SYNCLUSIVE

Funded by
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Living Lab Report

Amersfoort, Netherlands

Appendix 3 to D2.1 Realist Evaluation



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1. Living Lab: Amersfoort, the Netherlands

1.1. Building a Coalition

The Dutch Living Lab was coordinated by TNO (Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research) and Tilburg University, in close collaboration with the Municipality of Amersfoort. The Living Lab focused on labour market inclusion and career development in the childcare sector. The Municipality of Amersfoort played a central role in coalition building and facilitated several coalition meetings involving regional stakeholders.

The coalition brought together representatives from the childcare sector, the Municipality of Amersfoort, the Employer Service Point (WerkgeversServicepunt), the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), educational institutions, and labour market intermediaries. The coalition aimed to address labour shortages in the childcare sector through a combination of recruitment, training, and employee development activities. The childcare organisation involved in the Living Lab employed approximately 450 employees across 52 locations in the Amersfoort region.

In addition to the coalition activities, interviews were conducted with other childcare organisations in the region to identify sector-wide challenges and opportunities related to recruitment, retention, career development, and inclusive employment practices. These interviews provided input for the development and refinement of the Living Lab interventions, while also generating insights into factors that facilitate or hinder coalition development, regional collaboration, and the potential scaling-up of successful practices within the childcare sector.

1.2 The target group

The Dutch Living Lab focused on two target groups: migrant women seeking employment in the childcare sector and employees already working within a childcare organisation.

For jobseekers, the Living Lab targeted migrant women interested in entering the childcare sector. Although this group participated in the intervention activities aimed at developing their skills and self-efficacy in and effective entry into their (new) work in childcare, quantitative data collection proved challenging due to language barriers, varying literacy levels, resulting in difficulties completing the questionnaires. Following the baseline measurement, it was therefore decided not to continue quantitative survey data collection for this target group and to primarily rely on qualitative interviews and implementation data for the evaluation.

For employees, the Living Lab focused on career development, internal mobility, and sustainable employability. While employees were the intended beneficiaries of the intervention, they were not the primary recipients. Instead, the intervention mainly targeted supervisors and organisational practices that support employee development. This was driven by a needs analysis with supervisors and employees, which identified where development-related barriers existed and where opportunities remained, pointing specifically to supervisors as a lever for change. Furthermore, due to staff shortages, childcare organisations often focus heavily on inflow and recruitment, while retention receives comparatively little attention. The expected effects for employees were therefore indirect and mediated through changes in

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supervisory behaviour, practices and organisational support as well as through increased self efficacy of these employees to take a next step in their career.

To inform the intervention design and evaluate its implementation, both employees and supervisors participated in questionnaires and qualitative data collection activities, including interviews and a focus group. For the qualitative data collection also other representatives and stakeholders at coalition level were interviewed.

The quantitative data were collected at three measurement moments (T0, T1 and T2). Because the supervisor training was rolled out in phases across locations, employees and supervisors associated with locations that received the training later could be used as a (waiting list) control group during the evaluation.

1.3 Implementation of the intervention package

For jobseekers, the Living Lab focused on improving access to employment opportunities in the childcare sector for migrant women facing barriers to labour market participation. Through collaboration between the childcare organisation, the Municipality of Amersfoort, UWV, educational institutions, and other regional stakeholders, a tailored pathway was developed that combined recruitment, training, and workplace learning. Recruitment activities included outreach within neighbourhoods and local communities to reach women who were not always accessible through traditional recruitment channels.

The intervention aimed to lower barriers for entry into the childcare sector by combining practical work experience with training and coaching. Attention was given to learning on the job, language development, and creating accessible entry routes for individuals who did not yet meet the formal requirements for pedagogical positions. Participants could enter the sector through assistant roles and gradually develop the competencies, language skills, and qualifications needed for progression towards pedagogical positions. This pathway was seen as a stepping stone towards pedagogical positions. Through the coalition, this shortened pathway was arranged to lead either to partial certificates (deelcertificaten) or to a full diploma, allowing progression to happen gradually. In this way, the Living Lab sought to create sustainable employment opportunities for migrant women while simultaneously addressing labour shortages in childcare.

For employees, the Living Lab focused on career development, internal mobility, and employee retention. Employees themselves were not the primary recipients of the intervention. Instead, the intervention targeted supervisors, with the aim of strengthening developmental leadership and improving the support available to employees regarding learning, career development, and mobility opportunities.

A ‘developmental leadership’ training program was developed and delivered to supervisors. The training focused on increasing awareness of employee development opportunities, strengthening developmental conversations, supporting career planning, and enhancing supervisors’ ability to stimulate learning, professional growth, and mobility among employees. In addition, the Living Lab explored broader organisational opportunities to support employee development and retention, including improvements in career development processes, visibility of development opportunities, and the organisational conditions needed to facilitate employee growth.

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The intervention package was developed and refined iteratively through collaboration with coalition partners and through continuous input from employees, supervisors and management collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. These activities not only informed the design and implementation of the intervention package, but also generated insights into organisational practices, career development pathways, and conditions for employee retention that could support future improvements within the childcare organisation and the sector more broadly.

1.4 From drivers & barriers to solutions

For jobseekers, the Living Lab focused on improving access to employment opportunities in the childcare sector. Because of the staff shortages in childcare, the focus was on migrant women. However, these migrant women were facing barriers to labour market participation, amongst which their problems with the Dutch language. Through collaboration between the childcare organisation, the Municipality of Amersfoort, UWV, educational institutions, and other regional stakeholders, a tailored pathway was developed that combined recruitment, training, and workplace learning. Recruitment activities included outreach within neighbourhoods and local communities to reach women who were not always accessible through traditional recruitment channels.

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1.5 Quantitative results of the Amersfoort Living Lab

The research questions which were formulated for the quantitative part of the data collection were:

1. **Jobseekers:** To what extent do jobseekers experience changes in self-efficacy, skills, and other IMBP-related constructs, as well as living lab-specific outcomes, as a result of the intervention or intervention package?
2. **Employees:** To what extent do employees experience changes in self-efficacy, skills, and other IMBP-related constructs, as well as living lab-specific outcomes, following participation in the intervention or intervention package?
3. **Mobility effects:** To what extent does the intervention package lead to changes in jobseekers' employment status and in employee mobility within organisations, such as increased employment transitions or shifts in tasks and responsibilities?

1.5.1 Analyses

Quantitative analyses were conducted for employees and supervisors. No quantitative questionnaire outcome analyses were performed for jobseekers because language barriers made the questionnaire data insufficiently reliable. The evaluation of the jobseekers in this Living Lab therefore focused on training completion, qualifications, employment and further training outcomes, complemented by qualitative interviews and evaluation data.

Changes in continuous outcomes among employees and supervisors were analysed using linear mixed models (LMMs), comparing the intervention group with the waiting-list control group. For employees, there were two measurements before the actual implementation of the organizational intervention (training of their supervisors). This was due to the delay in the delivery of the supervisor training. The measurement closest to the intervention was used as the pre-intervention measurement where available; otherwise, the earlier pre-intervention measurement was used. This measurement was compared with the post-intervention measurement. For the supervisors, an intermediate measurement was also included. The analytical models included time and the time × group (intervention-vs control) interaction, with modelled baseline means constrained to be equal across groups. The interaction represented the estimated intervention effect.

LMMs accommodate repeated measurements and include all available observations. The tables present observed means and standard deviations, standardized effect sizes (Cohen's d), 95% confidence intervals and p-values. Effect sizes and p-values are based on the time × group interaction.

Given the small samples and attrition at follow-up, interpretation was not based solely on statistical significance. Very small effects ($|d| < 0.20$) were interpreted as indicating no meaningful difference. Effects between 0.20 and 0.50 were discussed when their direction

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was theoretically or practically relevant, while larger effects (|d| ≥ 0.50) were considered potentially meaningful. The quantitative findings should therefore be interpreted as indications of possible trends alongside the qualitative findings.

1.5.2 Responses in Amersfoort, the Netherlands

Table 1.1 presents participation in the interventions and quantitative research in the Amersfoort Living Lab.

All 29 jobseekers started the training programme; 21 completed it and eight were recorded as having dropped out.

Of the 23 supervisors recruited, 15 started and 14 completed the supervisor training. Employees did not receive the training themselves but may have been indirectly affected through their supervisors and were therefore included in the quantitative research.

Table 1.1: Participation in the interventions and quantitative research in the Amersfoort Living Lab.

	Number of people that were recruited for the training/inter-vention	**Number of people that started the training/inter-vention**	**Number of people that dropped out of the training/inter vention**	**Number of people that completed the training/ intervention**	**Number included in quantitative research (including controls)**
Jobseekers	29	29	8	21	6
Employees	NA	NA	NA	NA	138
Supervisors	23	15	1	14	23

Note. For employees, the intervention was delivered through their supervisors. The participation figures on recruitment, starting, dropout and completion are therefore not applicable at the individual employee level.

1.5.3 Jobseekers

In the Amersfoort Living Lab, migrant women were recruited for a tailored work-based training programme aimed at facilitating entry into the childcare sector. The programme combined training with workplace learning and enabled participants to obtain a diploma or relevant certificates. Of the 29 women who started, 21 completed the programme. Eight obtained a diploma and twelve obtained relevant certificates.

Because the questionnaire data were considered insufficiently reliable, the evaluation focused on programme completion, qualifications and subsequent employment or training outcomes. Follow-up information was available for 23 participants. Of these, 21 (87%) obtained a diploma or relevant certificate, six (26%) were offered a job at the participating childcare organisation and twelve (52%) entered another training programme or work trial.

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Table 1.2: Qualifications and subsequent employment or training outcomes among jobseekers with follow-up information (N = 23).

Employment status	Number in follow-up	Number	Percentage
Offered a job at the participating childcare organisation	23	6	26%
Entered another training programme or work trial	23	12	52%
Obtained a diploma or relevant certificate	23	21	87%

1.5.4. Employees

Table 1.3 presents employee characteristics by study group. The intervention and control groups were comparable in gender and years of employment, although employees in the intervention group were slightly younger and more often highly educated. Reported obstacles were generally more common in the control group, particularly limited motivation to work on one's career, health-related problems and personal circumstances.

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Table 1.3: Characteristics of employees in the intervention and control groups (N = 138).

	Intervention	**Control**
Population characteristics	**Means (SD) / Percentage (N)**	**Means (SD) / Percentage (N)**
Age	41.1 (10.5), n = 88	43.7 (17.4), n = 50
Gender (% women)	97.7% (86/88)	98.0% (49/50)
Level of education		
Basic education (secondary or lower)	3.5% (3/86)	0.0% (0/47)
Intermediate education (upper secondary education, post-secondary non-tertiary education)	64.0% (55/86)	74.5% (35/47)
Higher education (short cycle education tertiary or higher)	32.6% (28/86)	25.5% (12/47)
Years of employment	7.1 (1.8)	7.0 (2.0)
Obstacles[a]		
Lack of training and skills	10.9% (7/64)	15.2% (5/33)
Little motivation to work on my career	7.8% (5/64)	21.2% (7/33)
Problems connected to health/disability	12.5% (8/64)	27.3% (9/33)
Personal life situation (e.g., caregiving responsibilities)	17.2% (11/64)	30.3% (10/33)
Lack of a good network	9.4% (6/64)	18.2% (6/33)
Lack of financial resources	9.4% (6/64)	15.2% (5/33)
Barriers in organisation/company	20.3% (13/64)	24.2% (8/33)
Other reason	17.2% (11/64)	18.2% (6/33)

Note. Available N varied by characteristic.

[a] Obstacles were available for 64 employees in the intervention group and 33 in the control group.

Table 1.4 shows no evidence of an intervention effect on self-efficacy (d = 0.09). Career self-efficacy developed somewhat less favourably in the intervention group (d = -0.41), opposite to the expected direction, although the difference was not statistically significant. Descriptively, both outcomes declined in both groups, with a stronger decline in career self-efficacy in the intervention group.

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Table 1.4: Changes in primary outcomes among employees in the Amersfoort Living Lab.

Outcome	**T0** **N, Mean (SD)**		**T2** **Mean (SD)**		**Standardized effect size, d (95% CI)**	**p-value**
	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control		
Self-efficacy	65, 0.67 (0.06)	41, 0.68 (0.07)	46, 0.64 (0.08)	16, 0.64 (0.08)	0.09 (-0.52; 0.71)	.768
Career self-efficacy / job progression self-efficacy	64, 0.72 (0.15)	41, 0.70 (0.15)	47, 0.61 (0.16)	18, 0.68 (0.12)	-0.41 (-0.95; 0.13)	.139

Note. Positive effect sizes indicate more favourable change in the intervention group relative to the control group.

Table 1.5 shows no evidence of an intervention effect on organisational mobility or career planning. Perceived career possibilities developed somewhat more favourably in the intervention group than in the control group (d = 0.29), although this difference was not statistically significant.

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Table 1.5: Changes in secondary outcomes among employees in the Amersfoort Living Lab

Outcome	**T0** **N, Mean (SD)**		**T2** **Mean (SD)**		**Standardized effect size, d (95% CI)**	**p-value**
	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control		
Organisational mobility	70, 0.64 (0.20)	42, 0.60 (0.22)	46, 0.53 (0.18)	16, 0.52 (0.16)	0.00 (-0.54; 0.53)	.987
Career planning	68, 0.71 (0.22)	42, 0.68 (0.24)	46, 0.64 (0.26)	16, 0.67 (0.17)	-0.15 (-0.66; 0.36)	.562
Perceived career possibilities	79, 1.47 (0.26)	45, 1.44 (0.25)	46, 1.42 (0.25)	16, 1.34 (0.29)	0.29 (-0.28; 0.87)	.314

Note. Positive effect sizes indicate more favourable change in the intervention group relative to the control group.

1.5.5 Supervisors

Of the 23 participating supervisors, five completed all three measurement waves, eight completed baseline and one follow-up measurement, five completed only the two follow-up measurements, and five participated in a single measurement wave. In total, 15 supervisors provided data at T0, 18 at T1, and 13 at T2. Participation therefore varied across measurement occasions.

Table 1.6 presents the characteristics of the 23 participating supervisors: 12 in the intervention group and 11 in the waiting-list control group. The groups were comparable in age, and all supervisors were women. Supervisors in the control group had somewhat more often worked at the organisation for less than one year, whereas those in the intervention group had more often worked there for one to five years.

Table 1.6: Characteristics of participating supervisors (N=23).

	Intervention	**Control**
Population characteristics	Means (SD) / Percentage (N)	Means (SD) / Percentage (N)
Age	38.3 (7.6), n = 12	38.6 (5.9), n = 11
Gender (% women)	100.0% (12/12)	100.0% (11/11)
Years employed at the organisation		
<1 year	16.7% (2/12)	36.4% (4/11)
1–5 years	33.3% (4/12)	18.2% (2/11)
5–10 years	8.3% (1/12)	9.1% (1/11)
>10 years	41.7% (5/12)	36.4% (4/11)

Table 1.7 presents supervisor capabilities and employee development support. Although none of the intervention effects were statistically significant, perceived organisational mobility opportunities (d = 0.33) and career planning and clarity (d = 0.41) developed somewhat more

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favourably in the intervention group. These outcomes were closely aligned with the aims of the training. No meaningful differences were found for leader self-efficacy or leadership competencies. Coordination satisfaction showed a sizeable difference in the opposite direction (d = -0.99), but this estimate was based on very few observations and had a wide confidence interval. The findings therefore provide tentative indications of favourable developments in two intervention-related outcomes but remain highly uncertain.

