FRONTLINE BOUNDARY SPANNERS

HOW FRONTLINE BOUNDARY SPANNERS CREATE COMMON GROUND BETWEEN CITIZENS, SOCIAL SERVICES, POLICY MAKERS AND OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS IN COMPLEX SOCIAL POLICY SETTINGS

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Master thesis

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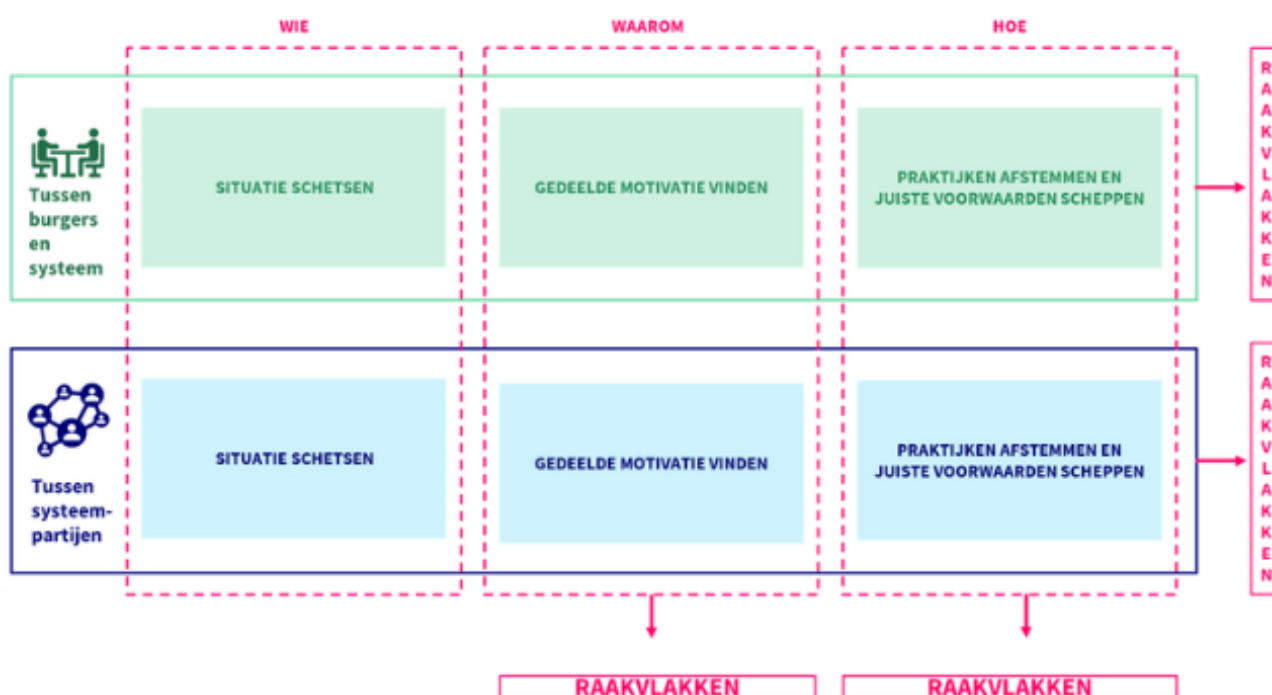# VERBINDERS AAN DE FRONTLINIE

HOE FRONTLINE BOUNDARY SPANNERS RAAKVLAKKEN CREËREN TUSSEN BURGERS, DIENSTVERLENERS, BELEIDSMAKERS EN ANDERE STAKEHOLDERS

WAT FRONTLINE BOUNDARY SPANNERS DOEN

- Legt verbinding tussen **burgers** en **(overheids)systemen** én bouwt **netwerk van partijen binnen deze systeemwereld.**
- Acteert primair binnen **netwerk** op **operationeel niveau** en in **direct contact met de burger**
- Zoekt naar **duurzame systeemoplossingen** voor doelgroep en **creatieve maatwerkoplossingen** voor individuele burgers.

