipate, and things start to feel more like improvisation.” (Supervisor 1)*

This respondent’s comment highlights the importance of self-reflection. It suggests that taking a step back from the rush of daily tasks is essential because otherwise, a person may begin to act without proper planning. When managing dual roles, prioritization was mentioned as one of the key skills.

*“I don’t know if I have any lesson to share except that people should stay relaxed. Even though we’re doing business, making results and all that, having a relaxed approach makes it more enjoyable for everyone.” (Supervisor 24)*

Many respondents highlighted that attitude is key to successfully managing both roles. A relaxed approach was not seen as a lack of interest or responsibility, but rather the ability to stay adaptable and maintain a sense of control in different kinds of situations.

*“Everything requires balance. It’s always about finding a compromise between different factors. The right balance depends on the workplace, department, tasks, and individuals. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.” (Supervisor 14)*

This perspective emphasizes that the balance between supervisory and expert roles is not static. Rather, it is a dynamic process influenced by various factors. The supervisors' experiences in this study strengthened the idea that there is no universal solution to combining supervisory and expert roles. Instead, the right balance is determined by an

ongoing negotiation between the demands of both roles and the unique needs of the team and organization. Understanding these different experiences begins with asking relevant questions about the topic and listening to individuals' perceptions. The purpose of the study was not to find a one-size-fits-all approach, instead, the main objective was to understand how individuals experience dual roles.

## 5 Conclusion

This chapter begins by addressing the two research questions, followed by a discussion of practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

### 5.1 Discussion of the Research Findings

This study aimed to identify the factors that support or challenge the balance between supervisory and expert roles. The study was guided by two research questions, which were addressed through existing theoretical literature on the topic and empirical data obtained from semi-structured interviews. The research questions were the following:

**RQ1:** “What factors support the balance between supervisory and expert roles?”

**RQ2:** “What factors challenge the balance between supervisory and expert roles?”

To answer both research questions, the empirical part of the thesis needs to be considered.

**RQ1:** What factors support the balancing of supervisory and expert roles?

The first research question focuses on the factors that support balancing both roles. In the interviews, the respondents identified several factors that help in the combination of the two roles. The results are presented in no particular order since the significance of each support factor varies for the situation and person in question.

**Role flexibility:** Role theory traditionally emphasizes that clarity in roles is critical for people’s well-being and work productivity (Saha et al., 2019, p. 137). However, most of the supervisors did not think that role had to be clearly defined. Instead, they appreciated the ability to determine the scope of their duties according to their skills and environmental demands. This enabled them to address the dynamic needs and manage

their leadership and expert roles in a way that was most convenient to them. While some supervisors mentioned that uncertainty in the expectations could sometimes be stressful, the majority of them believed that understanding what they are expected to do was most important. This perspective aligns with findings from Montani et al. (2020, p. 623) and Panaccio & Vandenberghe (2011, p. 1456), who have pointed out that role ambiguity can be beneficial up to a certain level as it helps in improving the adaptability and creativity of an employee, thus enhancing job satisfaction and performance.

**Previous experience in the expert work:** Prior experience in the expert work was considered an advantage as it increased their authority and leadership. Supervisors who were familiar with their team's tasks found it easier to combine roles, as their understanding of their subordinates' work allowed them to offer more relevant guidance and support.

**Self-managing teams:** In this case, most of the supervisors especially the those working in white collar jobs expressed that having self-managing teams eased the pressure on the management roles as the team members were more independent and required less supervision than previously thought. This made the supervisors to concentrate more on their area of expertise.

**Support systems:** The respondents mentioned that they received assistance from their colleagues and their supervisors, and HR was useful. Some supervisors stated that it was useful to have a small talk with colleagues over a cup of coffee during the workday. These conversations also given them a break in the long monotone workdays. Moreover, this approach appeared to be quite effective since the participants were able to share their concerns with their colleagues, who in one way or the other provided them with possible solutions to the problems. As pointed out by Fritz et al. (2011, p. 35) positive work relationships build and sustain energy that helps people perform their work and do it well. In addition, the results of the study revealed that supervisor and coworker support, as well as family support, are important protective factors that can help to alleviate the negative effects of role conflict (Michel et al., 2011, p. 659).