Table 1.7: Supervisor capabilities and employee development support outcomes in the Amersfoort Living Lab

Outcome	**T0** **N, Mean (SD)**		**T2** **Mean (SD)**		**Standardized effect size, d (95% CI)**	**p-value**
	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control		
Leader self-efficacy for supporting employee development	11, 0.71 (0.08)	4, 0.82 (0.06)	5, 0.74 (0.06)	6, 0.75 (0.10)	0.12 (-1.01; 1.26)	.826
Perceived organisational mobility opportunities	11, 0.64 (0.10)	4, 0.70 (0.17)	5, 0.68 (0.10)	6, 0.64 (0.18)	0.33 (-0.74; 1.41)	.533
Career planning and career clarity	11, 0.61 (0.16)	4, 0.63 (0.17)	5, 0.68 (0.11)	6, 0.64 (0.19)	0.41 (-0.63; 1.45)	.426
Coordination satisfaction	11, 0.83 (0.06)	3, 0.92 (0.04)	7, 0.70 (0.25)	6, 0.80 (0.08)	-0.99 (-2.79; 0.82)	.274
Leadership competencies supporting employee development	11, 0.40 (0.07)	4, 0.45 (0.08)	6, 0.39 (0.05)	6, 0.40 (0.09)	-0.04 (-0.95; 0.87)	.931

Note. T0 = baseline; T2 = post-intervention follow-up. T1 was included in the linear mixed models but is not shown. Positive effect sizes indicate more favourable change in the intervention group relative to the control group.

For development conversations (Table 1.8), none of the intervention effects were statistically significant. The clearest indication of a potentially meaningful difference was found for the number of formal development conversations (d = 0.78), which increased more strongly in the intervention group. Smaller differences in the expected direction were observed for the informal conversation outcomes (d = 0.26 to 0.32). Formal conversation frequency showed a small difference in the opposite direction (d = -0.24). Given the small numbers and wide confidence intervals, these findings should be interpreted cautiously.

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Table 1.8: Development conversation practices among supervisors in the Amersfoort Living Lab.

Outcome	**T0** **N, Mean (SD)**		**T2** **Mean (SD)**		**Standardized effect size, d (95% CI)**	**p-value**
	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control		
Formal conversation frequency	11, 2.82 (0.75)	4, 2.75 (1.26)	5, 3.20 (0.45)	6, 3.50 (0.55)	-0.24 (-1.15; 0.67)	.594
Equal access to formal conversations	11, 1.36 (0.50)	4, 1.75 (0.96)	5, 1.40 (0.55)	6, 1.50 (0.55)	0.21 (-0.71; 1.14)	.647
Number of formal conversations	11, 2.27 (2.45)	4, 0.75 (0.96)	5, 3.80 (3.03)	6, 1.67 (1.37)	0.78 (-0.25; 1.81)	.131
Informal conversation frequency	11, 5.09 (1.04)	4, 5.75 (1.26)	5, 5.40 (0.55)	6, 5.50 (1.38)	0.32 (-0.78; 1.42)	.560
Equal access to informal conversations	11, 2.00 (0.00)	4, 1.50 (0.58)	5, 1.80 (0.45)	6, 1.67 (0.52)	0.26 (-0.97; 1.49)	.675
Number of informal conversations	11, 7.64 (5.92)	4, 7.25 (7.46)	5, 9.00 (5.00)	6, 7.83 (7.06)	0.32 (-0.54; 1.18)	.457

Note. T0 = baseline; T2 = post-intervention follow-up. T1 was included in the linear mixed models but is not shown. Positive effect sizes indicate more favourable change in the intervention group relative to the control group.

Evaluation of the supervisor training

The training programme consisted of three sessions. Of the 12 supervisors in the intervention group, six attended all three sessions and six attended two.

Overall, responding supervisors evaluated the training positively. At T2, all five respondents reported greater awareness of their role and responsibilities regarding employee development. Four reported feeling better prepared to conduct development conversations and being more consciously engaged in employee development. The percentages were higher at T2 than at T1, but the small numbers and potentially different respondents mean that this should not be interpreted as evidence of change over time.

The evaluations are broadly consistent with the favourable directions observed for organisational mobility opportunities, career planning and clarity, and the number of formal development conversations. However, the quantitative estimates remain highly uncertain.

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Table 1.9: Supervisors' evaluation of the training intervention

Statement (% agree)	**T1 (n=7)**	**T2 (n=5)**
Better prepared to conduct development conversations with employees	42.9%	80.0%
More consciously engaged in employee development	71.4%	80.0%
More aware of development opportunities for childcare professionals	42.9%	60.0%
More aware of own role and responsibilities regarding employee development	71.4%	100.0%
More aware of the role of HR regarding employee development	42.9%	60.0%
More aware of the role of regional managers regarding employee development	28.6%	60.0%
Employees are more engaged in their professional development than one year ago	42.9%	60.0%

Note. Percentages represent the proportion of supervisors who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.

1.5.6 Interpretation of the quantitative findings

Overall, the objective outcomes for jobseekers were encouraging, particularly given the barriers faced by the target group and the fact that this approach was implemented for the first time. Many participants obtained a diploma or relevant certificate, while a quarter were offered a job and half progressed to another training programme or work trial. This suggests that the programme may have improved their labour market opportunities, although the absence of a control group prevents firm conclusions. Changes in self-efficacy, skills and other questionnaire-based outcomes could not be assessed because the questionnaire data were insufficiently reliable. The Realist Evaluation findings are therefore essential for understanding how the programme contributed to the observed outcomes, how participants experienced it and which barriers remained.

Among supervisors and employees, no statistically significant intervention effects were found. The small samples and wide confidence intervals limit the certainty of the quantitative findings. Nevertheless, most supervisors evaluated the training positively and felt better prepared to conduct development conversations, more consciously engaged in employee development and more aware of their own role and of available development opportunities. The quantitative findings also provide some indications of increases in formal and informal development conversations, perceived organisational mobility opportunities and attention to employees' career planning. These outcomes correspond closely to the training's focus on conducting development conversations, identifying opportunities for new tasks, roles and training, and helping employees clarify their career goals and next steps.

At employee level, these possible changes had not yet translated into improvements across most outcomes. The only favourable indication was for perceived career possibilities. No meaningful differences were found for self-efficacy, organisational mobility or career planning,

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while career self-efficacy developed in the opposite direction to that expected. The research question concerning changes in employee outcomes could therefore be answered only to a limited extent, as the findings provide little evidence of intervention effects at this stage.

No objective data were available on actual employee mobility, such as changes in jobs, tasks or responsibilities. The research question concerning employee mobility effects could therefore not yet be fully answered. It may also be too early to expect substantial mobility effects from the intervention. The pattern suggests that the intervention may first influence supervisors' awareness and development practices, while effects on employees' confidence, career behaviour and actual mobility may require more time. Such effects are also likely to depend on broader organisational efforts to strengthen the development culture and create the opportunities and conditions needed for employees to act on the support offered by supervisors. The organisation is currently working on these broader organisational conditions, meaning that their contribution may become visible over time.

Overall, the findings provide cautious indications that the interventions may have initiated relevant changes. For jobseekers, the objective outcomes suggest improved opportunities to obtain qualifications and progress towards employment or further training. For supervisors, the findings point to possible changes in awareness and development practices, although these had not yet clearly translated into employee outcomes. No firm conclusions about effectiveness can be drawn. The Realist Evaluation findings provide the main basis for understanding whether and how these changes occurred and what may be needed to achieve longer-term effects.

1.6 Realist evaluation results in Amersfoort, the Netherlands

In this section of the report, the research questions to be answered with the realist evaluation methodology are formulated both at the coalition-level as well as the individual-level. In addition, some additional research questions on the relevance of the ENGINE-approach were formulated as well:

The realist evaluation addresses the following research questions:

- **Coalition-level:**

Overarching research question: "*How do regional labour market coalitions work to stimulate upward or sideward mobility among employees facing barriers to progression and create traction for the inflow of jobseekers facing barriers to employment, for whom, and under what circumstances?"*

1. What key mechanisms drive coalition formation and functioning,

2. Which regional and national contextual circumstances enable or constrain these mechanisms, and

3. What outcomes do these coalitions produce?

- **Individual-level:**

Overarching research question: *"How do training and development interventions work to stimulate upward mobility of vulnerable employees and labour market inflow of vulnerable jobseekers — for whom, and under what circumstances?"*

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- **Employees:**

1. What key mechanisms drive interventions aimed at training and development for employees,
2. Which contextual circumstances enable or constrain these mechanisms, and
3. What outcomes do these interventions for employees generate?

- **Jobseekers:**

1. What key mechanisms drive interventions aimed at training and development for jobseekers,
2. Which contextual circumstances enable or constrain these mechanisms, and
3. What outcomes do these interventions for employees generate?

- **ENGINE implementation question:** How, and to what extent, is the ENGINE approach implemented in practice across the Living Labs, and how do contextual conditions enable or constrain this implementation? In addressing this hypothesis, the evaluation examines how the ENGINE approach takes shape in different contexts through its three core principles:

1. **Coalition building** is examined by analysing how governance structures, partner composition, leadership processes, member participation, and levels of employer engagement, commitment, and group cohesion shape coalition functioning over time. These elements may function as contextual conditions or as mechanisms, depending on how they influence actors' engagement and collaborative behaviour, and thereby shape whether and how coalition processes associated with the ENGINE approach develop and are sustained.
2. **Multi-level intervention packages** are examined by analysing interventions targeting jobseekers, employees, organisations, and the regional or system level, with specific attention to the extent to which these levels are aligned and mutually reinforcing, as hypothesised in the ENGINE approach. Particular attention is paid to employee development and upskilling activities and jobseeker activation or matching activities.
3. **Co-design and co-implementation** are examined by analysing how these principles are reflected in practice, including the presence and functioning of monitoring and feedback mechanisms, stakeholder involvement in intervention development and adaptation, and opportunities for iterative learning across partners.

In the sections that follow this realist logic is applied. We first outline the data sources and the broader contextual conditions that shape both coalition functioning and participant engagement. We then examine how the coalition-level and individual-level mechanisms identified in the initial programme theory manifested in practice, and how these interacted with contextual factors to produce specific outcomes. By structuring each Living Lab analysis along the layered CMO framework, we ensure comparability across sites and provide a coherent basis for refining the overall programme theory and informing upscaling strategies in later phases of SYNCLUSIVE (WP3).

First, on the next page you can find an overview of the qualitative data collected for the Amersfoort Living Lab.

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Table 1.11: Overview of qualitative data collected in Amersfoort, the Netherlands

Individual level: jobseeker		**Individual level: employees**		**Coalition level**	
Phase 1: theory developing	Phase 2: theory refinement / testing	Phase 1: theory developing	Phase 2: theory refinement / testing	Phase 1: theory developing	Phase 2: theory refinement / testing
Total amount of interviews	Total amount of interviews	Total amount of interviews	Total amount of interviews	Total amount of interviews	Total amount of interviews
6	0	12 (including supervisors of employees)	7 supervisors, 6 employees	17	15
Focus group:					
0	0	1 (6 employees)	0	0	0

1.6.1 Coalition-level general and context information

Amersfoort is one of the thirty-five Dutch labour market regions and comprises seven municipalities: Amersfoort, Baarn, Bunschoten, Leusden, Nijkerk, Soest and Woudenberg. The region has approximately 353,600 inhabitants, with the city of Amersfoort, around 163,300 inhabitants in 2025, as its centre. By Dutch standards it is average in size and centrally located, at a junction of motorways and rail connections between Amsterdam, Utrecht, Apeldoorn and Zwolle.

The population is growing, and the age structure is comparatively young for the Netherlands. Educational attainment is relatively high. The regional labour market is tight: national monitoring for 2025 and 2026 places Amersfoort among the thirteen regions where tightness is most pronounced, with shortages concentrated in care, education, childcare, technology and ICT. Project documentation estimated some 5,500 long-term unemployed on benefit in the region.

Overarching Living Lab context

Governance structure: Dutch labour market policy is decentralised: municipalities, the public employment organisation, education providers and employers each hold their own mandate and budget, and the thirty-five labour market regions coordinate rather than govern. Respondents described Amersfoort as comparatively advanced in this system, having established a regional employment center earlier than most Dutch regions. Respondents described the system as nonetheless in transition through 2025, with reorganisation under way at both administrative and operational level nationally. Two established regional instruments, the learning and work desk and the regional mobility team, were discontinued in January. One respondent described the effect as the previous shared working structure

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disappearing without anything new yet standing in its place. Under this arrangement, regional initiatives in the Netherlands generally have no default owner: whether and how they are commissioned has to be settled deliberately by the parties involved, rather than assigned by any single authority.

Existing social policies: Several national instruments bear on labour market inclusion of vulnerable groups. They differ in the actor they address: candidates/jobseekers, employers and workplaces, or regional actors. We first outline these instruments and then indicate which ones respondents referred to.

Candidates/jobseekers. Under the Participation Act, people receiving benefit can start with a trial placement, in which they keep their benefit for about two months while working at an employer. People in the national target-group register count toward the jobs agreement, which sets employment targets for people with a disability.

Employers and workplaces. Public sources describe instruments that reduce the cost and risk of hiring. These include municipal wage cost subsidy of up to 70 percent of the statutory minimum wage, a no-risk policy through the benefits agency that compensates sick pay, a wage cost benefit, and subsidy for internal or external job coaches. A second group supports learning at work, mainly the SLIM training subsidy for sectoral development pathways and the practical learning subsidy.

Regional actors. Central municipalities confirm the sector collaboration behind collective SLIM applications.

Institutional quality and effectiveness: Respondents described government institutions in general terms as slow to act, noting that decisions involving the municipality or UWV often take a long time regardless of which body is involved. A separate respondent described UWV as undergoing a reorganisation during the research period, alongside broader national reforms affecting work, income, and care. One respondent described the municipality as several separate units, each with its own mandate. This respondent also described municipal funding as often allocated reactively, with subsidies created in response to individual identified problems (for example, a subsidy for basic skills) rather than through an integrated plan. In the technical sector, one respondent reported hearing secondhand from peer coordinators that the regional Werkgeversservicepunt (WSP) had a weaker reputation among employers, associated mainly with UWV's harder to place candidates. The same respondent described UWV's internal culture as procedural and compliance driven, characterising it as box ticking.

Labour market structure: One respondent noted that Amersfoort is among the regions in the Netherlands that rely most heavily on temporary work agencies, though without specifying whether this applied to one sector or to the region's labour market more broadly. No respondent offered a single, sector-independent figure for the overall balance of SMEs and large employers across the region.

