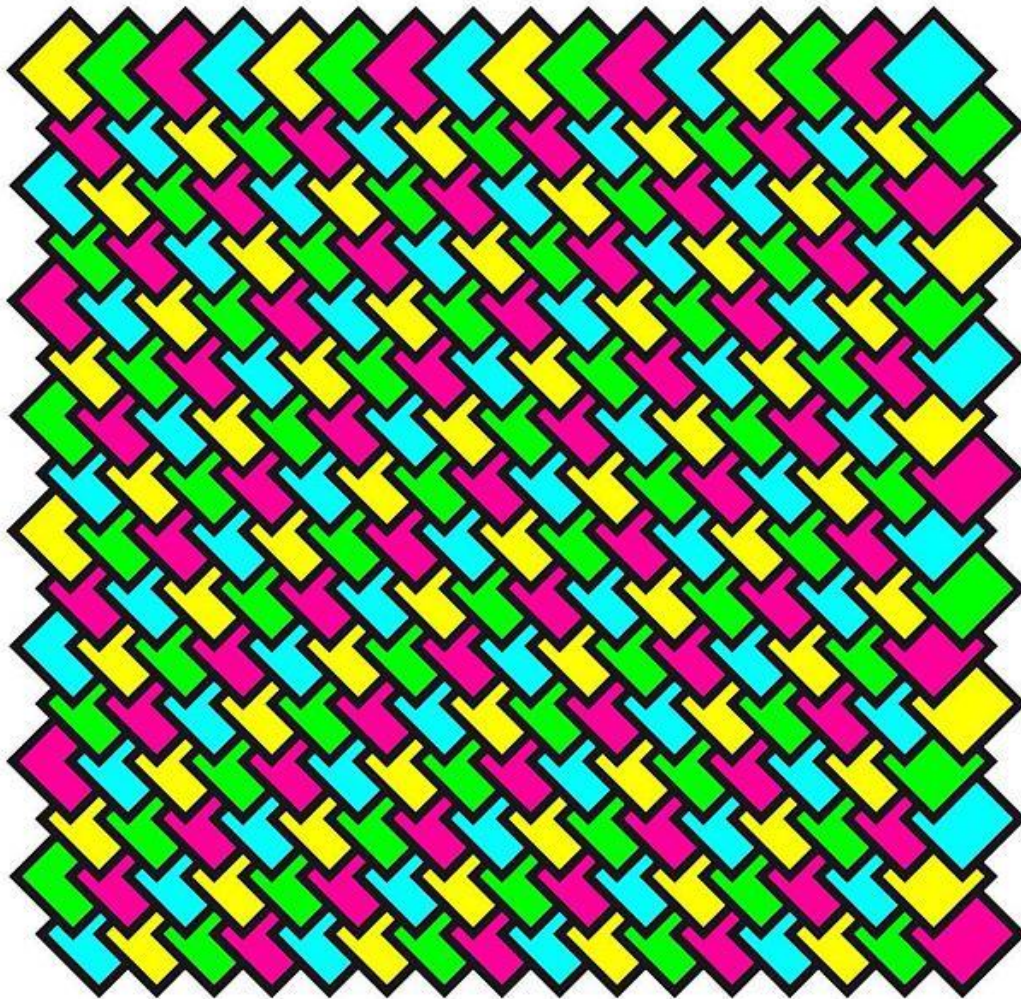


# Directed Professional Space

An ethnographic-phronetic research on the construction of implicit boundaries to  
activation practitioners' use of professional space



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Cover illustration: "Post-it Mania" (2015) by Evelien Schouten ([www.evelienschouten.nl](http://www.evelienschouten.nl))

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## Preface

If you look at the illustration on the cover, made by graphic designer Evelien Schouten, you see a “Post-it Mania”: a cheerful and structured image, but at the same time stressful and chaotic. The illustration represents in that sense the core of this thesis: understanding from different perspectives. Both the research design and the results are ‘a double experience’, which you will find out during reading this thesis. My personal experience of the research process has been ‘double’ as well. Doing research, especially a qualitative research focused on iteration and analyzing from different philosophical traditions, is extremely interesting and exciting, but confusing and stressful as well. Luckily, I got support from many others who brought new perspectives on my research and the process. That is why I want to thank a number of people who played a role in this.

First, this thesis would not exist if I would not have gotten the opportunity to do my research at the inter-municipal social service (ISS)<sup>1</sup> where this research is conducted. Special thanks go to the managing director, who was from the start until the end enthusiastic about my research project. He gave me all the freedom and trust to do whatever I wanted. Such a supporting attitude, open for critique and eager to learn, is admirable and inspiring. I am also grateful for all the employees who were willing to ‘let me into their world’ by participating in interviews, letting me observe during their work, during meetings and make me feel at ease at the ISS. Thanks for your openness!

My supervisors have been very important in my learning process. I want to thank Duco for being my first supervisor. You helped me to understand and structure my often vague ideas and varying interests. Your optimism and cheerful mood have been essential in balancing my own criticism and feelings of ‘being lost’. After all our meetings, I left with a smile and a renewed confidence. Peter, thanks for fulfilling the role of second supervisor. Your critique helped me to get clear what the essence of my research was. You also stimulated me to write simple and resist my tendency to complexity, which improved the quality of this thesis.

I want to thank my friends and RESMA classmates who inspired and motivated me over the last years. Some of them followed this research closely: Wieke, Jamie, Alésa, Lisa, Eva and Hilde, thanks for all the coffees in the library, thinking along with me and your mental support. Public Note-colleagues, thanks for the creative spirit. I am looking forward to the launch of our brand new online platform this Friday (see [publicnote.nl](http://publicnote.nl)). Lastly, of course, Thomas. Thanks for always making me laugh, telling me to take things slow and for just being there for me.

Finally, I want to thank my parents. You have been extremely important in my ‘study-career’, always motivating me to take it to the next level. Even when things did not go as planned, you stimulated me to make my own choices. During this research, I have seen many people who are dependent on social benefits, which made me very aware of the value of my research master diploma. My education would have been impossible without your unconditional trust and support. Thanks for giving me a future full of chances.

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<sup>1</sup> The studied organization is anonymized due to ethical considerations.

## Executive summary

Activation practitioners in the Netherlands seem to have an identity problem (Van Berkel et al., 2010; Van der Aa, 2012; Eikenaar et al., 2015): they are not classic bureaucrats who do their work within a strict framework of rules and procedures, but not professionals with large autonomy either. This does not necessarily mean that practitioners' work is chaotic (Schonewille, 2015), as sometimes suggested by authors (Eikenaar et al., 2015; Van Berkel et al., 2010; Van der Aa, 2012). Activation practitioners' professional space is limited by implicit guidelines (Schonewille, 2015). However, it is unclear how these boundaries to practitioners' professional space are constructed. Lack of knowledge of the construction of implicit guidelines in activation work makes activation risky, since we do not know if the guidelines that structure activation work are constructed in an ethically desirable way. This lack of knowledge forms the focus of this study, which is guided by the following research question:

*How are implicit boundaries of professional space of activation practitioners constructed, and is this construction desirable?*

This question is researched by means of combined research methodology. First, I ethnographically research *what* influences practitioners in the use of their professional space. In order to know *how* these influences work, the data is analyzed through a phronetic power lens. 'Phronesis' is a research approach designed by Bent Flyvbjerg (2012), aimed at providing practical wisdom by doing qualitative case studies, specifically focusing on power and value. The research is done at one inter-municipal social service. The results from this single case study show that activation practitioners experience a large professional space, but show hesitant behaviour concerning the 'enactment' of this professional space. This hesitant attitude is explained by two observed power mechanisms. Activation practitioners and their colleagues structure their behaviour according to the mechanism of 'avoiding hassle'. Due to high work pressure, using professional space is regarded as a high risk, which can lead to 'hassle'. Next the relation between practitioners and managers matter. While managers try to provide a large professional space by withdrawing from involvement in the content of implementation, and promoting the use of professional space, practitioners experience a 'double steering'. Practitioners experience the promoted space on the one hand, but feel that they cannot use this space on the other. This is the result of a panopticon effect: practitioners adapt their behaviour to their interpretation of which behaviour is (actually) expected by the managers. Paradoxically, practitioners do not dare to take risks or spend time on ideation to improve their work. These two mechanisms 'flourish' in a context of high work pressure. This construction of implicit power mechanism is not desirable, since it keeps activation work from moving towards professionalization and innovation. Therefore, activation practitioners, managers in social services *and* the professional association should 'organize' this professionalization process together.

# Table of Contents

Preface .....	3
Executive summary .....	4
Table of Contents .....	5
Abbreviations .....	8
<b>1. Activation in practice .....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1. Activation in the new welfare state .....	9
1.2. The identity problem of activation practitioners .....	10
1.3. Boundaries to the use of space in activation .....	11
1.4. Research objectives .....	13
1.5. Research design .....	13
1.6. Research questions .....	14
1.7. Relevance of this research .....	15
1.6.1. Scientific relevance .....	15
1.6.2. Societal relevance .....	15
1.6.3. Practical relevance .....	15
1.8. Outline structure .....	16
<b>2. Conceptualizing professional space .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1. Professionalism defined .....	17
2.2. Professional space from a professional and bureaucratic perspective .....	18
2.3. Having space and using space .....	19
2.4. Conclusion .....	20
<b>3. Research design and methodology .....</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1. Qualitative strategy .....	21
3.2. A double research approach .....	21
3.2.1. Ethnography and phronesis: Different assumptions .....	21
3.2.2. Ethnography and phronesis: Similar methods .....	22
3.3. The case under study .....	23
3.3.1. Case selection .....	23
3.3.2. Case description .....	23
3.3.3. Gaining access to the organization .....	25
3.3.4. Sampling: participant selection .....	25
3.4. Data generation .....	26
3.4.1. Semi-structured interviewing .....	27
3.4.2. Participant observation .....	28
3.4.3. Documents .....	28

3.4.4.	Drawing.....	29
3.4.5.	Dealing with bias.....	29
3.5.	Data analysis .....	30
3.5.1.	Iteration and sensitising concepts .....	30
3.5.2.	Analysis triangulation.....	31
3.5.3.	Software.....	31
3.6.	Quality criteria .....	32
3.7.	Ethical considerations.....	33
3.8.	Conclusion: The research process.....	34
<b>4.</b>	<b>Looking from the first perspective: ethnography.....</b>	<b>35</b>
4.1.	An ethnographic research approach.....	35
4.2.	Conclusion .....	35
<b>5.</b>	<b>Influences on the use of professional space .....</b>	<b>36</b>
5.1.	Experience of professional space at the ISS.....	36
5.2.	A culture of not using your professional space .....	38
5.3.	Reorganization towards innovative, networking professionals .....	39
5.3.1.	Dealing with professionalism.....	40
5.3.2.	Vision on professional activation work .....	41
5.4.	Accountability of professional space at the ISS.....	42
5.5.	Conclusion: managers and colleagues influence the use of professional space .....	43
<b>6.</b>	<b>Looking from the second perspective: phronesis.....</b>	<b>45</b>
6.1.	A phronetic research approach .....	45
6.2.	Studying social context: a climate perspective .....	47
6.3.	A team climate framework .....	49
6.4.	Power lens on the team climate framework.....	50
6.5.	Conclusion .....	51
<b>7.</b>	<b>Power influences on the use of professional space .....</b>	<b>52</b>
7.1.	Vision: From bulwark to network.....	52
7.1.1.	Clear vision: Professional, what is professional?.....	52
7.1.2.	Valued vision: We have always worked professionally .....	53
7.1.3.	Shared vision: “Why” is not yet in the genes .....	54
7.1.4.	Attainable vision: Achieving policy objectives.....	54
7.2.	Participative safety: Avoiding hassle & Double steering .....	55
7.2.1.	Safety to share information and to interact: Claiming colleagues’ time .....	55
7.2.2.	Safety to take risks: A double experience .....	56
7.2.3.	Safety to influence: Who decides?.....	59

7.3.	Task orientation: Avoiding change.....	60
7.3.1.	Commitment to task excellence: Diversity is the standard .....	60
7.3.2.	Critical appraisal of the task: This is the way it is, and no different .....	61
7.3.3.	Ideation about the task: Too busy for ideas.....	61
7.4.	Support for innovation: Supported or obliged professional space? .....	63
7.4.1.	Articulated support: Promotion of using professional space .....	63
7.4.2.	Enacted support: Organizing support .....	64
7.5.	Conclusion .....	65
7.5.1.	Influence from colleagues.....	65
7.5.2.	Influence from managers.....	66
7.5.3.	Overall conclusion.....	67
<b>8.</b>	<b>Conclusion &amp; Discussion .....</b>	<b>69</b>
8.1.	Conclusion .....	69
8.1.1.	The construction of implicit boundaries to professional space .....	69
8.1.2.	Is this desirable? .....	72
8.2.	Discussion: implications and limitations .....	74
8.2.1.	Implications for policy.....	74
8.2.2.	Implications for clients.....	74
8.2.3.	Implications for the scientific field.....	75
8.2.4.	Limitations of this research.....	76
<b>9.</b>	<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>78</b>
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>81</b>
	<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>86</b>
A.	Interview respondent characteristics .....	86
B.	Sensitising concepts & research questions .....	87
B-I.	Sensitizing concepts: open interviews .....	87
B-II.	Sensitizing concepts: in-depth interviews.....	88
C.	Analysis schemes .....	89
C-I.	Phronetic perspective on data.....	89
C-II.	Power lenses.....	90
C-III.	Code trees .....	90
D.	Observations & documents .....	93
D-I.	Observations .....	93
D-II.	Documents .....	94
E.	Drawings .....	94
F.	Tables on perspectives on professionalism .....	94
G.	List of interview respondents .....	95

H. Interview transcripts.....	95
I. Field notes .....	95

## **Abbreviations**

MDT = multidisciplinary team

R1, R2, R3, ... = "respondent 1", "respondent 2" etcetera.

D1, D2, D3, ... = "drawing by respondent 1", "drawing by respondent 2" etcetera.



# 1. Activation in practice

*“You make decisions on the basis of your professionalism. From your position. And in certain situations, there are no guidelines. We do not have standards or something” (R11).*

## 1.1. Activation in the new welfare state

In European welfare states, there has been a shift from a tradition of compensating social risks (‘old welfare’) to labor market participation as a main policy objective (‘new welfare’) (Ellison & Feller, 2013; Trommel, 2013). This concept of ‘new welfare’ is adopted in governance. The underlying idea of the ‘new welfare state’ – often described in Dutch politics and public policy as ‘the participation society’ (Tonkens, 2014) – is that citizens are responsible for their own social risks (Ellison & Feller, 2013). The participation society wants to ‘include everyone’, and provide ‘tailor-made services’ to make this possible. In the participation society, citizens have rights, but duties as well. These rights are conditional upon the fulfillment of their responsibilities (Schonewille, 2015). Labor market participation as a policy objective has led to a dramatic increase of the field of work integration support (Eikenaar, De Rijk & Meershoek, 2015). The effectivity of activation work is, however, often questioned, since research cannot prove that the use of activation instruments actually leads to more ‘activated’ citizens (CPB, 2016; Blonk, Van Twuijver, Van de Ven & Hazelzet 2015; Eikenaar et al., 2015). In other words, activation policy seems to be ineffective. It is thought that the effectivity of activation can be increased by professionalization of the implementation of the policy (Eikenaar et al., 2015).

Activation practitioners play a central role in this implementation. Activation practitioners are civil servants whose job it is to activate citizens who receive social assistance benefits (Schonewille, 2015). If unemployed citizens want social assistance benefits, they are obliged to fulfill their participation responsibilities under guidance of an activation practitioner<sup>2</sup>. Along this policy shift towards new-welfare, the role of the civil servant has changed as well. Instead of strictly following the rules from bureaucracy (in a Weberian sense), civil servants need to adapt to societal changes and use their professional space to improvise, in order to be able to provide tailor-made services (Boutellier, 2011; Trommel, 2012).

Professional space within activation work has been an important topic within public administrative research (Eikenaar et al., 2015; Schonewille, 2015; Van der Aa, 2012; Van Berkel, Van der Aa & Van Gestel, 2010). Scholars are interested in this topic because activation practitioners hold a special position within public organizations. Activation practitioners operate at the ‘frontline’ or ‘street-level’ of social service, that is, they have direct contact with citizens and form in this way ‘the face of government’. This position is therefore called ‘frontline workers’ (Tummers, Bekkers, Vink & Musheno, 2014) or ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (Lipsky, 2010). Activation practitioners are frontline workers who ‘take decisions regarding the access or denial of services, the content of services, the evaluation and treatment of clients, the jobs clients are expected to accept, and the distribution of rewards and sanctions’ (Van Berkel et al., 2010). Activation practitioners have to use their discretion to bridge the

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<sup>2</sup> There are different names for but also different types of activation practitioners. The term ‘activation practitioner’ (Schonewille, 2015) is an overarching term for a.o. the following terms in the field of social assistance: ‘client manager’ (Van Berkel et al., 2010; Van der Aa, 2012), ‘work reintegration professional’ (Eikenaar et al., 2015), ‘participation coach’, ‘client director’ and ‘process director’ (activation practitioner types that are present in this research).

gap between policy and practice, in order to provide personalized service that is asked from policy. However, there is an academic debate about the identity of activation work, which has consequences for the use of discretion.

## **1.2. The identity problem of activation practitioners**

Practitioners are not classic bureaucrats who strictly follow the rules, with as little discretion as possible in order to overcome arbitrariness and corruption (Weber, 1946), because they are expected to use professional space in their work and provide tailor-made services. Activation practitioners' large discretionary space for individualized treatment does fit within a professional logic. Professionals aim to help each client by using their discretionary space as wide as possible. Decisions professionals make are based upon all relevant knowledge to help clients. The professionals' knowledge plays an important role in their work. Professionals have obtained their knowledge from education and practice, have constructed an acknowledged set of professional standards, and are continuously involved with evaluating and developing their shared knowledge, especially within the professional association (Simons & Ruijters, 2014; Trappenburg in Noordegraaf, Geuijen & Meijer, 2011).

Activation practitioners can thus be regarded as professionals in the sense that they use a large discretionary space to serve the client in different ways, but the required recognized body of knowledge of professionals is problematic in activation work. In fact, an acknowledged set of professional standards about how citizens should be activated does not exist. Consequently, practitioners cannot easily defend the decisions they make in their work (Van der Aa, 2012). It seems as if the practitioners 'are just doing something' (Van Berkel et al., 2010). This lack of transparent professional standards is problematic for social benefit recipients as well, because they do not have a framework to judge the service they receive, while they are obliged to make use of activation service. Especially given the obligation to participate in activation practices, there should be high demands for the use of professional space in activation work (Van der Aa, 2012).

Deregulation and decentralization of activation policy allows different treatment of citizens, but at the same time, it is hard to account for these differences (Van der Aa, 2012:). This 'decentralized' thinking has reached management levels of social services as well. A management focus on mere output ('how many clients find work, with what effort and in how much time' (Eikenaar et al., 2015)) has allowed to arise different implicit frames of reference that steer guidance. Research shows that there are large differences in the way activation practitioners do their work (Blonk et al., 2015; Eikenaar, De Rijk & Meershoek, 2015; Van der Aa, 2012; Van Berkel et al., 2010). These different frames of reference of activation practitioners leads in practice to different guidance styles, and even more important, 'they also create differences in opportunities and chances between clients, and therefore also put into question the fairness of the system' (Eikenaar et al., 2015).

The use of professional space in activation work is a central question within research and implementation in this field of public service (Van der Aa, 2012). The essence of the problem is the fact that the decisions of activation practitioners cannot be unequivocally judged. Activation practitioners can justify their decisions in different ways, without a transparent, shared framework (Van der Aa, 2012: p. 279). Various philosophies about what should be the result of activation exist simultaneously in practice (Schonewille, 2015; Eikenaar et al., 2015). Many scholars argue that there should be a fundament of shared knowledge in activation work, because activation tends to become an arbitrary and non-transparent practice which can lead to risks for welfare recipients (Blonk et al., 2015; Eikenaar et al., 2015; Van der Aa, 2012; Van Berkel et al., 2010). The lack of professional standards in activation

is worrisome, because activation practitioners are increasingly treated as professionals, by their organizations and by society: they receive a large discretion to make their decisions, trusting upon the practitioners' 'professionalism'. This 'professionalism' seems to be rather rhetoric than factual. Guidelines in activation work are hardly developed (Eikenaar et al., 2015). In fact, activation practitioners are 'professionals without a profession', according to Van Berkel et al. (2010: p. 462). Activation work is an individual project of the practitioner, 'since frontline workers such as activation practitioners, make decisions in the absence of clear criteria, - which may be professional, bureaucratic, or otherwise' (Van Berkel et al., 2010: pp. 461-462). Activation practitioners seem to have an identity problem, which complicates a responsible way of activation.

### **1.3. Boundaries to the use of space in activation**

So, when activation practice is not based upon professional nor bureaucratic standards, how do activation practitioners know how to activate citizens? Is this as arbitrary as it seems from a bureaucratic and professional logic? Anna Schonewille (2015) tried to answer this question through her PhD research on 'what activation practitioners do'. She describes activation work in the Netherlands as two ways of "doing". Schonewille refers to *first doing* when she talks about 'the activation practitioners' accomplishment of the task of activating citizens' (2015: p. 14). The execution of their work, *first doing*, can be characterized by diversity and dynamism. '[...] activation practitioners adopt their personal, main approach (diverse) and when required by the situation they can adopt an alternative, subsidiary approach (dynamic)' (Schonewille, 2015: p. 144). This dynamism and diversity is not limitless, though. She found that activation practitioners perform a set of tacitly constructed framework of 'standards' in their work, to fill up the 'institutional void' (Hajer, 2003) of activation. Schonewille describes this framework of implicit guidelines as *second doing* of activation. She sees *second doing* as the accomplishment of order and normality in the work of activation practitioners, and describes it as a light and tacit framework of professional standards in activation work. This conceptual understanding of *first* and *second doing* implies that professional space is free, but bounded by implicit knowledge.

Activation practitioners in Schonewille's study demonstrated seven 'reservoirs of common knowledge' in their behaviour and via their use of language: 'activation moves along a continuum between enforcing and being lenient (common knowledge 1), when activating citizens differences in approaches to activation can be functional (common knowledge 2), activation is about creating a balance between building a trusting relationship with the citizen specific (common knowledge 3), activation is citizen specific (common knowledge 4), activation is targeted towards citizens who often find themselves marginalized (common knowledge 5), activation respects the material and psychological needs of citizens (common knowledge 6), and finally, activation is documented by activation practitioners (common knowledge 7)' (Schonewille, 2015: p. 144). These seven reservoirs are the basis for a framework of activation work, constructed in practice. This 'practical wisdom' functions as a boundary to professional space in activation work according to Schonewille.

Within the boundaries of this framework of practical wisdom, each practitioner has his own 'main approach'. When the main approach leads to an 'un-normal' result, being, a result that does not fit within the framework of implicit guidelines, practitioners adopt their 'subsidiary approaches' (Schonewille, 2015: p. 75). The following approaches were observed: following the rules; fulfilling client's desires; helping client see their 'realistic' work opportunities; get citizens back to work; let clients feel happy again and provide insight in client's personality (Schonewille, 2015). Eikenaar et al. (2015) found comparable main approaches in activation work, which they call 'frames of reference': a

procedural, a work-focused, a caring, a learning and a facilitating frame of reference. They focused, however, on the differences between these frames, and argue that the frames are so divergent that they lead to a large variety of outcomes for citizens. The authors state that the differences between these approaches are too large, which makes activation unfair. Schonewille (2015), instead, focussed in her study on the similarities between these approaches, discussed in the common knowledges above.

She suggests that, because of the main and sub approach 'citizens can expect to be treated in a similar fashion throughout the activation trajectory by their activation practitioner', which makes the practice of activation less problematic than sometimes suggested in the relevant literature' (2015: p. 100). Also, because practitioners discuss their work with colleagues when an 'un normal result' emerges and when needed, revert to a subsidiary approach, activation practice is 'ordered' by practitioners themselves. So activation work is ordered by implicit frames, and therefore not as risky as suggested by other authors as we have seen above (Blonk et al., 2015; Eikenaar et al., 2015; Van Berkel et al., 2010; Van der Aa, 2012). She subsequently argues that 'given the complexity of the task with their own individualities, it may be that when activating citizens we want to rely on 'practical wisdom' and the self-order accomplishing capacities of activation practitioners' (2015: p. 153). However, the use of implicit guidelines, whether or not in a structured way, is no guarantee against arbitrariness in activation work. We do not know how stable the described framework is, whether it can change over time, and what happens when practitioners cross the limits of this framework, for instance by using new ideas of doing activation work. The essence about these questions is the question how this framework of boundaries to activation is constructed.

Schonewille assumes that these implicit boundaries that practitioners demonstrate in practice are constructed by practitioners themselves. She concludes that activation practitioners are an advanced type of street-level bureaucrats, who construct their own professional standards. Street-level bureaucrats, a well-known concept in public administration literature by Michael Lipsky (2010), are civil servants working at the frontline of a public organization. His theory describes the role of discretion on the intersection of policy and implementation. Classic street-level bureaucrats need to find ways to cope with the gap between policy on paper and the practice of serving clients, with limited time and resources (Lipsky, 2010). According to Schonewille (2015), activation practitioners do not only determine what activation policy is in practice by using their discretionary space, but also co-determine the professional standards in their work. But Schonewille's thesis only shows how practitioners *discuss* the implicit guidelines of their work (what fits within the boundaries to their work and what not), but does not show how these implicit guidelines are *constructed*. So the assumption that practitioners constitute the guidelines that structure their work themselves, based upon the observation that practitioners demonstrate and discuss common knowledge about their work, seems not to be valid. This means that we do not know how boundaries to activation practitioners' space are constructed within this 'institutional void' (Hajer, 2003).

Moreover, Schonewille calls for more research on under which conditions *second doing* of activation practitioners 'flourishes' (2015). I agree with Schonewille that we need a better understanding of how boundaries to the professional space in activation work function. I believe, however, we do not only need to know *when* (under which conditions) boundaries to activation work are used, but we need to understand *how* these boundaries are *constructed*. The *second doing* framework of boundaries seems to be the only fundament that our social services rely upon in the implementation of their policies (since bureaucratic and professional norms do not apply), which makes it highly important to understand its

functioning. Schonewille also argues that as long as governance ensures the conditions under which activation practitioners' *second doing* flourishes are met, there will be 'a balance between what activation practitioners do and what society wants' (Schonewille, 2015: p. 153). But if we do not know *how* boundaries to activation are constructed, these boundaries could prescribe any standard for service provision. We do not know if it is constructed by activation practitioners themselves, or whether other actors are involved in this ordering process. Even more, if boundaries to activation are constructed implicitly, Foucault (1977) would call this the strongest form of exercising power: the *panopticon* effect. One acts as a prisoner of a *panopticon* prison: he or she behaves in a certain way because he or she thinks this is the way one should behave, out of fear of punishment. Especially when we do not know where this constructing power comes from, implicit guidelines could become dangerous. Lastly, we do not know how robust boundaries to activation are. Implicit boundaries could (implicitly) change in different guidelines. Frankly, we do not know whether the '*second doing* way' of working is ethical.

In short, professional space in activation work could result in the tailor-made services activation policy aims for, but it does not necessarily have to result in 'success'. It could lead to too much freedom for activation practitioners, facilitating risks of ineffective, inefficient and unequal treatment (see Van Berkel et al., 2010; Van der Aa, 2012; Eikenaar et al., 2015). As we do not know how implicit boundaries in activation work are constructed, we do not know how activation practitioners' professional space is influenced. Studying the construction of boundaries implies a question of power: who or what defines this space and *how*? We need to know who or what has the power to influence the way activation practice is limited and what these influences look like. This is important because knowledge about the construction of boundaries to professional space in activation work helps us to make an informed judgment about the question whether the current way of activation work is ethical. So this research puzzle is not only a question of power – who/what influences the construction of boundaries to professional space in activation work; but more importantly, a normative question – is this construction of boundaries to professional space in activation work desirable? These considerations result in the following leading research question:

***How are implicit boundaries to professional space of activation practitioners constructed, and is this construction desirable?***

#### **1.4. Research objectives**

The aim of this research is threefold: explorative, explanative and normative. First of all, this research tries to explore *who/what* influences activation practitioners' use of professional space and the experienced boundaries to it. Next to this first aim of '*verstehen*' (understanding) how boundaries to the use of professional space are experienced, this research aims to '*erklären*' (explanation) (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 136), by trying to explain *why* practitioners are influenced by these influencing factors. Lastly, the research will develop a normative consideration of the construction of implicit boundaries to professional space. These objectives result in useful insights about the use of professional space in the social service in this study, which can be used in their management and/or policy practices, but in comparable social services as well.