WAAROM EN HOE FRONTLINE BOUNDARY SPANNERS RAAKVLAKKEN CREËREN

- Verschillen tussen actoren vormen **potentiële bronnen van ambiguïteit** die **gezamenlijke actie** tussen hen kunnen verhinderen.
- Frontline boundary spanners zoeken daarom naar **raakvlakken** voor gezamenlijke actie ondanks deze ambiguïteit via **drie stadia:**

	WIE	WAAROM	HOE	
Tussen burgers en systeem	SITUATIE SCHETSEN	GEDEELDE MOTIVATIE VINDEN	PRAKTIJKEN AFSTEMMEN EN JUISTE VOORWAARDEN SCHEPPEN	RAAKVLAKKEN
Tussen systeem-partijen	SITUATIE SCHETSEN	GEDEELDE MOTIVATIE VINDEN	PRAKTIJKEN AFSTEMMEN EN JUISTE VOORWAARDEN SCHEPPEN	RAAKVLAKKEN
		RAAKVLAKKEN	RAAKVLAKKEN	

SUCCESFACTOREN EN VOORWAARDEN VOOR FRONTLINE BOUNDARY SPANNERS

- Voldoende **aandacht voor alle drie de stadia**
- **Dekking** vanuit strategisch/beleidsniveau
- **Tijd** om alle drie de stadia te kunnen doorlopen
- Een **autonome** en **onafhankelijke positie**

"I view the system surrounding at-risk youths as a marbles track. You only know how it works once you put a marble in and see whether it rolls down, or where it becomes stuck or drops out. That is how I view the network. And the coach has a couple of nice marbles in his pocket. And he throws them in and therefore knows where they get stuck and for what reasons. And then he knows who and what to tweak to make it work."'

- Project leader Red Carpet Coaching program Schiedam

ABSTRACT

This research studies how frontline boundary spanners (FBSs) create common ground between citizens, service providers, policy makers and other relevant stakeholders in complex social policy settings. A framework is developed grounded in empirical data from interviews with (frontline) boundary spanners, depicting the three-stage process of FBSs creating common ground between citizens and the system world, and between parties within this system world. Additionally, this study provides an illustrative case describing 'Red Carpet Coaches' as FBSs creating common ground, using the framework to understand their behavior. This study emphasizes the relevance of distinguishing between frontline and strategic boundary spanning and calls for more research addressing this specific type.

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Het publieke domein in Nederland wordt geconfronteerd met steeds meer complexe of soms zelfs 'wicked' vraagstukken. Dat levert voor (lokale) overheden en maatschappelijke partijen een paradox op; aan de ene kant kunnen zij deze problemen niet alleen oplossen, maar aan de andere kant vergroot het betrekken van veel verschillende partijen de ambiguïteit van de situatie omdat de doelen, belangen en waarden van betrokken organisaties kunnen schuren en soms zelfs botsen. Daarnaast staan lokale overheden sinds de decentralisaties van 2015 voor een grote uitdaging door nieuwe verantwoordelijkheden en verschoven (doch beperkte) budgetten. Van hen wordt verwacht 'dichtbij de burger' te staan, daardoor 'maatwerk' te kunnen leveren en 'de burger centraal' te stellen. In dit ingewikkelde speelveld en onder druk van deze tendensen worden steeds meer *integrale persoonsgerichte programma's* opgezet waarin integraal werken, oog voor het individu en het bieden van maatwerk voorop staan.

Een voorbeeld van zo'n integraal persoonsgericht programma is *'Rode Loper Coaching'*. Rode Loper Coaching is geïnitieerd door het ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid en heeft als doel preventief jongeren (vaak met multi-problematiek) die het risico lopen in de criminaliteit te raken, aan scholing of aan werk te helpen. Elke jongere in dit programma krijgt een coach die hem of haar door het doolhof van beleid, (overheids-)systemen en loketten helpt en op die manier problemen zo effectief mogelijk aanpakt. Het succes van deze coaches is daarbij afhankelijk van de kwaliteit en kracht van het netwerk rondom deze risicojeugd – ofwel in de metaforische taal van het programma: de 'rode loper'.