Within childcare specifically, one respondent described the sector as small and tight, structured more around foundations than profit-driven firms, and without an employers' organisation able to readily act or negotiate on its behalf. This respondent linked the sector's structure directly to how coalition-building efforts have to operate within it, given the absence of a single representative body to approach.

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Comparing the two sectors directly (childcare, technical), the same respondent described technology as having a relatively larger share of SMEs than childcare. A separate respondent, reflecting on technology specifically, described the sector nationally as dominated by small and medium-sized firms, most without dedicated HR capacity, in contrast to the smaller number of large, better-resourced organisations found within childcare.

Economic situation: The Netherlands has one of the highest rates of labour market participation in the European Union, and the region performs above the national average on this measure, which reflects a generally strong economic position. Respondents described sector-level economics as less favourable in the two sectors this Living Lab addresses. One employer described margins in childcare as structurally thin, explaining that placing an additional assistant on every group would give away the margin the organisation depends on. In technology, respondents linked cost pressure to hiring caution rather than to the business cycle directly, describing employers as reluctant to take people on while wage and secondment costs are high. Read together, these accounts suggest that sector economics limit what employers can absorb regardless of willingness, and that this limit operates separately from the shortage described in 1.5. The wider claim that appetite for training moves with the business cycle is an inference rather than something respondents stated.

Education and training system: The Dutch vocational education system offers routes at several qualification levels, including school-based and work-based learning, with a national body accrediting employers as training locations. Respondents described provision and certification infrastructure as uneven across occupational fields. Some trades were described as having well-developed modular routes allowing shorter or partial qualifications, while others offer only a single, longer entry-level programme. Respondents treated this unevenness as a national feature of the vocational system rather than a regional one and described it as affecting which occupations are accessible to candidates who need a shorter or more flexible route into work. One respondent described the choice of sub-sector as having followed partly from where such certification infrastructure already existed. Respondents also described qualification level as affecting reach, with lower-level routes drawing on a larger pool of eligible candidates.

Cultural attitudes toward vulnerable groups: Professionals within the Dutch employment and education system are generally positive towards labour market inclusion of vulnerable groups, reflecting the national policy consensus embodied in legislation and the job agreement for people with an occupational disability. Respondents described employer attitudes as more mixed. One coordinator described the practice as still unfamiliar to organisations and therefore somewhat discouraging simply because it was unknown, rather than as something employers objected to in principle. Respondents distinguished between more and less established target groups, noting that groups whose barriers are less familiar, such as limited language proficiency, are only slowly coming into view for employers. Respondents also described attitudes on the work floor as sensitive to how much unsupported guidance responsibility staff are asked to carry. At the same time, respondents described childcare as having a comparatively open culture of sharing practice across organisations, and one employer described the organisation as socially oriented by mission, stating that collaborating and not wanting to work alone is part of its make-up.

Other context factors: Two further national conditions are relevant. First, respondents described policy and practice as oriented mainly towards preparing and guiding candidates, with comparatively little structural support for preparing the workplaces and supervisors who

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receive them. Respondents identified this as a gap between placement and sustained retention. Second, regional labour market reform is proceeding nationally on a multi-year timeline, with full statutory implementation not expected before 2027. Respondents described regional initiatives in this period as operating within a governance environment that is itself still being settled.

1.6.2 Coalition-level CMO's

Coalition formation phase

1. Recruiting partners through relationships that already exist

> **IF a** new coalition has no track record and can offer no guarantees, while regional stakeholders already know one another or know each other by reputation,
>
> **THEN a** convening organisation can approach partners informally through relationships that already exist, rather than through a formal invitation,
>
> **LEADING TO partners** transfer their confidence in the person to the initiative, so that trust in an individual substitutes for trust in an institution that does not yet exist,
>
> **AS A RESULT commitment** is given quickly and without formal arrangements, and the coalition begins working before its governance is settled.

Respondents described the region as small enough that reputation travels ahead of formal contact. The public employment organisation has brought an existing relationship with the first childcare employer into the coalition, so that the very first conversation was not a cold approach but a continuation of contact that already existed. One respondent, reflecting on why the first trajectory could move quickly, explained that although this was the first direct contact with the specific person now involved, her name was already known there, and this created a form of trust before any coalition structure existed. The mechanism would therefore substitute something the coalition does not yet have, an institutional track record, with something a partner already has, a personal or organisational reputation. This looks efficient at the start, since it removes the need to build credibility from nothing, but it also sets up the stalling described two patterns further on, and the same account shows why: the respondent noted that liking someone personally does not by itself make clear who is responsible for what, so relational trust may open the door to collaboration without settling how that collaboration is governed once inside.

Hindering context factors

1. **Collaboration carried by individuals rather than by organisations.** Respondents describe collaboration in this region as running on personal relationships rather than on formal agreements between organisations. That makes things quick to start, but it also means the trust belongs to individuals and does not transfer when one of them moves on. The departure of one central figure here was followed by a period participants described as stagnation.
2. **Parties you need who are each other's competitors.** Where two organisations of the same kind are both needed, an informal approach through relationships does not resolve which of them to work with. The programme lead described getting a coalition together as feasible in principle, but said it sometimes feels as though you have to choose

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between education institutions. Bringing them together instead requires taking the conversation up to board level, which in turn means going up to board level inside his own organisation first. Asked what that costs, his answer was simply time.

3. **Employers already fielding more initiatives than they can tell apart.** A relational approach does not help where the obstacle is volume rather than unfamiliarity. A respondent working nationally described employers declining at the outset because it feels like the twenty-fifth initiative, adding that there are so many projects, pilots and ideas that people stop seeing the wood for the trees.

Facilitating context factors

1. **A region small enough that reputation arrives before contact does.** Partners are within one or two steps of each other, so an approach tends to arrive with a reputation already attached. That lets a partner form a judgement about whether to engage before there is any formal proposition to assess.
2. **Partners who already hold working relationships with employers.** Some partners have had standing relationships with employers before the coalition existed. This lets the coalition draw on those relationships from the outset, rather than spending its first year establishing contact and credibility with each employer itself.

Associated outcomes

1. **Early commitment from partners,** willing to explore further together.
2. **A working relationship between three parties established quickly,** on an informal division of tasks.

2. Framing the staffing shortage as a problem shared across the sector

> **IF** there is a labour shortage severe enough that employers cannot fill their vacancies through their own recruitment,
>
> **THEN** a municipality or sector body can approach regional stakeholders and present the shortage as a problem shared across the sector rather than as each organisation's own recruitment difficulty,
>
> **LEADING TO** stakeholders conclude that the problem is larger than any of them can solve alone and that acting together is worth the uncertainty,
>
> **AS A RESULT** a first group of stakeholders commits to exploring a regional coalition.

Respondents described the shortage as a concrete and pressing issue, with one childcare provider facing the prospect of closing locations for want of staff. The municipal coordinator introduced the shortage using the image of an oil stain, a solution that spreads outward from one organisation to the next, which has given partners a shared vocabulary for an interest they had until then experienced separately. The employer who joined first described recognising the coalition's aim as consistent with how the organisation already saw itself, being explicitly a socially engaged provider that does not want to work alone. This suggests the mechanism may work less by adding new information about the shortage, which employers already knew, and more by converting a private difficulty into a shared one that justifies joint investment. The reasoning step would are the move from "this is my problem" to "this is our problem and therefore worth addressing together", and it depends on the frame resonating with how an organisation already understands its own mission.

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Hindering context factors

1. **A shortage severe enough to remove the time needed to act on it.** A labour shortage cuts both ways here. It gives employers a reason to act, but it also means the person who would attend coalition meetings tends to be fully occupied covering shifts. the worse the shortage, the stronger the reason to join and the less time there is to do so.
2. **An instrument that has no concrete form yet.** Where the scheme a coalition is built around has not yet been published, willingness cannot be converted into a proposition a partner can weigh and so remains at the level of intention.
3. **Sub-sectors that differ too much for one sector-wide approach to fit.** Respondents working across regions suggest whole sectors are rarely in the same position. “Childcare” or “technology” each contain very different kinds of organisation: some parts are well organised through their own trade bodies and move quickly; others consist mostly of small firms with no such support. An invitation addressed to a sector as a whole may therefore speak to none of these situations precisely enough for any of them to recognise their own problem in it.

Facilitating context factors

1. **A shortage that is visible in concrete terms.** A provider facing the prospect of closing locations is something other employers can picture happening to them, in a way regional vacancy figures do not. Where employers recognise their own likely future in another organisation’s situation, they are more willing to treat it as a shared problem than as that organisation’s bad luck.
2. **Providers that already describe themselves in terms of a social purpose.** One employer described her organisation as an explicitly socially engaged provider that does not want to solve problems alone. For organisations of that kind, joining an initiative about employing people from vulnerable groups confirms an identity they already hold rather than asking them to adopt a new one, which may be why agreeing to take part costs them relatively little internally.
3. **Access to data on the regional labour market.** Access to labour market data proved insight into the regional labour market and helped the coalition identify where labour shortages existed and which sectors and employers had vacancies the most. A respondent working nationally highlighted the value of having this information available when deciding which employers to approach. Having such data available helped framing the problem as shared in more concrete terms.

Associated outcomes

1. **Early commitment from an initial core group,** and the motivation to explore a first joint trajectory without a long preparatory phase.
2. **A positive attitude towards coalition participation** among the employers first approached.

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3. Stalling where commissioning and mandate are left unassigned

> **IF** a coalition has formed informally through existing relationships, so that no commissioning body has been assigned, no project plan exists, and partners are represented by staff with operational responsibilities rather than authority to commit,
>
> **THEN meetings** continue to take place, but there is no route from something agreed in a meeting to action taken by the organisations behind the table,
>
> **LEADING TO participants** reason that they are structurally under-authorised, able to consult but not to decide, and increasingly doubting whether further investment of their time is worthwhile,
>
> **AS A RESULT progress** stalls, and involvement erodes among the partners who cannot proceed.
>
> **CONVERSELY** this same stalling is what makes the correction possible. Respondents describe the visible cost of the standstill as what legitimated appointing a coordinator and designating a commissioner, which is the pattern that follows.

This is the direct consequence of the informal start described in the previous pattern, and respondents describe it as the most consistently reported barrier of the forming phase. Because the coalition had come together through personal relationships rather than through formal agreement, the arrangements that would ordinarily be settled at the outset were not made. One respondent described the period as feeling as though things were merely ticking over, saying that conversations were being held but that they had no sense these would lead to a next step. After a key person left, the same respondent described it more sharply, saying that although they were certainly doing things, it felt as though nothing was actually being done, and that it had stagnated. A respondent looking back on the same period identified what had been missing in project-management terms: there was no clear project plan, governance was not in order, and a number of things an experienced project manager would have arranged at the front end simply had not been taken care of/arranged. The programme lead described his own position during this time as having no clear commissioning brief and no clearly designated commissioner, whether at official or at political level, which he linked directly to finding it harder to get a place at the regional tables where the work would have to be taken forward. What makes this more than an ordinary delay is that the consequence was not disagreement but paralysis: partners could discuss and explore, but nothing discussed became binding, so involvement gradually eroded, at the education partner and the public employment organisation in particular. Respondents also describe a second-order effect, in that unspoken tension accumulated because it was unclear who could raise a difficulty and when. One participant reflected that he had not named a problem in time, which he suggested let things simmer and created friction between people that would have been easier to resolve had it been raised earlier.

Hindering context factors

1. **Trust that was vested in individuals rather than in arrangements.** Because the coalition started through personal relationships, as described in the previous pattern, the departure of one central figure has removed what was holding the work together, and respondents describe the period immediately afterwards as stagnation.

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2. **A regional layer with no hierarchy, where authority stays with each member.** The Dutch labour market is marked by a flat hierarchy, so no coalition member alone can decide the course. Where partners send operational staff, those representatives cannot bind their own organisation, and on respondents' accounts agreement reached in the room does not then become action.
3. **A central instrument that had no concrete form yet.** During this same period the national scheme the coalition was built around had not been published, so respondents have had nothing definite to put in front of partners. This has compounded the stalling: there was neither the authority to decide nor anything specific to decide about.
4. **No occasion set aside for discussing the collaboration itself.** A coalition needs moments for talking about how the work is going, separately from the substance of the work. Where no such occasion exists, it is unclear who may raise a difficulty and when, so friction is left unspoken and accumulates. Respondents described unspoken tension as harder to resolve later than it would have been at the time.

Facilitating context factors

1. **A partner with experience of running coalitions, who can lead the conversation about the collaboration itself.** What was missing was not goodwill but someone used to this kind of work. One respondent said plainly that these projects had not been run with an experienced project manager, and that a number of things such a person would have arranged at the front end simply had not been. Because someone with that background stepped in as quartermaster, the coalition could be taken apart and put back together deliberately. She describes arriving at a point where nothing concrete was happening and everyone felt responsible while nobody felt responsible for creating movement. What this kind of partner brings is less the substantive work than the ability to hold a conversation about how the collaboration is running, which is what nobody had been positioned to do.

Associated outcomes

1. **No decisions translated into action,** and stalling progress during the forming phase.
2. **Eroding involvement** reported at the education partner and the public employment organisation in particular.
3. **A negative outcome that has generated its own correction.** Respondents describe the visible cost of this period as what legitimated the structural intervention described in the next pattern. it is the clearest instance in the dataset of a failure producing the conditions for its own repair, which may be worth noting for regions tempted to read an early standstill purely as a setback.

4. Assigning a coordinator and recording roles and mandates is needed for progressing the formation of a coalition that works

> **IF** the organisations in a coalition each retain their own decision-making authority and are represented by staff without a mandate to commit,
>
> **THEN** the coalition can appoint a coordinator acting as a facilitating leader, and record roles, tasks and responsibilities in writing,
>
> **LEADING TO** participants understand what they are authorised to decide, and consequently dare to raise problems and take initiative without first seeking reassurance,

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> **AS A RESULT** deliberation converts into decisions and the coalition will be/is able to act on behalf of its members.
>
> **CONVERSELY** where commissioning and mandate remain unassigned, participants can consult but not commit, so meetings do not produce action, progress stalls, and involvement erodes among partners who cannot proceed.

This is the correction to the stalling described in the previous pattern, and the most consistently reported pattern in the dataset. It operates in both directions depending on whether governance is settled. During the forming stage, coalition partners were represented by staff with day-to-day operational responsibilities rather than by people who could commit their organisation to anything. Meetings were held, but there was no agreed commissioner, no project plan, and no route from a decision made in a meeting to action taken by the organisations behind the table. One participant described this retrospectively, saying that they had started working before the project-management basics were arranged, and that an experienced project manager would ordinarily have settled this in advance. The consequence does not have been disagreement but paralysis: partners could discuss and explore, but nothing discussed became binding, so involvement gradually eroded, at the education partner and the public employment organisation in particular. The correction was the appointment of a quartermaster with project management experience and the placement of the coalition under a designated commissioner, after which tasks, roles and responsibilities were written down and agreed. Once this was in place, the same coordinator who had previously felt unable to act described now feeling authorised to give feedback when something was not working, and to initiate contact with new partners without waiting for permission. The underlying logic would are that a mandate is not simply a formality: without it, no one in the room can commit to anything on behalf of their organisation, and with it, ordinary participants can raise problems and take initiative rather than only attend.