**Personality traits:** The personality traits that were mentioned as helping in the combination of roles were social skills, flexibility in the work, a relaxed personality and a calm personality. These traits are consistent with the culture of the case company, which is “seriously relaxed,” where people are both lively and accurate at work but also laid back and polite to other workers. In the Five-Factor Model of personality, traits such as extraversion improve communication and relationships with others (de Jong et al., 2019, p. 10). Moreover, traits like openness to experience and agreeableness help the supervisors to be flexible and have good relations with their subordinates, which is important in dealing with role transitions and challenges in the organization (Zacher, 2016, p. 107).

**Personal skills:** Prioritization was cited as an important skill in managing two roles in this study. Supervisors stated that they were able to prioritize their work when there was a conflict of interest between their leadership and expert roles. Delegation was identified as a critical enabler that can help in the management of supervisory and expert roles. Some supervisors also indicated that if delegation was done correctly, it could decrease their workload and increase productivity. Delegation enables the supervisors to concentrate on the major tasks and does not distract them from the expert tasks that would have consumed their time as leaders.

**Role boundaries and recovery practices:** Some supervisors did not make the distinction between the supervisor and the expert while others did. Some blocked certain time for the different roles while others switched according to what was happening. This was because some of the supervisors viewed setting boundaries between the roles as one of the supporting factors. Some supervisors mentioned that when they were leaving for their free time, they purposefully closed their minds to work and did not want to think about work. Moreover, several supervisors stated that they transformed to the role of a parent when at home, and thus, there was a clear distinction between the working and personal lives. The ability to distinguish between the different roles that is, work or home role was considered as a good approach in stress coping and work-life balance, thus role

balance for personal engagement (Marks & MacDermid, 1996, p. 421). This is because; many supervisors stated that they practiced recovery practices after leaving work to build up their energy. Such practices included exercising, doing other things that interest one, or spending time with family and friends. These practices can be seen as crucial in helping to cope with the stress and demands of performing supervisory and expert roles.



**Figure 2.** Supporting factors.

**RQ2:** What factors challenge the balancing of supervisory and expert roles?

The second research question focuses on the factors that challenge balancing both roles. In answering this question, several challenges have been identified.

**Time management:** Time management was the biggest challenge, primarily due to fluctuating workloads. Many supervisors mentioned that they wish they could dedicate more time to supervisory tasks, but with the current workload, it was simply not possible. The unpredictable nature of the tasks made it difficult to plan workdays, as urgent tasks often required immediate attention. Supervisory roles in project-based work can be especially challenging due to the need to manage several tasks at once (Rafique, 2022, p. 494). According to role theory, role overload occurs when the expectations of one or more roles exceed the time and energy required to fulfill them (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 324). This unpredictability further complicated the balance between supervisory and expert responsibilities. Additionally, interruptions throughout the day disrupted the flow of work, making it harder for respondents to stay focused. The urgent tasks were usually related to the expert role and were often referred to as “firefighting.” As a result, supervisory tasks were often neglected or had to be put on hold. Bachrach et al. (2024, p. 11) note that skilled time managers can utilize their time more effectively, which can help counteract the negative effects of role overload.

Supervisors in knowledge-based and project-driven environments frequently face role blurring, which leads to the weakening of clear distinctions between roles (Ezzedeen & Zikic, 2017, p. 1547). This boundarylessness creates additional challenges in time management, as supervisors must navigate multiple responsibilities without clear separation between expert and leadership roles (Albertsen et al., 2010, p. 161). The ability to manage these boundaries effectively plays a crucial role in mitigating role overload (Brunning, 2023, p. 305). Some supervisors adopt an integrator approach, where they allow their expert and leadership roles to overlap, while others prefer a compartmentalizer approach, which involves creating clear distinctions between their responsibilities (Brunning, 2023, p. 305).

Several supervisors mentioned that they struggle to take breaks during the workday, excluding lunch breaks. Some explained that a full day of meetings left little time for mental rest, making it challenging to switch between tasks. Many respondents acknowledged the importance of improving their recovery habits, noting that short breaks during the day could improve their well-being, especially since skipping breaks was common during remote workdays. Fritz et al., (2013, p. 279) suggest that short, work-related micro-break activities, such as learning something new, creating meaning, and building positive relationships, are associated with higher energy and less fatigue.