De coaches hebben een tweeledige doelstelling: aan de ene kant begeleiden ze jongeren in de aanpak van hun problemen en het stroomlijnen van de interactie met dienstverleners en instituties. Aan de andere kant moeten zij deze dienstverlenende partijen bij elkaar brengen en een duurzame en sterke samenwerking tussen hen bouwen. Dit soort functionarissen worden *boundary spanners* genoemd – *verbinders* van verschillende organisaties, afdelingen, processen en mensen. De coaches treden op aan de *frontlinie* van de uitvoering – ze hebben direct en regelmatig contact met jongeren en moeten continu op zoek naar raakvlakken tussen de leefwereld van deze jongeren en de verschillende taken, bevoegdheden, rollen en routines van de vaak talrijke publieke professionals die zich met hen bemoeien.

Onderzoeksvraag

Ik noem deze coaches daarom *frontline boundary spanners* (FBS): verbinders op het frontlinieniveau van cliënten. Daar zijn er in Nederland inmiddels meer van gekomen; denk bijvoorbeeld aan de *re-integratie officier, gezinsmanager* en de *wijkagent.* Toch lijkt in academisch onderzoek naar *boundary spanning* vooral aandacht te bestaan voor *strategische boundary spanners* die op beleidsmatig niveau opereren. Er is daardoor nog maar zeer weinig bekend over de praktijken van deze FBS'ers en specifiek hoe zij het voor elkaar boksen om *raakvlakken* te creëren tussen de vele verschillende actoren waarmee zij te maken hebben. Daarom beantwoord ik in dit onderzoek de vraag: *Hoe creëren frontline boundary spanners raakvlakken tussen burgers, dienstverleners, beleidsmakers en andere stakeholders in complexe sociale beleidscontexten?*

Onderzoeksaanpak

Ik probeer in dit onderzoek deze vraag op twee manieren te beantwoorden. Ten eerste door een conceptueel raamwerk te ontwikkelen dat is gebaseerd op interviews met *(frontline) boundary spanners*. Dit raamwerk brengt in kaart hoe FBS'ers samenwerking op gang helpen en houden tussen verschillende partijen in de systeemwereld (zoals verschillende dienstverleners, gemeentelijke afdelingen en domeinen, publieke en private organisaties en beleidsmakers) onderling én tussen deze 'systeempartijen' en de leefwereld van burgers. Ten tweede laat ik zien hoe dit in de praktijk kan worden toegepast in een *case study* over Rode Loper Coaching. Ik illustreer dit in het bijzonder aan de hand van vier verhalen over Rode Loper Coaches en hun alledaagse werkpraktijken.

Dit onderzoeksproces leidde tot drie belangrijkste bevindingen.

Bevinding 1: Verbinders tussen systemen en clienten

Dit onderzoek laat zien dat er een duidelijk verschil bestaat tussen *boundary spanners* op strategisch niveau en *frontline boundary spanners*. Waar *strategic boundary spanners* acteren op strategisch of beleidsniveau, daar bevinden FBS'ers zich primair in operationele netwerken én in direct contact met de burger – en verbinden zij deze met elkaar. Ook hebben *strategic boundary spanners* vaker een generiek en afstandelijk beeld van burgers als *doelgroep* en zoeken ze naar verbinding voor duurzame oplossingen voor deze doelgroep, terwijl FBS'ers daarnaast ook zoeken naar creatieve, maatwerkoplossingen voor individuele burgers met wie zij te maken hebben. Dit is een belangrijk onderscheid om te maken in zowel onderzoek als praktijk, omdat het betekent dat een ander type persoon, met andere competenties, ervaring en netwerk, nodig is om deze taken uit te voeren. Er simpelweg vanuit gaan dat iemand allebei is of kan, kan tot teleurstellende resultaten leiden.