Hindering context factors

1. **Work beginning before any project plan exists.** This coalition has begun without a project plan. Questions an experienced project manager would settle at the very start, such as who delivers what by when, were left open, and were only answered after a standstill made continuing without answers impossible. (Policy and institutions)
2. **Employers with limited tolerance for governance architecture.** A respondent working nationally suggested employers are not often waiting for governance structures. That sets a ceiling on how much structure a coalition can build before partners disengage, which suggests what matters is that decision rights are clear rather than that the arrangement is elaborate.

Facilitating context factors

1. **A coordinator appointed from outside the existing relationships.** Such a coordinator has no stake in how tasks were divided previously. Steering on milestones, planning and division of roles has introduced a discipline the informal arrangement had not produced. (Policy and institutions)
2. **A coordinator not held to short-term delivery targets.** The coordinating role was briefed to build recognition and lay groundwork rather than to be judged on placement numbers. Since that early work produces no quick results, it that a coordinator judged on numbers would have skipped it in favour of quick wins. (Policy and institutions)

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3. **A facilitative rather than directive leadership style.** The role in this coalition has worked best where the coordinator proposed a way forward for the group to accept or amend, rather than deciding alone and issuing instructions. Partners have needed to experience the mandate as organising their own commitment, not as being managed from above. (History of collaboration)

Associated outcomes

- **Before the correction:** no decisions translated into action, and eroding involvement at the education partner and the public employment organisation.
- **After the appointed coordinator took charge:** more effective meetings and a clearer division of tasks are reported, with the coordinator initiating collaborations that had previously felt out of reach.
- **The confidence generated** becomes the condition on which several later patterns in this document depend.

5. Turning intentions into something partners can examine

> **IF** partners are asked to invest time in an initiative whose product, timing and conditions are not yet concrete, and whose meetings produce no decisions,
>
> **THEN** the coalition converts intention into something that can be examined: a published instrument, decisions with named owners, next steps with dates, and visible movement between meetings,
>
> **LEADING TO** partners appearing able to weigh what participation costs against what they can see it producing, and to conclude that the coalition does what it says,
>
> **AS A RESULT** stated willingness converts into commitment.
>
> **CONVERSELY** where meetings recur without decisions, deadlines or a tangible product, partners conclude that the return does not justify the time, and engagement erodes towards what one participant called another talking group that people decline to join.

Before the regional training routes were published, the municipal coordinator has had nothing in hand when talking to potential partners: no description of what the arrangement would actually involve, so there was nothing for a partner to react to or weigh up. The regional training routes are the sectoral development pathways approved nationally. They list the functions in a sector and the training available for each, for jobseekers, career changers, and existing staff. The coordinator holds this task for all sectors in the region, so this account concerns the pathways in general and not one coalition, and it dates from the forming phase. The coordinator described that period as talking about thin air and having to sell that thin air. Once a website went live listing the available training routes and job profiles and letting an organisation check what fitted its own situation, conversations with employers changed: there was now something to point to, which the coordinator described as making the plan a living thing rather than a concept. A respondent working nationally named what this kind of concreteness may do for an employer in particular: employers build their own plans and business cases on an arrangement, so they need to know whether it will still be there in a year, not only what it currently offers. The same distinction may also help explain why moving faster, later in the process, did not put employers off. One coordinator described no longer feeling like someone trying to sell something at that point, adding that the trust built up over the

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preceding meetings was what let the coalition sell something afterwards without it landing as pressure.

Hindering context factors

1. **Dependence on a national ministry for the instrument itself.** The pathway's content, funding and mandate were set by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment rather than by the coalition. Two respondents independently described this as disruptive: one for how unevenly funding and formal assignment was distributed across regions, the other for how slowly and unpredictably information reached the coalition.
2. **Instruments whose conditions are still being revised.** Where a national scheme is still being amended, no one in the coalition can state what participation will yield or when funding becomes available and on what terms.

Facilitating context factors

1. **A published scheme partners can finally assess.** Once the national training routes were published, with the available job profiles and courses set out, partners have had something specific to assess against their own situation. On the accounts given, this is what turns general willingness into a decision an organisation can actually take.
2. **Employers needing to know an arrangement will still exist next year.** Employers build their own staffing plans and business cases around what they commit to. A respondent working nationally put it plainly: where a coalition looks erratic, an employer asks what they are supposed to get out of it and may discount it regardless of its content.
3. **Trust already accumulated through earlier contact.** Publishing something concrete turns willingness into a firm commitment only if partners read it as the coalition delivering what it promised rather than as pressure to decide. That reading depends on clear governance and on the regular contact described under coalition maintenance below.

Associated outcomes

1. **Movement towards a declaration of intent,** reported at the last interview round as close but not yet settled.
2. **In the forming stage, by contrast:** partners reported as informed but uncommitted, and frustration among those unable to proceed with employers.

6. Absorbing coordinating work so that participation depends less on spare staff capacity of employers

> **IF** taking part in a coalition carries coordinating work for employers, in the form of meetings to attend, several public bodies to deal with and paperwork to complete such as subsidy applications, and organisations differ in whether anyone's role allows them to take that work on,
>
> **THEN** a partner of the coalition can take that work on itself rather than passing it across: one point of contact instead of several, subsidy applications completed on the employer's behalf rather than the requirements being explained and the work left with them, meeting formats and timing that fit operational reality, and a scale of participation matched to what each organisation can carry,
>
> **LEADING TO** employers judge participation as more feasible in the currency they are actually short of, which is time and attention rather than goodwill,

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> **AS A RESULT** participation and follow-through are less likely to concentrate among the organisations that happen to have staff for this kind of work.
>
> **CONVERSELY** where nobody absorbs this work, managers at larger organisations can reason that a colleague with a dedicated function can pick it up, while managers at small organisations reason that they have other things to do and let the opportunity lapse, even where they consider it worthwhile.

Time was the reason most often given by organisations that did not attach to the coalition. A respondent working nationally identified two forms the burden takes and described both as affecting employers generally rather than small ones specifically. Employers are approached separately by several public bodies about related matters: she described one dealing with three account managers, two work coaches and someone from the vocational qualifications body, and said it drives them mad. Administrative requirements, on her account, can also consume more time than the benefit is worth. What she proposed in response was an integrated approach in which an employer deals with one interlocutor, and practical help with the paperwork rather than instruction about it. Organisation size then determines how hard this lands. A coalition partner described the difference in these terms: at a smaller organisation the manager is “much more for everything” and therefore genuinely has no time, whereas at a larger organisation responsibilities are distributed and people do have that time. The concrete contrast given was that a small childcare provider must arrange everything, while a large one has one person for payroll and another for personnel matters. A childcare employer described this happening in her own case, unprompted: she had identified a candidate she wanted to support into the sector, knew a subsidy scheme probably applied, and still did not act, saying that she then thinks she has other things to do, so it does not get done, while it would of course be helpful and would fill a place where there are real shortages. Coalition actors present confirmed how often this happens, noting how frequently employers do not apply for a subsidy because it is too much hassle, and that small employers are often unaware which schemes exist at all. This suggests the constraint may not be willingness or awareness of value, but the absence of anyone whose role permits them to convert intention into action.

Hindering context factors

1. **Public bodies that each keep their own line to the employer.** A coalition would only be able to offer one point of contact if the other public organisations involved were willing to route through it. Where each retains its own account manager and to approach the employer directly, as respondents describe, the coalition may be unable to deliver the single interlocutor it is offering, however much it takes on itself. That the remedy proposed by a respondent working nationally was explicitly an integrated approach suggests the obstacle may lie in coordination between public bodies rather than in any one of them.
2. **Administrative requirements set nationally, which the coalition can carry but not reduce.** A coalition can complete an application on an employer’s behalf but cannot change what a scheme demands or when it opens. There may therefore be a floor below which the burden cannot be absorbed, and where requirements sit above what the benefit is worth, small organisations might still decline.
3. **A binding constraint that may be money rather than time.** Absorbing coordination addresses the time cost of taking part, but not the cost of supervision on the floor. Margins in childcare are described as thin across the sector, and the cost of an extra supervising member of staff is not covered by what a group brings in. Where the real

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barrier is financial rather than administrative, this resource does not reach it, which may be part of why arrangements of this kind sustainable during a funded pilot but less so afterwards.

4. **The coalition's own coordinating capacity resting on time-limited funding.** Taking work off employers presumably requires someone paid to do it. A respondent working across regions identified whether money was freed up for someone to spend days on this as the clearest difference between regions that progress and regions that stall, which suggests this mechanism may itself be vulnerable to the funding conditions described elsewhere in this document.

Facilitating context factors

1. **An organisation whose formal role is serving employers.** The region already has an organisation whose formal role is advising and supporting employers rather than regulating or funding them; its adviser described her own remit as being there for the employer. Taking coordinating work off employers would therefore be part of that organisation's job rather than an additional burden someone has to be talked into carrying.
2. **Administrative expertise already sitting with that organisation.** That same organisation deals with the relevant funding schemes routinely and, knows how the paperwork works. That expertise is what makes it possible to complete applications on an employer's behalf, rather than explaining the requirements and leaving the work with them.
3. **A sector mixing a few large providers with many small ones.** The local childcare sector consists of a few larger providers alongside many small ones. That variation makes it possible to ask different things of different organisations: a small employer can take one candidate where a larger one can take a group. Asking the same of both might either overwhelm the small provider or waste the larger one's capacity.

Associated outcomes

1. **Commitment reported from a wider base of organisations.** smaller organisations often struggle with the administrative and coordinating burden of initiatives, and that where a partner can help by taking over this role, they are more willing to participate.
2. **Participation and follow-through nonetheless still concentrated** among the larger organisations during the formation phase, which suggests any effect so far may be partial.

Coalition maintenance phase

1. **Convening competitors around a shared problem, repeatedly and with the same people, under a supportive facilitator**

> **IF** the organisations a coalition needs compete with one another for the same staff and have no shared setting outside that competition,
>
> **THEN** they are brought together at regular intervals, hosted in turn on each other's premises, by a party they experience as being there for them rather than as an authority over them,
>
> **LEADING TO** participants judge the setting safe enough to say what is not working as well as what is,

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> **AS A RESULT** a group forms that exchanges experience openly and keeps contact outside the meetings.

Every three months, the group of childcare employers met at a different employer's own location. Whoever was hosting gave a short welcome and a tour of their own building, after which the public employment adviser running the coalition took the agenda back over for the discussion itself. At the first meetings participants were guarded: one described the room as full of what she called "non-colleagues", a mix of competitor and colleague, sizing each other up. What changed that, in her account, was two things repeating together over several quarters rather than any single meeting: the same people kept showing up, and it was consistently the same adviser, someone whose job title is literally adviser for employers, who ran the room rather than the municipality or an inspector. During the tours something specific has happened. One employer would see how another had laid out a room or organised a shift and say so out loud, which has given people an opening to talk shop that the formal agenda did not. Over several quarters, employers started volunteering what had gone wrong for them and not only what had gone well, went into more personal territory in side conversations, and thanked the organisers unprompted for setting the meetings up at all. One employer had by then offered to host the next round.

Hindering context factors

1. **Competition for the same scarce staff.** The childcare providers in this coalition compete with each other for the same people, which made the first meetings a matter of mutual probing rather than exchange. Stronger competitive feelings among partners requires spending additional time working out these possible frictions.
2. **Organisations sending a different representative each time.** Where the person attending changes, familiarity does not accumulate, since it builds between individual people rather than between organisations. Each new face returns the group some way towards the guarded stage it started in.

Facilitating context factors

1. **The same individuals returning over several quarters.** In this coalition the employers met every three months, and one participant attributed the change in atmosphere not to how often they met but to the fact that the same faces kept returning.
2. **The convening organisation's existing standing with employers.** Employers accept an organisation they see as existing to support them more readily than one they associate with inspection, funding conditions or enforcement, even where the content of the meeting would be identical.
3. **A rotating venue with a tour of the host's own premises.** Seeing how another organisation actually works produces a familiarity that a meeting room does not, and to prompt comparisons a verbal description would not.
4. **A sector already used to share practice across organisations.** One participant described the sessions as genuinely participative, with providers sharing information honestly. That existing habit is part of what makes candid exchange possible once the setting feels safe enough.
5. **A mix of larger and smaller providers in the room.** Where every organisation present faces identical circumstances there is little to learn from each other, so differences in size and working method are what make attending worthwhile.

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Associated outcomes

1. **A reported shift from probing to open exchange,** with failures shared alongside successes.
2. **Contact between employers outside the meetings,** which participants described as new.
3. **Knowledge exchange that individual organisations cannot produce alone.** One employer said she found the sessions fascinating precisely because almost all the other organisations present were very small and looked at childcare, training and the labour market in a completely different way, and that she would not have wanted to miss this. Another respondent described the value as a sparring function, where one organisation can say it has been through the same thing and explain how it handled it. This suggests the coalition may add something bilateral relationships between two parties would not produce, although whether it actually improves recruitment and guidance practice has not been measured.

2. Making explicit who brings what, wants what, and is responsible for what, and recording it

> **IF** participation is non-binding and what each partner actually expects to contribute, gain and be responsible for has never been said out loud, so that different partners may be assuming different things without anyone finding out until something goes wrong,
>
> **THEN** the coalition works through, with each partner directly, what it wants from participation, what it can offer in return, and where its own responsibility starts and stops, and sets this down in a document the partners formulate together and sign,
>
> **LEADING TO** partners recognise themselves specifically in the arrangement rather than only a shared goal stated in general terms, and being able to hold each other, and themselves, to what was actually agreed,
>
> **AS A RESULT** commitment becomes explicit and reciprocal, something partners can be held to, rather than an assumed and open-ended goodwill.
>
> **CONVERSELY** where roles and contributions stay implicit, partners project their own expectations onto the collective without anyone confirming them, responsibility for follow-through has no clear owner, and a document signed on top of that would record an intention no one has actually tested.

One participant's own definition of what makes a coalition work at all starts from exactly this point. In that account a coalition means give and take on both sides, ***real reciprocity***, and ***an arrangement*** in which all partners contribute to the coalition. A partner that only receives from the coalition and contributes nothing in return causes the arrangement to stop working. Part of what that means is representation done properly: knowing who else you are speaking for, not only your own interest, and being able to hold each other to what was agreed, calling it out when something is not followed through and naming it when something works well. A second participant made a related point from the coordinating side, describing a specific failure to avoid: if a coalition designs something on employers' behalf instead of asking them to work out the actual demand together first, no single employer ends up feeling it is theirs to follow through on, because the question was never actually theirs to begin with. In the childcare coalition this has played out concretely. Rather than the coalition deciding what roles it thought employers needed, employers were asked to work through together the actual job descriptions

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the new roles would have to fill, and only then to put a joint signature under the result. A third participant explained why that signature may not be symbolic: once an organisation has co-signed a job description, it cannot later say it has no room for someone who fits it. Getting to that point has taken real preparation. The group sessions where roles and contributions were worked out were each preceded by one-to-one conversations with individual employers, which participants said was what let each employer trust that the collective version would still reflect what they had personally said.