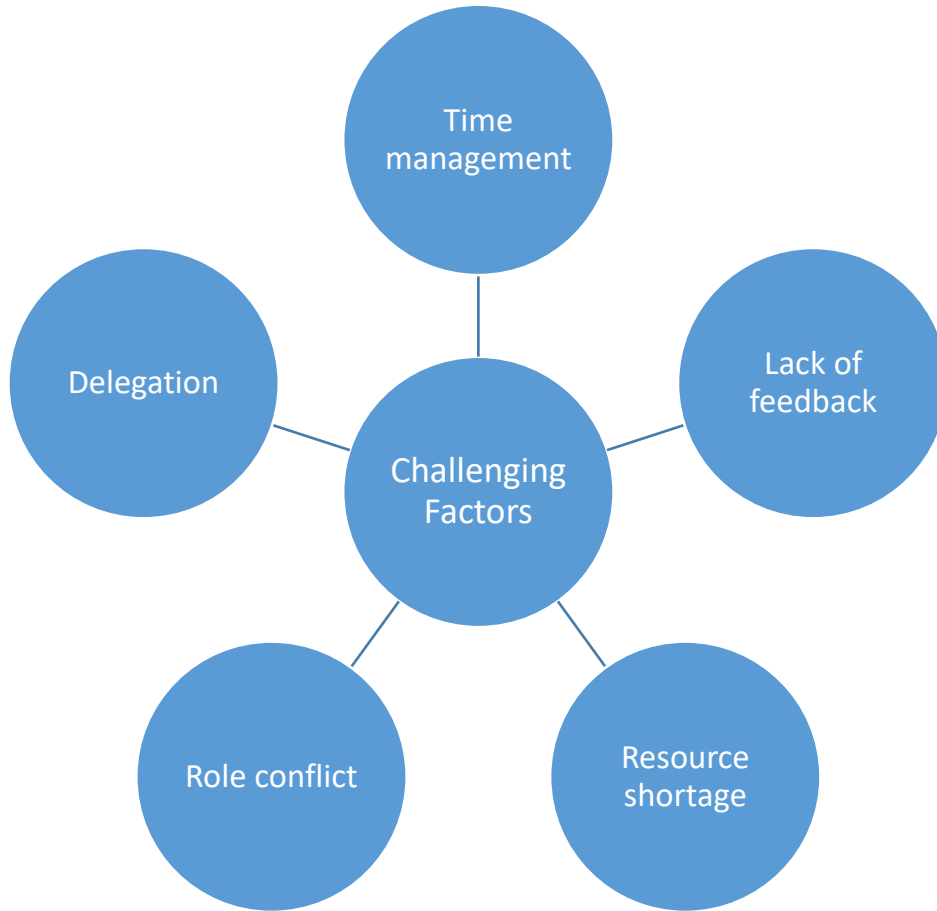
**Lack of feedback:** Over half of the supervisors mentioned the lack of feedback, both from their team members and their supervisors. Without positive feedback, employees may become disengaged, often limiting their efforts to just meeting the minimum requirements of their roles (Judge et al., 2010, p. 95). Additionally, (Martínez-Díaz et al., 2020, p.5) found that supervisor performance recognition and appreciation of performance can help reduce subordinate role ambiguity. However, several supervisors acknowledged in the interviews that feedback should be a two-way process and admitted that they could provide more feedback as well.

**Resource shortage:** Another challenge identified was the shortage of resources, often due to having too few team members or inefficient tools. Schmid et al. (2015, p. 2097) highlight that individuals in positions of power often face the challenge of limited resources. This shortage can lead people to experience role overload (Yip et al., 2008, p. 872). However, many respondents acknowledged that this is like a “hot potato”, something that is always present and difficult to resolve.

**Delegation:** While delegation was mentioned as a support factor, many supervisors also faced challenges with it. Some supervisors mentioned that they preferred to keep all tasks under control themselves, as they felt used to managing every detail. Additionally, many supervisors expressed that they did not want to burden their team members further, as they already had enough work to do. As a result, they took on many tasks

themselves. One challenge they faced was that certain expert tasks could not be delegated, as no one had a clear vision what the desired outcome should be, due to the development of something new. While delegation may seem simple in theory, it is often underutilized in practice, particularly in expert organizations (Ristikangas & Ristikangas, 2013, p. 176).