Bevinding 2: Hoe frontline boundary spanners raakvlakken creëren

Dit onderzoek laat daarnaast zien dat FBS'ers raakvlakken creëren middels een proces dat op te delen is in drie stadia. Dat proces bestaat uit het zoeken naar antwoorden op drie relatief simpele vragen: (1) met *wie* hebben we te maken? (2) *waarom* moeten ze samen actie ondernemen? En (3) *hoe* kunnen ze dat doen? Deze vragen spelen zowel bij het zoeken naar raakvlakken tussen systeempartijen, als tussen deze partijen en burgers. Dit proces is afgebeeld in onderstaand figuur.
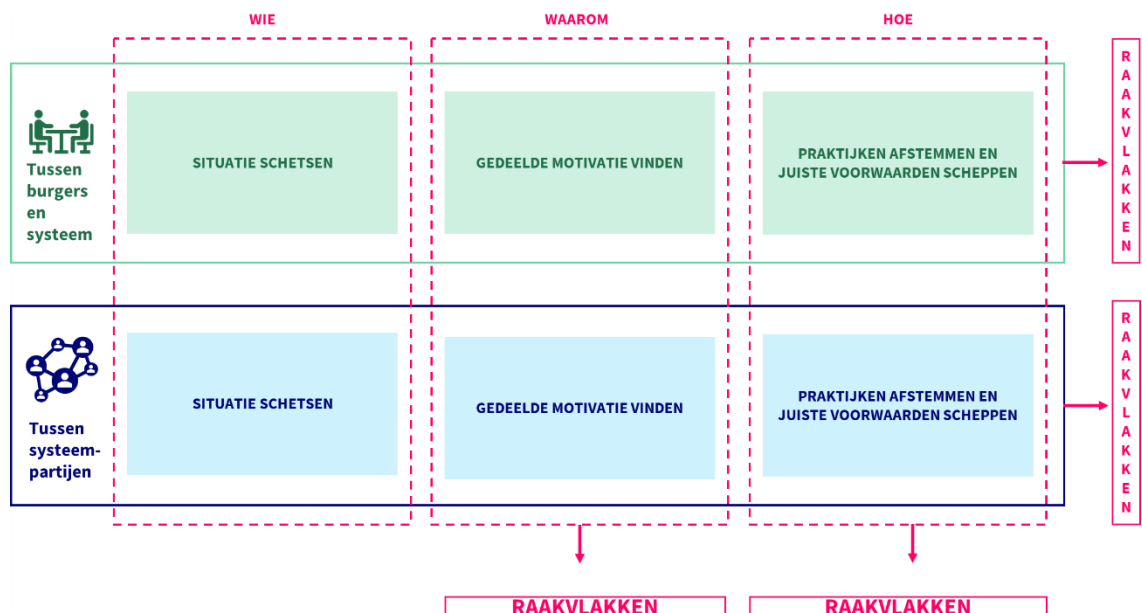
In het eerste stadium moet de FBS de *situatie schetsen*. Hierbij is de FBS nog niet bezig met het daadwerkelijk creëren van raakvlakken, maar met de cruciale voorbereidingen hiervan door duidelijk te krijgen *wie* in het spel zijn. De FBS probeert een beeld te schetsen van de doelgroep, de casus van de individuele burger goed en hoe de verschillende betrokken partijen werken, en moet vooral goed in kaart kunnen brengen welke potentiele bronnen voor frictie en juist voor raakvlakken bestaan. Daarnaast probeert de FBS zich te positioneren als *boundary spanner* tussen systeem en burger – als vertegenwoordiger van de burger en als stabiel aanspreekpunt voor de burger – en zich als verbinder of netwerkregisseur binnen het netwerk te vestigen.

In het tweede stadium gaat de FBS op zoek naar een door burger en systeempartijen *gedeelde motivatie* om tot gezamenlijke actie te komen. De FBS probeert daarbij beide partijen bewust te maken van de wederzijdse afhankelijkheid en *waarom* zij samen actie moeten ondernemen. Hierbij gaat de FBS dus daadwerkelijk aan de slag met het creëren van raakvlakken, en maakt hij of zij gebruik van eerder vergaarde kennis. Ditzelfde poogt de FBS te doen op het niveau tussen partijen.