Hindering context factors

1. **Divergent organisational interests.** Partners share an overall aim but differ in what each hope to get from it. Education and employers are the clearest example. A coalition partner described education as treating qualification as the aim, whereas employers see education as a means to get people into work. In the first childcare pilot, the employer wanted a skilled employee and the school wanted a diploma, and both found out only halfway through. Differences like these make the conversation more delicate and make explicit articulation of contributions more necessary.
2. **Membership that carries no conditions.** An organisation that contributes actively and one that merely attends have the same standing, so when a partner does not follow through there is no agreed expectation anyone can point to.
3. **Written declarations meaning different things to public bodies and to employers.** Written declarations are a familiar instrument in the public sector and a less familiar one for employers, whose commitments are usually commercial and specific. The same document may therefore be read by a public body as a statement of intent and by an employer as an obligation it is not certain it can honour.

Facilitating context factors

1. **A direct one-to-one relationship with each employer.** The coalition already to hold a separate relationship with each employer, which is what makes it possible to prepare a collective step through individual conversations beforehand.
2. **Accountability already settled.** Organisations unlikely to sign up to obligations towards a group while it is still unclear who in that group decides what, or who is accountable if things go wrong. Settling mandates and commissioning, described earlier in this document, would therefore come first.
3. **Earlier joint work that partners can point to.** The coalition has earlier joint work partners can refer to, which may give a new commitment a precedent so that signing up reads as continuing something already under way.
4. **Several comparable providers facing the same shortage.** The sector locally contains several providers of comparable size in the same position, which is what makes a collective arrangement possible at all rather than a bilateral deal with one employer.

Associated outcomes

1. **Joint drafting draw out honest disagreement.** One respondent described shared ownership as still uneven going in but said that as soon as something genuinely became a joint document, people spoke up rather than staying quiet, which is what let the result end up actually shared rather than shared in name only.
2. **Reported movement towards a declaration of intent,** which if signed would are the first anchoring of the coalition outside the project logic. It was unsigned at the last

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interview, so the reasoning attributed to employers is in part inferred from coordinators' accounts.

3. **For the target group:** making the collective decision explicit converts it into a concrete operational consequence. Once the group has agreed and signed off on placing a certain kind of candidate, an individual organisation can no longer say it has no room for one. This is the most direct route visible in the data from a coalition-level agreement to actual access for the target group.

3. Comparable examples and reciprocity deepen trust and move individual interest toward shared commitment

> **IF** the organisations that would have to adopt a practice hesitate not because they are against it, but because it is new territory they have no experience with, and the group already trusts each other enough to take one another's experiences seriously,
>
> **THEN** concrete examples of comparable organisations that have already done it are put in front of them at every meeting as an opening for discussion, and the coalition consistently asks what it can offer employers in return, not only what employers can contribute,
>
> **LEADING TO** participants feel that a genuine, two-way relationship is accumulating rather than a one-sided ask, which lets the practice itself start to look feasible for organisations like theirs rather than exceptional,
>
> **AS A RESULT** individual interest turns into something the whole group visibly stands behind and is willing to act on together.

The approach was deliberately gradual and concrete and has built on more than information alone. At every meeting the coordinator brought a specific practical example, a training route that had actually run at a comparable organisation elsewhere with a named result, alongside the vocational school and the sector body so they could discuss on the spot how something similar might work locally. The question put to the group was always the same and always open, namely whether this is what they want, rather than a proposal to sign off on. The coordinator described the meetings as doing a second thing at the same time: each one let trust grow and let the coalition show it gave something back, not only asked what employers could bring. She described this as planting a positive seed and giving it time to grow, until the idea started to live inside the organisation itself and not only in the room. She was explicit that this patience was necessary because the subject was still unfamiliar and somewhat discouraging to act on alone and contrasted it with a different situation in which a topic is already familiar and employers are actively asking for movement, where winning trust depends on acting decisively and following up quickly rather than on patience. In this case the gradual approach eventually produced a moment the coordinator described directly: enough employers had signalled willingness that continuing to ask, quarter after quarter, whether they wanted to proceed no longer made sense, so the coalition moved to visible next steps that the whole group did stand behind.

Hindering context factors

1. **Hesitation that comes from unfamiliarity rather than objection.** Childcare employers here do not be opposed in principle to recruiting people with limited work experience or limited Dutch; most simply never to have done it. If the obstacle is unfamiliarity, it would follow that a single presentation does not shift it, and the pattern here suggests repeated exposure over a long period does while argument does not.

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2. **Absence of cohesion in the group.** Without an established basis of trust, peer examples liable to be received skeptically rather than taken as relevant.
3. **A relationship that runs in one direction only.** The coordinator attributed employers' trust to two things together: what the coalition gives back to them, and what it does on the demand side on their behalf. Where a coalition only ever asks, that basis absent and peer examples may land as another request.

Facilitating context factors

1. **Examples recognisably similar to the employer looking at them.** An employer weighing something they have never done is asking whether it is feasible for an organisation of their size, in their sector, with their staffing. A case from a comparable childcare provider answers that question in a way an impressive example from a different sector does not.
2. **A recurring meeting that already existed.** A regular meeting of these childcare employers was already in place, held every three months. That matters because showing examples works only through repetition over many months, and without a meeting that recurs there would be no occasion at which to do it more than once.
3. **Comparable providers elsewhere who have already done this.** Childcare providers elsewhere in the country have already run training routes of this kind, so real examples with named results exist to bring to each meeting. A respondent working nationally suggested an example from within the group itself would be more persuasive still.

Associated outcomes

1. **Individual employers moving from reserve** to actively asking the coalition to return with proposals.
2. **That individual willingness converging** into a moment where the coalition judged the whole group ready to act together, rather than continuing to ask quarter after quarter.
3. **A caveat respondents' accounts cannot settle:** whether this reflects genuinely changed attitudes, or greater visibility of employers who were already interested, cannot be established without interviewing employers directly.

4. Providing a setting in which education and employers can question each other directly

> **IF** education providers and employers operate from structurally different institutional logics, with education assessed primarily on qualifications awarded and employers on whether someone can do the job, and they do not meet systematically without an intermediary,
>
> **THEN** the coalition organises sessions at which both are present, supported by a shared document stating aims and by a coordinator who translates between the two logics,
>
> **LEADING TO** each side appearing able to question the other's logic directly and to recognise a complementarity neither has seen alone,
>
> **AS A RESULT** a working connection forms between two systems that respondents suggest would otherwise not align structurally.

Respondents described the difficulty between education and employers as long-standing and rooted in genuinely opposing interests rather than in poor communication. One put it as needing education and employers to be facing the same way so that the employment side can do its own work at all, and said that in practice, for as long as she has known the field, it has

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been complicated for the two to work together. The practical expression of the gap is mutual invisibility. The same respondent described schools not knowing how to reach candidates while employers do not know how to reach them either and added that once a student is placed there is sometimes an email at the start and then nobody from the school for the next three months. Another respondent described the coalition as giving direction where practice had varied by organisation, with one provider doing it one way and another differently. A third described the coalition making it possible to prepare in advance, saying she wants to work with the workplace supervisors only once it is known who is coming, so that preparation is possible. what the coalition supplies here is primarily the setting rather than the message: a place where two systems that otherwise deal with each other only case by case can state aims and limits in front of each other. Whether this actually produces better-aligned success criteria is plausible based on the pilot lesson but was not confirmed in the later round.

Hindering context factors

1. **Schools and employers judged on different things.** Vocational schools are assessed largely on how many students obtain a qualification, while employers judge the same trajectory on whether they gained a colleague who can do the work. Both are legitimate aims, but they pull a design in different directions, and in this coalition's first trajectory the difference was never stated out loud and surfaced halfway through.
2. **Partial membership of the coalition.** The education institution was difficult to keep attached and sector bodies only partly involved, which limits how far this brokering function can extend.
3. **Guidance that thins after placement.** Where support from the school side falls away once a candidate is placed, the employer left carrying supervision it had not planned for, which may undermine the willingness this mechanism depends on.

Facilitating context factors

1. **A setting that does not exist otherwise.** Respondents suggest education and employers do not meet systematically without an intermediary, which would make the coalition itself the resource here that facilitates discussion between these two.
2. **A coordinator who translates between the two logics.** Where practice previously varied by organisation, the coalition provides direction, which one respondent described as creating points of connection.
3. **A shared document stating aims explicitly.** Respondents describe a joint document setting out what each side is aiming for, which gives the conversation something to refer back to rather than relying on each party's recollection.

Associated outcomes

1. **A structural connection between education and employers** via a shared platform, described by respondents as among the coalition's most distinctive contributions.
2. **Trajectories that may be easier to run** because education and employer are using the same terms, though this was not verified for the revised round.
3. **For the target group:** respondents anticipate less friction on the work floor because expectations would be aligned before a candidate starts. This is an expectation rather than an observed outcome.

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5. Co-creating trajectory content with employers before commissioning curriculum design

> **IF** a training trajectory for a vulnerable target group must be constructed from scratch and includes a substantial work-based placement component,
>
> **THEN** the coalition works with employers, iteratively rather than through a single round of input, to crystallise what a candidate needs to learn and be able to do over the course of the trajectory to function as a colleague, and only then commissions education to translate that specification into curriculum content,
>
> **LEADING TO** employers recognise the resulting curriculum as the product of content they helped work out in detail, rather than a specification handed to education to interpret alone,
>
> **AS A RESULT** employer engagement with, and reported ownership of, the trajectory increases.
>
> **CONVERSELY** where employers are consulted once and briefly, or not until after curriculum design, the resulting curriculum does not be calibrated to what employers actually need, and ownership correspondingly lower. This is the sequence the pilot followed.

Before curriculum design begins, the coalition works with employers to crystallise, through iterative discussion rather than a single consultation, what a candidate needs to learn and be able to do to function as a colleague. Only then does it commission education to translate that into curriculum content. One respondent situated this within the coalition's division of labour: the municipality and the public employment service can operationalise a request but cannot originate one, and if the specification is not worked out with employers themselves, responsibility for the trajectory not to settle anywhere. In the pilot the sequence was reversed. Education designed the curriculum first, employers were approached afterwards to supply placement capacity, and no detailed discussion of what a candidate actually needed to learn took place with them at all. On one respondent's account the consequences fell on candidates. That employer's retrospective account is specific: the group included people who had only worked abroad, in very different working cultures, and people who had never worked at all, and they were placed at a level that required both employee skills and command of Dutch that they did not yet have. Her conclusion was that learning employee skills and the language should itself have been step one.

Hindering context factors

1. **National qualification files that bound what can be agreed.** Dutch vocational qualifications are defined in national qualification files, which specify what a course must cover and what a graduate must be able to do. These are set nationally by the body responsible for connecting vocational education to the labour market. Whatever employers and the coalition work out together still has to fit them, which suggests what the conversation can settle may be bounded before it begins.
2. **Thin margins and no spare capacity to engage properly.** Childcare operates on thin margins with most providers having no staff to spare. An employer under that pressure might attend the design meeting, agree with whatever is put forward, and leave without having said what their organisation needs and how a program can actually fit their situation. Attendance is therefore not necessarily the same thing as co-creation.

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Facilitating context factors

1. **Freedom because no course exists, because the trajectory is built from nothing.** This trajectory did not yet exist and had to be built from scratch, so no vocational school has had a ready-made course to put forward. That absence is what left the content open, with employers deciding what the training should contain rather than commenting on a syllabus that already existed.
2. **The national qualifications body is present and reachable in the region.** The body responsible for vocational qualifications has a regional presence and to know precisely what the national files do and do not permit. Once it is in the room it can tell employers on the spot whether what they are proposing is possible, rather than the coalition discovering months later that an idea cannot be approved.
3. **Few enough employers to know eachother individually.** The childcare sector in this region is small enough for the coalition partners to know each participating employer individually, which is what makes repeated detailed discussion practical. With several hundred employers rather than a dozen, this way of working would presumably be much harder to sustain.

Associated outcomes

1. **A reported increase in employer enthusiasm and ownership,** attributed by the coordinator to the trajectory content having been worked out jointly with employers. This is the coordinator's own account and has not been independently confirmed by employers.
2. **Employer involvement in shaping the plan.** One respondent's view was that organisations only take responsibility for a plan if the request came from them in the first place. Co-creating the actual content is where that becomes real for employers rather than something the coalition merely states, and each time it happens they may have more reason to expect it next time.
3. **For the target group:** the entry level and content are matched to what candidates can actually carry. In the pilot the level was set too high: one employer reports that candidates on the level 3 route could not be kept on because they did not pass the language exam, while the level 2 route worked without that risk.
4. **A plausible route to higher long-term inflow of candidates** on the coalition's own reasoning, though not yet an observed outcome. No cohort had gone through the revised trajectory at the time of interviewing.

6. Binding several employers at once creates flexibility for candidates

> **IF** employers each run trajectories separately without a shared network, so that none of them has anywhere to refer a candidate when a particular match does not work,
>
> **THEN** the coalition creates a shared employer network with collective commitment across several organisations,
>
> **LEADING TO** employers reason that a failed match need not be the end, because the candidate could be referred on within the collective, which lowers the risk each of them carries individually,
>
> **AS A RESULT** the group of employers can place candidates in ways that no single employer could manage alone.

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Respondents describe this as the intended working of the revised approach with several employers rather than as an outcome already achieved. The logic they set out is that the collective, rather than the individual employer, can ask who has a place when a placement does not work. One respondent explained the reasoning behind moving away from a single employer directly, saying that with one employer the coalition can never do more than hope that employer remains able to take part, since a single employer can always drop out. The employer adviser described the same thing from the employer side as a sparring function, in which employers look at whether someone might fit better elsewhere among them. What this changes is the risk calculation: an employer considering a candidate they are unsure about would not be committing to carrying that situation alone. Whether internal referral actually happens once trajectories are running has not been established and would require data on referrals after a trajectory starts.

Hindering context factors

1. **Membership that carries no conditions.** Where nothing distinguishes an organisation that actively contributes from one that attends, it is unclear whether a referral request would actually be answered by the others.

Facilitating context factors

1. **Several comparable providers facing the same shortage and motivation.** The local sector contains enough providers in a similar position for a collective arrangement to be available as an option rather than a bilateral deal.
2. **A collective agreement that employers have co-signed.** Once the group has agreed and signed off on placing a certain kind of candidate, an individual organisation cannot then say it has no room for one, which is what would make a referral request answerable.
3. **Existing contact between employers outside the meetings.** The informal contact described under regular convening is the channel through which such a referral would in practice run.