#### **1.5. Research design**

The research puzzle asks for a qualitative research design that combines in-depth research and normative deliberation. This is researched in a single case study. An ethnographic analysis is done to get insight into who or what influences activation practitioners' experienced professional space. Next, a 'phronetic' analysis is done to understand *how* these influences work, in order to explain *why*

practitioners are influenced in the way they are. 'Phronesis' is a research approach designed by Bent Flyvbjerg (2012), aimed at providing practical wisdom by doing qualitative case studies, specifically focusing on power and value. Influences on boundaries to professional space is a political matter, so a research focus on power and values (interests) is appropriate to give insight into *how* and *why* these influence constitute boundaries to the experienced professional space of practitioners. The phronetic evaluation helps to make a normative judgment about the construction of boundaries to professional space. The combination of these methods resulted in an ethnographic-phronetic research design (which is elaborately discussed in chapter three). This thesis is divided in two parts: an ethnographic part and a phronetic part, the former directing the latter. The research is conducted at one inter-municipal social service (after this: ISS) in the Netherlands. Data is collected between March and August 2016 through semi-structured interviewing with 20 respondents (15 activation practitioners, 4 managers and 1 staff member); drawing during these interviews; participant observation during five months for two to three days a week; and document analysis of organization documents.

## 1.6. Research questions

This research is structured by a set of research questions that help to analytically study the research puzzle. As we have seen above, the leading research question of this research is:

*How are implicit boundaries to professional space of activation practitioners constructed, and is this construction desirable?*

This research question is guided by several sub questions. First of all, it is important to provide conceptual clarity about the central concept in this study, 'professional space'. The following theoretical research question will therefore be answered:

### 1. *What is 'professional space'?*

As described in paragraph 1.2, we do not know what influences the implicit boundaries of activation practitioners' professional space. This lack of knowledge means that an open research approach is necessary to find out *what* or *who* influences the experienced boundaries of professional space in activation work. Therefore, I started with an ethnographic exploration in the research field (the ISS) to be open to whatever would emerge, following Bryman's (2008) description of qualitative research. This phase was guided by the following exploratory empirical question:

### 2. *What influences the experienced implicit boundaries to professional space of activation practitioners at the ISS?*

This question helped to narrow down to the most important influences on the boundaries to professional space in activation work. These insights are used to take a closer look to *how* these influences work. This is done by a team climate analysis from a power perspective. This analysis will be done by answering the following two questions:

3. *How do colleagues influence the experienced implicit boundaries to professional space of activation practitioners at the ISS?*
4. *How do managers influence the experienced implicit boundaries to professional space of activation practitioners at the ISS?*

## 1.7. Relevance of this research

This research is done for several reasons. First of all, the research is started for a Master's program. But more importantly, it is valuable from a scientific, societal and practical perspective and for the following different reasons.

### 1.6.1. Scientific relevance

This research is scientifically relevant because it broadens the knowledge about how activation practitioners do their work. Specifically, it gives answers to the lack of knowledge about what constructs the implicit boundaries to professional space in activation work. It helps to better understand what the 'professional'-status of the activation practitioner means in practice. This is valuable, because we do not know if the way boundaries to professional space in activation work are constructed is desirable from a societal perspective (Van Berkel et al., 2010; Eikenaar et al., 2015; Schonewille, 2015). This research also contributes to the study of professional space in public organizations. It gives empirical insight into which mechanisms influence the experienced professional space of civil servants. These insights could be used in studying how professional space of other civil servants, and specifically street-level bureaucrats or public professionals at the implementation level, is influenced.

In addition, knowledge from research on activation work hardly ever reaches practice (De Koning in CPB, 2016; Blonk et al., 2015). So this research has scientific value in itself because it will bring science to the field: I will present the results at the social service where this research is conducted. Lastly, I experiment with a new research approach within the field of public administration, namely ethnographic-phronetic research. This combined research design can potentially be interesting for other scientists who want to use a micro-level approach, but aim to transcend description as well. The ethnographic-phronetic approach that I have developed helps to understand phenomena within their specific context, and extracts practices that can be generalized to other comparable contexts. In this way, this research can function as an example for future ethnographic-phronetic research and further development of this methodology.

### 1.6.2. Societal relevance

The use of space within activation work is a 'hot' topic. Many social services are experimenting and explore the limits of what they can do, by for example refusing to enforce 'The Return'<sup>3</sup>, an obligation in the Participation Act (De Graaf, 07-12-2015). The findings from this research contribute to these discussions because it gives insight into how space in activation work is influenced, and gives normative direction to how activation work should be done from a societal perspective. Next, this research is valuable to society because it challenges the idea that activation work is done in a responsible way because it is limited by *second doing*. As I have claimed above, we need to know *how* boundaries to the use of professional space in activation work (*second doing*) are constructed, because it determines the quality of the services and whether our social service is practiced in an ethical way.

### 1.6.3. Practical relevance

As it is valuable for science that results reach their research field, it is also valuable for the field to receive scientific insights about their organization. This thesis gives the social service of this research (the ISS) a broader perspective on the way their work is done. It gives both managers and activation practitioners insight into their role in the boundaries to the use of professional space, and how this could be changed if desired. This can give activation practitioners a better understanding of how they are (implicitly)

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<sup>3</sup> My translation from Dutch: 'De Tegenprestatie'

influenced, and consequently provide them agency to change their situation. Managers can get insight into the (un)intended effects of their actions and how they can change this, if desired. The thesis ends with specific recommendations for the organization about how to organize professional space in a desirable way at the ISS. This research aims to function as a mirror for the organization: it should reflect the way the organization works and give insight into how this reflection could be changed when they change their 'movements'.

## **1.8. Outline structure**

This first chapter has introduced you to the complexity of responsible use of professional space of activation practitioners. It showed the need to explore how activation practitioners are influenced in the construction of implicit guidelines for their use of professional space, given the lack of bureaucratic steering, professional steering, and absence of knowledge about the construction of practical knowledge in activation work. This research puzzle will be explored in the following order. First, the central concept of this study is defined in chapter two by answering the theoretical question '*What is professional space?*'. The ethnographic-phronetic design plays an essential role in this research, so the research design will be discussed in detail in chapter three. Chapter three also covers the introduction of the chosen case of this study (ISS), a discussion of data generation and analysis techniques and considerations about the role of me as a researcher in this research, quality criteria, ethics and research process. Subsequently, chapter four discusses the choice for an ethnographic perspective and what this perspective implies. Next, chapter five presents the ethnographic findings, by answering the sub question '*What influences the experienced implicit boundaries of professional space of activation practitioners at the ISS?*'. It provides an overview of the experienced professional space, and what aspects play an important role in limitations to the use of this space. These findings do not give clear answers to the *how*-question of this research, so in chapter six I will develop a phronetic perspective to look at the data. In chapter seven, once again, the findings are described, but this time from the new perspective. From this perspective, the other two sub questions will be answered, which explore how '*colleagues*' and '*managers*' influence the experienced implicit boundaries of professional space of activation practitioners at the ISS. Chapter eight answers the leading research question, including a phronetic judgment and a discussion of the results. Lastly, this research report ends in chapter nine with recommendations for practitioners and managers in the field of activation.



## 2. Conceptualizing professional space

To understand how professional space in activation work is influenced, it is useful to first take a look at what the term 'professional space' exactly means. Therefore, the theoretical research question is answered in this chapter:

- *What is professional space?*

The answer to this question gives us insight into what can be understood as 'professional' (§2.1). Next, it describes two general perspectives on professional space, an autonomy perspective and a discretion perspective (§2.2). Lastly, attention will be paid to the use of professional space in practice (§2.3).

### 2.1. Professionalism defined

If one talks about professional space, one talks about professionalism. The terms 'professional' and 'professionalism' are often used and in different ways, both in science and in practice (Simons & Ruijters, 2014). It has become an umbrella term for anything related to specialization of a skill, the use of standards in (paid) work, certification or licensing, and tailor made service occupations (Wilensky, 1964). Despite these differences in use, three main characteristics can be identified in the professional literature: a technical base, a service ethic and institutional control.

First of all, professionals have a *technical base* which gives direction to their actions (Wilensky, 1964; Simons & Ruijters, 2014; Trappenburg in Noordegraaf et al., 2011). This technical base consists of a combination of general, specialized knowledge and internalized knowledge from experience. This general, specialized knowledge is obtained through a specific, often university-level, education. This education enables the professional to translate abstract knowledge to situational specifics (Simons & Ruijters, 2014; Karssing & Wirtz, 2008). Professionals need to keep up with scientific developments, because they are the embodiment of the bridge between scientific knowledge and practice. So professionals carry the responsibility to be informed of all recent knowledge in their area, in order to help their clients in the best way possible. Next to knowledge from science, knowledge from practice plays an important role in professional work (Wilensky, 1964). Knowledge from practice is internalized, implicit and depends on the personal experience of the professional (Trappenburg in Noordegraaf et al., 2011). These implicit and personal aspects make it difficult to formalize this type of knowledge. Because of the ambiguity of this tacit knowledge, it is important to try to put this knowledge into words, so it can be discussed and challenged (Noordegraaf, Schiffelers, Van de Camp & Bos, 2014). Moreover, discussing and challenging others' knowledge from practice enables a shared professional development. So it is important that professionals exchange and discuss their experiences. This technical base gives professionals authority, because they have a monopoly on the knowledge of their field (Karssing & Wirtz, 2008).

A second characteristic of professionalism is that professionals have a *service ethic*. This means that professionals feel that they have a calling to pursue an ideal. An ideal is not personally (make money) or client oriented (help clients), but a higher, more abstract idea, such as healthcare, justice or social security (Trappenburg in Noordegraaf et al., 2011). They do this in an objective, impersonal and impartial way. Some scholars describe this as an altruistic service-orientation or a passion (Wilensky, 1964; Karssing & Wirtz, 2008; Simons & Ruijters, 2014). This service ethic enables professionals to make the right decisions in unforeseeable circumstances. Professionals need to deal with a lot of complexities in their work, since their aim is to provide tailor-made service.

Thirdly, a profession is *institutionalized* (Trappenburg in Noordegraaf et al., 2011). Professionals are united in a formalized occupational group, the profession. The profession decides who belongs to the profession and who does not: she makes her own qualification standards. Next, the profession decides how the work should be divided, who is allowed to do which part of the work. Another task of the profession is institutional control on the work of her professionals, to improve and maintain the technical base, service ethic and professional standards (Trappenburg in Noordegraaf et al., 2011). Professional standards are codes of ethics about the technical base and service ethics. These codes are important, because decision making about what the best service is depends on the combination of technical knowledge and ethical and pragmatic consideration (Simons & Ruijters, 2014). Professional standards thus legitimize professional decision making. Professional standards are informally and formally constructed by the professionals themselves. The profession reprimands and punishes her professionals when they do not meet these professional standards (Trappenburg in Noordegraaf et al., 2011). Since the profession determines and controls the professional standards, the profession has power on a societal level, because society accepts the self-regulation and monopoly of the profession (Hupe, 2009).

Simons & Ruijters (2014) critically reflect on the obligations of being a professional, because of their authority and trust they receive from society. The authors state that professionals are obliged to be always actively seeking for new technical and practical knowledge, how to use this knowledge in practice and improve their expertise. They argue that learning, looking for innovation and reflecting on their work should be a central activity for professionals. If professionals want to remain a professional, they need to keep on developing themselves and their profession. 'It is not (only) a matter of gaining a body of knowledge, but of maintaining a body of knowledge; not (only) having a theory of practice, but of keeping it accurate' (Simons & Ruijters, 2014: p. 970).

The three main characteristics, a technical base, service ethic and institutionalization, describe a picture of a classic professional, such as a medical doctor. Noordegraaf et al. (2014) state, though, that there are also other 'types' of professionals. The author describe 'street-level professionals', referring to Lipsky's 'street-level bureaucrats' (2010) who need to cope with demands from the organization and the client. Street-level professionals have a technical base through schooling and socialization, but their autonomy is influenced by the organizations they work for. The authors describe this process of organizational influence on professional work 'hybridization' (Noordegraaf et al., 2014). This brings us to the central focus of this research: influence on the use of professional space.

## **2.2. Professional space from a professional and bureaucratic perspective**

Professional space can be understood in two ways, from a classic professional perspective and a bureaucratic perspective (Van den Born, 2015). As described in the previous paragraph, professionals have freedom in their work because society trusts on professional's expertise (technical base, practical knowledge), service ethic and power over their own institutional control. This freedom makes professionals autonomous, because they have monopoly on their work. From a classic perspective, this freedom is often defined as 'professional space'. However, in this research it is called 'autonomous space', to make a clear distinction with the meaning of professional space in this research (which will be defined below).

Increasingly, professionals also have to deal with 'discretionary space' next to the space of their autonomy. This refers to the space practitioners have within the rules and regulations of the organization, that is, the room for interpretation. Lipsky (2010) describes how street-level bureaucrats

always have space within their work, because they have to judge how the complexities of reality should be interpreted within a framework of rules, regulations and policy, and with a feeling of compassion for the individual client. This street-level decision making process happens in a context of work pressure due to high caseloads and time pressure (Lipsky, 2010). On the one hand, discretionary space is necessary to be able to deal with the complexity of individual problems of clients. On the other hand, discretionary space is unavoidable, because every rule, regulation or policy is too abstract to cover all circumstances that it is made for. In that sense, street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010) or street-level professionals (Noordegraaf et al., 2014) always have discretionary space. The extent of this discretionary space differs per context of rules, regulations, policy and organizational pressures though (Lipsky, 2010).

The professional space of activation practitioners can be characterized by both types of ‘space’. As we have seen in the research puzzle, activation practitioners have a large autonomy to make decisions (Van Berkel et al., 2010) and a light, tacit framework of professional standards (Schonewille, 2015). However, activation practitioners are influenced by organizational policies and organizational structures as well (Van der Aa, 2012). In other words, professional space of activation practitioners consists of both ‘positive’ autonomous space, and ‘negative’ discretionary space. Van den Born (2015) presents an overview of how different types of space result in different types of workers (table 1). When someone does not have autonomy nor discretion, he/she can be identified as an assembly line worker. The assembly line worker follows rules and procedures without room for interpretation or the use of autonomy, because this will disrupt the production process. So the assembly line worker has no professional space. A ‘bounded professional’ is someone who has large autonomy, but does have to strictly follow rules and procedures of the organization the professional works in (Oude Vrielink & Bockel, 2013). The street-level bureaucrat (Lipsky, 2010) has discretion in the execution of his/her work, but have limited autonomy. Lastly, the classic professional has both large autonomy and both large discretion in their work, and in that sense the largest professional space.

		<b>Autonomous space</b>	
		-	+
<b>Discretionary space</b>	-	<b>Assembly line worker</b>	<b>Bounded professional</b>
	+	<b>Street-level bureaucrat</b>	<b>Classic professional</b>

*Table 1. 'Two types of space in relation to each other' by Van den Born (2015).*

### 2.3. Having space and using space

There is a difference between ‘factual’ space and ‘experienced’ space (Hupe, 2009), or space on paper and space in practice (Lipsky, 2010). Both descriptions refer to the same tension between formal space, created in rules and structures, and experienced space that is used in practice. This distinction is useful since space on paper and space in practice is often something different. Therefore, Lipsky (2010) argues that policy actually is ‘made’ in practice, because the way civil servants use policy and rules in practice determines what a policy eventually means ‘off paper’. Professional space can also be experienced, but not used. Professionals can hide behind self-designed rules (Kruiter, De Jong, Van Niel & Hijzen in Van den Born, 2015), or rules from the profession, organization or law. ‘They can subvert policy by denying their own discretion in order to protect themselves from having to take difficult decisions and being

subjected to blame' (Evans & Harris, 2004: p. 889). Lipsky describes examples of how street-level bureaucrats use their discretionary space in a defensive way, to be able to deal with high caseloads. They try to make their work more easy, by coping mechanisms such as 'rationing' (e.g. letting clients wait) or 'creaminig' (first choose clients who seem most likely to lead to 'success') (Lipsky, 2010). Lipsky (2010) is critical towards not using the provided discretionary space, because this is a way of policy deformation.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed what in this research is understood with the term 'professional space' of activation practitioners. This provides conceptual clarity around the central concept of this research. Professional space is a combination of 'positive' space (autonomy) and 'negative' space (discretion). The way professional space is experienced and used, depends on what these positive and negative influences on professional space look like. How this works out in practice, is going to be researched in the rest of this study. How this puzzle is approached, is discussed in the next chapter about the design and methodology of this research.

### 3. Research design and methodology

As described in the research puzzle in chapter one, it is unclear *what* influences the experienced professional space in activation work, and *how* these influences function. This lack of knowledge asks for a research design that allows theory to emerge out of data collection and analysis, rather than testing theories that are specified at the beginning of the research (Bryman, 2008). This means that the research puzzle needs a corresponding research design. In this chapter, I will explain how this research is designed in order to find meaningful answers to the research questions. I will discuss the qualitative strategy that is adopted (§3.1); why I have chosen for a double research approach (§3.2); describe the case that is used for these different approaches (§3.3); the way in which the data from the case is generated (§3.4); with which techniques the data is analysed (§3.5); which ethical considerations are taken into account (§3.7); and what the research process looked like (§3.8).

#### 3.1. Qualitative strategy

A qualitative research strategy suits this research puzzle best, because it gives the researcher the space to explore as much as desirable (Boeije, 2013). Hennie Boeije describes the purpose of a qualitative strategy as: '(...) to describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. The research questions are studied through flexible methods enabling contact with the people involved to an extent that is necessary to grasp what is going on in the field. The methods produce rich, descriptive data that need to be interpreted through the identification and coding of themes and categories leading to findings that can contribute to theoretical knowledge and practical use' (Boeije, 2013: p. 11). A qualitative research strategy furthermore implies that the relationship between theory and research is inductive, which means that the former is generated out of the latter (Bryman, 2008). The epistemological position of the qualitative strategy can be described as interpretivist. One can generate knowledge by interpreting the behaviour, language and interpretations of others. The ontological position of this research is constructionist, implying that social reality is constructed through interactions between individuals (Bryman, 2008).

#### 3.2. A double research approach

Diverging research approaches fall under the umbrella of qualitative, interpretative research strategies. As presented in chapter one, this research has a threefold ambition: understanding, explaining and making a normative judgment (§1.3), in order to create scientific, societal and practical relevance (§1.6). This ambition is covered by the leading research question, which is divided into two types of sub-questions: a what-question and two how-questions. While most researchers stick to one research aim and corresponding methodology, e.g. 'verstehen' and ethnography, this research puzzle and its threefold aim asks for a more sophisticated approach. Just as activation policy aims for tailor-made service, I have created a research design that is tailored for this research puzzle: an *ethnographic-phronetic* research design. This combined design deals with different assumptions (§3.2.1) and similar methods (§3.2.2).

##### 3.2.1. Ethnography and phronesis: Different assumptions

An ethnographic-phronetic research design is a double design for answering both the *what* ('verstehen') and the *how* ('erklären') of the influence on professional space of activation practitioners. Ethnography and 'phronesis' are different research traditions, based upon different assumptions about what research can do and how research findings can be used. It is not common in research to combine different approaches, because differences in assumptions can lead to friction between two paradigms that are central to the approaches. Likewise, this is the case for the assumptions and traditions of

ethnography and phronesis. Ethnography is a well-known research tradition within public administration and organizational science. It is focused on detailed understanding ('verstehen') of a culture in a specific social setting. Ethnographers adopt a modest stance: their interpretation is a description of an interpretation of interpretations of others, and their findings are so situational that generalization is impossible. Hence, relativism and context dependency is central to ethnographers (Bryman, 2008). Phronesis is a relatively<sup>4</sup> new research approach in public administration. The approach is, in contrast with ethnography, focused on explaining ('erklären') social phenomena by looking for power relations and creating practical impact. Phronesis teases knowledge out from the context to make a normative judgment, which can be useful in other situations as well (Flyvbjerg, Landman & Schram, 2012). These different assumptions are not compatible in essence, as presented in table 2.

ETHNOGRAPHY	PHRONESIS
Description	Explanation
Interpretive frame	Critical (power) frame
No judgment	Normative judgment
Generalization is not possible	Generalization is possible
Aim of providing insights about behavior	Aim of creating practical impact

Table 2. Tension between ethnographic and phronetic assumptions

However, given these differences, the approaches can potentially complement each other. This is done in this combined research design. Looking from an ethnographic and a phronetic perspective, gives answer to different questions. The first part of the research puzzle is about finding out *what*, at all, influences activation practitioners in using their professional space. As described in chapter one, there is no knowledge about what these influences are. Ethnography is then a useful strategy for mapping influencing relations, which enabled me to determine the focus of the research. However, ethnography was not an adequate approach for my second aim, explaining these influencing relations, and understanding them from a larger perspective. Ethnography's relativism can be transcended by looking to the data for a second time, from a phronetic perspective. This enabled me to answer to explanative part of the research question, make a normative judgment and create practical relevance.

### 3.2.2. Ethnography and phronesis: Similar methods

Despite these differences in assumptions, ethnography and phronesis are still approaches from the same interpretive, qualitative tradition. In fact, their methodologies are quite similar. Both approaches focus use methodologies to understand how social action experienced, that is, how respondents make sense of what they are doing. "How?"-questions are central in the ethnographic as well as the phronetic method, because they both aim for 'verstehen' (Bryman, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2012). Next, local micro practices and experiences form for both approaches the point of departure (Bryman, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2012). Phronetic and ethnographic researchers focus on what Clifford Geertz called "thick description": rich accounts of the details of the studied phenomenon (Bryman, 2008: p. 378; Flyvbjerg, 2012). 'The 'thicker' the description – the more details of lived experience, the more modes of symbolic expression that are discovered and described, the more nuanced and layered the text – the more one is ascertained of the validity of one's interpretation' (Yanow, 1996: p. 53). Thick descriptions can be found by asking 'little' questions. 'Little' refers from both perspectives to personal, individualized questions about

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<sup>4</sup> Phronetic research is more familiar within organizational sciences. Flyvbjerg (2006) refers to several organizational studies that consist of the essential 'phronetic characteristics': they must be 'effectively deal with deliberation, judgment, and praxis in relations to values and power, and as long as they answer four value-rational questions' (Flyvbjerg, 2006: p. 382) that are central in phronetic research. I will elaborate on these characteristics in paragraph 2.2.

specific experiences. The two approaches take experience of practices in a specific context as a central focus point. Lastly, ethnography and phronesis both make use of the combination of different research techniques, which is called *triangulation* (Bryman, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2012).

These similarities in research methodology made it possible to use one dataset for two different approaches for analysis. This means that the data is generated in one way, but analysed in two different ways and with different goals. The construction of the dataset is explained in the following paragraphs.

### **3.3. The case under study**

This research is designed around one case. The empirical part of this research is conducted at one inter-municipal social service. A single case study enables a researcher to focus on the minutiae, practices and details that are central to ethnography and phronesis. This information helps him or her to understand the meaning of phenomena in their local context (ethnography) as well as the larger context (phronesis). This paragraph describes the way the chosen case is selected (§3.3.1); introduce the case (§3.3.2); describe how access is gained to the case (§3.3.3); and the way in which participants in this research are selected (§3.3.4).

#### **3.3.1. Case selection**

Ethnography and phronesis want to study phenomena closely within their specific context. This means that a case needs to provide rich information, to be able to make thick descriptions and extract the important details for generalization to other cases. When Flyvbjerg, the ‘founder’ of phronetic social research, talks about generalization, it is not about generalization one-to-one to other contexts. Moreover, ‘the power of a good example is underestimated’ (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 77). A good example can show mechanisms that can be recognized in other studies (‘recognizability’ will be discussed further in §3.6). This requirement of being a ‘good example’ has steered the case selection. In order to maximize the utility of information from the case, I have selected a case on the basis of certain characteristics that can help us to understand the issues of the research puzzle (Flyvbjerg, 2012; Boeije, 2013). This is also called ‘purposive sampling’ (Boeije, 2013: p. 35) or ‘information-oriented selection’ (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 79).

I have selected the case of a Dutch Inter-municipal Social Service<sup>5</sup> (from now on: ISS). This case is likely to yield rich information about the use of professional space of activation practitioners, because the organization is recently reorganized (two months before the start of this research). This reorganization implied a flatter hierarchy in the organization, and more space for ‘professional’ activation work: less managerial steering and more decision making space for practitioners. Professional space is thus a ‘hot’ topic at the ISS. The practitioners are considered as ‘professionals’, which is a requirement for this research. If practitioners would have a bureaucratic function in the organization, it would be difficult to research its professional space since this is limited due to strict rules and procedures. At the ISS, activation practitioners are regarded as professionals who have space in their work to provide tailor-made services. This makes it likely that the case will lead to rich data on the experience of influences on professional space in activation work.

#### **3.3.2. Case description**

The ISS has approximately 3000 clients and 160 employees. The ISS started with a reorganization two months before I started my research there. The organizational structure regarding the implementation

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<sup>5</sup> Translated from Dutch: Intergemeentelijke Sociale Dienst.

level changed from position-orientation to task-orientation. Before, practitioners worked in teams that were composed of people with similar positions, serving clients from all different municipalities. The organization had a classic hierarchical character. The teams had A-consultants, seniors in the teams who divide the tasks and caseload among their teams and answered operational questions. The teams were managed by a team leader, who felt under the guidance of a strategic manager (manager Implementation). This strategic manager was managed by the managing director.

The reorganization meant that practitioners henceforth work in multidisciplinary teams (MDT's) that are focused on one municipality. The hierarchy of the organization has changed with the reorganization. There are no team leaders or senior consultants anymore. The organization on paper has become flatter, there are less people in the line between the implementation level and the management team. The MDT's need to function as 'self-organizing'<sup>6</sup> teams from now on. Unit managers facilitate the MDT's to be good functioning self-managing teams. The policy focus has changed along the reorganization as well, from a focus on 'Income' to 'Work'. The title of the strategic manager has changed as well from 'Manager Implementation' to 'Manager Service': a more client-oriented and less structure-oriented name.

Next, the positions at the implementation level changed. Before the reorganization, the ISS was divided into two separate units: 'Income' and 'Work'. In the unit Income, two types of activation practitioners – income and diagnose consultants – were active, and another type activation practitioner – individual trajectory consultants – worked for the Work unit. Since January, the Income and Work domain have been integrated in two new units: 'Direction' and 'Work and Participation'. A group of income consultants were automatically transferred to back office employees, dealing with Minima Income Policy<sup>7</sup>, Special Social Assistance<sup>8</sup> and long term clients with (mental) disabilities. All individual trajectory consultants have automatically been changed into participation coaches. The rest of the employees had to apply again for one of the two new positions: process director – who generates all information about a client and decide whether a client has right to social assistance – or client director – who is the personal client manager of a client and determines the trajectory of clients.

The unit Direction now consists of process directors and client directors, and the participation coaches work in the unit Work and Participation, which also covers the employer service point. Activation has become a shared task of client directors, process directors and participation coaches, who work together in MDT's. These MDT's are sorted per municipality, so the teams are able to work 'locally'. There are five municipal MDT's, anonymized as Volantis, Lys, Norvos, Tolos and Oros<sup>9</sup>. These teams fall under the unit Direction. There is one other MDT, the Youth team, which is the only inter-municipal team and falls under the unit Work and Participation. Lastly, there is a Job Service team, which is a team of a group activation practitioners, that is also a part of the unit Work and Participation<sup>10</sup>.

A part of the reorganization of 1,5 years is the 'learning journey'. The learning journey is a series of 'learning sessions' (including homework) during three months, with small groups of employees and a

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<sup>6</sup> My translation from Dutch: 'zelfsturende'.

<sup>7</sup> My translation from Dutch: Minimabeleid.

<sup>8</sup> My translation from Dutch: Bijzondere Bijstand.

<sup>9</sup> To ensure anonymity, names of cities from the HBO-series *Game of Thrones* are used instead of the names of the municipalities the ISS works for. There was no other specific reason for the choice of these names.

<sup>10</sup> ISS-teams that were not appointed to a certain area, but to a certain task, got an adjusted team name, which still covers the task of the team.



'learning coach'. The learning coaches are the unit managers and some other employees who were chosen by HR and the management. These group meetings consists of workshops, assignments and evaluations. The employees have to set their own goal that they want to achieve in the learning journey. At the end of the journey, the employees should have learned something that make them better in their job, and be more 'in connection' with colleagues at the ISS. Next to the learning journey, all client directors and activation practitioners had to follow a course in motivational interviewing during the research phase.

### ***3.3.3. Gaining access to the organization***

After selection of a case, a researcher needs to get access to the selected case. Boeije (2013: p. 40) recommends for research in organizations, such as the ISS, to follow 'the formal path', e.g. by sending a letter to the board of directors of the organization. I have sent an email to the director of the ISS. The director was interested in my offer, which allowed me to make subsequent agreements on the exact topic under investigation at the ISS. However, I was aware of the fact that 'approval from the highest authority does not open every door, and therefore every employee whom the researcher contacts will have to be asked for cooperation individually' (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973 in Boeije, 2013: p. 40). This is also important regarding ethical issues, which is discussed in paragraph 3.7. Gaining access at more levels in the organization thus meant that I had to gain trust from other employees in the organization. I have taken several steps to gain this trust.