**Role conflict:** Role conflict occurs when conflicting demands arise from different roles (Kahn et al., 1964, as cited in Karla et al., 2023, p. 437). In this study, role conflict was not a major issue for most supervisors, but challenges did arise, particularly when transitioning between expert tasks and leadership responsibilities. Supervisors found it difficult to shift from an expert mindset to a leadership role, reflecting inter-role conflict (Biddle, 1986, p. 198). A key challenge mentioned by supervisors was prioritization, where balancing both roles often required choosing which tasks—supervisory or expert—needed more immediate attention. Some also struggled with delegation, feeling compelled to retain control over tasks they felt most qualified for, which created tension between their leadership and expert duties.



**Figure 3.** Challenging factors.

The findings of this study show that managing dual roles is a process where balancing and prioritization are key. Even though supporting and challenging factors can change with time, the participants of this study for the most part looked at their dual roles as positive rather than a burden. Rather than external rewards like salary or recognition, the most significant factors were interest and challenge of work tasks. However, the experience of a dual role is complex and is influenced by the interaction of different factors, thus the importance of individual and situational factors.

## 5.2 Practical Implication

Based on the findings of this research, several action points can be suggested. The following recommendations are made to help supervisors navigate their dual roles more efficiently.

- 1. Practical Time Management Strategies:** Supervisors need organized time management approaches to fulfill their dual responsibilities, which result in effective performance. One practical approach is time blocking, which encourages supervisors to schedule specific periods for their supervisory work as well as their expert duties. Supervisors who create specific quiet periods in their schedules can use these times to complete essential tasks while they adjust the times according to their work needs and organizational requirements. Additionally, providing workload training can help supervisors develop effective methods for managing fluctuations in their workloads. The effectiveness of time management skills can be enhanced by training programs, which have been found to improve role overload (Aeon et al., 2021, p. 14).

Supervisors can also benefit from using tools like the Eisenhower Matrix or Pomodoro Technique to prioritize tasks, ensuring that urgent and important tasks receive the necessary attention. The regular evaluation of workloads against personal targets and organizational objectives helps supervisors maintain goal alignment, which leads to better organizational efficiency.

- 2. Enhancing Delegation Strategies:** The development of task assessment skills by supervisors leads to their ability to identify which work needs delegation and which tasks remain essential for their position. Supervisors who evaluate tasks based on complexity and importance can maintain essential responsibilities for their plate while focusing on high-priority matters. When supervisors delegate work, they must provide clear expectations, deadlines, and instructions to prevent task misinterpretation. Regular assessment of both personal work and team

workloads should be done consistently as a vital method to achieve balance. Additionally, supervisors should practice letting go of control to foster trust and autonomy within team. Supervisors need to track task distribution to guarantee equal responsibility sharing among team members while avoiding overload and enhancing productivity throughout the team.

- 3. Maximizing Resources in a Limited Environment:** Supervisors need to encourage resourcefulness by fostering creative problem-solving abilities in their teams to manage resource shortages effectively. The implementation of innovative thinking allows teams to discover different solutions while optimizing their usage of available resources. The supervisor should maintain the current Lean methodology implementation to optimize business processes and remove unnecessary waste. The approach optimizes current resources to enable the team to maintain peak performance even when resources are limited.
- 4. Fostering a Strong Feedback Culture:** Supervisors need to establish an open two-way feedback system, allowing employees to share positive and constructive feedback. The practice builds transparency together with trust and team growth. The team needs to establish regular feedback channels through weekly meetings or check-ins to receive ongoing and timely feedback. Supervisors must find time to deliver substantial feedback that recognizes achievements and pinpoint development spaces. The organization's dedication to feedback creates an environment where employees receive support for their growth while the team maintains its drive to reach better performance levels.
- 5. Navigating Role Conflict Effectively:** Supervisors need to start by establishing precise limits between their supervisory duties and their expert responsibilities. The establishment of clear boundaries between roles prevents confusion and ensures efficiency in the workplace. Role flexibility needs to be encouraged when the organization faces high-demand periods. Supervisors need the authority to adapt their work priorities according to task urgency while keeping their main

duties well-defined. The method enables supervisors to handle conflicting requirements while decreasing their stress levels and enhancing their performance. Additionally, taking short breaks, like brief walks, allows supervisors to recharge and maintain focus, allowing them to navigate conflicting role demands more effectively.