Associated outcomes

1. **An anticipated increase in collective placement capacity** beyond what individual employers can achieve. Respondents describe this as the intended working of the new approach rather than a demonstrated outcome.
2. **For the target group:** an anticipated higher chance of a successful landing, since a candidate whose first match does not work would not automatically leave the trajectory. This is the clearest route in the data by which coalition breadth could translate into individual outcomes, but it has not been observed.
3. **A reported lowering of the risk each employer carries,** which may itself be part of why employers willing to take part.

7. Deciding together what a trajectory is for, and whom it admits

> **IF** coalition partners hold different ideas about what a trajectory should achieve, for example offering people a low-threshold chance to explore a sector while keeping their benefit, as against preparing them for paid work, and these aims have not been separated,
>
> **THEN** the partners decide collectively what the trajectory is for, which entry route fits that aim, and whom it therefore admits, and they tell candidates plainly what the trajectory does and does not lead to,

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> **LEADING TO** partners being able to explain to each candidate why a route does or does not suit her, and candidates entering with expectations that match what the route can offer,
>
> **AS A RESULT** candidates are more likely to start on a route they can complete and that leads where they expected.
>
> **CONVERSELY** where the door stays open to everyone without a shared decision about the aim, candidates enter routes that do not match their starting position, and those who do not reach the expected result may conclude that their time would have been better spent elsewhere.

A respondent working across regions raised this point on her own initiative, offering it as feedback to the organising partners. In her view, two aims were running through each other within the coalition. One was offering places where people could orient themselves on childcare while keeping their benefit, even if this led nowhere in particular. The other was setting up a route through which people could actually come to work in childcare. She argued that these should be separated, and that the choice between them belonged to the collective rather than to one partner. She named the difficult consequence directly: once the collective settles on a route, only people who can realistically complete it should be admitted. She suggested, as her own assumption, that the wish to keep the door open reflected a conviction that everyone deserves a chance. In her view, this was where the first childcare trajectory had gone wrong. She reported speaking with two participants who were frustrated and felt they could just as well have done something else, and she considered their frustration justified.

Other respondents described the same issue from different positions. A respondent involved in the pilot recalled that the rules may have been too loose, because the introduction was open to everyone and routes were offered at levels 1 to 3. The same respondent stated that partners had repeatedly told candidates that levels 1 and 2 carried no job guarantee. The employer adviser said that expectations had been named often in the pilot and had still diverged. Some candidates assumed they would be pedagogical professionals afterwards, whereas the revised route prepares them for admission to a training programme. An employer respondent described expectations among everyone involved as extremely important, because resistance follows when events differ from what people had in mind. The same employer concluded that partners should have agreed together that learning employee skills and the language was sufficient as a first step.

From this we infer that informing candidates is not enough when partners themselves have not settled what the trajectory is for. Clear messages to candidates hold only when they rest on a collective choice about aim and admission. This pattern connects with pattern 4, in which education and employers pursue different definitions of success, and with pattern 5, in which employers help specify trajectory content. It adds a distinct step that comes before both: deciding whom the trajectory is for.

Hindering context factors

1. **Partners judged on different results.** One respondent in an employer interview described municipalities as wanting people in work, education as wanting diplomas and employers as wanting good employees. A diploma without sufficient command of the language may still fall short on the work floor.
2. **A target group with widely varying language skills and work experience.** Where some candidates have worked only abroad and others have never worked, a single entry route is unlikely to fit everyone.

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Facilitating context factors

1. **Qualification routes with several entry levels and partial certificates.** Where the education system offers routes at different levels, a coalition can match candidates to a route instead of excluding them altogether.
2. **A collective setting in which choice(s) can be made jointly.** A decision about admission is easier to hold when it has been taken by the group rather than by one partner.

Associated outcomes

1. **A revised route framed as preparation for admission to a training programme,** with a lower entry level (see institutionalisation phase, pattern 1).
2. **For the target group in the pilot:** In the pilot it was not always clear what the trajectory would lead to: a job, a qualification, or a first step toward a training programme. Some candidates expected to become pedagogical professionals afterwards, although partners had told them that levels 1 and 2 carried no job guarantee. A respondent who spoke with two participants reported that they were frustrated and felt they could just as well have done something else. We have no account from the participants themselves.

8. Setting one framework for all candidates before placements begin

> **IF** a coalition places a group of candidates with several organisations or locations at the same time, and each of these applies its own rules, while candidates' financial arrangements also differ,
>
> **THEN** the partners agree in advance on one framework that applies to every candidate, covering what candidates may and may not do, how they are paid or supported, and which partner is responsible for what, and they make this framework known from the first week,
>
> **LEADING TO** candidates finding that their situation matches that of the others in their group, and partners being able to refer to the framework when a placement deviates from it,
>
> **AS A RESULT** candidates are less likely to read differences between placements as unequal treatment, and the group can focus on the trajectory itself.
>
> **CONVERSELY** where each placement sets its own terms, candidates who know each other well compare their situations, and differences that may be reasonable on their own become a source of unrest.

The employer adviser from the regional employment centre described the pilot in terms of unequal conditions rather than training content, in two interview rounds. In the first round, she named uniformity across locations as a main lesson of the pilot, adding that candidates told each other that one was allowed something the other was not, which created a lot of noise among participants. She described clarity for everyone as the most important element. In the second round, she explained that candidates had spent seven weeks together at school, four days a week, before their placements began, and had become almost like friends. Once the placements started, they compared what each of them was allowed to do and found many differences. She described this as causing considerable unrest in the group, and said she received many emails about it. She also described the teacher at the time as partly going along with this, so that what different people said diverged and every arrangement seemed contested. Financial arrangements were a second source of unrest: in the pilot, one candidate kept a benefit while another was paid. In the revised approach, one rule applies to everyone.

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Candidates with a benefit keep it, and candidates without one take part unpaid. She expected a framework document from the first week to remove much of the unrest, with deviations traceable to the party responsible. Asked by the interviewer what had reduced the unrest, she pointed to expectation management and to clear agreements between education, the employer and the employment centre about who is responsible for what. She added that uniformity also requires the teachers who deliver the programme to attend joint sessions, which costs time.

From this we infer that the mechanism works through comparison within the group. A candidate judges her own conditions against those of the people she trained with, not against an abstract standard. For a coalition, this means that harmonising conditions is a collective task. A single member organisation can make its own arrangements consistent, but it cannot align them with those of other organisations. The pattern rests mainly on one respondent, and its effects on candidates have not been observed, because no cohort had completed the revised trajectory at the time of interviewing.

Hindering context factors

1. **Income support rules that differ with each candidate's situation.** National rules allow some candidates to keep a benefit while others have no entitlement. Unless a coalition sets a common rule, one trajectory therefore carries different financial conditions for people in the same group.
2. **Placements spread across organisations or locations that each set their own practice.** Where decisions about daily arrangements sit with each location, differences arise without anyone intending them, and candidates are usually the first to notice.

Facilitating context factors

1. **A partner that holds the financial arrangements in one place.** The employer adviser described her organisation as carrying the financial side of the trajectory. That makes it possible to set one rule centrally rather than negotiating it with each placement.
2. **A partner willing to act as the driving force with all parties present.** The employer adviser suggested that uniformity follows when one partner takes the lead in bringing everyone together, rather than each employer arranging matters separately.
3. **A first trajectory whose problems partners can name concretely.** Partners could draw on what they had seen go wrong in the pilot when agreeing what the framework should cover.

Associated outcomes

1. **One rule on financial status for all candidates,** reported as in place.
2. **A framework document for the first week,** setting out responsibilities between education, employer and the employment centre, reported as the intended approach.
3. **For the target group:** less unrest and clearer expectations are anticipated. This is not yet an observed outcome.

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Institutionalisation phase

1. **Evaluating a first attempt openly and translating the diagnosis into a revised design**

> **IF** a first trajectory has produced identifiable failures, and an actor is available who has no stake in describing it favourably,
>
> **THEN** the coalition evaluates it explicitly with those who carried the consequences, including candidates and receiving locations, and translates the diagnosis into concrete design changes,
>
> **LEADING TO** the coalition treat the failure as working material rather than as a verdict on the approach, and deliberately taking the steps it had previously skipped,
>
> **AS A RESULT** the next iteration rests on a specific diagnosis rather than on assumption.
>
> **CONVERSELY** where failure is read as a verdict on the approach rather than as information about it, the attempt is likely to be discontinued and the diagnosis lost with it.

The first trajectory combined a target group facing several barriers at once with a high qualification target, a single employer, and workplace supervisors who had not been prepared, and success criteria between education and employer were never aligned. Evaluating that experience has produced the most concrete design changes in the programme design. One respondent described steps now being taken that had been skipped the previous time as very positive. Another described attention to workplace supervisors explicitly as a lesson learned, noting that the candidates had formed a close group and that setting out clearly in advance what is and is not permitted could remove the friction that arose when different supervisors allowed different things. A third explained the reasoning behind moving to several employers, saying that with only one employer the coalition can never do more than hope that employer remains able to take part. An employer added the evidence on entry level, reporting that the level 2 group were all able to complete without the contractual risk attached to the higher level. A respondent working nationally described the more general requirement, suggesting that treating failure as productive rather than disqualifying is something a facilitator has to make acceptable within a group, because the reflex on encountering it is to conclude that the approach does not work.

Hindering context factors

1. **A scheduled checkpoint with no agreed criteria behind it.** Setting a decision date is insufficient on its own if the group has not also agreed what a candidate needs to have reached by then. In this coalition that is what produced inconsistent decisions, with some contracts extended for people who months later still had not met the requirement.
2. **Evaluation driven from one partner organisation.** One respondent disagreed with how the pilot evaluation was run, describing it as looked at from the wrong angle, namely how the employer and the public employment service had experienced it, when in her view the coalition does not exist for either of them.
3. **Employer openness that responds to how a placement actually goes.** Openness towards this group does not be fixed. In the first trajectory, as the supervision candidates needed increased, acceptance among colleagues on the work floor fell, which suggests an unmanaged burden can erode the willingness the coalition depends on.

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Facilitating context factors

1. **An evaluator with no stake in a favourable account.** Somebody was available to review what happened who gains nothing from a positive description of it. Where every organisation in the room has a stake in how the trajectory is described, the resulting picture unlikely to be honest enough to base the next design on.
2. **A steering group sitting above the operational level.** One employer argued that safeguarding regular review moments belongs with a steering group rather than with operational staff, on the grounds that it can protect them when everyone else is too busy and can settle disagreements the operational partners cannot resolve between themselves.
3. **A sector already willing to discuss what went wrong.** The open culture described elsewhere in this document is part of what makes candid accounts obtainable rather than defensive ones.

Associated outcomes

1. **Design changes reported as carried through:** several employers instead of one, a lower entry qualification level, workplace supervisors involved before candidates arrive, and agreed decision points.
2. **For the target group: greater consistency across placements.** By aligning expectations and conditions across employers in advance, candidates are less likely to encounter substantial differences between placements, such as one employer allowing activities or arrangements that another does not. This can prevent disagreements and perceptions of unequal treatment between candidates.

2. Writing the theme into a multi-year policy agenda rather than running it as a pilot

> **IF** a coalition's work depends on time-limited project funding, so that partners cannot assume it will still exist once that funding ends,
>
> **THEN** the theme is written into the organisation's own policy and delivery agendas with a stated multi-year horizon and named target groups for later years,
>
> **LEADING TO** the coordinator be held accountable for working to that agenda over several years rather than for delivering results within months, which protects the slow relational work from short-term delivery pressure,
>
> **AS A RESULT** the approach can be extended to further sectors and further target groups rather than ending with the pilot.

One respondent described this shift explicitly. The theme of sectoral development pathways was taken up in both the policy agenda and the delivery agenda of the organisation, with a stated plan to develop provision for particular sectors within a period running to 2027. He described the effect on his own position directly, saying that he is not judged on whether something stands in three months but on whether the organisation is working structurally to that agenda over the coming years, and adding that although he had expected to be further along, he takes considerable energy from how the work is now done. He also described a decision at board level to make development pathways part of the core business of the social development company and said he would have laughed at anyone predicting that earlier, because at the time he did not feel he could get the idea to take hold there at all. The stated intention was structural from the outset: he described always having said that development

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pathways should be something structural rather than a pilot trajectory, and contrasted working on structural labour market solutions with being able to run a class quickly. what this mechanism changes is not the work itself, but what the coordinator is answerable for, which respondents suggest is what allows the groundwork this document describes elsewhere to be done at all.

Hindering context factors

1. **Time-limited project funding with no answer about what follows.** Where a coalition runs on project money, who carries the work afterwards remains an open question throughout, and partners reluctant to build the arrangement into their own organisations while they cannot assume it will continue.
2. **Capacity for a dedicated driver depending on local budget discretion.** Whether a region can pay someone to spend substantial time on this depends on what it can free up itself. A respondent working across regions identified this as the clearest difference between regions that progress and regions that stall.
3. **Funding that requires a new coalition to be formed.** Where schemes fund the creation of new coalitions while the collaborations already working receive nothing, which one respondent called the wrong way round, effort goes into constituting structures rather than into the work.

Facilitating context factors

1. **Organisational-level commitment to structural embedding.** Structural continuation requires the theme to be adopted beyond the project itself and incorporated into the organisation's core business. A board-level decision to make development pathways part of the organisation's regular work was described as an important step in moving the approach from a project-based initiative towards structural implementation.
2. **An accountability horizon measured in years rather than months.** Where a coordinator is assessed on working to a multi-year agenda, the early relational work that produces no quick results can be done rather than skipped in favour of demonstrable short-term output.

Associated outcomes

1. **Reported extension to further sectors.** Respondents describe development pathways being established for additional sectors, with a strategic rather than ad hoc approach to which are developed when.
2. **For the target group:** structural embedding is what allows a trajectory to widen beyond its first group. One respondent reports that expansion to further target groups, including refugees with residence status, is already scheduled for later years.
3. **A shift in what the work is measured against,** from whether a class can be run quickly to whether structural labour market solutions are being built. Whether this holds once the current funding ends are not established in these data.

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1.6.3 Individual level CMO's

CMO context for supervisors

Work context: maintaining day-to-day continuity dominates attention

Across locations, day-to-day continuity requires constant coordination and problem solving. Several supervisors describe their work as "keeping the puzzle together" when staffing is not stable or when people unexpectedly drop out. In some cases, staff shortages were so severe that a group had to be temporarily closed.

Even when locations are "running well," operational realities still structure how time is used. For example, work pressure can be experienced as strongly dependent on the day's group dynamics (e.g., children not sleeping, "difficult" behaviour), and teams explicitly try to reduce evening meetings unless they are truly needed.

This matters for development-oriented leadership because it means that reflective time and structured development conversations must compete with immediate operational priorities. Where instability is high, supervisors explicitly describe that "first the priority is becoming complete again and forming a team so there is calm," with development initiatives being put "on hold" until basic stability returns.