The managing director arranged that I got my own desk at the organization and was allowed access to the intranet and email of the organization. During the research, I had three different desks, which allowed me to get to know more employees in a natural way. I made sure that I negotiated my position every time I met a new 'organization member'. I took initiative to shake hands with anyone I met in the room where I had a desk, in the hall ways and at the coffee corner, to make them aware of my presence and that I was doing a research. I gave information about my research and asked about their role in the organization, in order to make them interested and gain acceptance of my presence. This was highly important, because gaining entrance and building and maintaining trust in the organization under study is key for 'field work' (Boeije, 2013). Even more, from a phronetic perspective, it is important to create interest within the organization by involving members in your research. I asked help from some 'gatekeepers' at the beginning of the research process – actors who can help (but potentially also obstruct) a researcher to get in contact with the research population (Boeije, 2013: p. 61). A project leader, a communications officer and the director gave me suggestions for respondents. The first two interviews were arranged by a project leader of the organization, the other four were people I was suggested to talk to. These first six interviews were used for a first exploration. After this exploration, I chose all respondents by myself. This selection process, 'sampling', is described in the following sub-paragraph.

### ***3.3.4. Sampling: participant selection***

The research sample is constructed through a process of purposive sampling. This must be done in a strategic way, so that 'those sampled are relevant to the research questions' (Bryman, 2008: p. 415). According to Bryman (2008), the qualitative researcher often aims to select members with different key characteristics in order to ensure a good deal of variety in the resulting sample. Thus, it was my aim to create a broad view of activation practice at the ISS, in order to generate rich data. One of my gatekeepers gave me a list of all people working in MDT's and their current position. This formed the basis for my participant selection. Because I had access to the intranet of the organization, I could look

up background information about potential participants. I found everyone's age and functions before the reorganization on the intranet. This enables me to select all types of activation practitioners (client directors, process director and participation coaches)<sup>11</sup>, from all the MDT's and other teams in which practitioners are active<sup>12</sup>. I have also taken different backgrounds into account<sup>13</sup>. The MDT's have to work together to achieve the task of activation. Therefore, I selected all managers who were responsible for the service of the MDT's: two unit managers, the strategic manager and the managing director<sup>14</sup>. Next, I have taken the age distribution<sup>15</sup> and male-female ratio<sup>16</sup> into account.

Another criteria was that participants needed to participate on a voluntary basis. Forcing people (e.g. by means of a command of the manager director) to participate in my research would probably lead to too much bias (participants feel forced to give answers managers want to hear). That is why I tried to build trust and enthusiasm for my research through personal relations and transparency about what I was doing at the ISS. I experienced no problems in selecting participants. Only one person refused to participate because of lack of time. One participant forgot our appointment and another participant forgot to respond to my email. These last two offered to make a new appointment, but at that point, I already generated enough data so this was not necessary. The other participants all responded within a week to my request, which made it easy to arrange interviews and observations.

I approached the participants via the organizational email with a personal email address from the organization. In my emails, I explained shortly the topic of my research and why I would like to interview them, and stressed that all interviews were anonymous and confidential. I choose to do this via the organizational email because this made me 'one of them', which could stimulate the feeling of urge to respond to my request. On the other hand, I presented myself as an independent researcher, who uses the data anonymously, confidential and for the purpose of my education. Next, because the request was sent via email, and not in person, the respondents were free to think about it first before they say yes or no, so they did not feel forced to participate. It is easier to say 'no' via email than in person. Next, it contributes to the confidentiality of the research. If the respondent does want to participate, but does not want his or her colleagues to know that they participated, we would be able to arrange this, discretely, via e-mail.

I have conducted 20 interviews of approximately 60 minutes, of which the shortest interview was 45 minutes, and the longest 102 minutes<sup>17</sup>. A number of 12 interviews is regarded the least number of interviews to arrive at the stage of 'data saturation': you will start hearing the same kind of topics and stories. Data saturation has become the golden standard which determines purposive sample sizes (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). However, there is always a possibility that other respondents would have led to other results. But it is not feasible to study 'everyone', so saturation is an acceptable and most viable strategy for purposive sampling (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006).

### **3.4. Data generation**

For this research, I followed the ethnographic and phronetic tradition of triangulation: combining different qualitative research techniques. I used semi-structured interviewing (§3.4.1), participant

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<sup>11</sup> See table 7 in appendix D.

<sup>12</sup> See table 8 in appendix D.

<sup>13</sup> See table 15 in appendix G (confidential appendix).

<sup>14</sup> See table 9 in appendix D.

<sup>15</sup> See table 10 in appendix D.

<sup>16</sup> See table 11 in appendix D.

<sup>17</sup> See table 12 in appendix D.

observation (§3.4.2), drawing during interviews (§3.4.3) and document analysis (§3.4.4). Triangulation enables the researcher to create a layered and thick description of the research phenomenon (Boeije, 2013). This has been useful for gaining a deeper understanding of the influences on the experienced professional space. Data was collected during different phases, between March until August in 2016.

### **3.4.1. Semi-structured interviewing**

Semi-structured interviewing is a technique to collect in-depth information about the respondent's experience. 'Semi-structured' means that interviews do not have a fixed structure, formulation or sequence of questions, nor will there be answer-options for the participants. The interviewer adapts the structure, formulation and sequence of the questions to the storyline of the respondent (Boeije, 2013). I used open-ended questions, in order to avoid steering the respondent towards a certain answer. This was done in an ethnographic-phronetic style by asking 'little' "How?" questions, and asking for examples, opinions, experiences and values as follow-up questions. I also asked what their expectations for the future were.

I used 'storytelling' and 'follow-up' questions to enhance the quality of the interviews. Storytelling questions are used to elicit sense making by means of respondents' stories. Stories involve experiences, values, (power) relations and implicit rules (Rhodes, 2014). Follow-up questions are important as well: follow-up questions make an answer more interesting. After each new question, I asked one or more follow-up questions to generate an in-depth understanding of how these topics mattered to the respondent. Listening and asking about experience and stories tells us about how professional space is experienced and what influences their experience (Rhodes, 2014). The questions were asked in an organic way with the story of the respondent. If the respondent talked about certain topics that were important to them, I tried to zoom in on that topic.

Interviews were held at different stages with different purposes, while simultaneously developing my research focus. The first six pilot interviews were rather 'open' interviews. This means that I only used a few basic questions<sup>18</sup> and let the respondent's story direct the interview. These interviews are held with two managers, three practitioners and one staff member. After these six interviews, I extracted the most often returning topics and looked for literature that could explain the most important guiding concepts that emerged from this first phase of data collection. This led to 'in-depth' interviews, in which I used a more narrowed down list of questions<sup>19</sup>, though still asking open-ended questions and letting the respondent determine the direction of the interview.

Interview environments matter as well (Bryman, 2008). Since ethnography wants to study 'normal practices', it was important to do the interviews in a 'normal' setting. The interviews were held in small meeting rooms at the organization. This was considered 'normal', because employees often have formal and informal meetings in these meeting rooms. If colleagues would see us enter the room together, they would not know whether this is for an interview or for something else. The small meeting room enabled me to have a personal and confidential conversation with the respondents, so they would not have to fear that others could hear us (Bryman, 2008). Next, I reserved the rooms beforehand, so we would not be disturbed by others who wanted to use the room as well.

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<sup>18</sup> See appendix B-I.

<sup>19</sup> See appendix B-II.

I used, with permission of respondents, an audio recording device during the interviews. The records were used for transcriptions of the interviews<sup>20</sup>, so I could focus on listening and asking questions during the interview, instead on remembering their answers. In addition, I stressed that all interviews were anonymous, names mentioned would be deleted from the transcripts, and if respondents feel uncomfortable afterwards about something that they had said, that they could let me know and I would delete that section from the interview. None of the respondents made use of this offer.

### **3.4.2. Participant observation**

Participant observation means that the researcher attempts to become a part of a specific social setting. Instead of observing at a distance, the researcher tries to observe from 'the inside', as if he or she could observe from the perspective of the members of an organization (Bryman, 2008). The advantage of this method is that the researcher can research behaviour, interactions and their development in real time, while interviews or questionnaires only enable to research reflections on past events and experience. There is always a gap between what happens in real life and how respondents in interviews reflect on these events, dependent on their own experience, preference and remembrance (Bryman, 2008; Schonewille, 2015). Next, participant observation enables the researcher to see which different components of an organization – e.g. values, beliefs, behaviour – interconnect (Bryman, 2008). Participant observation thus provides valuable information which is not accessible through other research methods.

I have observed as much as possible: individual meetings between practitioners and clients, client training sessions by practitioners; formal and informal meeting between colleagues; formal and informal meetings between practitioners and managers; management team meetings; and organization-wide meetings. The more interviews I did, the more 'normal' it became that I participated in formal work meetings and during client meetings. Employees knew me, why I was there and participants accepted, and sometimes even appreciated, my presence. The wide variety in respondents made it more natural that an employee was, formally or informally, talking to me, since many people from the organizations did. The combination of qualitative interviewing with participant observation has been mutually beneficial, because it helps to understand the observations in the context, and the fact that I have 'been in the field' for a while contributed to participants' openness in interviews. When respondents are open and honest in interviews, the researcher is more able to gain understanding of what is important (Bryman, 2008). The researcher will get an 'inside perspective' by becoming a participant in the social setting, but you will never be able to grasp the full perspective. Observations by the researcher are his/her interpretations of a situation, but these do not necessarily have to be accurate. The combination of qualitative interviewing and participant observation thus allowed me to grasp a richer understanding of the practice of activation work.

### **3.4.3. Documents**

Organization documents are studied as a source of information about the way people work in the organization and what influences the organization (power distribution). Documents are a non-reactive source, which keeps chances for bias low. The organizational documents are created for internal use, which increases the quality of the source (Baarda, De Goede & Teunissen, 2005). Policy documents, implementation documents, intranet messages, internal news messages, power point presentations, implementation and accountability models, vacancy texts, research reports about the organizational

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<sup>20</sup> See appendix H (confidential appendix).

culture and reports about the rebuilding were studied. These documents were studied to gain an understanding of (a) the vision and mission in the organization (formulated by managers in policy papers), (b) to get a taste of how respondents communicate with each other and between hierarchical levels and (c) to understand what are important, topical topics in the organization. This contributed to the validity of the interpretation of the data.

#### **3.4.4. Drawing**

Next to these well-known data generation techniques, I have used a less traditional one: drawing. Leavy (2015) argues that creative research methods enhance understanding and the quality of qualitative data. During the semi-structured interviews, I asked the respondents to draw. Drawing can help to elicit tacit ideas and feelings, and gives the respondent the chance to explain their experience without the limitations of language (Leavy, 2015). Newton, Long & Sievers (2006) use the *organization-in-the-mind* method. This method prescribes to ask respondents to draw their position within the organization. The respondent is confronted with their own perspective on their role and position in relation to the organization. I have asked this *organization-in-the-mind* question during the interviews. This resulted in different drawings of the organization and the roles of members in it. The drawings give insight into the perspectives on the organization, gave feelings an image which increased my understanding of their perspectives, and functioned as a 'playful' way to talk about hard and soft organizational structures and influences. It thus functioned as a facility for communication (Newton et al., 2006). I asked the respondents 'the draw-question' after approximately three-quarter of the interview time. The idea of this timing was that respondents could do 'something new' instead of talking, to overcome drowsiness and feelings of an interrogation, and a serious interview became a bit more 'fun'. The drawing technique was introduced in the in-depth phase, because at that point, I knew better which direction I needed to go with this research. I already interviewed two of the four managers in the ethnographic phase, so I collected their drawings later in short (10 min) interviews.

#### **3.4.5. Dealing with bias**

A risk of qualitative research is potential bias of socially 'desired' behaviour or answers (Bryman, 2008). It is impossible to exclude the potential for a social desirability bias, but a researcher has to try to minimize this of course. Former studies have shown that social desirability bias in interviews arises when there is little social distance between interviewer and respondent (Dohrenwend, Colombotos and Dohrenwend, 1968; Weiss, 1968, 1969; Williams, 1968, 1969; in Nederhof, 1986). Lack of social distance is likely to lead to social exchange, where norms of polite interaction win over honest answers. So on the one hand, I had to comfort respondents to feel free to be honest, but keep social distance at the same time I have tried to overcome this potential bias by spending sufficient time in the organization under study, so the researcher's presence feels 'natural'.

I tried to create a confidential, though professional band with the participants. Professional interviewers are friendly, but task-oriented and not 'warm' or person-oriented, which is sometimes assumed (Nederhof, 1986). This means that interviews should not be a talk between friends<sup>21</sup>, but the respondent does have to feel comfortable to tell what he or she thinks is necessary or important. I explained the rights of the respondents<sup>22</sup> when they participated in interviews, I gave information about my research topic, what I was going to do with the data, about my education and my personal background. The way a researcher dresses matters as well (Schonewille, 2015). Most practitioners wore

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<sup>21</sup> The aim is not to be, as we say in Dutch, 'gezellig'.

<sup>22</sup> See paragraph 2.8 (ethical considerations), in which I explain which rights the research participants have.

casual clothes: jeans, comfortable shoes and a t-shirt or blouse. Managers wore more formal clothes: suits, dresses and blazers. I dressed most of the times black trousers, heels and a blouse. This made my look more formal than practitioners, but not as serious as a management team member. A formal look contributes to the idea of professionalism and autonomy of the researcher, which contributes in reducing bias (Nederhof, 1986). By being clear about the respondent's rights and my role and interests, I tried to make sure that respondents trusted upon my professionalism. Some participants asked whether my research was an initiative of the management team, for example. This question suggests a little suspicion towards the research aim and my 'actual' role. Therefore, I emphasized that I am an autonomous researcher and doing this research in order to graduate. In this way, I tried to make clear that I was dependent *on them* (to get my degree), instead of their dependence *on me* (because I could have the power to sketch a good or bad picture about them for the management).

Another technique that I used to reduce bias, is asking for a lot of examples and explanations in the interviews. This forced respondents to think about their answers. On the one hand, this could decrease bias because respondents are forced to ask themselves how they feel about their answer (e.g. by drawing their position in the organization). On the other hand, some respondents changed their minds during the interview. They told me that they never took the time to sit and think about their work, and talking with me opened their eyes on certain aspects. This is a source of bias, because their perspective could be (come) different from the way they do their work without interference of a researcher.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

Analysis of the data is done in different phases with different techniques. As described earlier in this chapter, the analysis in this research is done from two perspectives: ethnography and phronesis. Whatever approach is chosen, there are some techniques used for both approaches. A basic rule of analysis is that you need 'to read, view and re-read or review *all* textual and visual data at least once. This is a requisite for a thorough understanding and grounded interpretation of the data; it is needed to enable you to connect different parts of the data' (Evers, 2016: p. 18). For this reason, I have transcribed all the interviews myself. This forced me to listen to the 'raw' data in slow motion, paying attention to the way people say things, when they pause their story, when they sigh, et cetera. It brings back the feeling of the interview, and makes you more sensitive to the richness of the data. After transcribing the data and reporting the observations, the analysis could start. The following paragraphs explain how I have dealt with this.

#### **3.5.1. Iteration and sensitising concepts**

An iterative strategy – which is a characteristic of the qualitative method – was used for the analysis: an interplay between data collection, interpretation and theorizing to adjust the research focus in an ongoing process (Boeije, 2013: p. 24). During this iterative process, sensitizing concepts were constructed. Sensitizing concepts provide a 'skeletal framework' (Morse in Boeije, 2013: p. 23) of some global notions and ideas that are used to guide the research. This framework functions as a means for uncovering the variety of forms that the studied phenomena can take. The more information was gathered, the better sensitizing concepts could be narrowed down and be studied in-depth. The development of theory emerged from this narrowing down process, bringing the concepts in relation with existing theory, going back to the data, and back to the theory again (Bryman, 2008: p. 373). This process is iterated until enough data and theory is generated to develop a new theory.

Sensitizing concepts are the leading concepts during your research phase, which give direction but are open for change (Boeijs, 2013: p. 109). The chosen research design implies that the sensitizing concepts are developed and redeveloped during the research process. The first sensitizing concepts are developed in open interviews, observations and document analysis. I have explored these sensitising concepts through different techniques. I used document analysis in the ethnographic phase, by studying policy documents, internal communication through intranet of the organization and participant observation in management meetings, caseworker-client interactions and small talk with employees while I was working there. The sensitising concepts were covered by open questions in formal interviews<sup>23</sup>. The questions were asked in a way that gave the respondents the freedom to give sense to the questions in a way that was important to them. This open approach is highly important in this research, because it makes the findings ‘fit with reality’, instead of ‘fit with theory’.

### **3.5.2. Analysis triangulation**

Triangulation was also as an analysis technique. Evers and Van Staa (2010) call this *thick analysis*. Thick analysis is an analysis technique to ‘enhance the depth and breadth of data analysis by professionally combining several analysis methods, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis’ (Evers, 2016: p. 1). I have used three stages in the analysis process, as distinguished by Evers (2016): analytic technics, analytic tactics and analytic strategies. Analytic techniques serve to make the data searchable and make strategies to re-organize the data. This was done by coding the data on the basis of the sensitising concepts and ‘emerging’ topics, which were discussed frequently and were highly valued by practitioners<sup>24</sup>. The second stage of tactics is a process of connecting: interpreting which groups of segments can be made. Differences, similarities and patterns were explored. Earlier codes functioned as instruments for this analysis<sup>25</sup>. Lastly, analytic strategies were used to transcend interpretation by an overall analysis of the results, tactics and theories, by recoding and re-arranging the data (Evers, 2016): the process of analysing the results in the light of existing literature<sup>26</sup>.

Evers (2015) uses the wood engraving *Other world* by M.C. Escher (1947) to picture the idea of triangulation. While looking at the wood engraving of Escher, one slowly discovers new types of movements that go inside your head as you try to unravel and make sense of your data. If you take the time and look closely at the data from different angles, you will see new things. This is the same idea as the dialoguing with a polyphony of voices, where I explained integrating the different perspectives into one picture which allows different dimensions, referring to Picasso’s ‘Woman with yellow hat (Jacqueline)’ (1961).

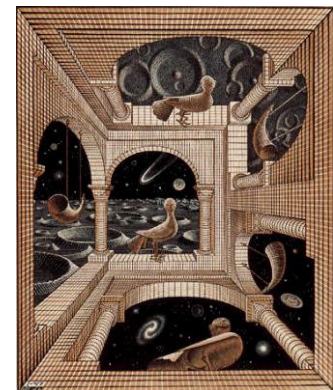


Figure 1. M.C. Escher (1947) “Other World”

### **3.5.3. Software**

I used the transcription software *Transcribe* with a payed license which protects the data. The transcripts are limitedly accessible in the data base of the university: only with permission of the researcher and the university. The software program *Nvivo* was used for the coding process. *Nvivo* is a

<sup>23</sup> See appendix B for sensitising concepts from the open interviews and in-depth interviews.

<sup>24</sup> See appendix B for sensitising concepts from the open interviews and in-depth interviews that are used for analytic technics.

<sup>25</sup> See appendix C-III “Ethnographic phase” for the code tree that resulted from analytic tactics.

<sup>26</sup> See appendix C-III “Phronetic phase” for the code tree that resulted from analytic strategies.

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software program (as recommended by Evers, 2016) and my license was provided by Utrecht University.

### 3.6. Quality criteria

Validity, reliability and objectivity are often used as standards to measure the quality of a research and the appropriateness of its methods. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that the use of validity, reliability and objectivity as a quality assessment for qualitative research is inappropriate. They state that these standards presuppose ‘that a single absolute account of social reality is feasible’ (in Bryman, 2008: p. 377). This does not fit the philosophical stance of qualitative research, which allows several accounts of reality present at the same time. Trying to ‘objectively’ measure the exact same concept in different settings, is not possible from this perspective. This does not mean that the quality of qualitative research is less important. Bryman (2008) argues that quantitative and qualitative research have to measure up to the same standards of science: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. However, how these standards are interpreted differs per scientific tradition. Guba & Lincoln (1994) argue that it should be assessed by credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (in Bryman, 2008). The scheme in table 3 shows the different interpretations of quality criteria between quantitative and qualitative traditions.

CRITERIA	QUANTITATIVE INTERPRETATION	QUALITATIVE INTERPRETATION
TRUTH VALUE	Internal validity	Credibility
APPLICABILITY	External validity	Transferability
CONSISTENCY	Reliability	Dependability
NEUTRALITY	Objectivity	Confirmability

Table 3. Quality criteria from two perspectives, based upon Bryman (2008: p. 377).

*Credibility* means that research should be ‘carried out according the canons of good practice and submitting research findings to the members of the social world who were studied for confirmation that the investigator has correctly understood that social world’ (Bryman, 2008: p. 377). This means a validation by the research field, and it is often referred to as ‘respondent validation’. This is done by ‘bringing the research back to the field’: the report is presented to the organization. Another way in which credibility is ensured is by the use of research method triangulation. This allows the researcher to ‘check’ whether data from one method matches with data gathered with another technique (Boeije, 2013). Especially participant observation over long period of time allowed me to ensure a high level of congruence between theoretical concepts and observations (Bryman, 2008). In addition, analysis triangulation contributed to the credibility for the same reasons: the results are analysed from two different philosophical approaches, which means that the chance is higher that the results fit with reality. Given these different methods and analysis techniques and ‘respondent validation’, it can be concluded that the credibility of this research is high.

*Transferability* is about the extent in which the research findings can be ‘transferred’ to other (research) contexts. Transferability requires that researchers produce ‘thick descriptions’: rich accounts of the details of the studied culture. These thick descriptions can be used to judge the possible transferability of findings to other contexts (Flyvbjerg, 2012; Bryman, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the more specific a context is described, the better it is recognizable for other context. The level of transferability depends on every other specific research context (Bryman, 2008). The transferability can thus be determined when more research is done in the same way. Moreover, Flyvbjerg, Landman & Schram (2012) argue that transferability also has to do with ‘adequation’: the



extent to which the results are adequate to be used in practice. This research ends with specific recommendations for practice, which makes the findings transferable or adequate for practice.

*Dependability* can be measured by 'auditing'. This means that the researcher needs to keep records of all phases of the research process: 'problem formulation, selection of research participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, data analysis decisions and so on' (Bryman, 2008: p. 378). Peers with whom I discussed my research process and my thesis coordinators act as 'auditors' assessing whether procedures have been followed in a proper way. I have also described in this research report the different steps I have taken, which increases the transparency of the level of consistency in this research.

*Confirmability*. Using an qualitative research strategy, one acknowledges that complete objectivity is impossible, because it is its assumption that this is impossible. There are always different perspectives on reality, which means that results will always be influenced by the researcher's personal views. To ensure confirmability it is important to not allow personal values or theoretical inclinations play a role in the conduct of the research and the findings that derive from it (Bryman: 2008). Triangulation helps to 'check' whether findings are coloured by the researcher or not. Confirmability can also be assessed by the auditors (Guba and Lincoln, 1985).

Because all these four quality criteria of qualitative research are met, it can be concluded that this research is, what Guba and Lincoln (1985) call 'trustworthy'.

### **3.7. Ethical considerations**

Researching social reality means that this reality is 'disturbed' by the researcher's presence and the result of the research has impact on this reality. The researched case is in that sense 'vulnerable'. As a researcher, you have the obligations to therefore take ethical considerations into account during all phases of the research. I have used the following four ethical principles of Bryman (2008: pp. 123-124), to make sure this research is done in an ethically sound way.

1. The research may not bring any harm (physical, mental, status, etc.) to the participants in this research.
2. Participation should always be based upon informed consent.
3. The research may not invade the privacy of participants.
4. Deception of research results is not permitted.

I have made sure that these principles are maintained by informing all participants about these considerations and their rights as participants. Participation in this research was voluntary, respondents were free to refuse to answer any question, they are allowed to withdraw from the research at any time, and they are allowed to withdraw their data. Bryman (2008) advises to enable research participants to withdraw their data within two weeks after data collection, but I have given my participants more time, because this helped to make them feel more comfortable in participating in the research. I told my respondents that they could let me know any time during the whole research period (between March and September 2016) that they could withdraw their data or parts of their data. No participant made use of his or her right of withdrawal. Also, I anonymized all collected data. This means that names are taken out of the data, respondent numbers in this report are random and all respondents are referred to as he/she. I wrote out the interviews and field notes, so my research can be 'audited' when there is a presumption of deception. Lastly, I will present the research findings in a research report and presentation for the organization members, so it can be checked whether my end results are in line with their experiences.

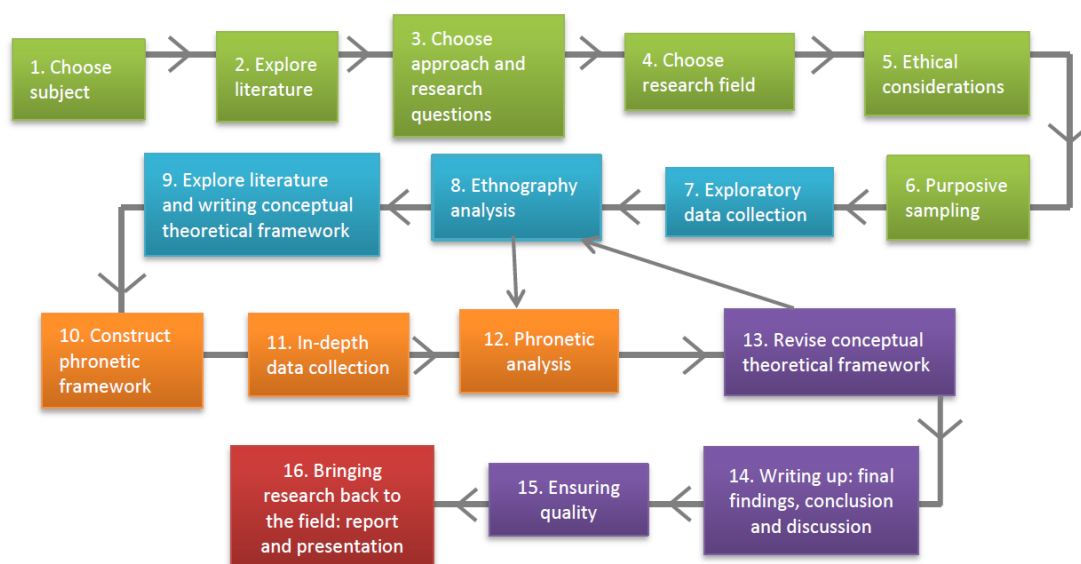
I have been open to research participants about my role as a researcher in all stages of the research. The advantage of ‘revealing’ the researcher’s role is that the researcher do not need to ‘pretend’ and can focus on the research, take notes and ask questions whenever necessary (Schonewille, 2015). Next, studying activation work brings along a moral obligation to be open about your role as a researcher, due to the personal information during client meetings and the vulnerability of the client (Schonewille, 2015). Possible disadvantages of revealing the researcher’s role are that the awareness might elicit ‘best behavior’ or that altered behaviour becomes more salient, as discussed in paragraph 3.4.5 about bias.

I noticed during the research that respondents always want some sort of reaction while you are observing, to avoid the feeling that I was ‘spying’ on them. I always tried to answer in a way that I would not influence the situation, but give a satisfying answer as well. Sometimes it helped to just tell something about my research or studies, but sometimes my opinion about a specific topic was asked. I always tried to say something abstract about what has been said before by others, so I would not change the ‘vibe’ in a meeting. I continuously tried to balance between what would disturb the least: saying something or saying nothing (Bryman, 2008).

### 3.8. Conclusion: The research process

This chapter shows that ethnographic and phronetic methodologies can be completely similar, as practiced in this study. In figure 2, the research process is depicted. It shows the preparatory phase (in green); the ethnographic exploration (in blue); the phronetic, in-depth part (in orange), the ‘writing’ part (in purple); and finally the finalization (in red). As one can see, the two analyses happened in an iterative process, back and forth between approaches and between theory and empirics. How this analysis is done exactly, will become clear in the upcoming chapters. Chapter four explains how the ethnographic lens is used, and the ethnographic results are presented in chapter five. In addition, the phronetic lens is explained in chapter six and applied in chapter seven.

Figure 2. Research process based on Bryman (2008) and Boeije (2013).



## 4. Looking from the first perspective: ethnography

As described in the previous chapter, the first step in the empirical part of this research is exploring the first question on *what* influences the implicit boundaries of professional space of activation practitioners at the ISS. This question can best be analyzed from an ethnographic perspective. The previous chapter already gave an overview of the basic assumptions of ethnography, and how the methods used in this study correspond with these assumptions. This chapter functions to provide a clear oversight of the 'ethnographic lens' that is used to answer the first sub-question of this research.

### 4.1. An ethnographic research approach

Ethnography is derived from anthropology, and studies a research phenomenon as it is practiced in a naturalistic setting (Rouncefield, 2011). The ethnographic researcher is inherently a part of that reality. The ethnographer tries to 'immerse' in the research setting, also called 'the field'. During 'fieldwork' (a researcher who is present in the research setting), he or she tries to interpret the participant's views and experiences in a specific context by studying everyday actions and interactions (Rouncefield, 2011; Ellis, 2004: p. 401). The ethnographic researcher investigates the behavior and sense making of a specific social group at a certain setting.