### **5.3 Limitations**

Some limitations should be acknowledged in this study. The sample size of the study was 25 participants; however, this is rather limited to allow generalization of the findings to other populations. Moreover, all the participants were selected from the same organization, which means that the variety of the data was limited by organizational context. Therefore, the results could be more relevant for the specific organizational culture, policies, and practices of the company in question, and may not be easily transferable to supervisors in other companies or other contexts. This study employed semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method.

Semi-structured interviews are a flexible method for collecting in-depth data from participants, but they are also not without certain limitations, including the potential for interviewer bias and the subjectivity of responses. However, the interpretation of the participants' responses might also depend on the researcher's perceptions and his or her previous experiences. In addition, this study used self-reported data, which can also suffer from self-reporting bias. Supervisors may have given socially acceptable responses and may have hidden some aspects that may be considered unpopular or negative by other participants. Finally, this research has not considered other factors such as organizational changes, market trends, or leadership shifts. These might have affected the experiences of participants during the study period.

## 5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Some recommendations for future work can be offered based on the findings of this research as the subject offers many directions for further inquiry. It would be useful and beneficial to contrast the outcomes of this research with those of supervisors from other companies. This type of comparison across different organizations could give a better understanding of the experiences of supervisors in dividing their time between two roles and may reveal similarities or differences with other settings.

Another idea for future research is to examine the point of view of team members who work under the supervision of managers who have dual roles. This could give the whole picture of the issue and show how team members perceive and react to supervisors who have two sets of responsibilities. Knowledge of team members' requirements and anticipations may give useful information for enhancing the performance of supervisors and the overall performance of the team.

Moreover, using other research approaches can also help to shed new light on the problem. This study employed semi-structured interviews to gather data from supervisors. However, future work could build on alternative approaches, for instance, through an analysis of the language used by the participants. This may open up new aspects of the discussion, such as how supervisors discuss their parts and duties, which could help to expand the understanding of the issues surrounding dual role management.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions for supervisors

#### Background information

- How long have you worked in this company as a supervisor?
- How many subordinates do you have?

#### Roles and their combination

- Can you tell me in your own words how you see the content of the supervisor role?
- How do you experience the combination of supervisory and expert roles in your work? Is it smooth for you?
- How does the team size affect the combination of these roles?
- How is your working time divided between supervisory and expert tasks in percentage? Is this balance working for you?
- What factors do you think are necessary for successfully combining supervisory and expert roles in your work?

#### Role clarity and challenges

- Have you experienced situations where your supervisory and expert roles conflict with each other?
  - If yes, can you describe how these situations appear in your work and how you have tried to resolve them?
- Do you feel that your supervisory and expert roles are clearly defined and that you understand the expectations associated with them?
  - In which situations do you experience ambiguity?
  - What factors increase clarity?

#### Workload and time management

- How challenging do you find managing the responsibilities of both roles, especially from a time management perspective?
  - Have you experienced situations where your workload was too high?
  - What strategies do you use to manage the workload of both roles? How do you particularly handle busy situations?
  - Do you have specific routines for prioritization and stress management?
- Do you feel that you receive enough support, such as guidance, resources, or feedback, to effectively manage the combination of your supervisory and expert roles?
  - What improvements would you like to see in this regard?

- Which role do you tend to prioritize when the workload becomes excessive? Why?
- Do you have a clear understanding of what tasks you could let go of or delegate to focus on more important responsibilities?

**Personality and strengths**

- What personality traits and skills help you in combining your supervisory and expert roles?

**Work motivation and well-being**

- How does the combination of supervisory and expert roles affect your work motivation and well-being?
- Do you use any specific tools or practices to maintain your motivation and well-being?

**Closing discussion**

- Is there a specific situation or lesson related to combination these roles that stands out to you and that you would like to share?
- Is there anything else you would like to mention or highlight regarding this topic?