Role of supervisors: hybrid of operations and relational focus

The supervisor role is described as a hybrid function: supervisors carry responsibility for the team and location functioning, while also dealing with practical constraints and continuity. In some cases, the role is explicitly "meewerkend" (working on the group several afternoons) alongside coordination tasks, which reduces slack time and forces constant prioritisation ("what is important now and what can wait").

Support structures around the supervisor role can shift quickly. For example, when a key pedagogical support role leaves, supervisors describe becoming "the only core team member," with additional pedagogical responsibilities added without additional hours.

There is also variation in span of control: some supervisors oversee multiple locations, which structurally reduces day-to-day presence in any single team.

Organisational development backdrop: role (re)definition

The intervention took place against an organisational backdrop where the supervisor role is already being discussed as something that will "change." At least one supervisor explicitly links this to being involved in a workgroup about the future role of supervisors, indicating that role development was a live organisational topic before and during implementation.

This backdrop is important context for later mechanisms around role clarity and ownership: role questions were not only individual uncertainty but embedded in a broader trajectory of redefining what the organisation expects from supervisors.

Cross-location peer infrastructure: "own island" and limited time to talk

A recurring starting condition is that supervisors have limited structured time to speak with other supervisors. Supervisors describe that they "never" speak to each other and that even when there are meetings, these often function as agenda-driven coordination rather than time

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for meaningful exchange. This contributes to a baseline situation of working on an “island,” even though supervisors recognise that others face similar issues.

Team and learning culture: variation in stability, openness, and readiness for development

The interviews show meaningful variation in local team climates that existed before the intervention. Some teams are described as stable and long-tenured, with high self-organisation and shared problem solving (e.g., colleagues actively thinking along in scheduling solutions and covering shifts).

Other teams are characterised by internal friction or differing readiness for change. One supervisor describes a “tough” team where long-tenured employees hold on to habits and ways of working, while newer staff are more willing to move but are “pulled back” by the older group.

In addition, when staffing or structure changes disrupt the team, supervisors describe that development work becomes harder to prioritise until basic functioning and team cohesion are restored.

At the same time, supportive relational conditions do exist in some contexts: where “good contact” is present on the location, supervisors can ask colleagues for help when they lack experience, and others will make time when possible (although capacity constraints still apply).

Starting position of supervisors: heterogeneous experience and leadership biography

The starting position of supervisors varies strongly in background and experience. Some are relatively new in the role or organisation, with fluctuating team size and recruitment pressures (including reliance on trainees/interns), and describe having had to close groups due to shortages.

Others entered the role through career transitions and explicitly describe enjoying “the hustle” of planning and coordinating, while lacking prior experience with formal performance and development conversations.

Finally, some supervisors manage multiple locations and work with highly self-directed teams, which shapes both the need for delegation and the risk that agreements “fade” when the supervisor is less present.

1.6.3.1 Core CMO’s at the individual level of supervisors

1) Peer learning strengthens social support and self-efficacy for difficult conversations

Mechanism

The intervention offered structured i*ntervision/peer exchange* with real-case discussion (intervision). This seemed to prompt two related processes. First, *peer exchange* was described as creating *social support* and *normalisation*: supervisors recognised similar challenges in others regarding development-oriented leadership, which may have reduced feelings of “doing it alone.” Second, hearing how peers approached comparable situations and using concrete wording appeared to support *vicarious learning*. Taken together, these processes suggest an increase in *self-efficacy* or confidence to handle difficult conversations.

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Outcomes
Supervisors appeared more likely to approach difficult conversations with *greater confidence* and smoother execution, and to try out peer-derived wording and strategies in practice. Peer exchange also seemed to *help supervisors surface uncertainties* that could be followed up outside the peer setting (e.g., clarification questions to relevant roles in the organisation).

Context: facilitators

This mechanism seemed particularly relevant because normally, supervisors have limited routine time to exchange experiences with other supervisors and experience leadership work as locally isolated. It also appeared to hinge on whether the group climate allowed people to share real cases and uncertainties openly (*psychological safety*).

Hindering context factors

Peer learning may be less effective when group dynamics reduce seriousness or openness (lack of psychological safety), or when participants experience large differences in experience/level that make exchange feel less applicable. It may also add less value for supervisors who already feel highly experienced or well-supported informally.

Overarching CMO

If supervisors have limited peer contact and leadership work is normally experienced as isolated, then peer learning through intervision may strengthen social support and self-efficacy, because shared cases can normalise challenges and provide workable examples and language, which may lead to more confident handling of difficult conversations.

2) Role-mapping reduced role ambiguity and support follow-through on coordination issues

Mechanism
The intervention included a flipchart role-mapping exercise (including HR, supervisor, line management responsibilities). This makes responsibilities more explicit, which supported a *shared understanding* of role boundaries (*role clarity* + *shared mental model* of leadership role). Further, when HR was visible in the discussion, this appeared to provide validation that role questions are *legitimate* and worth acting on, rather than something supervisors should "just figure out."

Outcomes
Role questions became more actionable: supervisors could more readily name what was unclear and where it belonged (*reduced role ambiguity*). There were also indications that, when uncertainty arose about role boundaries and escalation routes—for example, whether an issue belonged with the supervisor, HR, or line management—making these uncertainties explicit in the group increased the likelihood that supervisors would take concrete follow-up steps (such as contacting the relevant role-holder for clarification).

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Facilitating context factors
This mechanism seemed to particularly be triggered because responsibilities were not always already formalized, as well as when supervisors experience recurring uncertainty about "who owns what" around employee development or escalation routes.

Hindering context factors
For supervisors who either (a) experienced the role-mapping as offering little new value, or (b) relied strongly on entrenched routines in how they handle issues, the exercise was less likely to translate into new behaviour.

Overarching CMO
If responsibilities for employee development and escalation are not fully formalised and supervisors experience the role-mapping exercise as relevant (rather than redundant) and are open to adjusting their usual approach, then role-mapping may reduce role ambiguity and support follow-through, because it can build a shared mental model of role boundaries and legitimise clarification and escalation, which may lead to more actionable coordination and clearer next steps.

3) Conversation techniques and prompt cards increased self-regulation and intentionality in development conversations

Mechanism
The intervention offered co-created prompt cards and concrete conversation techniques (e.g., follow-up questions, silence, slowing down, safer framing). These tools appeared to work as behavioural prompts, helping supervisors to step out of routine responses and prepare more intentionally (**s***elf-regulation; attentional control*). The techniques appeared to provide a simple structure for staying with the conversation and exploring development in greater depth (**c***ognitive structuring; deliberate practice*). Safer framing—grounding feedback in shared standards rather than personal judgement—appeared to reduce concerns about relational harm (*reduced interpersonal threat*), which may have made it easier to address difficult topics (*task-specific self-efficacy*).

Outcomes
Supervisors appeared to conduct key conversations more deliberately: where possible, they planned more protected time and used deeper questioning (more follow-up, more patience). This suggests a shift towards greater intentionality in interaction (*behavioural self-regulation*) and more attention to development in official feedback moments.

Facilitating context factors
Whether supervisors could use the prompt cards and techniques seemed to hinge on the degree of operational "breathing space" in their daily work. When the workday allowed even limited preparation time and fewer acute disruptions, supervisors were more able to approach conversations with *intentionality* and sustain *attentional control*. In those conditions, developmental conversations could be planned and deepened, rather than squeezed into short, reactive moments. Uptake also appeared more likely when there was already a routine of formal or semi-formal conversations that could be strengthened, because an existing practice provided a stable behavioural anchor for *deliberate enactment* and *habit formation*.

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Hindering context factors

Sustained staffing pressure, frequent interruptions, and day-to-day firefighting appeared to constrain implementation of the cards in real-work scenario's. Under such conditions, supervisors' attention narrowed towards immediate continuity, consistent with *cognitive load* and *attentional narrowing* under stress. This reduced the likelihood that developmental conversations could be prepared, paced, and carried out with depth.

Where development conversations were not structurally embedded—such as lacking protected time or clear expectations—tools risked remaining unused because the surrounding workflow did not support *behavioural consistency*.

Finally, for some highly experienced supervisors, established conversational routines appeared to override the perceived need for new prompts, suggesting that strong prior scripts can limit uptake unless there is a clear reason to revise existing habits (*habit strength*; *automaticity*).

Overarching CMO

If supervisors operate in a context where development conversations risk becoming reactive due to routine pressures, but where at least minimal preparation time and conversational structures are present (**C**), **then** the use of prompt cards and concrete conversation techniques may trigger more intentional pacing and focus in conversations (**M**: activation of self-regulation, attentional control, and reduced interpersonal threat), **because** these tools function as behavioural cues that interrupt automatic responses and provide safe conversational scripts, **leading to** more deliberate and development-focused conversations (e.g., deeper questioning, more patience, protected time), particularly when workload and staffing conditions allow sustained attention (**O**).

4) The pitch exercise appeared to calibrate improvement goals and strengthen ownership (or trigger defensiveness if misaligned)

Mechanism

The intervention included a pitch assignment in which supervisors formulated and presented a concrete improvement idea to higher-level management and received feedback. This appeared to initiate a process of goal calibration. By presenting their ideas to upper-management, supervisors had to translate initially abstract improvement intentions into concrete proposals and confront these proposals with external feedback. This helped them assess whether their ambitions were sufficiently specific, realistic, feasible, and appropriate to their context, and adjust their plans accordingly. In this sense, the pitch functioned as a calibration mechanism: it helped supervisors align their improvement ambitions with what they perceived as practically achievable, while the act of formulating and presenting a concrete proposal may also have strengthened commitment and perceived ownership (implementation intention; goal commitment).

When feedback was experienced as constructive and aligned with the learning purpose, it appeared to support this calibration process by helping supervisors refine their plans and develop a clearer sense of what was feasible and what next steps were required (goal calibration; perceived behavioural control). However, when feedback was experienced as evaluative or misaligned with expectations, the same exercise could instead trigger defensiveness or feelings of being judged (evaluative threat; reduced psychological safety), interrupting the calibration process.

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Outcomes

When the goal calibration pathway was activated, supervisors appeared more likely to refine ambitions into feasible next steps and to continue working on these plans after the session (greater follow-through and ownership). In cases where the feedback triggered threat rather than calibration, supervisors were more likely to experience friction or temporary withdrawal, which could delay uptake or reduce immediate motivation.

Facilitating context factors

This mechanism was more likely to be triggered when there was (1) a learning-oriented climate where improvement was treated as development rather than judgement (*learning orientation*), and/or (2) a baseline of trust and approachability between supervisors and management (*psychological safety*), and/or (3) shared expectations that the pitch was meant to refine feasibility (*expectation alignment*), and (4) enough operational stability to make follow-through feel realistic (*implementation capacity*) existed.

Hindering context factors

The pitch was held back when, (1) the climate was perceived as evaluative or punitive (*evaluative threat*), (2) expectations about the purpose of the pitch were not aligned (*role/goal ambiguity*), (3) staffing pressure and instability made implementation feel unrealistic (*overload; low capacity*), and (4) line management changed frequently, weakening relationships and continuity, so supervisors were less sure how feedback would be received and what standards applied (*low relational continuity; reduced trust*).

Overarching CMO

If supervisors are required to pitch a concrete improvement idea in a context where feedback is experienced as coaching-oriented and expectations are aligned, **then** the pitch exercise may strengthen ownership and feasibility of action plans, **because** upward feedback helps calibrate goals and clarify next steps, **leading to** more sustained follow-through. However, if the feedback context is experienced as evaluative or misaligned, the same exercise may trigger defensiveness, which can reduce immediate uptake or delay implementation.

1.6.4 Overarching findings of the quantitative and qualitative analyses

1.6.4.1 Reflecting on the quantitative and qualitative results

The quantitative part of the evaluation was designed to capture change among individuals: whether jobseekers obtained qualifications and work, and whether employees and supervisors changed in self-efficacy, career-related outcomes and development practices. What it could not capture was the learning that took place among the partners around these individuals. The qualitative data show that much of what the Living Lab produced lay at that level. Partners came to a shared view of what a trajectory for this group should look like, set up a catch-up route when outcomes fell short of expectations, and developed a different trajectory with a new group of employers that is intended to fit the target group better. That new trajectory has yet to start, so there are no outcome data on it. In this sense, the quantitative results describe

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the first round of a process whose most important products, at the time of writing, were insights rather than measurable outcomes. The qualitative data make these insights visible, and they also change how the quantitative results themselves can be read.

This is clearest for jobseekers. Questionnaires proved unsuitable for a group with limited proficiency in Dutch and varying literacy levels, and the survey was discontinued after the baseline measurement. The evaluation therefore relied on objective outcomes such as diplomas, partial certificates and subsequent work or training, and changes in self-efficacy or skills could not be measured. The difficulty is itself a finding: the groups that inclusive labour market policy most wants to reach are also the groups for whom standard evaluation instruments work least well. The qualitative data did more than fill this gap. The objective outcomes showed high completion alongside comparatively few full diplomas, a pattern that could easily be read as a judgement on the candidates. The coalition data suggest a different reading, in which the diploma figures say more about the fit between the level of the route and the command of Dutch and employee skills candidates brought with them. The qualitative data also show that these outcomes were not final. When the number of full diplomas stayed below what partners had expected, the coalition set up a catch-up trajectory through which several candidates still obtained a diploma or partial certificates. An end-of-programme measurement alone would not have shown this.

For supervisors, the survey showed no significant effects, with very small groups at follow-up and several outcomes developing in the expected direction. The interviews explain why averages only tell part of the story. They show the mechanisms at supervisor level operating under some conditions and not under others, depending for example on operational breathing space, psychological safety and continuity in line management. The interviews also describe marked differences in team climate between locations that existed before the training. In a small sample, the average then combines supervisors for whom the mechanisms were triggered with supervisors for whom they were not. We therefore read the small quantitative effects as uninformative about whether the training can work, rather than as evidence that it does not. The qualitative data shift the question from whether the training worked to where, for whom and under which conditions it could work. On one outcome the two sources point in different directions: supervisors described growing confidence in development conversations, while the self-efficacy scale showed no meaningful change. We cannot resolve this divergence with these data, and we do not treat the qualitative account as the more valid of the two.

For employees, the survey showed little evidence of change in self-efficacy, career self-efficacy, career planning, perceived career possibilities or organisational mobility. The qualitative data suggest why this may be expected at this stage. The training was aimed at supervisors, so any effect on employees depends on supervisors first changing how they conduct development conversations, and on employees then experiencing enough of those conversations to notice a difference. Supervisors described their room for development work as depending on staffing, and some described it as put on hold where a location first had to become fully staffed again. Each step in this chain takes time and is exposed to the same pressure. The qualitative data also indicate that, in conversation with the employer, supporting employees' growth as a route to retention came to matter more than mobility as a goal in itself. Outcomes such as self-efficacy and perceived career possibilities remain relevant to that aim, but organisational mobility becomes a less central yardstick.