The aim of ethnography is to uncover the group's culture, so an ethnographic approach implies a cultural perspective on social settings (Ellis, 2004; Bryman, 2008). Culture is studied by looking for underlying meanings of behavior and the use of discourse (Bryman, 2008). Yanow (1996) makes the useful distinction between symbolic language, symbolic objects and symbolic acts. Symbolic language focuses on how the research participants deal with for example agency names, organizational metaphors and tacit knowledge. Symbolic objects look at the value that practitioners give to 'tangible' matters, such as agency programs, policy papers or organization-scapes. Lastly, examples of symbolic acts are rituals (routines) and myths (stories) in the organization, what is outspoken and what is unspoken (Yanow, 1996). These aspects are taken into account in the cultural perspective of the ethnographic approach.

The ethnographic researcher tries to understand the researched phenomenon through the eyes of the research participants, researcher tries to tell the 'story' with two voices: the own experiences and the thick descriptions of the participants' experiences. In telling these stories, ethnographers adopt a modest stance and claim that generalization is not possible. They can only provide thick descriptions, in order to understand the studied social reality.

### 4.2. Conclusion

Since we do not know *what* influences activation practitioners in the boundaries that they experience in their work, a cultural approach to social context, open to 'whatever will emerge' seems to be appropriate. Now the ethnographic lens is clear, we are going to look to the results that are generated from this lens. This functions to give direction to the research question. By first doing an ethnographic phase, the empirics narrow down the research focus, instead of theory.

## 5. Influences on the use of professional space

This chapter presents the findings from the ethnographic phase of this research. This phase functions to generate an overview of the most important topics for the research field, in relation to the research puzzle. In this way, it determines the first steps in the research focus. This is done by answering the general question of the ethnographic phase:

- *What influences the experienced implicit boundaries of professional space of activation practitioners at the ISS?*

The results are described in an ethnographic tradition: along the line of an emerging story from the empirics. First of all, I discuss how professional space is experienced at the ISS (§5.1). The use of professional space at the ISS is related to the organizational culture (§5.2). The influence of the reorganization of the ISS is discussed, since it aims to enhance the use of the professional space at the ISS (§5.3). Next, ideas about professionalism function as an accountability mechanism for using professional space (§5.4). Finally, I discuss in the conclusion how we can understand these different influences and what this means for the use of their professional space (§5.5).

### 5.1. Experience of professional space at the ISS

Professional space is seen as an important aspect in activation work by both managers and practitioners (R7, R4, R11, R13, R8, R18, R19, R17, R6, R10, R3, R5). Using professional space is even promoted by the management (R1, R6, R10, R15, R19, R20). Almost all practitioners consider themselves as a professional, who have an adequate 'basis' to make the right decisions for clients, without following strict standards (R7, R11, R8, R2, R20, R15, R17, R1, R6, R10, R3, R16, R5). Practitioners thus experience autonomy based upon their professional position. As a practitioner explains:

"You make decisions on the basis of your professionalism. From your position. And certain situations, there are no guidelines. We do not have standards or something, no" (R11).

Practitioners' professional space can be used for several reasons. Most of all, all practitioners find professional space necessary in their work, to be able to fulfill their task of providing tailor-made service and putting the client central (R7, R11, R8, R2, R20, R15, R19, R17, R1, R6, R12, R10, R3, R16, R5). This space can be used in diverging ways, as long as it leads to result for the client, which is desirably a step forward on the participation-ladder (vision document; R7, R11, R8, R2, R20, R15, R19, R17, R1, R6, R12, R10, R3, R16, R5).

The experience of professional space is dependent on different things. First of all, the law determines a part of the space that practitioners need to deal with. First of all, practitioner's professional space depends on the possibilities within the municipality their team is assigned to (R11, R20, R15, R17, R1, R6, R10, R3, R5). The more options a practitioner has, the better he/she can provide tailor-made services. These options concern the possibilities within local policy, budget, employment and reintegration trajectories (local initiatives, volunteer work) in a municipality. Network partners need to be willing to collaborate with the ISS, which is not always the case (R1, R12). Practitioners do not experience boundaries to their work through law, because the law provides enough space to provide tailor-made services (R&, R11, R8, R2, R20, R15, R19, R1, R12, R5). Practitioners experience space and argue that creativity is necessary to provide tailor-made services (R3, R10, R11, R15, R18). However, practitioners and managers say that practitioners at the ISS are not making use of their professional space, and stick to the same work methods (R7, R4, R13, R8, R18, R1, R3, R16, R14, R9). Practitioners do

often not dare to make their own decisions, and ask permission from their manager. There is thus little experience of autonomy. A manager describes this as follows:

“This organization cannot be defined as creative, absolutely not. There is now space for that, and we steer upon that, we hope that, that the space is used to start thinking creatively, and that is why we do not give a lot of frames in the MDT’s. An example, a client director came to me and said, ‘I would like to use an education for a client, and it costs X. Can I do that?’ ‘Yes, if you think that it is the right thing to do and it leads to something, then you are allowed to do it!’ And this colleague was really seeking, ‘yeah but what happens if I do it, and in the end it appeared that I should not have done that?’ Then I say, ‘I rather let you take 10 wrong decisions, than 1 time that you do not. Because otherwise, you are not going to learn’. So that hinders the professional space, the fear to be judged and punished” (R18).

As this quote shows, managers want to steer towards autonomous use of professional space. According to them, this space is dependent on the way processes are designed (R13, R18, R14, R9). Before, activation work was a fully organized process, at matter of ticking of boxes (R13). Managers thinks that the need for using professional space in activation work “is there”, but that it insufficiently comes to the surface because of the former structure of the organization. Practitioners never had space in the organization, so managers do ‘blame’ practitioners that they do not use the space that has emerged out of the reorganization (R13, R18). Especially income consultants are regarded to be not that professional, because they like to stick to the rules as strict as possible, which is regarded as inherent to their job (R13, R8, R13). This is problematic though, because the new function of client director is taken up by former income consultants, while client directors receive more professional space and are expected to use this (R13, R18). However, in practice, practitioners keep asking for rules and procedures:

“Through all the rules and procedures, but they often ask for them as well. We have, of course, now a new management which says, well, what do you think about it yourself? What do I know about it as a manager? You are the professional. It is your decision. I like to think with you, but you have to make the decision. And people find that really hard. Because, the word already goes around, ‘he does not understand our work at all, that manager’. And then I think: ‘Does he have to? You know, for me, it does not have to. That is why they are professionals. So that is a dilemma” (R13).

So on the one hand, activation practitioners are happy with the amount of professional space (R19, R1, R3, R16), on the other they experience too little steering regarding that space and have no idea how to do their work (R7, R20, R19, R12, R3). Next, practitioners feel hindered in their professional space because they are not supported by means of good working systems or a fixed structure for administration of activation work (R7, R11, R15, R12). This makes it difficult to make professional decisions. But, she states, “good professionals” can be trusted to make the right decisions.

“There could be more structure here for the work you are doing on the one hand. On the other hand, you get the space as a consultant to look for what someone needs. [...] Well, it is a big responsibility for the consultant, but well, they have to recruit the good ones! [laughs] Yes, hire good professionals, and we should trust upon that I think” (R11).

While managers stimulate practitioners’ independent decision making “as a professional”, some practitioners experience hindrance concerning the implementation of new ideas from their managers. These practitioners often come up with creative ideas to improve their work and tell their managers about it. However, managers often do not follow-up on these ideas (R8, R12, R10, R3). Other activation practitioners see, in contrast, their colleagues as the main problem why new ideas are not picked up (R7, R11, R20, R16), while they feel fully supported by the management. A practitioner gives an example of her colleagues who do not want to innovate:

"I have noticed that every time, I was clashing with others when I came up all my new ideas. After a while, I completely collapsed. Because, what happens when you are the only one who is enthusiastic, who wants to change things and has a lot of ideas? You are the only one who takes up these ideas, and you're going to do everything by yourself. I wanted to change *everything* in the way we do the work here. But if you're all by yourself, you're going to give up after a while" (R7).

## 5.2. A culture of not using your professional space

Respondents explain that the cause of not wanting to use space for professional space in activation work is the organizational culture. It is a "conflict-avoiding" (R11, R13, R18, R1), "sweet" (R11), and "complaining" (R7, R15, R16, R9) culture. A "culture of fear" is experienced (R7, R16; participant observation small talk): fear of making mistakes (R13, R18, R15, R1), fear of being blamed<sup>27</sup> (R18, R15, R10, R3, R16, R9), fear of speaking up (R11, R13, R15, R17, R3, R16, R9) and fear for hassle (R20, R15, R19, R1), with two exceptions, who do not experience fear in their own or colleagues' work at all (R8, R10). An activation practitioner explains that this culture is problematic because colleagues do not keep each other sharp, which harms the effectivity and quality of the work:

"People hardly speak to each other about their work. I think it is very important to keep each other sharp. Because it is now quickly like, 'okay it is alright this way'. Instead of a critical note, 'do we have to do it this way, couldn't we better...?'. A little 'for the sake of peace', you could say. [...] Well, I do not find it easy either. I am also a little bit 'for the sake of peace'. So yes, it may be more critical" (R11).

"You hear often from colleagues like, you can speak up, but you will be blamed for it eventually, and then I think, well, I find that a shame to hear" (R16).

These fears seem to be related by a low level of interpersonal trust in the organization. Practitioners doubt if they can trust their colleagues (R19, R3; observation I, II, III organization wide meeting) and managers (R20, R19, R12; observation 'the social contract'). The observation 'the social contract', presented below in table 4, describes a presentation from a learning journey group of their 'output' of the journey. This observation shows that ISS-employees want to be 'protected' by a social contract. It gives them something to refer to when they want to speak up towards colleagues or managers. There is a practitioner who sees this as proof that the organization is 'unsafe' (and refers to it as "tragic"), but the large majority is happy with the social contract (they applaud). It seems that the learning journey has given the practitioners insight in these processes, and created an intention to prove this in the future.

### ***Learning journey presentations I: the social contract***

*Practitioners found during the learning journey that the entire organization was in need of more trust. To safeguard a feeling of trust, they drew up a social contract for the organization. They invited everyone to sign it, and because that would take a lot of time, they asked the managing director to come to the fore and symbolically sign the contract on behalf of the whole organization. The managing director responds positively and happily signs the contract. Responses in the room are generally positive, although an employee says, in person, to the director: "Isn't this tragic? That we need a social contract to trust each other?". The managing director disagrees, and says that it's a good thing that people dare to be sensitive and honest about it, and found a solution with each other.*

Table 4. Observation organization wide meeting II 'the social contract'

There is a lot of talk *about* each other, but not *with* each other (R7, R11, R13, R18, R1, R6, R14). This is problematic for the level of professionalism according to the management:

<sup>27</sup> My translation from Dutch: 'afgerekend worden op' / 'afrekencultuur'

"It is a VILLAGE. 160 people work here, but they know for instance, 'oh he is on holiday because his car is parked askew'. Those type of things, people know about each other, but not why someone is in this organization! What someone's position is. Yes, I find that really, really strange. I find it really weird sometimes! [laughs] I have seen quite a lot of organizations, but here, there is something that is a little strange. [...] "Starts to look like a family?" (Me). "Yeah, that village culture. I think it isn't a good thing, honestly. Because I want that professionalism" (R13).

The culture of not talking about working and fear of failure (R7, R13, R18), is also reflected in the fact that practitioners say to managers that they understand what their new positions asks from them, and at the same time do not perform in the expected way by managers (observation MT meeting I). Some practitioners consult each other (R8, R2, R20, R1, R12, R5), but some do not, because they are insecure or afraid that their work is not good enough, and that feedback will result in more work (R15, R19, R1, R6). Additionally, organization members describe their organization as a "culture of rules" (R7, R13, R18), a "typical civil servant culture" (R7, R11) with a "rigid" and "slow" way of working (R8), divided in "islands" (R7, R4, R11, R13, R18, R2, R10, R5). Practitioners and managers argue that a cultural change is necessary (R7, R4, R11, R13, R18, R1, R3, R14, R9). The culture should become less rule-oriented (R7, R13, R18, R19, R9) and more professional (R7, R4, R13, R18, R14, R9).

"My colleagues seem not to want to look, are not interested in what is good for the client. They do what they are used to, things are right the way they are. They follow the rules and do not want to deviate from it. The work becomes better when you take that space. So I don't get why my colleagues are focused on the rules, if you can do it in another way" (R7).

The practitioner elaborates that her colleagues are not open to new ideas or improvement at all. The culture is "every man for himself" (R7, R17, R6) in which there is no shared feeling of "let's fix this problem together as professionals" (R7). It is, though, accepted among practitioners that some colleagues are not interested in professional space or innovation at all, and just want to do their work in one way (R7, R11, R8, R19, R1). Everyone has their own style, which is good as long as there is diversity in styles.

"Look, everyone is different, whether it be clients or colleagues. The one is very.. Well, I always say life is no Excel file, but others find it nice to stay within the Excel file. Because that is who, what, why, how, that is safe. I understand that. [...] It is good that there is a counterbalance. So it is okay." (R8).

Managers (R13, R18, R14, R9) and practitioners (R7, R2, R15, R10) state that practitioners at the ISS were never expected to show interest in development, personal responsibility for the work and searching for new and improved ways of working. "They are just raised that way here" (R13), so practitioners cannot be blamed for this (R13, R18). Despite that 'practitioners cannot be blamed', the ISS's management found the organization was in desperate need of a reorganization in order to enhance the professional level of the organization.

### **5.3. Reorganization towards innovative, networking professionals**

All respondents talk about how the reorganization influences their work. The reorganization at the ISS has different functions: to adapt to challenges from the decentralizations in the social domain; redefine the ISS's position in the social domain network; to work more effective and efficient as an organization; get all clients 'in the picture'; reduce organizational costs; give space for professional to do their work; and create a more professional culture (vision document, organization design document). Especially this last point – the organizational culture – seems to be a pressing problem in the organization, as we have seen above. The idea of professionalism plays an important role in the reorganization, for both managers and practitioners. Since the reorganization, practitioners need to organize activation work themselves within the MDT's. This means that they received managerial tasks – more "self-leadership" (vision document; R3, R14); overseeing the work processes (vision document; R18, R14); network with

colleagues from other teams, stakeholders and partners outside the organization (vision document; R4, R11, R8, R18, R20, R1, R10, R14, R9); and addressing each other about their work (vision document; R7, R4, R8, R18, R2, R6, R16, R14, R9). Next to that, they have to organize the work processes themselves – solve administrative problems themselves (R7, R11, R13, R8, R18, R2, R20, R15, R3, R16); determine in the team what most effect organizing strategies are (R7, R6, R19, R10); and do weekly evaluations (“improvement sessions” observation; participant observation; R4, R7, R9, R12, R14). This reorganization means ‘on paper’ that practitioners receive more autonomy, and would move towards ‘classic professional’ space for practitioners.

### **5.3.1. Dealing with professionalism**

The responsibility for the implementation is now at the implementation level, so “professionals” have the freedom to make their own decisions and are responsible for their decisions (R13, R18, R1, R6). The management’s philosophy behind this shift in responsibilities is that the “professional” at the implementation level knows best what works and what not (vision document; organization design document; R18, R9). As a consequence, managers do not answer operational questions anymore, because practitioners have to learn to find solutions themselves. Before, there was a team leader and an A consultant – a ‘senior’ of the team who fulfilled a sort of captain role. These two leaders at the operational level do not exist anymore, and everyone in the MDT’s are equal to each other; there is no hierarchy any more within the teams, only a ‘captain’ role of the two client directors per team. Finding solutions to questions that once were answered by team leaders or A consultants, is now by the management regarded as an important aspect of the professionalism of the activation practitioner (R13, R18, R14, R9).

Activation practitioners say, however, that they do not know how to deal with all these new managerial and organizational tasks and their new responsibilities in their MDT (R2, R11). The seeking process (R7, R11, R18, R16) is experienced as “chaos” (R7, R3, R16). The re-organization and new positions of client director, process director and participation coach have led to time pressure and a high case load, because a lot of people still need to ‘figure out their job’; what exactly they need to do in their new function and especially, how do they have to do it within their ‘self-organized’ team. “People have no idea how to become self-organizing teams, what it entails, how to address it” (R7). This new organizational structure means that next to ‘the normal job’, the teams have to do ‘managerial’ work: dividing tasks, making priorities, making team reports, monitor their results and progress and do evaluations. The unit managers both explain how it is a struggle to find the right approach towards the ‘self-organizing’ practitioners:

“Sometimes, it is really difficult.. I want that everyone can do their work in a nice way. And sometimes I send them away with a unsatisfactory answer. Well, let me put it right: I explain why I do not say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ for example’ (R18). “You do not make the decision” (Me). “That’s it. I do not want to make that decision for a professional. He has to do that by himself, eventually. But it is a fact that the questions keep coming, that is true” (R18).

“And then I think, okay, so apparently this is a question. While I then think, okay, but you are the professional, and you indicate now that there is nothing to do anymore, then you close the trajectory? What else would you do? Why would you keep him in a trajectory? What is he going to do then, wait in a trajectory? Plus that is another spot which makes your agenda full. While you are flogging a dead horse. [...] Those are all decisions that a participation coach and a client director can take together with client administration, totally independent, they do not need us at all to do that. And that awareness is not there, I think” (R9).

Managers treat their employees as professionals (R13, R18; policy document), for example by saying “I do not want to make that decision for a professional” in the first quote. On the other hand, managers



recognize that practitioners are not professional's yet, as we can see in the second quote: "the awareness is not there". Managers see, therefore, the guidance of the teams in their "journey" towards "professionalism" as their most important task (R13, R18, R9):

"For me, it is most important that the employees develop themselves to real 'job mature' professionals. That they, together, and that is with the team but also with the network, focus on the client and the result. (...) For me it is really important to give clarity where necessary, and space where possible" (R18).

### **5.3.2. Vision on professional activation work**

Another important aspect of the professionalism that managers want at the ISS is networking. The slogan of the reorganization is therefore "From Bulwark to Network". The ISS was, before the reorganization – a bulwark within the social domain, for clients and stakeholders (vision document). Collaboration with stakeholders has become necessary given the fewer resources for implementation in the whole social domain (vision document). Also within the organization, employees work in "islands", and are thus not effective in relation to the bigger picture of the organization (vision document). An activation practitioner indicates that he/she has not noticed yet that the organization has moved from a bulwark to a network, while she feels the need to deliberate about the work with other practitioners, especially from the same function.

"At the moment, I have no real equal colleague. In other teams of course, but in practice, I do not often speak with them. Because we still are those little islands, although I may not say that of course. From Bulwark to Network is the new slogan of the organization. And bulwark it was, I think. But I have to say, now with the MDT's you will get it again, yes bulwarks, a little taboo to say it" (R11).

Managers observe that practitioners do not network yet, because "they are not service providing towards each other" (R13) and "they do not fully see the effect of an action on the work of someone else" (R18). A practitioner explains that he/she knows that in the future, they should do more in collaboration with the neighborhood teams, but does not know how or when they are going to do that (R11). A practitioner for example says that the decentralizations in the social domain have had no effect on her work (R8). It seems as if the practitioners are not able to translate the network discourse from the reorganization – which is a consequence of the decentralizations that imply network governance – instead of hierarchical governance to their work in practice.

An explanation for the discrepancy between managers' expectations and practitioners' experiences can be found in the fact that the organizational vision allows for different, diverging interpretations. In the preparation for the reorganization, the organization has formulated a shared "Why": the most important reasons why they do their work, which should function as the fundamental vision of the reorganization (vision document; observation organization-wide meeting II). This "Why" is presented by the management in policy documents and presentations (vision document; PowerPoint presentation; observation organization-wide meeting II). I have extracted underlying values in the "Why", presented in table 5 on the next page. The "Why" is a combination of vision (in green) and norms (in blue), and implies certain values (extracted by me, between brackets and in italics).

### Organization-Why [extracted value]

- Everyone is personally responsible to give direction to their own situation [self-responsibility] and need to be able to fully participate in society [independency].
- We support our target group by meeting the demand [helpfulness] and by giving direction to this demand, create chances [malleability] and take the personal situation into account [tailor-made service].
- We seek, where necessary and where possible collaboration with colleagues and professionals from our network [collaboration] to effectively and efficiently carry out our task [effectivity and efficiency].
- We work within the frameworks of the law [justice] and local policy [democracy] and, in this way, make sure that we spend public money expediently [expediency].

Table 5. Organization-Why and underlying values

This “Why” can be summarized in the slogan “helping people one step further” (vision document). What these underlying values mean, and how a practitioner should deal with this in their work, differs between management and the operating level though (R13, R18, R5, R14, R9). A manager (R18) tells that practitioners like to guide their clients through the rules and procedures (*helpfulness*), and like to strictly follow legal procedures (*justice*). When clients, for example, forget to hand in their bank account information, the practitioners will remind the client, over and over again until everything is in order. The management wants to change this approach: the client is responsible for his or her own trajectory (*self-responsibility* and *independency*). The manager argues that this approach puts the client as the focus point of the procedure, instead of the procedure and guiding the client through the procedure. However, practitioners interpret “putting the client central” as serving the clients in their needs. A manager describes how practitioners reacted to this new policy:

“The first reaction of some people was, ‘Oh this is not okay! It is legally not allowed. You can really not do this!’ It is accompanied with a lot of insecurity. ‘What happens if we receive an objection?’ Well, I think if we receive a few times an objection in a year, and we have to pay..” (R18). “..What is the damage?” (Me). “Exactly, yes. It is just a cost-benefit analysis. That is still a bit complicated for some colleagues. While this is far from the pinnacle of creativity, it is just a smart way of designing your process” (R18).

### 5.4. Accountability of professional space at the ISS

Activation practitioners at the ISS have a large space to be professional and innovative, as long as they base this upon their ‘professionality’. This large discretionary space is often not used for experimenting with new and improved ways of working, though, due to a preference for the bureaucratic style. Before the reorganization, practitioners did not have to account for the choices in their work (R11, R8, R17, R1, R6). The reorganization vision of professionals in multidisciplinary teams with little steering, means that there is little control on how practitioners use their professional space as well. A manager explains that the management is going to try to stimulate an accountable way of using of professional space through steering with a 4-R’s model: Direction (Richting), Space (Ruimte), Accountability (Rekenschap) and Results (Resultaten):

“First we give Direction and we give Space. And after that, we ask for Accountability for the Results. And that is what you would want, the client managers, the persons in the execution, that they experience space, though with direction, that their creativity pops up naturally [...] This morning in the MT we were talking about the re-integration policy rules, and it was already written as ‘if someone earns this much, than we do this, then we do that’, you know, and then I think ‘oh’, those are not the right rules that we need to determine with each other right now. So that is a little bit dithering between two thoughts. Some people need it, because otherwise, they cannot make a decision. But what you actually want, is that someone reflects in a meeting, what does this person need? And yeah, can I [provide a] good, individualized if possible [decision], can I substantiate that, before I take a decision, as a professional. But apparently it is still the case, that people need many rules, because otherwise they do not dare to make a decision. So there is really a sort of underlying fear’ (R13).

As the manager explains in the quote, the R-model does not have the desired effect (yet), on both managerial level as implementation level. There is an “underlying fear” of accountability, which results in not using professional space (R13, R14). Also, managers are used to fix all operational practices in procedures, as described in the quote above. A manager says that accountability of activation work is about making agreements about desired results, and explaining why you have met your targets or have not:

“Accountability you were talking about, what is that?” (Me). “That’s accountability giving and asking, yes. So, I tell [a unit manager], ‘I expect that you take care of 100 clients outflow per MDT, [...] then I want to know by the end of the year if you made it’. And if yes, good work, and no, how did that happen? It is not that your head is going to be chopped, you know. [laughs] [...] It counts for everyone in the line, but it has not dug in yet” (R13).

A unit manager explains that control on the use of professional space is not necessary in principle: “Well, if he [a practitioner] has good arguments, he has space” (R18). So using professional space is accountable, when practitioners have “good arguments”. What a “good argument” is and what not, differs per situation, though (R18). Practitioners are expected to know how they can judge what is good in which situation (R13, R18, R14, R9). Managers want to trust upon practitioners’ professionalism, and focus on the results that teams achieve. Their role is to facilitate this achievement (R13, R18, R14, R9). A unit manager describes his/her role as follows:

“For me it is really important to give clarity where necessary, and space where possible” (R18). “And what do you need to fulfill your task?” (Me). “Time. Numbers. [...] If I see that the results are lacking. Then, I want to go in deliberation with people, how did this happen, what is the cause? What do you need to achieve those results? If I hear that someone is busy, then I want to see figures how busy someone is. That is really leading for me. That is where we start, you could say” (R18).

Lastly, a practitioner says about accounting for the decisions in activation work that “it is not necessary, because [unit manager] knows I am loyal” (R8). So loyalty to managers also plays a role in the use of professional space.

## **5.5. Conclusion: managers and colleagues influence the use of professional space**

This chapter has provided an overview of what different aspects matter concerning the use professional space of activation practitioners at the ISS. This enables me to answer the first empirical question of this research:

- ***What influences the experienced implicit boundaries of professional space of activation practitioners at the ISS?***

Activation practitioners experience professional space from both autonomous and discretionary perspectives. The ISS has always been a classic bureaucratic organization, but is currently redesigned to create more space for activation practitioners to work in a professional way. However, practitioners still feel hesitance to actually use their professional space, especially when it comes to work creatively. They prefer to stick to a bureaucratic working style. The few practitioners that do come up with new ideas about improvements in their work, get demotivated by their colleagues, or their ideas end up on a shelf of the manager because they follow the ‘bureaucratic route’. It is also unsure what exactly is meant when respondents refer to professionalism. Managers assume that their practitioners have the knowledge to decide what the best decision is, because they see them as autonomous professionals. If practitioners have ‘good arguments’, they are allowed to use their professional space. But does a ‘good

argument' make a practitioner a professional? Besides, how 'good' is determined, is context dependent, and thus also an undefined standard.

There seems to be a paradoxical side to these ideas about professionalism at the ISS. The practitioners are treated as 'fully developed' professionals in the new organization structure and are managed as professionals who deserve autonomy, in the hope that they will be able to be innovative in their work. But most practitioners seem not to want this large professional space nor the responsibility for the decisions that they make. At the same time, they describe themselves as experienced professionals. This practice works in a circle: practitioners are treated as professionals, in the hope that they start acting like the professionals that managers want to see, but the practitioners already feel like professionals, and/because they are treated as such.

This circle reasoning shows that practitioners do not base their autonomy on an institutionalized profession, as is prescribed by the classic professional perspective. Practitioners do not mention a connection to a professional institution (Trappenbrug in Noordegraaf et al., 2011), but show a service ethic and refer to internalized knowledge from practice, which is a characteristic of a technical base (Wilensky, 1964; Simons & Ruijters, 2014; Trappenbrug in Noordegraaf et al., 2011). However, practitioners say that there are no shared professional standards of the activation profession, and most practitioners have not followed a specific education. Only one respondent (R1) mentioned that he/she followed a course at Divosa to expand her knowledge, and was frustrated that none of his/her colleagues were interested as well. It can thus be concluded that practitioners do not feel limited by the professional standards of the institutionalized profession, as classic professionals would. Their professional space is thus not limited by the profession.

The reorganization of the ISS should lead to more use of professional space, but there is still a hesitance of using this space. Instead, practitioners refer to their managers, colleagues and the organizational culture as influencing their behavior concerning their professional space. So the following question is, how can this influence from the social context on the use of professional space of activation practitioners be explained? The ethnographic findings in this chapter gave insight into *who/what has power to influence* activation practitioners' behavior (structure) – managers and colleagues – but does not tell us *how this power works* (process). To understand *how* this power works, we need to use a relational power lens on the organizational context. This lens will be explained in the following chapter.

## 6. Looking from the second perspective: phronesis

As we have seen in the previous chapter that ‘colleagues’ and ‘managers’ emerged from the empirics as influencing factors on the use of professional space of activation practitioners. If we want to understand *why* activation practitioners do not (always) use their professional space, we need another perspective on professional space than the autonomous and discretionary one. We need to understand *why* managers and colleagues within the social context have such a big influence on the use of professional space of activation practitioners. Ethnography enabled me to describe how the boundaries to professional space are experienced, but does not help to understand *why* these boundaries are constructed this way, and what we should think about this. That is why I have looked at the same data for a second time, but this time from a phronetic perspective. The phronetic perspective takes more preparatory work than the ethnographic perspective. This chapter presents the framework that I have used to do the phronetic analysis. I will discuss the essentials of phronetic analysis (§6.1), what this perspective means concerning an academic debate about studying social context (§6.2); which framework is used to ‘phronetically’ analyze the social context (§6.3) and which ‘lens’ is used to look at this framework (§6.4).

### 6.1. A phronetic research approach

Flyvbjerg (2012) states that if we want social science to matter, we have to accept that social sciences will never produce cumulative and predictive theory like natural sciences do. Instead, we must focus on problems that are meaningful in local, national and global communities in which we live. ‘Phronesis’ is an Aristotelian term for ‘practical knowledge’. A phronetic method is a prudent analysis of both practical and abstract level. Phronetic research focuses on values and power, because its goal is to make a normative judgment about a researched phenomenon.

Phronesis takes ‘*verstehen*’ a step further. Focusing on *verstehen* enables the researcher to find answers to the more structural “Why?”-question, leading to *erklären*. This combination of *verstehen* and *erklären* provides insight into the effects of the phenomenon under study and its meaning in relation to the social system it belongs to. By asking “How?”, the researcher collects stories. Narratives give us insight in past experiences, but also provide us a look into the future. It enables us to deal with situations before we encounter them, and allows you to envision alternative future scenarios (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 137). The phronetic tradition tries to break with dualisms of actor/structure, hermeneutics/structuralism, and voluntarism/determinism. This is done by focusing on the actor and the structural level at the same and the relation between the two: understanding from “within” and from “without” (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 137). This means in practice that the researcher asks questions about ‘what structural factors influence individual actions, how those actions are constructed, and their structural consequences’ (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 138). Where ethnography stresses the importance of local practice, a phronetic perspective tries to look at both abstract and practice and their relationship: what happens on a micro level and what happens on a macro level, and how do they influence each other?

By focusing on values, phronetic researchers reject both foundationalism (the idea that there is one, objective truth) and relativism (the idea that there is no objective truth), and replace them by contextualism (truth exists within certain contexts) (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 130). This means that right and wrong are not universal, nor is one set of values just as good as another. Right and wrong can be determined in specific situations. Researchers ‘point of departure in their attitude to the situation in the society being studied. They seek to ensure that such an attitude is not based on idiosyncratic morality or personal preferences, but instead on a common view among a specific reference group to which the

researchers refer' (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 130). Interpretations will be normatively analysed by looking which interpretation is a "better" alternative than another interpretation. The "better" interpretation is valid, until another interpretation is produced which reduces the value of the previous interpretation (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 131). The normative judgment can, according to Flyvbjerg, be made by asking the following value-rational questions:

- *Where are we going?*
- *Who gains, who loses and by which mechanisms of power?*
- *Is this desirable?*
- *What should (if desirable) be done?*

At first, the researcher does not take position regarding the value of a practice. Next, the researcher places the different practices next to each other, and tries to understand the total system of relations (Flyvbjerg, 2012). If there are discontinuities between the rationality of the individual practice and that of the total system of relations, the researcher has to find out how this "dubious" rationality influences the context (Flyvbjerg, 2012). Developing a normative judgement is thus a process of relating micro practices with macro practices.

In understanding these relation, phronesis places power relations at its central focus of analysis. Studying power does not only involve the Weberian question posed by Robert Dahl "Who governs?", but also the Nietzschean questions "What 'governmental relationalities' are at work when those who govern govern?" (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 131). By asking what governs the experienced space for professional space in activation work, I am looking for these 'governmental relationalities'. The following Weberian-Dahlian/Nietzschean-Foucauldian interpretation of power, designed by Flyvbjerg, will be used to study 'governmental relationalities':

- a) 'Power is seen as a productive and positive and not only as restrictive and negative.
- b) Power is viewed as a dense net of omnipresent relations and not only as localized in "centres" and "institutions", or as an entity one can "possess".
- c) The concept of power is seen as ultra-dynamic; power is not only something one appropriates, but also something one reappropriates and exercises in a constant back-and-forth movement in relations of strength, tactics, and strategies.
- d) Knowledge and power, truth and power, rationality and power are analytically inseparable from each other; power produces knowledge, and knowledge produces power.
- e) The central question is how power is exercised, and not only who has the power, and why they have it; the focus is on process in addition to structure.
- f) Power is studied with a point of departure in small questions "flat and empirical", not only, nor primarily, with a point of departure in "big questions" (Flyvbjerg, 2012: pp. 131-132).

This analysis of power should help to make a normative judgment that has societal value and practical implications. "So what?" results - research that lacks relevance – are avoided by getting close to the phenomenon studied during all phases of research. This is in line with what I called above 'bringing your research back to the field'. This practice of communicating your research ideas and process with your field, helps to improve the validity of your research by staying 'close to reality', and helps to create interest of your field in your research (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 132). This can be done by being as much as possible 'in the field' and in interaction with the field, and using different methods to understand reality (Bryman, 2008: p. 402).

The end result of the phronetic approach will be a representation of multiple, overlapping or contrasting beliefs and values. Yanow (1996) uses an example of a Cubist portrait to describe the end result of such a study: 'one attempts (but never wholly succeeds) to portray assembles elements together from multiple angles, exposing the contrasting planes and the logically incompatible perceptions. This is the closest we can approximate its "reality" – a reality constructed of actors' readings of it' (Yanow, 1996: pp. 53-54). Pablo Picasso's 'Woman with yellow hat (Jacqueline)' (1961) shows this cubist perspective, by integrating different angles of the same studied object (which is Jacqueline, in Picasso's case). I strive to produce input for thinking about activation practice in the researched organization, in the field of activation practice and academia. In this way, I hope to be able to connect the academic debate to praxis. Phronetic research is a contribution to a dialogue, instead of an ultimate, unequivocally verified knowledge. The significance of the research depends on the acceptance of the researcher's validity claims (Flyvbjerg, 2012: p. 139).



Figure 2. Pablo Picasso (1961) "Woman with yellow hat (Jacqueline)"

Now we have seen what phronesis exactly means, it is time to develop a framework to loop from a phronetic perspective to the case of the ISS. Chapter five ended with the conclusion that influencing power comes from managers and colleagues and not by the profession, as desired by Van Berkel et al., (2010), Eikenaar et al. (2016) and Van der Aa (2012). This means that influences on the use of professional space come from the direct social context. Since I want to understand *why* the social context influences professional space, I have zoomed in social context. We have seen in chapter four that ethnography adopts a cultural perspective on studying social contexts. However, an ethnographic, cultural perspective is not sufficient to analyze from a phronetic perspective, since it does not enable us to find explanative mechanisms for influencing sources (that is, managers and colleagues), nor determine 'where we are going'. It may be clear that another framework is necessary to analyze social context from a phronetic perspective. I have therefore used an *organizational climate* framework, which I will discuss in the next sections of this chapter.

## 6.2. Studying social context: a climate perspective

There has been an academic debate about what the best perspective is to study social contexts. Daniel Denison (1996) describes how organizational culture literature and organizational climate literature study the same phenomenon, but hold a different interpretation. Both traditions study 'the creation and influence of social contexts in organizations' (Denison, 1996: p. 646). However, culture researchers focus on an *evolved* context, 'rooted in history, collectively constructed and sufficiently complex to resist many attempts at direct manipulation' (Denison, 1996: p. 646). Whereas climate researchers interpret the social context as 'a *situation* and its link to the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of organizational members. Thus, it is temporal, subjective, and often subject to direct manipulation by people with power and influence' (Denison, 1996). So where culture researchers are mainly interested in the evolution of social systems over time, climate researchers focus on the impact that organizational systems have on groups and individuals (Hoy, 1990). Both approaches have acknowledged the same problem of the holistic organization: social contexts are simultaneously a powerful influence on individuals and a product of the individual interactions (Denison, 1996).

The 'culture' camp argued that social contexts have to be researched in a qualitative way, while the 'climate' camp stated that a statistical approach is the best way to go. Climate researchers aim for

finding distinct dimensions in the social context that can be generalized to other contexts, while culture researchers argue that this does not do justice to the holistic character of an organizational culture, which is always unique. Analysing a social context by means of dimensions can be a useful strategy though, because 'it can aid in the discovery of new contexts and can enable comparisons among types' (Denison, 1996: p. 628). When studying dimensions, it is, however, important to be aware that a social context can never be fully grasped in dimensions, because the holism of a social context is too complex for that. Or as Marshall Poole (1985: p. 86) argues: 'these types (i.e. contexts) can be *rated* on dimensions – for example a democratic climate is high in supportiveness, low in structure, and emphasized rewards rather than punishments – but cannot be *reduced* to dimensions, because they are wholes'. Over time, the distinction between climate and culture research has disappeared. Where culture research has started to look for dimensions by means of statistics, climate researchers have adapted the social constructionist approach to understand the construction of the dimensions in their context (Denison, 1996).

As we have seen in this academic debate, the climate perspective fits the phronetic perspective best. Its goal is to study the perceptions of behavior on a concrete level (study 'the little'), and aim for using this knowledge to improve organizations (create practical impact) (Hoy, 1990). A climate perspective helps to distinguish which structural factors have an influencing role on activation practitioners' use of professional space, and gives insight into how this can be changed, if desired. The focus on structural *processes* in a social context, enables me as a researcher to join agency and structure (what structural factors influence individual actions, how are these actions constructed, and what could be their structural consequences), as prescribed by the phronetic approach (Flyvbjerg, 2012). Moreover, climate factors help to generalize processes to other cases. This fits the aim of this research, to be able to generalize from 'the little' by using 'the power of example' (Flyvbjerg, 2012).

The results from chapter five show that activation practitioners identify with the social context of the ISS, and specifically the social context of their multidisciplinary team. Michael West (1990) has developed a theory about the concept 'team climate'. He distinguishes four factors that influence the "innovativeness" of a team. He defines innovation as 'the intentional introduction and application within a role, group or organization of ideas, processes, products or procedures, new to the relevant unit of adoption, designed to significantly benefit role performance, the group, the organization or wider society' (West and Farr, 1989: p. 16). Innovation is thus about *action*, about *doing*. Moreover, this action is aimed at improvement. An innovative team climate is thus a climate in which people take actions to improve their work: they use their professional space to make their work better. Since innovation leads to improvements in performance of the individual, group, organization and/or wider society (West & Farr, 1989), an innovative climate is a desirable climate for organizations.

Next, as Simons and Ruijters (2015) describe, the essence of professionalism is the learning process of generating more technical and practical knowledge and reflect on this on both individual and institutional level (with the profession). This is necessary in order to keep on improving the profession and maintain the professional status. 'Bodies of knowledge as well as the standards of work quality and contexts change so rapidly, that nobody can earn the 'title' of professional by studying hard and keep it forever. The title continuously has to be re-earned by a way of practicing and learning' (Simons & Ruijters, 2014: p. 970). Looking for innovation is thus essential in the behavior of professionals. So, an innovative team climate perspective is a useful lens to look at how we can understand how the team climate of the ISS leads to a hesitance towards using professional space, instead of the desired



innovative professional attitude. This will give insight into the empirical questions of this research about *how* managers and colleagues have influence on the use of professional space of activation practitioners.

### 6.3. A team climate framework

To study influences on the use of professional space on a team climate level, I have used the theory for an innovative team climate by West (1990) that is described in the previous paragraph. West's theory is a well-known and empirically proven method in team innovation research (Loewen & Loo, 2004; Anderson et al., 2014). His theory for team climate innovation describes how four factors contribute to the innovativeness of a team climate: 'vision', 'participatory safety', 'task orientation' and 'support for innovation'.

The factor **vision** means 'an idea of a valued outcome which represents a higher order goal and a motivating force at work' (West, 1990: p. 310 in Anderson & West, 1998: p. 240). The vision of a team needs to be understandable. It has to be clear what the objectives of the team are (*clarity*). These objectives need to be valued by the work group members, they need to be committed to the goals of the team (*perceived value*). Next, the vision needs to be shared among the team members, it has to be widely accepted within in the teams (*sharedness*). Lastly, a vision and its objectives need to be realistic and achievable (*attainability*) (Louwen & Loo, 2004). When a vision is not feasible, it can be too abstract to bring it into practice, or work in a demotivating way (Anderson & West, 1998).

**Participative safety** refers to a climate that is perceived as interpersonally non-threatening, concerning involvement in decision-making processes. 'West proposes that the more people participate in decision-making through having influence, interacting, and sharing information, the more likely they are to invest in the outcomes of those decisions and to offer ideas for new and improved ways of working' (Anderson & West, 1998: p. 240). The concept of participative safety is thus about the freedom that practitioners experience to propose new ideas and problem solutions in non-judgmental environment (Anderson & West, 1998). In short, this dimension can be assessed by the degree to which *information is shared*, one dares to take risks (*safety*), decision making is collective (*influence*) and the team *interaction frequency* (Loewen & Loo, 2004).

**Task orientation** can be described as 'a shared concern with excellence of quality of task performance in relation to shared vision or outcomes, characterized by evaluations, modifications, control systems and critical appraisals' (West, 1990 in West & Anderson, 1998: p. 240). Task orientation is thus about thinking, reflecting and critical appraisal (*appraisal*) in a work group about the work methods and team performance. A commitment to high standards of task quality (*excellence*) is facilitative for the search for and adoption of improvements in activation work (Anderson & West, 1998). Lastly, task orientation is about the extent to which members build on each other's ideas in order to achieve the best possible outcome (*ideation*) (Louwen & Loo, 2004).

**Support for innovation** is defined by West (1990 in Anderson & West, 1998: p. 240) as '... the expectation, approval and practical support of attempts to introduce new and improved ways of doing things in the work environment'. Support can take the form of articulation, e.g. through policy documents (*articulated support*). Support can also take the form of enactment, e.g. making resources available for innovations (*enacted support*) (Loewen & Loo, 2004).

Using this theory of West helps to answer Flyvbjerg's phronetic question 'where are we going?', because the four factor framework has predictive power concerning innovation in the team: if these

dimensions 'score high' in the climate, there is a high chance for innovation. In the literature about activation work, one can distinguish different ideas about how these factors should be influenced in order to come to desirable way of activation work. The factors could be influenced by practitioners themselves, as assumed by Schonewille (2015), by managers, as assumed by Lipsky (2010), or by the profession, as desired by Van Berkel et al. (2010), Eikenaar et al. (2015), Blonk et al. (2015) and Van der Aa (2012).

#### **6.4. Power lens on the team climate framework**

A phronetic perspective means, as we have seen in the first paragraph of this chapter, that power is the central in analysis. I therefore use a 'power lens' to look at the team climate framework of West. A power lens is an important focus for analysis, because power steers all social relations (Flyvbjerg, 2012; Foucault, 1970), such as relations in organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Foucault explains that structures in organizational life are not fixed, but a continuous reconstruction. This interpretation makes structure an active, shared and political activity: structure is the result of continuously creating order together (Foucault, 1977). This reproductive process means that behaviour of individuals constructs a relations, and influences the reconstruction of this relation at the same time.

If we look at the ethnographic results presented in chapter four, we can understand professional space as a relational power concept, constructed in a social context. Professional space is influenced by the relation of practitioners with others (colleagues and managers specifically). Martin Hetebrij (2006) argues that people in organizations often 'forget' that they play an active part in the construction of power relations. Everyone's behaviour in a group interaction contributes to the power distribution within that group. So if one wants to change this power distributions, individuals must not 'forget' that they can play a role in this themselves. Power is thus not limited to formal positions, everyone in social relations has power. The extent of power of an individual differs though, because of the combination of someone's position and the quality of the social relations.

Power relations can be recognized by looking at sources of power. The source of power can determine how it works as an influencing mechanism on behaviour. Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal (2008) distinguish different sources of power on different levels in an organization. These sources dependent on formal and informal structures in organizations. Some power relations are related to a position, while others have a dynamic character and are about an individual's role in a relation with others. However, since power is relational concept, even power that is 'given' to positions, is dependent on corresponding behaviour of others (Flyvbjerg, 2012). For instance, the power position of a manager must be acknowledged by employees. If employees do not accept the manager's position as a powerful one, the manager has no power in practice, because he/she is not able to influence others. Looking for sources of power helps to find power mechanisms, if one studies the behaviour that is related to the power source.

The most 'well-known' source of power is authority, power obtained from your *position* (Bolman & Deal, 2008). As described above, this power is not something that someone 'possesses'. Power is only 'real' when this authoritative power is acknowledged by others (Flyvbjerg, 2012). Then, *control of rewards* - such money and support - brings power. Rewarding others make them dependent on you. *Coercive* power comes from the ability to punish, interfere, constrain or block. Employees can do a strike, unions can walk out, managers can punish. As we have seen in the description of the classic professional, having important *information and expertise* lets power flow to you (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Knowledge produces power, and power enables one to determine what knowledge is (Flyvbjerg, 2012; Foucault, 1977).

Expertise can help to build a good *reputation*. A good reputation leads to ‘blind’ trust in persons, which gives them power. Someone can also gain power through their attractive and social character – a certain charm, charisma, humour et cetera. This is called *personal power* (Bolman & Deal, 2008). However, more can be achieved in an organization when you work together with others. Making friends in *alliances and networks* helps to work through a complex network of individuals and groups. In organizations, some groups have more *access and control of agendas* than others. Those who have ‘a seat at the decision making table’ can have more influence than those who have not. Lastly, the power to *frame (control of meanings and symbols)*, is the ability to shape meaning and make others believe what is most important (Bolman & Deal, 2008). By having an eye for these different sources, I look for power relations and specifically, how power is exercised in these relations (Flyvbjerg, 2012). This will help to extract relevant power mechanisms.

Power distributions differ per organization. Alderfer (1979) and Brown (1983) make a distinction between an ‘overbounded system’ and an ‘underbounded system’ (in Bolman & Deal, 2008: p. 205). The first type is a system in which power is highly concentrated at one point, and everything in the organization is tightly regulated. An underbounded system can be understood as the opposite: an organization in which power is diffuse and there is little control on each other (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Bolman & Deal also state that the different power sources in organizations easily lead to conflict, because public organizations always operate in a context of scarce resources and divergent interests. From a bureaucratic perspective, focused on hierarchy and clear division of tasks and responsibilities, conflict is a problem, because it is an impediment to effectiveness (Bolman & Deal, 2008). However, conflict does not necessarily have to be a problem or a sign that something is going wrong. It is inevitable and can even lead to a better organization. Dealing with conflict is thus a matter of strategy and tactics, instead of resolution (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Because ‘a tranquil, harmonious organization may very well be an apathetic, unprofessional, stagnant, inflexible, and unresponsive organization. Conflict challenges the status quo [and] stimulates interest and curiosity. It is the root of personal and social change, creativity and innovation. Conflict encourages new ideas and approaches to problems, stimulating innovation’ (Heffron, 1989 in Bolman & Deal, 2008: p. 207).

## **6.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented how I have used the phronetic perspective to look at the data for a second time. I have chosen to use West’s four factor theory (1990) as a framework to indicate the “innovativeness” of a team climate. I have looked through this framework with a power lens, based upon the relational power assumption of Foucault (1977) and Flyvbjerg (2012) and power sources of Bolman and Deal (2008). So, in the next chapter, the use of professional space of activation practitioners will be studied from this phronetic framework. This enabled me to understand which processes work as power mechanisms in a social context in which managers and colleagues have influence on practitioners’ use of professional space.

## 7. Power influences on the use of professional space

The first part of this research – the ethnographic part – has given insight into the ‘map’ of influence on activation practitioners’ professional space. Practitioners experience both discretionary and autonomous space in their work. However, they do not act as classic professionals. The practitioners experience influence from their managers and colleagues in their organization, and identify themselves with their MDT. They do not feel influenced by activation practitioners from other organizations, nor from the profession (BvK). The map of influence thus shows that influence is limited within organizational and within team boundaries. This means that influence is located, but not explained. This knowledge can still not explain *by which mechanisms* the observed hesitance (implicit boundaries) of using professional space is constructed. We need to know this in order to explain *why* activation practitioners experience these implicit boundaries to professional space. This question is explored in this chapter. I have looked at the same data for a second time, but this time from a phronetic perspective. As presented in the previous chapter, I have constructed a team climate framework to look at the influence of managers and colleagues. The framework is interpreted from a power lens, following the phronetic tradition. This perspective provides an answer to the still unanswered question about *how* this influence from managers and colleagues work. Hence, the following empirical sub-questions are answered in this chapter:

- *How do colleagues influence activation practitioners’ use of professional space?*
- *How do managers influence activation practitioners’ use of professional space?*

The results are described along West’s climate factor framework: vision (§7.1), participative safety (§7.2), task orientation (§7.3) and support for innovation (§7.4). The results are analyzed with a power lens. Literature from other research is used to explain why the observed processes work the way they work. In the conclusion of this chapter (§7.5), I give answers to the empirical research questions, which will follow from the discussion of these four climate factors.

### 7.1. Vision: From bulwark to network

A team vision can be a productive, positive power mechanism: it can steer people towards certain ideas and behaviour. The way the vision is defined, communicated, interpreted, experienced and enacted – a relational process between the vision-‘definer’ and vision-‘follower’ – determines the extent to which it has a powerful effect. This paragraph describes how the organizational vision affects the experienced professional space of activation practitioners. The MDT’s are united in the vision of the organization ‘From bulwark to network’ (vision document; organization design document). All teams have to bring the same vision into practice but for their own specific target group, classified by municipality. In the following paragraphs, I will follow West’s dimensions of his concept of ‘vision’, and analyze if and how the vision is clear (§7.1.1), valued (§7.1.2), shared (§7.1.3) and seen as attainable (§7.1.4) (Louwen & Loo, 2004).

#### 7.1.1. Clear vision: Professional, what is professional?

The general vision ‘From Bulwark to Network’ is clear in essence for practitioners and they adopt policy language (R11, R8, R19; participant observation), but some also admit that they do not really get what it means in practice (R16, R19). They understand it as a call for networking in the local sphere, having all clients in the picture, have an eye for what a client specifically needs (using the network to find a solution) and taking responsibility for your tasks and decisions (R2, R20, R15, R19, R17, R1, R6, R12, R10, R3, R16, R5), which is in line with policy (vision document, organization design document; R18, R14). A

part of the vision of 'From Bulwark to Network' is aimed at the development of professionalism in the organization (vision document; R13, R18, R14, R9). As discussed in chapter four, everyone agrees on the concept of 'professionalism' as an accountability and quality mechanism for activation work, but it is not clear what this exactly means. There are different ideas about what this should mean between managers and practitioners, and practitioners themselves<sup>28</sup>. For example, a practitioner questions whether their work can really be described as 'professional': "Professional, what is professional? Do we really work professional?" (R19). There is agreement on abstract policy rhetoric, but disagreement about the translation of this rhetoric to practice (observation MT meeting). Also, we have seen from an ethnographic perspective that the organizational "Why" allows different interpretations of potentially contrasting values that are central in their work. Let us look again at the following quote by a manager:

"The first reaction of some people was, 'Oh this is not okay! It is legally not allowed. You can really not do this!' It is accompanied with a lot of insecurity. 'What happens if we receive an objection?' Well, I think if we receive a few times an objection in a year, and we have to pay.." (R18). "...What is the damage?" (Me). "Exactly, yes. It is just a cost-benefit analysis. That is still a bit complicated for some colleagues. While this is far from the pinnacle of creativity, it is just a smart way of designing your process" (R18).

This is not just a matter of different views, but it exemplifies a power struggle between different interpretations of the work's core values. It is about *information and expertise power*: how do we decide how these core values should be reflected in practitioners' actions in practice, and about which values are most important? As the example shows, the manager prefers 'efficiency' over the value of 'helpfulness'. Next, it is a struggle of *framing power*: how is the meaning of these values controlled? These struggles can be explained because activation practitioners have to serve different interests at the same time. They do not only need to serve the interests of their management and municipalities, but also from their clients, the general public, and other service providers (Van der Aa, 2012; Schonewille, 2015). So this leads to struggle about disparate, ambiguous and sometimes contradictory interpretations of the vision on how the work should be executed.

### **7.1.2. Valued vision: We have always worked professionally**

In general, practitioners value the objectives of organizational vision (R7, R11, R8, R2, R20, R15, R12, R3). They believe that it is necessary in their work 'to go outside' and make smart use of stakeholders within their municipalities. Some practitioners indicated to not have read the central vision document "From Bulwark to Network" (R19, R17, R13, R15). They feel that they hear enough about it through their managers, in organization-wide and unit meetings, to understand it. The vision paper in itself, has limited value – limited *framing power* – for them. Storytelling is thus important, since that seems to be the most powerful communication mean.

Most employees and managers feel good about the vision to enhance the professionalism in the organization (R7, R4, R11, R13, R8, R18, R2, R15, R17, R1, R6, R14, R9). There are also critical notes from practitioners (R20, R19, R12, R10, R16, R5) about the usefulness of the aim of becoming more 'professional' and the statement that the ISS needs to transform from a 'bulwark' to a 'network' (R20, R19, R10, R3). For them, these policy aims do not do justice to the former organization with which practitioners identify themselves (R19, R10, R16, R5). The following two quotes illustrate this thought:

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<sup>28</sup> See appendix F "Tables on perspectives on professionalism".

“Professional, I find it a disingenuous term. We have always worked professionally” (R10).

“I find it a little exaggerated, ‘From Bulwark to Network’. It actually does, it actually implies that, before, we actually were nothing, but now we have found the holy grail. While that is absolutely not the case. Before, we already did a lot of networking. Had meetings here for which we invited a lot of external parties who shared their story, that exchange has always been there. And at a certain point, the idea emerged that it wasn’t there. And that does actually harm to the truth!” (R10)

Some practitioners see the vision as a linguistic policy trick (R5, R10), instead of a description of what is necessary for the organization to perform better. By describing the organization as a ‘bulwark’, while they are already working professionally, and after the reorganization, they can show politics that all practitioners have become professionals (R5). This resistance to the vision of the networking professional is a resistance to *framing power*. Who may decide what we are and what the quality is of what we do? Bourdieu (1991) calls this a struggle over symbolic power, ‘the power to define the situation in which the interactions that comprise the negotiated order take place’ (Bourdieu, 1991: p. 166). Practitioners see the policy aims towards networking and professionalism as symbols for the fact that their former work was ‘weak’. Practitioners feel unacknowledged, because they feel that they do not have to change their work since they already are professionals (R20, R10, R16, R5). Practitioners protect their *position power*, *information and expertise power* and *reputation power*, by claiming that they have always been professionals. Besides, this is feeling not strange, since we have seen in the former chapter that managers address practitioners upon their professionalism and (already) call them ‘professionals’ (R13, R18, R14, R9) who have to make autonomous decisions. There is a tension between authoritative *position power* of managers, which gives their *frames* more power than practitioners’, since they do not pose a challenging *frame*. A part of the practitioners feel attacked by the bulwark-frame by their management, but do not defend themselves. This conflict over framing because of the quality of the work of practitioners leads to a limited value to the policy objectives, because they experience a feeling of resentment. So some practitioners value the organizational vision, while others feel offended by it.

### **7.1.3. Shared vision: “Why” is not yet in the genes**

The degree of shared agreement about the organizational vision in a team, is coherent with the perceived value and clarity of the vision. Practitioners agree with each other and their managers on abstract values and norms of the organization. As we have seen, a rhetoric agreement, which implies an acceptance by practitioners of *framing power* of managers. As we have seen, the level of abstraction allows conflict about the implementation. This conflict makes it questionable to what extent the vision is actually shared in practice. What is remarkable, is that only the managing director and the strategic manager refer to the organizational “Why” when they talk about the organization, while the unit managers and practitioners are not. It is thus questionable to what extent this “Why” is ‘alive’ - to what extent it has symbolic meaning (Bourdieu, 1991) that is, *framing power* – among unit managers and ISS-employees. The values that are central in the work of practitioners do not necessarily differ from these values, but the practitioners do not seem to value the *collectivity* of the “Why”, or the fact that these values are ‘officially’ connected to the essence of the organization. As a manager says, “The ‘Why’ is not yet in the genes” (R13). Practitioners do not feel the urge to unite with this vision. The vision seems not to work (yet) as a power mechanism that steers everyone in the same direction.

### **7.1.4. Attainable vision: Achieving policy objectives**

Both managers and practitioners believe that, in general, the vision of the organization is realistic and achievable (R11, R13, R8, R18, R2, R20, R15, R19, R17, R1, R6, R12, R10, R3, R16, R5, R14, R9; D2, D6,

D9). However, both levels indicate aspects that problematize achieving the vision. Managers indicate that the understanding of professionalism and corresponding attitude of practitioners stands in the way of development. But if practitioners 'will get it' (R13, R14, R9; D9), development can go really quick. Practitioners thus have *coercion power*, they can block organizational development along the desired policy objectives. Practitioners, on the other hand, find the vision ambitious (R1) and vague concerning implementation (R11, R2, R20, R15, R19, R6, R12, R10, R3, R16). Practitioners feel as if the management has not thought through what this vision means on an implementation level, since there are many practical questions. As a consequence, practitioners have to find it out themselves, but have no idea where to start or how to approach these problems (R7, R8, R9, R10, R14, R17). Practitioners would therefore like more steering about how to attain the objectives of their vision, especially because they have to deal with high caseloads and organizing tasks and want to handle this in an efficient and effective way (R1, R3, R7, R8, R9, R13, R14, R15, R16). Practitioners thus feel dependent on managers' *expertise and information* about organizational processes, while managers expect professionals to have this *information power*, because they are professionals who know what is best to do.