These findings should be read in light of an important limitation concerning timing. The coalition interviews took place before the new trajectory started, which is why its effects on

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candidates could not be examined. The employee interviews in the theory-testing phase, and the quantitative follow-up, took place relatively soon after the supervisor training. Although we collected qualitative data among employees themselves, the training may not yet have had enough time to change supervisors' behaviour in ways that employees could notice. Both data sources may therefore have been too close to the intervention to detect effects that could still emerge. This limitation applies to the absence of effects as much as to their presence: the data cannot show that effects will follow, only that the period observed was probably too short to establish whether they do.

1.6.4.2 Impact of the coalition on individual-level initiatives

This section considers what the overarching patterns in the data suggest about how a regional coalition can affect initiatives for individual jobseekers and employees. We focus on structures that recur across the CMO-configurations and on the context in which they arose, because these are most relevant for policymakers and municipal project leaders considering similar approaches elsewhere.

Initiatives for vulnerable groups are assembled across organisations

The Dutch context places the coalition in a specific position. Labour market policy is decentralised: municipalities, the public employment service, education providers and employers each hold their own mandate and budget, and the regional structures that connect them coordinate rather than govern. The elements a vulnerable jobseeker needs to enter work, such as outreach, income support, training, certification, a placement and guidance on the work floor, are therefore held by different organisations. No single organisation can offer a complete trajectory. In our interpretation, this made the coalition less an addition to existing structures than the setting in which an individual-level initiative could be assembled at all.

Looking across the configurations, most of the matters partners had to settle concerned the points where one organisation's responsibility ends, and another's begins. They include who is admitted to a trajectory, the criteria education and employers use to judge success, the conditions that apply when candidates are placed with different organisations, the relation between a candidate's benefit and her placement, and the guidance that continues once a candidate is at work. We infer that individual-level initiatives for vulnerable groups are most vulnerable at these seams, because each organisation can do its own part well while the trajectory as a whole still fails to fit the candidate. The coalition's distinctive contribution is in making these seams visible and agreeing how to handle them. For policymakers, this suggests that the value of a coalition should be judged less by the activities it runs and more by how well it manages the transitions between organisations that a candidate has to pass through. What matters at these transitions is fit: whether what one partner has arranged connects with what the next partner expects, for example whether the level a candidate is trained matches with what a workplace needs. A coalition's contribution may lie less in what each partner does separately than in whether the parts fit together.

Coalitions learn what an initiative is by doing it

A second structure concerns how partners came to agree on these matters. The configurations suggest that the coalition's impact on individual-level initiatives ran less through a design fixed at the start and more through a gradual process of collective sensemaking. By sensemaking we mean the process through which actors develop a shared interpretation of an ambiguous situation that allows them to act on it (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). At the

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outset, partners shared a concern about staff shortages and a wish to open the sector to migrant women. What they had not yet established together was what a trajectory for this group should achieve, whom it should admit, which conditions should apply across organisations and what candidates needed to learn first. These questions were settled step by step, in the course of joint work.

The first trajectory was central to this process. In our reading, it functioned as a collective experiment that gave partners concrete experiences to reflect on, including outcomes that differed from what several of them had expected. Beyond adjusting individual activities, partners revisited underlying assumptions, such as who the trajectory was for and in which order partners should contribute to its design. The organisational learning literature describes this as double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978), and research on collaborative governance describes shared understanding and the capacity for joint action as developing through repeated cycles of engagement rather than being in place at the start (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh, 2012).

Two implications follow for individual-level initiatives. First, each round of joint reflection aimed to bring the initiative closer to what the people involved wanted and needed, and only the coalition could align the parts held by different organisations with each other. Second, an initiative whose purpose and design partners have worked out together is carried by several organisations rather than by one, which may make it more durable. Respondents described development pathways being extended to further sectors and target groups, which suggests that what partners learned is being carried beyond the original initiative. For municipal project leaders, the practical lesson is that a first trajectory is better planned as a learning round than as a finished product, with the time, openness and evaluation this requires. The effects of the redesigned trajectory on candidates had not yet been observed at the time of interviewing, so this conclusion concerns the process rather than its results.

Labour shortages open the door but limit what happens inside

A third structure runs through the economic context. The regional labour market is among the tightest in the Netherlands, and childcare operates on thin margins. The shortage gave employers a reason to consider a group they might otherwise have overlooked, and in this sense it was the condition that made the initiative possible. The same conditions left little time and money for what this group needed once inside: preparation, guidance and room to learn. In our interpretation, this shaped which initiatives could take hold. They had to ask little extra of employers, which is why the coalition took on coordinating work that employers could not carry. The cost of guidance on the work floor, however, remained with employers, and respondents described it as a financial barrier. National policy was described as oriented mainly towards preparing candidates, with little structural support for the organisations that receive them. We infer that in shortage sectors the binding constraint on individual-level initiatives is less employers' willingness than their capacity, and that this is where public support may make the most difference.

Progress depends on a few people in an unstable environment

A fourth structure concerns instability. During the project, national instruments were being revised, the public employment service was reorganising, partner organisations were going through their own transitions and contact persons changed. Each of these interrupted the shared understanding partners were building. The configurations show a small number of people holding the process together, and a period of stagnation after one of them left. We infer

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that the coalition's impact on individual-level initiatives rests to a considerable degree on the continuity of these people. This dependence is a strength while they remain, because trust and shared understanding accumulate in them, and a risk once they leave. For policymakers, it suggests that continuity of coordinating staff is not an administrative detail but a condition for impact.

Coalitions mobilise around shared problems

Finally, the coalition's impact was concentrated on the inflow side. The supervisor training for current employees was developed and delivered within one organisation, by the employer and the research partner, and the coalition-level configurations say little about it. We infer that a regional coalition is most readily mobilised around a problem that no employer can solve alone, such as finding new staff, while the development of current staff is more easily treated as each organisation's own business. This asymmetry has consequences for approaches such as ENGINE, which rely on connecting the two, as discussed in section 1.6.3.3.

1.6.4.3 The ENGINE approach

The SYNCLUSIVE proposal describes the ENGINE as a systems approach that creates traction in the regional labour market. Its core mechanism is that upward or sideward mobility of current, often low-skilled employees frees up starting positions, which prepared jobseekers can then fill. To make this work, the proposal combines three elements. The first is a regional coalition of all relevant stakeholders, built along the lines of Community Coalition Action Theory, with the municipality or regional labour market centre in a coordinating role. The second is an integrated intervention package attuned across levels, including development of employees, development-oriented leadership for supervisors, innovation of education and recognition of skills, matching, and preparation of jobseekers, with peer learning as a central format. The third is a stepwise and adaptive process in which partners identify stakeholders, drivers and barriers, integrate and adapt existing interventions, implement them with action-based monitoring and evaluate the results. Below, we reflect on which of these elements the Amersfoort data support and which they call into question.

Coalition building

The data support the proposal's premise that regional collaboration is a precondition. As argued in section 1.6.3.2, the jobseeker trajectory could only be assembled across organisations. Two aspects of the proposal's picture fit the data less well. First, the proposal envisages a broad coalition of all relevant stakeholders, including trade unions, civil society organisations and work integration social enterprises. In the coalition-level configurations, the coalition centres on the municipality, the employment centre, education and childcare employers, and other stakeholders are hardly visible. In our interpretation, a smaller coalition may have made progress easier in a sector without a representative employers' body. This may suggest that a coalition does not need to involve every relevant stakeholder from the outset: starting small, with the partners a trajectory most directly depends on, can be enough to begin learning, with broader participation added once there is something concrete to join.

Second, in the SYNCLUSIVE's proposal, it treats the coalition mainly as the vehicle through which interventions are delivered, which implies that the coalition is formed first and then acts. In Amersfoort, coalition and intervention developed in parallel. The configurations suggest that this was partly a matter of sensemaking at a level above the trajectory itself. The coalition was

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built around national instruments, a subsidy scheme and sectoral development pathways, whose conditions were still being revised and about which information reached the region slowly and unpredictably. As long as these instruments had no concrete form, respondents described partners as unable to weigh what participation would yield, and willingness remained at the level of intention. In our interpretation, the coalition was also the setting in which partners tried to work out together what these instruments meant for them in practice, and in which a partner could take on the resulting paperwork, such as subsidy applications, on behalf of employers. Partners thus learned what the coalition was for while learning how the national framework around it worked. For the ENGINE approach, this suggests that coalition building should be planned as a process that runs throughout implementation, rather than as a first step to be completed before interventions begin.

Multi-level intervention package

The package in Amersfoort was intended to address inflow and development together, through a pathway for jobseekers and a training for supervisors. Several of the proposal's elements were realised. Jobseekers were prepared through a tailored trajectory, supervisors received development-oriented leadership training, and the use of partial certificates reflects the proposal's emphasis on recognising skills in steps. Peer learning appeared to work well at supervisor level, where exchange with peers helped supervisors normalise difficulties and find usable approaches.

The central mechanism of the ENGINE, however, did not appear to drive employers' interest. The interviews suggest that employers were interested above all in inflow. A municipal respondent observed that the childcare pilot had started by bringing people in at the entry level, rather than by first creating room there through the development of current staff. An employer, asked what mattered most, said that at this moment it was simply having enough people. In our interpretation, this reflects a mismatch between the ENGINE logic and the labour market in which the Living Lab operated. The ENGINE logic assumes that starting positions are occupied and must be freed up before new people can enter. In a sector with structural shortages, extra hands are needed at every level, and particularly at the entry level. Room for newcomers does not first have to be created, so a chain of vacancies set in motion by employee mobility has little to act on.

Retention, by contrast, appears to offer a more promising point of connection. Although retention tends to receive comparatively little attention in a sector where shortages keep the focus on recruitment (section 1.2), it concerns a problem employers already experience, and the employee-side initiative was framed around it from the outset. In conversation with the employer during implementation, it became clear that mobility did not need to be a goal in itself, and that supporting employees in their growth might contribute more to retention. This suggests that the ENGINE's core mechanism depends strongly on labour market conditions. In shortage sectors, a version that frames employee development as a retention strategy, and treats inflow and retention as two sides of the same staffing problem, may connect better with what employers already want. The outcomes reported in this chapter also remain well below the estimates in the proposal, which anticipated between 75 and 150 jobseekers entering work per Living Lab during the project. In our interpretation, this reflects the time needed to build a coalition and to learn from a first trajectory, rather than evidence against the principle of collaboration itself.

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Co-design and co-implementation

The adaptive process described in the SYNCLUSIVE proposal is the element the Amersfoort data support most clearly. Co-design was less a principle applied from the start than a practice that developed through successive iterations. Looking across the configurations, the iterations differed in what they were about. The first round concerned the content and level of a trajectory. The evaluation of that round raised questions about partners' own roles, such as the order in which employers and education contribute and the conditions that apply across organisations. Later design choices concerned the structure around the trajectory, such as a network of several employers and a shared framework for candidates. In our interpretation, each iteration moved the learning one level up, from what candidates should learn, to how partners should work together, to what the coalition as a whole should arrange. This resembles what the evaluation literature describes as developmental evaluation, in which evaluation supports ongoing adaptation in complex settings (Patton, 2011).

This iterative character also clarifies what co-design looks like in practice. Partners rarely designed something from nothing. The trajectory built on existing vocational routes, which the coalition shortened and arranged so that they could lead to partial certificates or a full diploma. Existing meetings and existing relationships with employers became the setting for joint work. In our interpretation, co-design at regional level consists largely of adapting what already exists to a target group and a set of partners, and it is in this adaptation that partners come to see an initiative as partly their own. The coordinator attributed greater employer ownership to employers having worked out trajectory content in detail, although employers themselves did not confirm this. Ownership may therefore follow less from being consulted and more from having changed something.

Two critical observations qualify this picture. First, co-design in the coalition took place mainly among organisations. In the coalition data, the target group's perspective entered chiefly through the evaluation of the first trajectory and through what partners reported hearing from candidates, rather than through direct participation in design. Co-design at regional level may therefore be well placed to align organisations with each other while remaining at some distance from the people the trajectory is for. Second, iteration depends on capacity that the economic context erodes. Employers under pressure may attend design meetings without being able to contribute fully, so participation does not guarantee co-creation, and a coalition may be unable to run as many learning rounds as it would need. For the ENGINE approach, this suggests that the adaptive process should be resourced as a core activity, with time for successive rounds and a deliberate choice about whose experiences inform each of them.

1.6.4.4 Maintenance and sustainability of the coalition

Looking across the maintenance and institutionalisation configurations, several general lessons emerge about how a coalition of this kind can continue to exist. They concern the process of collaboration more than its content.

The first lesson is that the process of working together deserves as much attention as the work itself. Most of the maintenance configurations are not about trajectories but about how partners relate: bringing competitors together in a setting they experience as safe, making explicit what each partner brings, wants and is responsible for, showing examples from comparable organisations, and creating a setting in which education and employers can question each other. A respondent working nationally described a declaration of intent in similar terms. In that account, the value of the declaration lay less in the document than in the conversation it

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prompted about what each side expects, contributes and does when something goes wrong. In our interpretation, a recurring conversation about the collaboration itself, a meta-conversation alongside the substantive work, may be one of the most important conditions for a coalition to last. It allows partners to notice and address differences in expectation before they erode commitment.

The second lesson concerns the kind of partners and the kind of accountability a coalition needs. The configurations suggest that the coalition's learning depended on treating disappointing outcomes as working material rather than as a verdict, and on partners being willing to try again. The institutionalisation configurations show the same logic at organisational level: once the theme was written into a multi-year agenda, the coordinator was held accountable for working towards it over several years rather than for results within months, which protected the slow relational work. We infer that coalitions of this kind are more likely to last when their partners, and the organisations behind them, are not driven mainly by short-term targets, and are prepared to experiment and learn together without a fixed outcome that has to be reached within a project period. This sits uneasily with the formation-phase finding that partners need something concrete to weigh before they commit. In our interpretation, the two can be reconciled by making progress visible through concrete steps, decisions and products, while leaving the eventual outcomes open.

The third lesson is that sustainability requires trust to move from individuals to organisations. The coalition started through personal relationships, stalled when a central person left, and regained momentum once roles and mandates were recorded. Later steps, such as a board-level decision and a multi-year agenda, anchor the theme in organisations rather than in people. This transition does not replace personal trust, which remains what makes open conversation possible, but it makes the coalition less vulnerable to the departure of any single person.

The fourth lesson is that continued participation has to remain worth it for partners in the currency they are short of. For employers in this sector, that currency is time rather than goodwill. The configurations show the coalition taking over coordinating work, asking what it can offer employers rather than only what they can contribute, and binding several employers together so that each carries less risk. We infer that a coalition sustains itself partly by continuing to lower the cost of taking part, and by keeping the relationship reciprocal.

These lessons come with caveats. Several of the developments that point towards continuation, such as the declaration of intent and the extension to further sectors, were intentions rather than completed steps at the last interview round, and they were reported largely by partners closely involved in the coalition. The coalition's coordinating capacity also depends on time-limited funding, while funding schemes that support new coalitions offer little to collaborations that already work, as one respondent described. In our interpretation, a coalition of this kind is better understood as regional infrastructure that requires continuing investment than as a project that should become self-sustaining. What most needs to be sustained is not a particular activity but the coalition's capacity to keep learning together.

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