## **7.2. Participative safety: Avoiding hassle & Double steering**

The factor 'participative safety' (West, 1990) is analyzed by focusing on the degree of information sharing (§7.2.1), interaction frequency (§7.2.1), the willingness to take risk (§7.2.2.) and extent of influence through decision making (§7.2.3) (Louwen & Loo, 2004). The behavior concerning those aspects reflects power relationships at the ISS. These relationships are steered by two dominant mechanisms: 'avoiding hassle' and 'double steering', as will become clear in this paragraph.

### **7.2.1. Safety to share information and to interact: Claiming colleagues' time**

There is little information sharing between the MDT's, and between the supporting teams and the MDT's (R11, R2, R20, R1, R10). Practitioners would like to do this more often, because sharing information helps practitioners to learn from each other's progress (R20, R1), and know how qualities in their team and other teams can be used (R19, R10, R5). *Information power* is thus dependent on the relations between teams. Without these relations, practitioners' knowledge/power development is limited to their MDT and their manager. Because of the new divisions of teams, former power relations in *networks* are not functional anymore (R7, R1, R10, R5). Practitioners have less power through their *network and alliances* and need to construct new ones to regain power. However, constructing new relations is not easy. The other teams feel like "bulwarks" that you cannot easily enter (R11, R2, R20, R19, R1, R12, R10, R16, R5). The MDT's would specifically work better when there was a closer connection with supporting teams (R2, R12, R5).

Many practitioners say that they do not often ask their colleagues for help, because they do not want to claim their time. They have to respect each other's agenda: it is not accepted to make your colleagues' work more complicated and busy (R2, R20, R15, R19, R17, R1, R6, R3, R16). So practitioners are afraid to harm their relations with others by asking for help, because it will cause 'hassle' for their colleagues. However, practitioners want to change this hesitance to collaboration. This '**avoiding hassle**' attitude is illustrated in an observation of an organization-wide meeting in which groups had to present what they had learned in the 'learning journey' (table 6).

**Learning journey presentations I: the play**

The group does a short play. A practitioner walks to her colleague and asks whether she can help with a problem. The colleague ignores the practitioner. The practitioner asks it again in a polite way. Employees in the public laugh. The colleague snubs that she has no time for this and is too busy with her own work: "Can't you solve it yourself?", she asks agitated. Employees in the public laugh. The practitioner walks away sadly. The practitioners play the scene again. The first one asks whether her colleague is able to help her. The colleague reacts positive, and says "Of course!" They discuss the problem shortly and decide to ask a third colleague to brainstorm with them. They solve the problem with each other and thank each other for the help. A practitioner explains after the play that they wanted to show that it is a small effort to help each other, and it brings so much more than just focusing on finishing your own tasks.

Table 6. Observation organization wide meeting II 'the play'

This observation of 'the play' shows that colleagues feel unsafe to ask others for help. The public laughs about the play, which is a sign of recognition; they are familiar with this situation. So, a feeling of unsafety, due to saddle your colleagues up with work pressure, is an explanation for the lack of information sharing.

The frequency of interaction *between* teams is, along the line of the level of information sharing, low. *Within* teams, the frequency of interaction differs. Four teams are positive about the interactions in their multidisciplinary team (R11, R8, R20, R1, R12, R10). Three teams score low in interaction, because these teams are strongly influenced by *personal power*, *coercion power*, *alliances* and *position power*. This means that dominant colleagues 'block' interaction by refusing to take part in team meetings, because they do not find it necessary or important enough concerning their busy schedule (R2, R15, R3). This is done individually through position power (e.g. because of my position<sup>29</sup>, I do not have to be at every team meeting (R2, R14, R19)) or as an alliance ('we do not find this relevant' (R2, R17)). This refusal of joining team meetings can be explained as well as 'avoiding hassle'-behavior: trying to lower your *job responsibilities* by not participating in team meetings. Lastly, there are meetings per 'type' of practitioners, unit meetings and organization-wide meetings. Practitioners have double feelings about these meetings. They complain that there are too many meetings, which interferes with their normal work (R20, R15, R19, R1, R6, R12; observation unit meeting Work & Participation). At the same time, practitioners state that they feel the need to share information and ideas to learn from each other (R11, R2, R15, R1, R12, R10, R3, R16, R5). So on the one hand practitioners would like more interaction, which will provide them *information power*, but on the other, they do not find it worth to spend time to it, because they experience work pressure due to their job responsibilities.

### **7.2.2. Safety to take risks: A double experience**

As we have seen in chapter five (especially in §5.2), fears plays an important role in the organization: fear for avoiding conflict and hassle, fear for making mistakes, failure and being blamed. There is a 'risk frame' constructed in the organization. Practitioners feel that they do not have the *power* to change this *frame* on an individual basis (R11, R15, R19, R1, R16). These fears work as a steering mechanism on practitioners' willingness to take risks in their work (R7, R2, R20, R1, R16, R14, R9). Some colleagues do not want to learn or try new things, and only stick to what they are used to (R7, R2, R16, R14). Some practitioners "torpedo" (R14) new ideas immediately when they are suggested (R7, R2, R16, R14, R9), which is an example of how *personal power* influences behavior of others. Rejection of ideas influences other team members, who do not dare to support new or risky ideas (R2, R9, R14). Avoiding risks and sticking to old ways of working, keeps up the *information and expertise power* and *reputation power* of

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<sup>29</sup> Position power is used in many different ways. Some use their position power because they are client director, and thus captains in the team (R2, R14, R19). Others use their position power because they do not find certain meetings important for their position as participation coach (R2) or process director (participant observation 'not for me').



practitioners. Changing the work could mean that information or knowledge is no longer relevant, which could harm the *expert* (professional) *reputation* of a practitioner.

In chapter five, a non-intervention culture was described. People do not speak up to each other, which consequently allows dominant, 'negative' practitioners to keep on using their *personal power* to hinder risk taking:

"What I find painful is that these two colleagues were very well known for their behavior in their team. And I find it actually very painful, and a very bad thing, that their other colleagues in their room, in their team, have accepted their behavior. [...] In the end of December we received a list from our unit manager, which showed the team classifications. And I was like, nice! Cool. A mix. New people. And their colleagues, they saw my name with theirs, and they were all like, 'yeah we immediately felt sorry for you'. While I think, well, but if you're facing this for years, why haven't you done anything about it?" (R16).

However, the fears that steer practitioners' behavior concerning taking risks does not only come from their colleagues' behavior, but from their managers' behavior as well. Practitioners experience that their management promote using professional space and initiating totally new ideas (R7, R11, R8, R17, R1, R6). To actually implement their ideas, practitioners claim to *want* trust from their managers, and practitioners also *feel* trusted (R7, R11, R8, R15, R19, R1, R6, R3):

"Trust in the sense of, how I, that I just can do my job, in a way that I think is good. That I do not get frames like, we want you to work with your client in this way. [...] No I do my own thing, and my own style, and I am free to do that" (R6).

So practitioners are optimistic and happy about the invitation of managers to come up with new ideas and solutions. By steering upon taking risks, managers shift *position power* and *information power* to practitioners: practitioners may autonomously decide when and how a risk should be taken. However, practitioners still do not use their experienced professional space to take risks (R2, R15, R19, R6, R9). This can be explained by the fact that practitioners experience a form of implicit steering as well: a '**double steering**'. Some feel that using professional space is, in practice (in contrast to what managers *say*), not always appreciated by managers (R12, R15). Practitioners experience that managers strongly steer towards outflow numbers and the reduction of backlogs (observation organization-wide meeting I; observation unit Work & Participation meeting, R7, R18, R20, R15, R19, R6, R3, R14, R9). A manager explains the managerial struggle between being lenient and strict in steering towards taking risks:

"But it would be nice if someone would take good initiative, and that it goes wrong, so you can show like, see, this went wrong, but it is not a problem. Then you would have a nice example" (R9). "You can take the fear of failure away, you mean?" (Me). "Exactly, yes. It is, well. I think we as an organization are still a little double in that" (R9). "What do you mean?" (Me). "That 'going wrong', I know by myself, very much, I just know it by myself that I can deal with it when it goes wrong. But I also know that I will be reprimanded: 'Okay guys, something is wrong'. I am personally not that afraid for it, but the general picture in the organization, also for the employees.. We do are an organization who works for municipalities and municipalities have a council. So making mistakes is always a thing you know, politically sensitive, or perhaps, under a magnifying glass. So the message is double in a sense that we need to be fairly cautious, don't want to make mistakes and have the results in order. Because we are seen, and we are being watched. And at the same time we give the invitation of 'go and play outside, and just do it'. I understand that that is a tricky one, that is why we need to pick out the individual cases and steer upon that, I think it's the best way to steer upon creativity and foster the experienced space" (R9).

The 'double steering' can be an effect of the 'double management challenge of activation' that Duco Bannink (2013) describes. Bannink states that managers in social services have to deal with two challenges. They do not only need to manage a complex task (practitioners facing complex problems of clients), but a conflict of interests from different stakeholders as well. Political pressure (*control of*

*rewards* in the form of political and financial support) on the organization arises when there are high inflow or low outflow numbers that do not fit within their financial framework, or when managers do not focus on the goals that are politically supported and/or expected. So financial and political preconditions influence the way managers can do their work (Bannink, 2013). Although the political and practitioners' demands are often conflicting, managers can benefit from their *power position* between politics and implementation. The manager has a certain freedom to formulate the options of the implementation level to the political actors, and formulate the essence of the political demands for the operating organization. On the one hand, it is about understanding and passing on the requirements from politics and the capabilities and potential of the organization. On the other hand, it is about giving meaning to and translating those requirements and capabilities, reasoning from their own position (Bannink, 2013). This is not a matter of simply passing the message through (Evans, 2011). Managers need to actively use their *symbolic power*: they have to *frame*<sup>30</sup> activation policy for politics and implementation (Bannink, 2013). *Framing* is thus aimed at connecting the demands of the strategic and implementing level of activation (Bannink, 2013).

The management of the ISS aims to serve both politics and implementation level, by on the one hand, promoting professional space and autonomy of practitioners, and on the other hand, being strict on the outflow numbers and number of advance payments. However, this *frame* of the management is difficult to understand for practitioners. Steering towards numbers does not necessarily have to lead to a decrease in using professional space, since using professional space in activation work is expected to lead to more effective forms of activation (Schonewille, 2015). However, using professional space is regarded as a risk of making mistakes/blame, so practitioners do not dare to take their experienced space (R2, R12, R19). This risk perspective shows the experience of a bureaucratic power relationship between managers and practitioners: practitioners want to receive orders from managers how to do their work best (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000). Managers thus still have dominant *position power* and *expertise power*. Anxiety towards managers arises, because practitioners have the feeling that managers are 'testing' them: managers do know what they want, but they are not telling us, as one can interpret from the underlined parts in the following quotes:

"It has, in particular, to do with how the work processes are designed, and work instructions, and that is why I am like, yeah what do you [management] want? How should I do it? And if you then, because you cannot do nothing, then people start to run around like headless chickens. But I notice in particular, like, that some people get an instruction and stick with that command, they take little freedom" (R12).

"While they [managers] probably, what I hear according to everyone, on a basic level, do know which way they want to go with the main line. So you are trying to find things out at the bottom, that is my feeling, and it would be nice, if there was more collaboration I think" (R2).

Some practitioners question which side their managers are on – are they loyal to practitioners or the management team (R20, R15, R12, R3, R5). Evans (2011) describes how loyalty determines how much professional space street-level bureaucrats receive from their middle managers. Middle managers, such as unit managers, have *framing power* in the translation of strategic policy to the implementation level. When middle managers tend to be loyal to strategic management, professional space in the implementation is rather limited. While middle managers who are loyal to street-level bureaucrats tend to provide a larger professional space (Evans, 2011). Unit managers can thus use their *framing power* in *alliances*. This loyalty is often connected to the background of managers: whether they climbed the

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<sup>30</sup> My translation from Dutch: 'duiden'.

ladder from the street-level or come from a management position (Evans, 2011). Both unit managers do not have a background in 'income', which makes many practitioners worried that their managers do not care about that aspect of the work. These worries contribute to the anxiety towards managers' steering: they do not trust the 'double steering' towards taking risks and meeting targets.

The experienced anxiety fits the characteristics of a Foucauldian (1977) *panopticon* effect. Practitioners adapt their behavior to what they *think* is the (unspoken) intention of managers. This means in practice that practitioners do not use their professional space, because they think that their own choices do not match managers' expectations, and fear that they will be blamed or punished when they do make their own decisions (R2, R15, R19, R12, R10, R9). Practitioners are aware of managers' *control of rewards* and *coercion power*, which implies for them a certain desired behavior. The following quotes insinuate that if practitioners would take risks using their professional space, they will be punished for it, while 'friends of the boss' will not. This refers to the idea that through *power from networks and alliances* and *personal power*, one can avoid punishment from managers.

"He is super creative, ehm, and then I hear 'yeah but that is him' or you know, 'He knows [the managing director] very well so he can afford to do that', you know, so, then I think, wait, this is the wrong way" (R9).

"You hear often from colleagues like, you can speak up, but you will be blamed for it eventually, and then I think, well, I find that a shame to hear" (R16). "And how will you be blamed for it?" (Me). "Yeah I have never experienced it. But I do hear it from people." (R16).

The lower quote shows that the power relation between managers and practitioners works automatically and impersonal: it is based upon a general idea, not a consequence of immediate actions by defined persons (only an abstract idea of 'the management'). It is an accumulated interpretation of the experience of 'blaming' actions in the past, even from former managers who no longer work at the ISS (R3, R16).

Practitioners are not only afraid for a wrong effect of taking risks, but are also worried that taking risks costs them time that they cannot spend on their 'normal job'. They expect that they will be blamed for providing disappointing results regarding their caseload, so practitioners are reluctant to do extra things (R7, R18, R2, R19, R17, R1, R6, R16). One can observe here a positive power mechanism that steers practitioners towards *not* taking risks to potential improvements in their work. This behavior can be characterized as a form of 'avoiding hassle': sticking to what is you are used to, because deviation could lead to 'hassle'. This reaction means that 'double steering' does not lead to the desired bridge between implementation (providing professional space) and politics (providing the right outflow numbers).

### **7.2.3. Safety to influence: Who decides?**

Decision making is not experienced as collective by practitioners, but top-down and non-transparent (R2, R20, R15, R12, R10, R3, R5). Managers have power over the *agenda-setting* in the organization. Practitioners experience a distance from management decisions (R20, R19, R3, R16, R5; D16, D19, D20) and they do not feel acknowledged in their *knowledge (information power)* (R20, R15, R10, R5). When practitioners are asked to deliver input, (e.g. about a new accountability model<sup>31</sup>), the room for input is little and about 'managerial' topics that practitioners do not have knowledge about (R2, R3, R12). While decisions about things that they do have an opinion about (e.g. the use of telephones) are taken by managers alone (R2, R6, R19, R20). Practitioners would like to have clearer and more personal

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<sup>31</sup> This accountability model is called 'the bulb model'. This example will be discussed in paragraph 7.4 as well.

communication about decisions and more involvement from upwards to downwards (R2, R20, R15, R1, R12, R16, R5), as two practitioners say:

“I know I can e-mail them, I know I can walk into [strategic manager]’s or [managing director]’s room anytime, but that is not enough. It would be nice if it would be more ‘alive’, and well.. There would emerge more mutual understanding, I think, between management and employee. [...] I will try to approach them more as well” (R20).

“It is harder to make the step upwards than the other way around. [...] Especially when it is not going well, it is nice to see someone. And I hear from others like, ‘yeah now he is nowhere to be seen, the big man’” (R15).

As one can read from the quotes above, practitioners see a role for themselves as well to become more active in the relationship with their managers. Though, they feel hesitant in doing so. This hesitance is kept up by the building of the organization. Practitioners refer to ‘them upstairs’ and ‘us downstairs’ (R20, R15). This fits Foucault’s idea that *panopticon* power relationships are facilitated by the physical environment: managers are not seen, physically not present, but still steer the behavior at the implementation level. Some practitioners argue that they would like to know which dilemma’s their managers have to face (e.g. concerning political pressure), so they can get a better understanding of *why* they make the decisions they have made, since this is often not communicated (R5, R10, R12, R20).

Practitioners are used to a strict hierarchy in which managers or team leaders take decisions. Now, everyone in the MDT is equivalent, which leads to challenges concerning decision making. Every team has two client directors who have to function as ‘captains’ in the team, but they have not yet ‘found’ this leader’s role (R2, R15, R19, R20). Decisions are often made because of *personal power*: strong, dominant characters decide what is done, or not done, in a team (R7, R16, R14, R9). The management is increasingly decentralizing decision making to the implementation level, though. MDT’s will in the near future need to take decisions together with other MDT’s, because they have a collective budget and procured services which they need to distribute among the teams. This provides practitioners with *agenda-setting power*, *information power* and *position power*. Practitioners are worried how they are going to deal with this responsibility (observation client director’s meeting I). “Will we still trust each other?” (R15).

### **7.3. Task orientation: Avoiding change**

West’s (1990) conceptualization of ‘task orientation’ describes a commitment to standards of excellence (§7.3.1), the degree of monitoring and critical appraisal of practitioners among each other (§7.3.2) and the frequency of idea generation in the team according to practitioners (§7.3.3) (Louwen & Loo, 2004). In thinking about task orientation, practitioners at the ISS are mainly focused on avoiding change.

#### **7.3.1. Commitment to task excellence: Diversity is the standard**

As we have seen in chapter five, according to practitioners, there are no standards or guidelines for professionalism. As long as practitioners have experience (R1, R8, R20, R15, R19, R11, R6, R10, R5) and focus on helping the client (R1, R8, R2, R19, R11, R10, R16, R5, R14), they are able to do the work adequately. Practitioners find ‘professionalism’ highly important (R1, R8, R7, R11, R20). A good way of working may be diverging (R1, R8, R11). Even more, some practitioners state that it is good that everyone has a different working style, as long as not everyone works in the same way (R7, R11, R8, R19). This fits the theory of Schonewille (2015), who argues that activation work should be diverse (in the sense of diverging work styles) and dynamic (in the sense that styles should be switched). This case shows that activation work is diverse, but not necessarily dynamic. Dynamism is rather an exception than a working standard at this case (R3, R5, R12).

Practitioners can thus decide that dynamism is only necessary when they think it is, and this decision is, again, based upon the use of ‘professionalism’ that can be filled in by the individual practitioner. In that case, it comes down to a combination of the ‘frames of reference’ of practitioners (Eikenaar et al., 2015) and the (power) pressures from managers, colleagues and caseload. Tension arises when you want to change or challenge existing work methods (R9, R12). A practitioner describes that the willingness to work together and innovate is there, but in practice, people are too focused on retaining their current work methods:

“People do want to, but they have acquired rights, and they want to retain that. That is what I notice in my team in particular. So it requires time, to change that culture. And I notice it among the different departments as well. Sticking to your own, current work methods” (R12)

Sticking to the current way of working at the ISS is, what Foucault (1977) calls, ‘normalized’. This means that an order is established about the behavior in a social context. Changing this order will lead to resistance, correction and/or punishment. This could lead to harm to *information* and *reputation power*, again, because their knowledge about what the best way of working is could not be relevant anymore. This order of diversity and dynamism works as a power mechanism as well: if people work in a different way than you do, you should not question this, and these ideas should not be challenged. However, these ideas allow relativism about the actual content of activation work, since contrasting interpretations are allowed and appreciated.

### **7.3.2. Critical appraisal of the task: This is the way it is, and nothing else**

The degree of monitoring and critical appraisal in the organization is low. As we have seen in chapter five and paragraph 7.2, practitioners do not critique each other, because they ‘avoid hassle’ for their colleagues (R11, R13, R18, R15, R19, R17, R1, R16, R14, R9). Asking about a colleagues’ rationale about the choices in their work, is not appreciated and can be understood as a breach with the normalized order: “the culture is traditionally a bulwark, and you do not touch it. This is the way it is, and it is nothing else” (R12). Many practitioners provide examples of the fact that questioning the other’s way of working is not appreciated (R11, R2, R20, R19, R1, R6, R12, R10, R16, R5; observation ‘the play’). This makes critical appraisal difficult, because there is little space for giving each other feedback. This keeps up influences from *personal* and *reputation power*, because established positions cannot be questioned.

However, since the learning journey, ISS employees feel a strong urge to improve this situation (observations organization-wide meeting II; R5, R15, R19). There is a lot of informal talk about giving each other more feedback (R15, R6, R10, R14, R9) and practitioners propose solutions for creating space for actually giving each other feedback, such as a social contract (observation organization-wide meeting II) and providing an example of desired behavior (as presented in table 5). In these examples, practitioners are reflecting upon the interpersonal behavior and relationships and the effects of behavior on these relationships. Next, practitioners indicate that they want more (individual) appraisal (R3, R14, R16). So an emerging space for critical appraisal in the organization is observed.

### **7.3.3. Ideation about the task: Too busy for ideas**

The frequency of ideation in multidisciplinary teams is low. Two (interrelated) explanations can be distinguished. First of all, practitioners “feel a tension” to come up with new ideas about ways of working (R2, R15, R19). They do not know whether their colleagues are open for ideas for improved ways of working, and fear for a negative response (*personal* and *reputation power*), because “you are already very busy” (R2, R15, R19). Initiating new ideas could mean that you are the evil-doer who saddles

everyone up with more work pressure. So the fear of creating ‘hassle’ for your colleagues works as a power mechanism regarding ideation as well.

But lack of ideation can also be explained by the new, flatter organization structure. Before the reorganization, when practitioners had ideas, they just ‘dropped it’ in a meeting, and the A consultants and team leaders would divide the work or decide what to do with it (R5, R14, R15, R19). Now practitioners have to do this by themselves, they have become hesitant in coming up with ideas. As a practitioner describes, being creative means digging your own hole, because new ideas take time:

“Before, someone would cry like ‘this and that does not work’, and then okay, we are going to discuss it in the A team meeting. Because we used to have four A’s and the team leaders, and they would go brainstorm like hey, how can we do this differently? Who do we need? So eh, people would easily come up with something. I notice that now. By then, people would easily come up with things in meetings, and I notice that now people are like, oh gosh no I am already busy enough, I will let this pass, we’ll see later about that. It is just a different role now” (R9). “So if you propose something now, you know, if I want that something will be done about it, I have to do it myself?” (Me). “You miss the first step. And then I think as well, whatever, it will come another time when I am less busy, and then I think, that is a shame” (R15).

Ideation is thus perceived as taking risks. This behavior of avoiding ideation can be explained from a *reflexivity* theory. The flatter organizational structure is made to work more efficient and problem-oriented instead of structure-oriented (vision document; observation organization wide meeting II). This management idea can be understood as a ‘reflexive’ (Giddens, 1990) or ‘improvising’ (Boutellier, 2011) way of working. Giddens (1990) argues that reflexive workers constantly monitor and adapt their behavior. This reflexive way of working is risky, because we do not know beforehand what the consequences of our work are. Giddens argues that taking risks is not a negative thing, because it is the start of dynamics and innovation. In addition, taking risks brings employees in new situations in which they have to ‘reflex’, which helps them to learn from the past and be better prepared for new, unforeseen situations (Giddens, 2002). Reflexive practitioners are practitioners thus see non-linearity as a chance: they can adapt the situations to their preferences, and are not held back by structures, from for example bureaucracy. Practitioners are thus autonomous in their reflexive behavior, and constantly learn from taking risks, which enables them to innovate in new situations (Giddens, 2002).

Working in MDT’s can be understood as working ‘reflexively’: intuitively finding solutions to new problems, without being hindered by existing structures (Boutellier, 2011). Boutellier (2011) uses the metaphor of the jazz musician to explain how reflexivity, or what he calls ‘improvisation’, works. The music is improvised, but it is not a cacophony. There are rules about what belongs to whose role in the jazz band – the drummer drums, the pianist plays piano, and there are patterns of how the music *can* be played. The jazz band is an example of a network: they work simultaneously together, improvising, and base their actions upon what the others in the jazz band (that is, the network) are doing, and their knowledge about their instrument and the patterns they can play. These are the prerequisites for a well-functioning network, according to Boutellier (2011). They need to know their position in the network they are working in, to be able to get a grip on their tasks and perform them in harmony with their network (Boutellier, 2011). This understanding helps to explain the practitioners’ frustration: they need to work in a new way, improvise, but they do not know their position in the network, nor the ‘patterns’ that can be played. Initiating ideas is seen as a risk: where will it lead to? How much time will it take? At what cost? Boutellier’s idea can also be recognized when managers explain what they think is needed to create space for professional space and initiating ideas and taking risks. As the managing director describes:

“If you experience your space [for professional space], and I think that you are going to experience it only when you understand what your role actually *is*, and that those people come in the loop upwards., and that the people who feel oppressed, [...] and that they will feel further oppressed, and do not have the feeling that they are able to extricate themselves, and do not know how to do this” (R14).

Practitioners feel stressed about their reflexive situation: they have no grip on the situation, their work is a constant reaction to the work that comes in (e.g. clients keep calling all day with questions they need to sort out and answer (R6)), and managers demand time from practitioners for consultation meetings, presentations, learning journey et cetera, and they are held accountable for the outflow numbers (R1, R2, R12, R19, R20). They feel like they cannot make the time to do their work as they would like to do it (R1, R12), because the work pressure (caseload in combination with organizing job responsibilities) is too high, and they do not feel capable of changing this situation. Instead, practitioners wait until things will get better, when they will ‘receive’ space (R6, R19). As a consequence, practitioners feel under pressure, because they do not know how what the best ‘improvisation’ or ‘professional action’ is to the desired end of activation. They think in a bureaucratic structure, ‘wait-and-see’. The described experience of practitioners is in line with Bauman’s (2000) evaluation of reflexive working. Bauman states that it is hard for reflexive individuals to make autonomous decisions, because they do not know where to base their decisions upon since the consequences of their decisions is unknown. This reflects the fear of practitioners initiate new ideas.

Work pressure is an important part of problem: “you are up until here with work, and you do not see the space, you are just overwhelmed with work” (R3). Employees experience high work pressure due to their backlogs, caseload and other tasks (R15, R19, R6, R12, R3, R16). This is in line with Van der Aa’s (2016) statement that activation practitioners have to deal with too high caseloads, which makes them unable to reflect on their work to innovate. High caseloads form a bigger obstacle in activation work than performance management, as Van Berkel and Knies (2015) found in their study. *Control over job responsibilities* is thus an important steering mechanism as well, something Bolman and Deal (2008) have overlooked. Lipsky’s (2010) idea that street-level bureaucrats are under constant pressure from high caseloads and limited time and resources, is still relevant.

#### **7.4. Support for innovation: Supported or obliged professional space?**

West’s (1990) fourth and last factor is ‘support for innovation’. Support for innovation can manifest itself in two ways: articulated support (§7.4.1) – in spoken and written word – and enacted support (§7.4.2), actions that which support innovation (Louwen & Loo, 2004). At the ISS professional space is generally supported, but this support is sometimes experienced as an obligation.

##### **7.4.1. Articulated support: Promotion of using professional space**

There is a high degree of articulated support for innovation by the management, since it is promoted to use your professional space in policy documents and management talks (R8, R2, R20, R15, R19, R6, R10, R3, R16). Practitioners do not always articulate support to new ideas of their colleagues, as exemplified in ‘the play’ observation<sup>32</sup>, and the feeling of being too busy for innovation, due to an experience of time pressure (as we have just seen in §7.3.3). Support from colleagues is also sometimes difficult because of lack of communication. This is due to the fact that new islands seem to emerge between the teams (R2, R10, R11, R14, R19), and especially between implementation and supporting teams (R2, R5, R12).

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<sup>32</sup> See table 4, p. 54 for observation ‘the play’.

Though, as discussed in the previous paragraph, there is an increasing willingness to support each other in generating and implementing new ideas.

In addition, managers see it as their role to provide frameworks to the professionalism of activation practitioners (R9, R18). Practitioners see the role of the manager as one of the problem solver. When practitioner stumble upon a problem, practitioners see it as their manager's role to come up with ideas to solve it (R6, R19). "That is what the management is for! [laughs] That is what they may think of together, what the best solution is" (R6). This can hinder the implementation of professional ideas, because practitioners suggest an improvement to their managers, and do not hear feedback about what will be done about it (R8, R19, R12, R10, R16). This 'wait-and-see' role of practitioners, can also be characterized as a bureaucratic relationship, in which the manager has *framing, position* and *decision making (control of agenda's)*, while the practitioner waits for commands from the manager (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000). Practitioners thus need to hear articulated support (because they expect a 'command') from their managers to take on actions.

#### **7.4.2. Enacted support: Organizing support**

Managers try to support the development of the professionalism of practitioners in actions by organizing sessions in which they can learn to become more autonomous, self-responsible, self-aware and self-organizing (vision document). There are learning journey meetings, an interview technique course, team meetings, practitioner-type meetings, unit meetings, project meetings, and organization-wide meetings (participant observation I). All these meetings are obligated for practitioners, and they have to unsubscribe with their manager or colleagues if they do not want to or are able to participate (R2, R12, R15). So managers exercise *control of agenda's* by literally planning practitioners' agenda's full with courses and meetings that should stimulate and help their quest towards the desired innovative, networking professional. These meetings are, though, not experienced as management support, but as 'things they need to do because the management wants it': an obligation (R20, R15, R2, R12).

An example is the bulb model meeting (R2, R20, R15, R19, R3). Practitioners were invited to think about the best way to approach new accountability methods. However, they were obliged to use the 'bulb model', and this model is introduced in different meetings, spread over a few months, with a fixed topic per meeting. A MDT wanted to start with another topic, because this was a pressing issue for them, but this was not possible (R3). This is also a 'double' way of steering: managers try to organize the use of professional space, but decide how and when this professional space should be used (by obliging to take part in several meetings and courses which are structured in a specific way). Practitioners feel overloaded with work (R7, R15, R19, R6, R17, R1, R12, R3), but still feel obliged to go to all the meetings because they want to satisfy their managers (R2, R15, R19, R12). So it is not experienced as matters that can empower them.

Lastly, practitioners do not feel fully supported in a material sense. There are especially a lot of problems concerning the administrative support, the registration system. Practitioners have to work in two systems, which costs them a lot of time and effort, so half of the time they "copy"/"paste" their work from one program to the other (R2, R12, R15). This is done in different ways, and practitioners argue that it is highly necessary that there comes a uniform system, so they can work in a more unified, efficient way, within and between the MDT's and different departments (R11, R2, R20, R15, R1, R12). Practitioners feel dependent on their managers, because they have *control* over how money is used as *support*.



## 7.5. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide another perspective on the social processes that steer the use of professional space of practitioners at the ISS. Where chapter four aimed at description of who or what influences the use of professional space, this chapter functioned to transcend this description by searching for explanations for the influence of the social context on practitioners' use of professional space. Next, I used the four-factor theory of West to make an analytic distinction between the different aspects of the social context. This theory presented different aspects that allow a researcher to predict to what extent the social context is facilitative for innovation. As discussed in chapter five, an innovative climate is a desired climate for professionals to work in. It enables professionals to experience professional space to develop and improve their profession. The four-factor theory is interpreted from a power lens, to be able to understand how practitioners feel (implicitly) influenced. This analysis has led to answers to the second empirical question about the influence of colleagues (§7.5.1) and third empirical question about the influence of managers (§7.5.2). Lastly, I have formulated an overall conclusion of the results (§7.5.3).

### 7.5.1. Influence from colleagues

The ethnographic findings have shown that practitioners' use of professional space is strongly influenced by their direct colleagues. Therefore, I asked the following question in the phronetic phase:

- *How do colleagues influence the experienced implicit boundaries of professional space of activation practitioners at the ISS?*

Activation practitioners and their colleagues within the ISS mutually construct a boundaries to using professional space, by means of a power mechanism that is characterized as '**avoiding hassle**'. This mechanism is constructed and 'being reconstructed'<sup>33</sup> by a combination of aspects within the climate framework of West (1990). The organization vision towards innovative, networking professionals is clear in an abstract sense, but there are some discontinuities in the translation of this vision to practice. Practitioners hold different interpretations but this does not lead to conflict among them, because practitioners adopt 'avoiding' behavior. They avoid sharing information and interactions with other MDT's and supporting teams. *Personal power* and *position power* is used in the teams to make decisions or to avoid interaction. Practitioners are not open to discussing work methods, because it could change their position and reputation. Change of methods is understood as 'what we did before was wrong', which would harm someone's reputation.

Besides, practitioners feel that the new way of working is no different from what they already do since they 'have always worked professionally'. Behaviour is determined by a fear of getting too busy. This means in practice that practitioners withdraw from (group) interactions and let everyone 'do their own thing'. This approach is even appreciated, since diversity in work methods and styles are cherished. This attitude is restrains innovation to arise, because practitioners do not feel the need to improve their diverging working styles. Appraisal of each other or ideations would then imply to taking the risk to get even busier than they are now, because 'innovating' is an extra task on their list.

I have observed an underlying power source that steers these relations, next to Bolman & Deal's (2008) nine power sources: *control over job responsibilities*. Practitioners do their work in a Lipskian (2010) way: they make all their decisions in a context of limited resources and time. 'Avoiding hassle'

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<sup>33</sup> The phronetic perspective on relational power argues that a power construction is always a process, not a final product. To make this clear, I refer to the combination of construction and 'being reconstructed'.

behaviour can thus be understood as a socially constructive demarcation process of the responsibilities for their caseload and tasks. In a context of 'busyness', everyone tries to limit his/her job responsibilities by defending their caseload and tasks. All activities that can bring their job responsibilities 'at risk', that is, processes that could lead to a higher work pressure or that former working methods are no longer relevant, are avoided. The 'avoiding hassle' mechanism that is observed is thus in line with Van Berkel and Knies (2015) and Van der Aa (2016) who claim that caseload pressure is the most important problem that keeps activation work from innovation.

### **7.5.2. Influence from managers**

The ethnographic phase indicated that managers play a big role regarding the use of profession space in activation work as well. Therefore, the third empirical question was posed:

#### ***How do managers influence the experienced implicit boundaries of professional space of activation practitioners at the ISS?***

Activation practitioners in this study experienced influence in their work due to a power mechanism that is characterized '**double steering**'. This mechanism is constructed and 'being reconstructed'<sup>34</sup> by a combination of West's (1990) climate factors as well. Practitioners experience the factor 'vision' in a 'double way': it is a clear and appreciated vision on paper, but diffusion about the meaning of this vision in practice. While practitioners value the vision of innovative, networking professionals, they feel unacknowledged by it as well: as if their former way of working was 'unprofessional'. This feeling of resentment steers towards a reticence towards the valued and shared feeling of the vision. This double feeling leads to a double belief of the attainability of the vision: practitioners are hopeful and motivated, but at the same time worried how they should deal with it in practice. This is due to a lack of knowledge on *how* to bring this vision in practice, because there is a struggle between managers and practitioners about how the vision should be interpreted and used.

The mechanism of 'double steering' becomes clearly apparent when one looks at the factor 'participative safety'. Practitioners do not feel safe to take risks in their work. They 'know' that they are expected to take risks and try out new things when they find this appropriate, but they do not 'act' upon it, due to a 'double' feeling. Trying out new things is interpreted as a risk for making mistakes and being blamed for it. This idea is confirmed by result steering by managers: at the end of the day, managers want to see a high number of outflow, and practitioners have to decide by themselves how they are going to do this. Because practitioners hold a negative 'risk frame' (Bauman, 2000): they do not dare to take risks because they do not know where this could lead to, or as Boutellier (2011) would say, they do not know the 'patterns' that can be expected. Taking risks and ideation are perceived as the same risk of failure: they do not know where trying out new things will lead to, so it can best be avoided, since practitioners experience pressure from their *job responsibilities*.

I have observed that 'double steering' leads to a *panopticon power relation* (Foucault, 1977) between activation practitioner and manager. Practitioners expect managers to value the outflow results, and because they perceive experiments through a 'risk frame', they avoid risks and try to create 'grip' through rules and procedures. This *panopticon* effect is paradoxical, because managers want practitioners to make their own, autonomous decisions, instead of bureaucratic rule-following behaviour. This 'double experience' of management steering is also reflected in a double experience of managerial support for innovation. While managers provide a lot of articulated support for innovation,

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<sup>34</sup> See footnote 33 on the previous page.

which is recognized and experienced by practitioners. However, this experience is sometimes experienced as an obligation to professionalize, in which the practitioner has little autonomy to decide how this should be done, which leads to frustration.

### 7.5.3. Overall conclusion

This chapter gave insight into the influence of the organizational climate on the behavior of activation practitioners at the ISS. This behavior is explained by specifically focusing on the power relations with and between colleagues and managers, analyzed by the framework of West’s four-factor theory (1990): vision, participative safety, task orientation and support for innovation. Phronetic research is about understanding the whole system of relations (Flyvbjerg, 2012). So while we have discussed the influences structured in “collegial influence” and “managerial influence” in the sub questions, I will not describe the overall system of influences along the line of the West’s four-factor theory.

If we look at table seven below, we see an overview of the experienced we how the innovative climate can be judged. We see that dimensions are often experienced in a double way, due to ‘double steering’ mechanisms. Practitioners often deal with double feelings, but their fears seem to win over their trust in each other and their managers. This leads to behavior that can be characterized as ‘avoiding hassle’.

<b>Vision</b>	Clarity	High and low
	Valued	High and low
	Shared	Low
	Attainable	High and low
<b>Participative safety</b>	Information sharing	Low
	Interaction frequency	Low
	Taking risks	High and very low
	Influence	Low
<b>Task orientation</b>	Excellence	High and low
	Appraisal	Very low
	Ideation	Very low
<b>Support for innovation</b>	Articulated	High
	Enacted	High and low

Table 7. Overview of organizational climate

As discussed in the power lens paragraph in chapter six (§6.4), the way power is distributed in an organization can lead to an ‘underbounded system’ or an ‘overbounded system’ (Alderfer, 1979; Brown, 1983 in Bolman & Deal, 2008). The ISS can be understood as an ‘underbounded system’ in the sense that there is little managerial steering on activation practitioners. Since the reorganization, practitioners have received power to determine how the work should be done. This implied that the power distribution changed from a strict hierarchal one to a more diffuse power distribution that is characterized by organizations in which professionals work. A diffuse power distribution implies a tension between the different power ‘holders’: since power is distributed, it is not clear beforehand how decisions are going to be made.

This tension can lead to ‘healthy’ conflict that stimulates innovation by challenging the status quo (‘critical appraisal’ in West’s terms) and stimulating interest (‘commitment to task excellence’) and

curiosity ('ideation') (Heffron in Bolman & Deal, 2008). On the other hand, the ISS is a 'overbounded system' if we look at the observed implicit power mechanisms of 'avoiding hassle' and 'double steering'. Practitioners' behavior is strongly influenced by these two power mechanisms, which makes them feel as if they do not have agency within the use of their professional space, because they adapt their behavior to their interpretation of the expectation of colleagues and managers. These implicit boundaries lead to 'unspoken' conflict, which seem to provide boundaries to innovative behavior. Development towards innovation in the teams is thus obstructed by the power mechanisms of 'avoiding hassle' and 'double steering'.

This chapter gave insight into *why* activation practitioners feel a hesitance in using their professional space, and how this stands in the way of innovation in activation work at the ISS. The next step is to zoom out from the researched case, and see what these findings mean from a larger perspective. This is done in the next chapter, in which the results will be discussed and the leading question that arose from the research puzzle is answered.

## 8. Conclusion & Discussion

This research started with a research puzzle about the central policy in new welfare states: activation. This policy means for social services that they need to provide tailor-made services in order to “activate” unemployed citizens. Activation practitioners working in social services receive professional space to fulfill this task, but this has not lead to results yet. Statistical research on a national scale shows that activation in the Netherlands is not effective (CPB, 2016; Blonk et al., 2015). Improvement is sought in the professionalization of activation practitioners. Qualitative research shows that activation practitioners have an identity problem: they aren’t bureaucrats nor classic professionals (Van Berkel et al., 2010; Van der Aa, 2012). Activation work lacks a shared body of acknowledged knowledge on how activation should be done. This identity problem is, though, put in perspective by Schonewille (2015), who observed a light, tacit framework of professional standards (*second doing*) that limits the professional space that activation practitioners have (*first doing*). Her observations show that activation is not a chaotic practice, but structured by implicit boundaries (Schonewille, 2015). However, I remarked an ethical problem that relates to this ‘*second doing way of working*’ with implicit boundaries. How are these implicit boundaries constructed? Because we do not know how these boundaries, functioning as ‘light’ professional standards, are constructed, we do not know if this way of activation work is ethical. Therefore, I posed the following pressing research question:

***How are implicit boundaries to professional space of activation practitioners constructed, and is this construction desirable?***

This question is researched in two ways: from an ethnographic and phronetic perspective. The ethnographic perspective provided a *description* of who influences activation practitioners’ experienced professional space, and the phronetic part helped *explaining* how this influencing works. The obtained knowledge in this research is used in this chapter for answering the leading research question in ‘the conclusion’ (§8.1) and reflecting upon the limitations and implications of this research in ‘the discussion’ (§8.2).

### 8.1. Conclusion

The leading research question is answered in two steps: first discussing how implicit boundaries to professional space in activation work are constructed (§8.1.1) and second, making a normative, phronetic judgment (§8.1.2).

#### 8.1.1. The construction of implicit boundaries to professional space

Let us go back to the cover of this thesis. “Post-it Mania” (figure 5): a diverse, structured and cheerful picture. Looking again, a different sense arises: chaos, dominant colors, layers and an overload of different aspects which make it hard to oversee the whole. This double feeling illustrates how activation practitioners experience the professional space in their work. On the one hand, practitioners are very optimistic about the professional space they experience in their work, on the other, it is experienced as a chaotic overload of different influences, which make it hard to actually use their professional space. This ‘double experience’ of professional space in activation work can be explained by the observation in this study that practitioners’ **professional space is implicitly directed**.

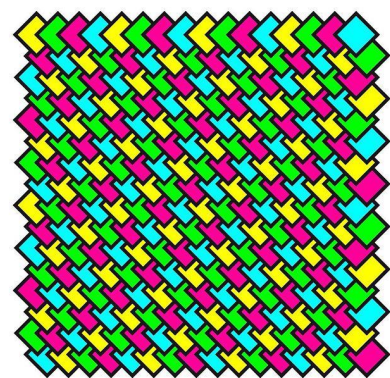


Figure 5. “Post-it Mania” (2015) by Evelien Schouten.

Professional space is directed by two power mechanisms that influence the construction of boundaries to the use of professional space. The results from the ethnographic phase show that boundaries to activation practitioners' space are influenced in the interaction with their direct colleagues and managers. Activation practitioners experience a large discretionary space within the boundaries of the law and policy, and experience autonomous space from their position as well. However, there is a hesitance to actually use this professional space, which cannot be explained from an ethnographic perspective. This hesitance can be explained by a climate in the MDT's that is not facilitative for innovation. A closer look at the different aspects of the organizational climate showed that practitioners often experience mixed feelings about the organizational climate. On the one hand, practitioners are positive towards using their professional space, but on the other, they feel hindered because they have to deal with a lot of fears and pressures from their colleagues and managers. This 'double experience' can be explained by two power mechanisms: 'avoiding hassle' and 'double steering'.

'Avoiding hassle' means that practitioners avoid sharing information and interactions with other MDT's and supporting teams. There is no space for critical appraisal in the organization, nor is there time of ideation. Practitioners perform this 'avoiding' behavior because they have adopted a 'risk frame' on the use of professional space. Using professional space is regarded as a risk for more *job responsibilities*, which leads to a higher work pressure. This behavior aligns with Van Berkel and Knies's (2015) findings that high caseloads have a detrimental effect on activation practitioners' performance. Lipsky's (2010) argument that street-level bureaucrats' behavior is steered by a context of limited resources and time still holds. I used the term 'double steering' for the steering activation practitioners experience from their managers. On the one hand, practitioners experience large professional space in their work and support to use this professional space according to their own insights. On the other hand, managers steer upon results which leads to a panopticon relationship between manager and practitioner. Practitioners do not know how to work more effectively in the light of the work pressure they are experiencing. As a consequence, they adapt their behaviour towards what they think is expected from them by their managers. Paradoxically, practitioners reverse to the rules and procedures that they are familiar with, instead of using their space.

The functioning of these two power mechanisms can be explained by the most important point of critique on activation work: the lack of an acknowledged body of professional knowledge in activation work (Van Berkel et al., 2010; Van der Aa, 2012; Blonk et al., 2015; Eikenaar et al., 2015). The results of this study confirms this problem, because it seems to be the essence of difficulties that 'avoiding hassle' and 'double steering' mechanisms create. The results show that absence of this knowledge makes it hard for practitioners to account for their 'professionalism', as van der Aa (2012) also observed in his PhD study. Moreover, this study indicates that this lack of knowledge is an important aspect in the functioning of the power mechanisms 'avoiding hassle' and 'double steering'. Since practitioners do not know what is expected from them in their new role as 'professionals', they experience work pressure and search for *control of their job responsibilities*. They do not have the knowledge to understand what 'patterns' (Boutellier, 2011) they can expect when they make certain decisions. This creates an anxious feeling towards taking risk, trying out new things or discussing current working methods. These actions towards innovation are experienced as extra *job responsibilities* at the cost of time they can spend on their 'normal work'.

This 'avoiding hassle' behavior does not only restrain innovation, but forms a problem from an ethical perspective as well, as the analysis of the factor 'task orientation' has shown. 'Avoiding hassle'

leads to avoiding critical appraisal of work methods, avoiding ideation and a relativist stance towards how activation should be done, since diversity is regarded as the standard of excellence. This behavior does not fit the moral obligation of professionals to society to keep on developing and challenging their knowledge that is prescribed by Simons and Ruijters (2014). This is problematic, because different 'frames of reference' are accepted as 'professional' approaches to activation. Eikenaar et al. (2015) stated that these different 'professional' frames of activation practitioners can be contradictory and lead to extreme differences in the service provided to citizens. Allowing different 'frames of reference' is thus unfair and arbitrary (Eikenaar et al., 2015). The 'avoiding hassle' mechanism even increases this problem of arbitrariness of different frames, because it shows that practitioners avoid discussing these frames. Since these frames are labeled as 'professional' (Eikenaar et al., 2015), searching for the dialogue seems to be an insult to your colleagues' quality. The content of frames is not discussed and cannot be challenged, while Eikenaar et al. (2015) state that this is highly important to overcome this problem of arbitrariness.

This avoiding behavior worrisome from a 'connective professional' standard as well. Noordegraaf, Steen and Van Twist (2013) argue that professionalism does not have to be focused on sharing the same professional standards, but on sharing relations. This is called 'connective professionalism'. Connective professionalism means that professionals organize relations between members in a field, situations, knowledge, identity and standards, organizations and outsiders (Noordegraaf et al., 2013). When these relations are embedded well, professional member are able to learn from each other, respond to professional and organizational dynamics and outside pressures (Noordegraaf et al., 2013). However, I have not observed a strong embedded relations, and 'avoiding' mechanisms that keep these relations from development.

Likewise, lack of a shared and acknowledged body of professional knowledge on how to do activation maintains the power mechanism 'double steering'. I have observed a panopticon effect as a consequence of this double steering. Managers try to give autonomous space to practitioners by only steering towards results. The managers have collectively decided to not make decisions, since they expect their practitioners to have the 'professional' knowledge to make the right decisions. Practitioners do have the discretionary and autonomous space that is a part of professional work, but lack the technical knowledge, acknowledged and institutionalized in a profession (Blonk et al., 2010; Van Berkel et al., 2010; Eikenaar et al., 2015). This means that practitioners do not know how to make the right decision. This insecurity is increased by the fact that all practitioners use their own style and methods which may not be contested. Moreover, as we have seen above, practitioners try to *control their job responsibilities*, because they fear they cannot meet the targets set by their managers. The lack of knowledge makes practitioners act upon their interpretation of what they think their managers expect from them: the paradoxical effect of the panopticon effect. So practitioners' lack of shared acknowledged body of knowledge leads to conflict between managers who perform a double steering (towards using professional space and towards outflow results) with a panopticon effect which leads to fear to *enact space*, and practitioners who 'avoid hassle' by not taking risks, limit interaction and information with colleagues,

This study has provided an overview of the 'systems of relations' between activation practitioners, their colleagues and their managers. Looking at the 'total system of relations' (Flyvbjerg, 2012) of activation practitioners and how these relations work has shown discontinuities (the observed 'double experience') between these different power relations. While the power distribution between

managers and practitioners becomes more diffuse when practitioners professionalize, practitioners do not act upon this 'professional power', because they are not sure about the *information and expertise power* they are expected to have as 'professionals'. This central observation in this study indicates that there is not only a gap between 'factual' space and 'experienced' space (Hupe, 2009), as often assumed in public administrative research. In fact, a third discontinuity is observed. Professional space of activation practitioners on paper<sup>35</sup> ('factual space'), sense making of this space<sup>36</sup> ('experienced space') and the behavior related to this space<sup>37</sup> ('enacted space'). This third understanding of professional space, *enacted space*, is crucial in understanding discontinuities between policy and practice in activation work. What practitioners *experience* and what they *enact*, is thus steered by different influences.

Former studies on activation have shown that *framing power* is a strong mechanism that creates the experience of professional space, when practitioners think about their work (e.g. 'second doing' (Schonewille, 2015) or 'frames of reference' (Eikenaar et al., 2015)). Policy and ideas about professional activation work makes that practitioners experience discretionary and autonomous space, and make them feel optimistic and positive about moving towards an innovative, networking professional. However, this experience of space is not a sufficient explanation of the behavior of practitioners, since they do not behave according to this experienced space. The results in this study show that practitioners' use of professional space, their *enacted space*, is limited by their colleagues and managers. This creates a 'double experience' of positive feelings and trust towards their future development, and on the other hand negative feelings that are led by power mechanisms, that keep activation practitioners from making the step towards behavior that facilitates innovation and professionalization.

### **8.1.2. Is this desirable?**

The second part of the research question, 'Is this construction of implicit boundaries to activation practitioners' professional space desirable?' is asked to make a normative judgment about the research findings. A normative judgement about the findings is central to the phronetic research approach, since because it ensures the practical use of the findings that can contribute to developments in society (Flyvbjerg, 2012). In this way, phronetic science wants to create societal value. I use the four 'rational-value' questions of phronetic research, presented in chapter six, to make this judgment.

First of all, '*Where are we going?*' In order to make a judgment about the current situation, we need to understand where this situation leads to in the future (Flyvbjerg, 2012). I have chosen to use the 'predictive' model of West (1990), to be able to make a normative judgment about the direction in which activation practice is going. West's (1990) theory describes which factors need to score high to predict the innovativeness of a team. These characteristics of innovative behaviour fit very well within the classic professional perspective. Simons & Ruijters (2014) argue that professionals have an obligation to continuously develop their knowledge, since they receive trust from society that they do their work the best they can. Moreover, professionals need to discuss their technical and tacit, practical knowledge with each other, so this knowledge can be shared, discussed and challenged (Noordegraaf

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<sup>35</sup> As observed in the document analysis and interviews with managers.

<sup>36</sup> As observed from the ethnographic perspective.

<sup>37</sup> As observed from the phronetic perspective.



et al., 2014; Noordergaaf et al., 2013), which fits within West's framework as well<sup>38</sup>. An evaluation of micro practices at the ISS shows that the observed climate is not facilitative for innovation. If we relate these findings on a micro level to knowledge on a macro level (as prescribed by the phronetic approach), we see that activation is not effective on a national scale (CPB, 2016). The combination of this micro and macro level means that activation practice is not going to improve: it is not going to innovate, while this is necessary to be able to change the ineffective results on a macro scale (CPB, 2016; Van der Aa, 2016).

*'Who gains, and who loses, by which mechanisms of power?'* is the second phronetic question. West's framework indicates that the power mechanisms 'avoiding hassle' and 'double steering' contribute to a climate that hinders innovation. There is no true 'winner' in this situation. Practitioners are able to *control their job responsibilities* and cope with their high caseload by 'avoiding hassle'. However, they do not feel comfortable in the 'double experience' of their professional space. So while they succeed to 'avoid hassle', it does not solve their anxious feelings. Managers retain their power through a 'double steering' power mechanism, despite the fact that practitioners experience professional space. This is explained by the steering panopticon effect. But this process is paradoxical concerning the intentions of managers: they want practitioners to take that power to make autonomous decisions.

This makes it easy to answer the following question, *'Is this desirable?'* Practitioners' behaviour does not correspond with their experiences, which leads to undesired feelings of anxiety. Managers' intentions do not lead to the desired effect of a bridge between politics and implementation either. Moreover, as we have seen above, the current situation is not leading to the development of professional standards in activation work. It maintains the current way of working, which is unfair for clients (on a micro level) (Van Berkel et al., 2010; Van der Aa, 2012; Eikenaar et al., 2015) and ineffective on a macro level (CPB, 2016). Moreover, the observed 'avoiding' behavior keeps practitioners from fulfilling this moral obligation to society, since practitioners receive *and* experience autonomous space, as this study showed. As we have seen in chapter one, Schonewille (2015) argues that 'given the complexity of the task with their own individualities, it may be that when activating citizens we want to rely on 'practical wisdom' and the self-order accomplishing capacities of activation practitioners' (Schonewille, 2015). However, given the lack of proof that activation on a macro level actually is *effective* (CPB, 2016; Blonk et al., 2015), it seems naïve to trust the idea that we can trust upon practical wisdom in activation practice. As this research shows, professional activation does not arise when practitioners have received and experience professional space. The 'former bureaucratic' activation practitioner is left with an uncomfortable institutional void. Managers expect practitioners to fill this void with professionalism, but practitioners do not show the desired innovative, professional behavior.

Then, *'What should be done?'* The undesired 'direction' could be changed when the power balance in the organization changes. Practitioners would experience more power if they would develop themselves to the classic professional, and thus experience autonomy, based upon acknowledge and shared knowledge from the profession. If practitioners are continuously busy with developing and discussing their knowledge with colleagues and also practitioners from other organizations in an institutionalized setting, they would create legitimate reasons to make certain decisions. As Boutellier (2011) argues, you need to know what you can do with your position in the network, to be able to

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<sup>38</sup> The following dimensions of West matter from a professional perspective: clear vision, valued vision, shared vision, safety to share information, safety to interact, safety to influence, commitment to task excellence, critical appraisal of the task and ideation about the task.

successfully improvise on the basis of this knowledge. However, this knowledge does not emerge by itself, as suggested by Schonewille (2015) and Boutellier (2011). This knowledge development and discussion has to be organized. If knowledge from practice would be shared on an institutional level, which helps to generate more knowledge about what could be effective activation and what is not. This commitment to knowledge development of activation practitioners needs more attention in the field. There is an important role for the Association for Client Managers. It should become a standard that all client managers become a member of the association and participate in knowledge and network events of the association.

Moreover, activation practitioners, the association for client management ('the profession') and the managers are responsible for steering towards developing this knowledge and seeking for innovation. Next, it is important to keep on sharing ideas about professional standards with other practitioners, outside the own organizational context, because it provides reflection on the different developed 'frames of references' on activation work. Critical appraisal of activation is thus highly necessary in order for innovation towards desirable activation: activation that is both effective on a macro level and fair on a micro level. This should be fueled by the professional association in the first place; because it is her responsibility to monitor and critically assess the professional standards (Simons & Ruijters, 2014). However, to make the professionalization of practitioners effective, activation practitioners, managers and the profession should organize this together and claim their role in this process. These implications for the field are discussed in the next chapter, 'Recommendations'.

## **8.2. Discussion: implications and limitations**

The results of this study are discussed by looking at the implications and limitations. I have studied this research from a managerial and practitioner perspective. It is important to discuss what these findings mean from a policy (§8.2.1), client (§8.2.2) and academic perspective (§8.2.3). Lastly, the limitations of this study are discussed (§8.2.4).

### **8.2.1. Implications for policy**

From a policy perspective, the observed construction of implicit boundaries to professional space in activation work is not desirable. The idea of the participation society is that citizens are responsible for their own social risks (Ellison & Feller, 2013; Trommel, 2013). However, the current way of activation is a risk for the citizen: who is going to be his client manager depends on the treatment he/she will get. This does not fit with the idea that the client is responsible for his/her own social risks; it is the government, in the (ultimate) decentralized form (through the 'autonomously' deciding activation practitioner at the street-level) who is deciding on what conditions a citizen has right to social security. So the current way of working is not desirable from a policy perspective either. This research also shows that it is important to think about what the professionalization of activation practitioners should mean. There should be normative discussion in and between the entire vertical line of activation policy: from client, practitioner, manager, politics to society. The current policy allows a relativism that keeps activation practitioners from choosing a *shared, acknowledged* normative direction that can function as a professional standard, and institutionalized relations to keep on discussing and challenging these professional standards. This is necessary to overcome the problem of arbitrariness.

### **8.2.2. Implications for clients**

These considerations about the lack of discussion about the normative direction in activation work imply that the light and tacit framework of *second doing* that is observed by Schonewille (2015) is not restrictive enough to overcome unfair and arbitrary treatment of clients. Schonewille argues that *second*

*doing* ensures that activation practitioners always use their main approach or their secondary approach, so clients can be sure to be treated in a similar way in their trajectory. From a client perspective, this conclusion is not satisfying. The 'avoiding hassle' mechanism shows that different views on activation are appreciated and cherished. This is problematic, following Eikenaar et al. (2015) who claim that the different frames of references of activation practitioners are so diverse that activation work highly depends on arbitrary preferences of the individual practitioners. This thus means in practice that a client could be sanctioned by practitioner X for not showing enough effort, while practitioner Y will release a client from reintegration duty because he/she has to cope with too much psychological pressure: this creates differences in opportunities and chances between clients, which is not desirable (Eikenaar et al., 2015). When practitioners have a main and subsidiary approach, does not take this arbitrariness concerning the different treatments of clients away. The 'avoiding hassle' mechanism maintains this cherishment of diversity in professional standards. So from a client perspective, the lack of shared scientific knowledge that are translated into professional standards is problematic and most importantly: unfair.

### **8.2.3. Implications for the scientific field**

This research has implications for the research to activation work as well. I have chosen to combine two research traditions. One could question whether a double perspective, combining ethnography and phronesis, was necessary to come to these findings. The conclusion has already described that the phronetic perspective is very important and has proved itself in this research, since a power lens has helped to find underlying mechanisms of behavior. This led to the analytical distinction between 'factual', 'experienced' and 'enacted' professional space in activation work, which is an important contribution to the literature and thinking about how activation practitioners do their work. An ethnographic perspective only helped to locate the most powerful actors, but was not sufficient to elicit how their power position worked. The question then arises whether an ethnographic perspective is necessary to study the influences on the experienced boundaries to professional space. Why not start with a phronetic perspective straight away? If we go back to the research puzzle, we see that we actually had no knowledge on who or what influences practitioners in the construction of boundaries to professional space in activation work. Only Schonewille argued that practitioners are a special type of street-level bureaucrats, who are able to construct their own professional standards (and as I have stated before, I questioned her reasoning). If I would have followed her theory, I would only have focused on the colleague interaction, while this study shows the important influence of *managers* in the 'enactment' of professional space. So, I would argue that an ethnographic start was essential to do this research appropriately, because there was too little knowledge on what could possibly be influencing practitioners in their use of professional space. Another source could also be 'the profession', as one could reason from the professional literature. Therefore, it was important to be 'open to whatever could emerge' at the start of this research. So ethnography and phronesis formed an adequate combination for approaching this research puzzle and triple research aim.

This analysis of the use of the double research approach implies that the study of power is essential in understanding the functioning of activation work. Using a phronetic power lens gave insight into specific power mechanisms that can explain the construction of implicit boundaries to professional space in activation work. If one wants to understand *construction*, one has to study *influence*, which is inherently connected to power. In former research, structuring mechanisms of activation practice are explained by implicit rules and what the discourse of these implicit rules means in practice (Schonewille, 2015; Eikenaar et al., 2015). There has also been research specifically on the steering influences on activation

work, but this research lacks a power perspective as well. Deborah Rice (2013) developed a micro-institutionalist perspective on the implementation of activation policies in the new welfare state. She sketched a broad overview of different influences on activation practitioners, but this framework does not tell us how these influences relate to each other. A power perspective could provide more insight into what these influences actually mean in practice. This study focused in particular on processes and power relations, which provided insight into the gap between 'experienced' and 'enacted' space.

#### **8.2.4. Limitations of this research**

The purpose of this study was to triple: to explore ('*verstehen*'), explain ('*erklären*') and make a normative judgment about influences on the construction of implicit boundaries to the professional space of activation practitioners. These three goals are achieved, but bring some limitations along with them as well.

An important note to make concerning the phronetic framework that was constructed with West's factors is the realization that this climate framework potentially does not do justice to the actual experience of the social context. As we have seen in the discussion about studying culture or studying climate, a climate perspective forces a researcher to assign a certain value to the different dimensions of the factors, which is potentially not close enough to reality. As Poole argued, a social context 'cannot be reduced to dimensions, because they are wholes' (1985: p. 86). So it is important to acknowledge that reality is always more complex than the dimensions that I focused on through the team climate framework.

Next, I have adopted a team level perspective in the phronetic analysis by using West's (1990) four-factor theory for team innovation. This level of analysis can be questioned, though, if we look at the results from this analysis. If one studies on a team level, you would expect specific outcomes per team. However, the results show little differentiation between the different teams. Practically all activation practitioners in this study showed some or a lot of characteristics of 'avoiding hassle' behavior and 'double steering'. This made it useless to distinguish the results per team. This similarity in results per team can be explained by the fact that all the teams have to implement the same policy; they have the same task to fulfill and are steered in the same way. I have only observed differences regarding participative safety between the teams, since some teams have dominant individuals who use *personal power*, as described in the results.

Another important point for discussion is the extent to which the results of this research are generalizable to other cases. This is an interesting matter given the contrasting viewpoints of ethnography and 'phronesis'. Since this study is a single case study, the findings of this study cannot be one-to-one generalized to comparable other contexts. As one could read out through this thesis, I have adopted the stance that these results *can* be generalized to other cases, but only in a 'phronetic' way. This means that the power mechanisms that are observed can *potentially* be transferred to other contexts. This research provided thick descriptions of the processes and showed how these power mechanisms are constructed within an organizational climate. These thick descriptions and thorough analysis make this study a 'powerful example' (Flyvbjerg, 2012) of which other organizations can learn. The thicker the description, the higher the chance it can be 'recognized' in other contexts. However, this does not mean that these power mechanisms are necessarily expected to be present in comparable social contexts; this always has to be proved in practice. The generalizability is in that sense an empirical matter (Flyvbjerg, 2012). That is why it is important to use these concepts in other (comparable) research.

A possible disturbing factor for the explanative power of this research could be 'the reorganization'. A reorganization can be an abnormal situation, in which respondents perform extreme behavior, which will just change 'over time'. This has consequences for the level of generalizability of this research, because practitioners and managers could possibly only perform this behavior when they work in a context of a reorganization aimed towards professionalization of practitioners.

## 9. Recommendations

As Flyvbjerg (2012) argues, social research only matters when it is able to create practical impact. The knowledge obtained in this research is for that reason translated into recommendations for the field of activation work. An explicit, acknowledged and shared body of professional knowledge is necessary to create a new power balance in social services. When practitioners have explicit, shared knowledge on how activation should be done, they are less likely to perform 'avoiding' behaviour. They have more power to come with 'good arguments' about the choices in their work, which fuels a healthy discussion between managers and professionals. However, professionalizing behaviour does not arise by itself, as this study has shown. That is why I have specific recommendations for practitioners, managers and the profession.

### **For practitioners: dare to claim your professional position.**

- Activation practitioners need to realize that they will have more power when they have institutionalized professional knowledge. If they feel supported by other professionals within the profession, practitioners can make a stronger statement about why certain ways of activation are the best way to go. This could take their fears for failure and blame away, because they are better able to make informed and supported decisions that are harder to challenge by their managers. Since managers want to hear 'good arguments', this would be an effective and mutually beneficial solution.
- This implies 'the guts' to take this position. While practitioners feel hesitance to take their professional space at the moment, since they are afraid of the consequences for their individual position, I recommend practitioners to unite and feel strengthened by their institutionalized professional knowledge. Associations have *position power* to claim *information and expertise power*, so be aware of this powerful position.
- Keep on developing *and* discussing your knowledge from practice and knowledge from education. Since you receive autonomous space, you have a moral obligation to continue developing and challenging this knowledge. Most activation practitioners have adopted a certain way of working and stick to that. Consistency does not necessarily lead to good service, as this study has presented. So dare to "connect" and challenge what you know: this is the essential in your professionalism and makes your position stronger. This could feel like 'risk taking' in the beginning or lead to conflict. But conflict can be healthy and useful, as long as it leads to a discussion on how activation should be done.

### **For managers: be patient and guide practitioners in their professionalization process.**

- Wait with treating activation practitioners as fully developed professionals. Since the professional knowledge base and institution is not established and shared yet, it is hard for practitioners, who have always worked in a 'bureaucratic logic', to know what is expected from them. Practitioners need steering and support in discovering their new role.
- Help your practitioners with this discovering process. This should be done by looking for constructive dialogue on the practitioners' vision and tasks orientation. As we have seen with the learning journey: practitioners start to reflect upon their work and start to create an opinion about their work. There is an important basis: a willingness to use professional space. Activation practitioners are thus on the right track towards developing into the desired professionals, but need to be helped to understand their position in their network and how they can strengthen this position by their professionalization.

- The best way to approach practitioners is by ‘micro management’. This means that practitioners learn most from manager – employee interaction and value the personal relation with their managers. I thus recommend managers to take initiative to create more dialogue between managerial and implementing level, to enhance the trust and break the impersonal power mechanism of the panopticon effect. For example, during the research, the managing director has done held conversations with all the teams. This was really appreciated by practitioners and the managers as well. I recommend that the other managers take this ‘time to really talk’ as well.
- The context of high caseloads and *control of job responsibilities* is a recurrent theme in activation work. While I observed a willingness to use professional space and experience of professional space, practitioners often feel overloaded with work, which leads to avoiding behaviour. Stimulate the solution-oriented dialogue about these caseloads. This could give practitioners a feeling of being understood, since their mind is in the first place focused on their work pressure, not on their professional development.
- Practitioners are not going to professionalize by themselves. That is why they need to be steered towards this development. Be careful in the organization of this professionalization that practitioners are still able to ‘own’ their learning process: they want to be able to provide input, feel heard and taken seriously. A fully structured learning process, such as the bulb model, decreases practitioners feeling of autonomy. It could be useful to steer towards professional development *outside* the organization: within the profession. It could for example become obliged that practitioners go to knowledge events from the profession. However, this should not be obliged by managers from a single organization; but an obligation for any practitioner in the Netherlands, so knowledge development becomes central to the work of activation practitioners. This brings me to an important third party that should take her responsibility: the profession.

#### **For the profession: claim your position.**

- The profession is expected to fulfil an important position by providing professional knowledge in the ‘institutional void’ (Hajer, 2003) in activation policy. However, this case showed that practitioners are hardly concerned with the presence of the profession. They identify themselves with their organization, not with their profession. There is a profession since 2012, and this profession should claim its position.
- In 2012, the Vocational Association for Client Managers<sup>39</sup> (BvK) was founded, to facilitate the professionalization of activation work and to monitor the quality of the professional practice of client managers (BvK website, 09-07-2015). Further institutionalization of the profession is highly important (Van der Aa, 2012; Van Berkel et al.; Blonk et al., 2015). It has not yet become self-evident for activation practitioners to be active in the vocational association, to be educated in activating clients, nor is it normal to use recent scientific insights about activation in their daily work. The Cultural Plan Bureau report Promising Labor Market Policy<sup>40</sup> (CPB, 2016), argues that existing knowledge about what works for which client type, is insufficiently used in practice. Scientific insights about which instruments work for who hardly reach activation practitioners. Activation practitioners see themselves as professionals who are most suitable to

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<sup>39</sup> My translation from Dutch: ‘Beroepsvereniging voor Klantmanagers’.

<sup>40</sup> My translation from Dutch: ‘Kansrijk Arbeidsmarktbeleid’.

judge and decide how the client should be helped. They base their decisions on practical knowledge rather than science. Koning (2012) explains this by 'the large distance between on the one hand the abstract outcomes of research that give an estimate of the average added value of an instrument, often measured a long time after the instrument is used, and on the other hand the need of the client manager for concrete information with a face, preferably directly applicable to a specific client' (in CPB, 2016b: pp. 197). So on the one hand, practitioners believe in their knowledge obtained by practice and do not feel the need for scientific knowledge. On the other hand, could there be a wide gap between science and practice, speaking in different languages and talking in abstract terms about specific, complex problems.

- I think it is the profession's role to take up the position of the (facilitator of) the translator from these scientific insights into practice. The profession should not 'wait' until they are discovered and appreciated, but claim make agreements, perhaps with Divosa, that active membership is an obligation if one works as an activation practitioners. The profession needs to stand up and actively join the debate about professional activation and take up their moral obligation to develop activation practitioners' professional knowledge and network.



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## Appendices

### A. Interview respondent characteristics

Table 8. Positions respondents

POSITION:	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
ACTIVATION PRACTITIONER	
- CLIENT DIRECTOR	7
- PARTICIPATION COACH	5
- PROCESS DIRECTOR	3
MANAGER	
- UNIT MANAGER	2
- MANAGER SERVICE	1
- MANAGING DIRECTOR	1
STAFF MEMBER	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 9. Teams respondents<sup>41</sup>

TEAM:	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
MANAGEMENT TEAM (MT)	4
VOLANTIS	2
LYS	3
NORVOS	2
TOLOS	2
OROS	2
YOUTH	3
JOB SERVICE	1
HR	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 10. Managing power distribution

WORKING DIRECTLY UNDER MANAGER:	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
MANAGING DIRECTOR	1
MANAGER SERVICE	2
UNIT MANAGER WORK & PARTICIPATION (W&P)	6
UNIT MANAGER DIRECTION (D)	9
NO ONE	1
UNKNOWN	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 11. Male-female ratio respondents

SEX:	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
MALE	8

<sup>41</sup>To ensure anonymity, names of cities from the HBO-series *Game of Thrones* are used instead of the names of the places the ISS works for. ISS-teams that were not appointed to a certain area, but to a certain task, got an adjusted team name, which still covers the task of the team.

FEMALE	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 12. Age distribution respondents

AGE CATEGORY:	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
<30	1
30-35	3
36-40	7
41-45	3
46-50	1
51-55	3
56-60	0
60-65	4
>65	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 13. Interview time

INTERVIEW TIME:	MINUTES
MEAN	60,55
SHORTEST	45
LONGEST	102
SUM OF ALL INTERVIEWS	1211

## B. Sensitising concepts & research questions

### ***B-1. Sensitizing concepts: open interviews***

The research puzzle was explored through rather open sensitizing concepts based on the four rational-value questions of the phronetic method: ‘where are we going?’; ‘is this development desirable?’; ‘what should, if anything, we do about it?’; and ‘who gains, who loses?’. These questions led to the following sensitising concepts: (a) work; (b) values; (c) puzzles; (d) future; and I professional space. These sensitising concepts developed along with the process of narrowing down the research focus.

By focussing on ‘work’, I would get a general idea about practitioners and managers experience activation work. It helps me to understand how they see activation work and what is currently plays a role in their work. What is regarded as important was specifically addressed by the sensitising concept ‘values’. Focussing on values enables a researcher to understand what things mean to people, what drives them and what is critical to them. The topic ‘puzzles’ helped me to find a focus in the research: what is currently experienced as problematic, what is a bottleneck for the respondents/the organization? The topic ‘future’ gives insight into what direction the respondents/the organization would like to go in the future. It gives an indication about what is desired and what is not. The topic ‘professional space’ was used because this is a central topic in my research puzzle. The phronetic power-question, ‘who wins and who loses’, was not used in the sensitising concepts, because it is an overall judgment about the research results. Besides, the phronetic approach implies a power perspective on the answers to all questions.

I found in policy documents two leading stories of the organization: the reorganization and the organizational culture. So I used these two topics to find respondent's experiences and stories.

SENSITISING CONCEPTS	OPEN QUESTIONS
Work experience	<i>Could tell me something about your work?</i>
Values (what is important)	<i>What is most important in your work? Can you mention for example 3 things? What influences what you find important?</i>
Puzzles (where are we going)	<i>What are, at the moment, questions about your work that keep you busy?</i>
Future (what, if desired, should be changed)	<i>What, if anything, would you like to change in your work?</i>
Space for professional space	<i>How does professional space play a role in your work? What should I pay attention to when I am studying professional space in this organization? What facilitates professional space in your work? What hinders professional space in your work? To what extent do you experience space for professional space?</i>
Other factors	<i>What influences your experienced space for professional space (which we have not discussed yet)?</i>
Story telling	<i>How did you experience the reorganization? How would you describe the organizational culture?</i>
Follow-up questions	<i>What do you think about that? Can you give me an example? What was it like for you? How did your colleagues experience this? How did your colleagues react? How did the managers react? What was it like before the reorganization? How did it change for you? Why ...? How ...?</i>

Table 14. Sensitising concepts of ethnographic phase

### ***B-II. Sensitizing concepts: in-depth interviews***

SENSITISING CONCEPTS	OPEN QUESTIONS
Work experience	<i>Could tell me something about your work?</i>
Values (what is important)	<i>What is most important in your work? Can you mention for example 3 things? What influences what you find important?</i>
Managers	<i>How do managers influence your work?  What do you think about the policy From Bulwark to Network? What do you think about the reorganization? How do managers respond to new ideas?</i>
Colleagues	<i>How do colleagues influence your work? How do others respond to new ideas?</i>
Ideas about professionalism	<i>Could you tell me something about your work? What does 'working as a professional' mean for you? How do you see your position in the organization? How do you like it? [Dutch: hoe bevalt het?]  How do you experience your new role?</i>
Space for professional space	<i>What facilitates professional space in activation work? What hinders professional space in activation work? What influences your experienced space for professional space?</i>



	<i>To what extent do you experience space for professional space?</i> <i>What influences your space for professional space what we have not yet talked about?</i> <i>How do others respond to new ideas?</i>
<b>Story telling</b>	<i>How did you experience the reorganization?</i> <i>How would you describe the organizational culture?</i>
<b>Puzzles (where are we going)</b>	<i>What are, at the moment, questions about your work that keep you busy?</i>
<b>Future (what, if desired, should be changed)</b>	<i>What, if anything, would you like to change in your work?</i>
<b>Follow-up questions</b>	<i>What do you think about that?</i> <i>Can you give me an example?</i> <i>What was it like for you?</i> <i>How did you experience that?</i> <i>What was it like before the reorganization?</i> <i>How did it change for you?</i> <i>Why ...?</i> <i>How ...?</i>

Figuur 15. In-depth interviews

## C. Analysis schemes

### C-I. Phronetic perspective on data

After the first ethnographic exploration, I added a phronetic lense on the findings of chapter 3. Figure 16 shows which questions were asked for which sensitising concepts, and how they *could* relate to West's Four Factor Theory. Results were presented in chapter 4.

SENSITISING CONCEPTS	OPEN QUESTIONS	WEST'S FOUR FACTOR THEORY (1990)
<b>Work experience</b>	<i>Could tell me something about your work?</i>	Vision, Task orientation
<b>Values (what is important)</b>	<i>What is most important in your work? Can you mention for example 3 things?</i> <i>What influences what you find important?</i>	Vision, Task orientation Vision, Participative safety, Support for innovation, Task orientation
<b>Managers</b>	<i>How do managers influence your work?</i> <i>What do you think about the policy From Bulwark to Network?</i> <i>What do you think about the reorganization?</i> <i>How do managers respond to new ideas?</i>	Participative safety, Support for innovation Vision Vision, Support for innovation Participative safety, Support for innovation
<b>Colleagues</b>	<i>How do colleagues influence your work?</i> <i>How do others respond to new ideas?</i>	Participative safety, Support for innovation
<b>Ideas about professionalism</b>	<i>Could you tell me something about your work?</i> <i>What does 'working as a professional' mean for you?</i> <i>How do you see your position in the organization?</i> <i>How do you like it? [Dutch: hoe bevalt het?]</i> <i>How do you experience your new role?</i>	Task orientation, Vision Task orientation, Vision Task orientation, Vision Participative safety Task orientation, Participative safety, Support for innovation, Vision
<b>Space for professional space</b>	<i>What facilitates professional space in activation work?</i> <i>What hinders professional space in activation work?</i> <i>What influences your experienced space for professional space?</i> <i>To what extent do you experience space for professional space?</i>	Could all be related to all four factors.

	<i>What influences your space for professional space what we have not yet talked about?</i> <i>How do others respond to new ideas?</i>	
<b>Story telling</b>	<i>How did you experience the reorganization?</i> <i>How would you describe the organizational culture?</i>	Could all be related to all four factors.
<b>Puzzles (where are we going)</b>	<i>What are, at the moment, questions about your work that keep you busy?</i>	Could all be related to all four factors.
<b>Future (what, if desired, should be changed)</b>	<i>What, if anything, would you like to change in your work?</i>	Could all be related to all four factors.
<b>Follow-up questions</b>	<i>What do you think about that?</i> <i>Can you give me an example?</i> <i>What was it like for you?</i> <i>How did you experience that?</i> <i>What was it like before the reorganization?</i> <i>How did it change for you?</i> <i>Why ...?</i> <i>How ...?</i>	Could all be related to all four factors.

Table 16. Sensitizing concepts of phronetic phase

All sensitising concepts from figure 16 and West’s factors – except from ‘storytelling’ and ‘follow-up questions’ because they function as “interview quality enhancers” – are used for coding the transcripts, organizational documents, observation reports and drawings in *Nvivo*.

## **C-II. Power lenses**

### **Power sources (Bolman & Deal, 2008):**

- Position power (authority)
- Control of rewards (accessibility of money and (political) support)
- Coercion power (block, intervene or punish)
- Information and expertise (specific know-how; knowledge)
- Reputation (track record as proof of expertise)
- Personal power (social characteristics)
- Alliances and networks (relations within a group, enemies and friends)
- Access and control of agendas (access to decision making areas)
- Framing: control of meaning and symbols (knowledge is power; normative control instruments).

### **Power characteristics (Flyvbjerg, 2012):**

- Power is both negative (restrictive) as positive (productive).
- Power is relational in centres and institutions, not positions.
- Power needs to be appropriated and reappropriated, thus not constant, dependent on relations of strength, tactics and strategies.
- Knowledge and power are analytically inseparable

## **C-III. Code trees**

### **Ethnographic part:**

- Experience of professional space
  - o Activation work is regarded as work of a professional
    - Space is experienced by practitioners because they feel like professionals (autonomy)

- Practitioners experience freedom from their management in the use of their professional space (discretionary)
    - Managers think practitioners still need to learn to be professional
      - But practitioners are treated already as professionals, as a way to learn it (provide autonomous safety, but have the last say in what is a “good argument”)
      - It is the manager’s role to not support them in their bureaucratic behavior, which they show according to managers
- Use of professional space
  - Hesitance of using prof. space
  - Abstract experience of ‘the organizational culture’ hinders use of prof. space
    - Conflict avoiding
      - Sweet
      - Non-intervention
    - Culture of fear
      - Fear of making mistakes (failure)
      - Fear for speaking up (complaining behind back)
      - Fear for hassle
      - Fear of being blamed
  - Reason for not using space
    - Practitioners blame colleagues who are typical civil servants and non-cooperative
    - Managers have bureaucratic idea in mind of practitioner’s behavior
    - Strong rule orientation
    - Organization is not professional enough
- Accountability of professionalism
  - Prof. space is free, as long as practitioners have ‘good arguments’
  - But practitioners ask for rules, so they do not have to come up with ‘good arguments’
  - When it is not sure if an argument is good > quantification
- Reorganization [org. structure]
  - Working in multidisciplinary teams
    - Should increase use of professional space
      - Self-leadership
      - Overseeing work processes
      - Networking
      - Evaluating and reflecting upon work
      - Guidance from managers
    - But practitioners have no idea how
    - Managers treat practitioners already as professionals

**Phronetic part (climate factors + power lens):**

- Vision
  - The degree of clarity of team objectives (clarity)
  - The degree that objectives are valued (perceived value)

- Network to bulwark does not do justice to what we do
    - Professionalism idea is valued
  - The degree of agreement about team objectives (shared)
    - Practitioners claim all to be proponents of:
      1. Adapt to challenges from decentralizations
      2. Stronger position in the social domain
      3. Reduce organizational costs
      4. Work more effectively and efficiently
      5. Get all clients in the picture
      6. Give space for professionals to do their work
      7. Create a more professional culture
  - The degree that team objectives are viewed as realistic and achievable (attainability)
- Participative safety
  - The degree to which information is shared (information sharing)
    - Practitioners have no idea what is going on in other teams.
      - They would like to know, they feel as if knowledge is getting lost.
      - Knowledge about who is good in what (network no longer relevant)
  - The degree to which one is willing to take risks (safety)
    - People feel that they can take risks from their autonomy and discretionary space, but do not do it
      - Because, they have risk perspective on their work.
        - Framing power of fears: practitioners create a fear frame / risk frame / avoiding power conflict
    - Fear for reaction of colleagues
      - Personal power, coercion power
    - Fears related to management.
      - They feel that they cannot do it, concerning what their managers are expecting from them.
      - Double steering
        - Due to double management challenge of activation
        - Doubt about loyalty managers
      - Leads to panopticon effect
        - restrictive power, because of control of rewards, coercion power, position power, reputation, personal power, information and expertise
      - Taking risks could weaken your position
        - position, knowledge, coercion, control of rewards
  - The degree to which decision-making is collective (influence)
    - Managers take decisions about what is done
      - Top down, bureaucratic
    - Practitioners would like to hear more why they take certain decisions, make it collective.
      - Access and control of agendas
    - When managers do ask for input, most practitioners experience this as pre-programmed

- Access and control; information and expertise
  - Flat hierarchy in MDT
    - Personal power
- Level of team interaction (interaction frequency)
  - A lot of meetings
  - But due to other priorities, they are often not complete
  - General rule: ‘Leaving your colleagues alone’, avoiding hassle!
    - Alliances
- Task orientation
  - The degree of commitment to high standards (excellence)
    - Diversity and dynamism allows relativism
    - Discussion about task division
      - Bureaucratic reaction
  - The degree of monitoring and critical appraisal of each other (appraisal)
    - Vertical monitoring en appraisal on results, not horizontal
      - Avoided (avoiding hassle)
  - The frequency with which members feel ideas are generated in the team (ideation)
    - Seen as a risk: digging your own hole
- Support for innovation
  - The degree to which the teams encourages innovative activities (articulated support)
    - Panopticon effect of politics: we are being watched, so making mistakes is not allowed [managers]
    - Managers strongly recommend to use professional space
  - The degree of practical support for the team (enacted support)
    - Practitioners are responsible for the budget.
    - Support is experienced as an obligation
    - Practitioners do not feel supported by supporting teams

## D. Observations & documents

Table 9 presents the hours of observation in this research, and table 10 presents the different documents that are 93pprox.93.

### D-I. Observations

*Table 17. Observations*

OBSERVATIONS	HOURS
INDIVIDUAL CLIENT MEETINGS	4,5 (4 meetings of 93pprox.. 30 min)
MANAGERS MEETING IMPROVEMENT SESSION	1
MANAGEMENT TEAM SERVICE MEETING	1
PARTICIPATION AND WORK WORKSHOP	3
YOUTH WORKSHOP	2
WORKSHOP REDESIGN	2
QUARTERLY MEETING UNIT WORK AND PARTICIPATION	2
ORGANIZATION WIDE MEETING I	2,5

ORGANIZATION WIDE MEETING II	4
CLIENT DIRECTORS MEETING I	1
CLIENT DIRECTORS MEETING II	1
MEETING IMPLEMENTATION LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT	1
JOB APPLICATION TRAINING	2
EXTERNAL LOCATION GUIDED TOUR WITH PARTICIPATION COACH	1,5
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AT THE WORKFLOOR (WORKING AT THE ISS)	349
SMALL TALK INTERN	0,5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>356,5</b>

## D-II. Documents

Table 28. Documents

### DOCUMENTS

VISION DOCUMENT
ORGANIZATION DESIGN DOCUMENT
POWERPOINT PRESENTATION 'STEERING IN THE SOCIAL DOMAIN'
TWO-YEAR PLAN ISS 2015-2016
INTRANET INFORMATION

## E. Drawings

In external, confidential appendix

## F. Tables on perspectives on professionalism

Table 19. Overview perspectives on professionalism in activation work by practitioners

<i>Perspectives on professionalism</i>	<i>Times mentioned by practitioners</i>
<i>Doing your work conscientiously / knowing what you can and cannot do within the rules and regulations</i>	3
<i>Having experience in activation work, which means doing the work for a long time.</i>	8
<i>Helping clients 'in time', preferably as quick as possible.</i>	6
<i>Taking/feeling responsibility for your tasks.</i>	3
<i>Serving the client / have eye for the individual circumstances</i>	6
<i>Being interested in knowledge development. Some refer to knowledge within the social judicial field, others from broader literature, e.g. psychology.</i>	4
<i>Having experience from jobs in other fields.</i>	2
<i>Having a higher (social judicial) education</i>	4
<i>Standing for your decision and defend it with good arguments.</i>	2
<i>You have to know and adapt to the consequences of legislative change. While others say that the work does not change because of legislation or policy (R5).</i>	2
<i>Having short lines with colleagues and communicate clearly and friendly with them</i>	2
<i>Serving your employer / meeting targets</i>	2
<i>The appropriation of certain subjects, being a subject owner (R7). Feeling responsible that certain topics are 'picked up', for example European funding.</i>	1

<i>Keep on exchanging thoughts with colleagues.</i>	3
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Table 203. Overview perspective on professionalism in activation work by managers

<b><i>Perspectives on professionalism</i></b>	<b><i>Times mentioned by managers</i></b>
<i>Reflecting on your own abilities and performance</i>	3
<i>Reflecting on your colleagues abilities and performance</i>	4
<i>Giving feedback to your colleagues and managers</i>	4
<i>Making autonomous decisions based upon 'good arguments'</i>	4
<i>Taking responsibility for your decisions</i>	3
<i>Knowing how your actions influence others</i>	3
<i>Having administrative sensitivity</i>	2
<i>Networking (looking for connection) with stakeholders, but also within the organization</i>	4
<i>Being proud on your achievements and performance, and "craftsmanship" (professional pride)</i>	3

### **G. Overview of interview respondent characteristics**

In external, confidential appendix

### **H. Interview transcripts**

In external, confidential appendix.

### **I. Field notes**

In external, confidential appendix.