In het derde stadium probeert de FBS verdere mogelijke barrières voor gezamenlijke actie op te heffen. Hierbij probeert de FBS de *gebruiken en werkwijzen* van burgers en systeempartijen én tussen systeempartijen *op elkaar af te stemmen* of deze te ondervangen door *de juiste voorwaarden* voor gezamenlijke actie te scheppen.[1]

Het creëren van raakvlakken tussen burgers en systeemwereld en tussen verschillende partijen in de systeemwereld, zijn niet los van elkaar te begrijpen. Zo is het voor de FBS makkelijker om raakvlakken tussen burger en systeemwereld te creëren, als de neuzen van verschillende partijen binnen dit systeem dezelfde kant opstaan. Dat is lang niet altijd het geval – denk aan voorbeelden waarbij een professional bij het ene loket een regeling weet te treffen, welke uiteindelijk toch strandt bij een andere afdeling. In dergelijk geval kan de relatie tussen systeem en burger én tussen FBS en burger verslechteren omdat de belofte op dat moment niet nagekomen kan worden. Aan de andere kant kan een FBS juist zijn begrip van de wensen en belangen van de burger gebruiken om tot een gezamenlijk doel of uitgangspunt voor verschillende partijen te komen (en daarbij de wensen van de burger centraal te stellen). Dit betekent ook dat de FBS'ers in praktijk niet (altijd) actief is op één van de twee relaties, maar door zijn of haar positie juist ook aan beide tegelijkertijd kan bijdragen. Daarbij moet worden opgemerkt dat het creëren van raakvlakken een continu proces is. Ondanks dat een netwerk naarmate tijds- en energie-investering vordert, stabieler en duurzamer kan worden, zullen personen wisselen, belangen en regels wijzigen en kan de (politieke) omgeving veranderen. Een continue investering vanuit de FBS blijft dus nodig. Bij het verbinden van individuele burgers en systemen begint dit proces continu opnieuw wanneer een nieuwe cliënt in beeld komt. Naarmate het netwerk sterker is en de FBS meer ervaring opdoet, is het wel mogelijk dat dit proces steeds efficiënter wordt.

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[1] Voorbeelden hiervan zijn het ook beschikbaar zijn buiten gebruikelijke openingstijden of het opbouwen van een nodige vertrouwensband.

Bevinding 3: Succesvoorwaarden voor frontline boundary spanning

Dit onderzoek toont niet alleen aan dat FBS'ers raakvlakken creëren door de beschreven drie stadia te doorlopen, maar laat in de ook zien dat aandacht besteden aan alle drie de stadia belangrijk is om hierin succesvol te zijn. In de praktijk lopen deze stadia vaak door elkaar heen en gebeurt veel tegelijkertijd. Dat kan ertoe leiden dat een FBS niet de mogelijkheid krijgt voldoende aandacht aan alle drie de stadia te besteden, waardoor bijvoorbeeld blijkt dat er nog niet voldoende kennis bestaat over de verschillende partijen om hun praktijken goed op elkaar af te kunnen stemmen. Daarnaast geeft dit onderzoek inzicht in drie verdere belangrijke voorwaarden voor succesvolle FBS'ers, namelijk: (1) voldoende *dekking vanuit strategisch/beleidsniveau* (door bijv. een *strategic boundary spanner)* omdat verbinding op dit niveau soms lastiger te leggen kan zijn voor de FBS zelf; (2) voldoende *tijd* om aandacht te kunnen besteden aan alle drie de stadia; en (3) een *autonome en onafhankelijke rol* binnen het netwerk.

Wat betekent dit voor beleidsmakers?

Dit onderzoek leidde tot drie praktische lessen voor beleidsmakers:

1. **Zet FBS'ers in de juiste context in**. Niet iedere professional hoeft een FBS te zijn. Hierdoor is het mogelijk FBS een 'speciale' positie te geven (zie les 2). Uit dit onderzoek blijkt dat FBS'ers vooral waardevol zijn als intensief contact met cliënten nodig is, veel dienstverleners betrokken zijn, de ambiguïteit hoog is en maatwerk en doorbrekendheid verwacht worden (bijvoorbeeld in de aanpak van multi-problematiek).
2. **Bouw ruimte, autonomie en strategische/bestuurlijke dekking in**. Daarmee verkrijgen FBS'ers de positie om te kunnen handelen naar eigen inzicht, raakvlakken te creëren, snel beslissingen te maken en maatwerk te kunnen leveren. Voorwaarde hiervoor is dat de kaders helder zijn.
3. **Zorg voor informatiestructuren om frontlinie-data op te halen**. FBS'ers bezitten een rijke bron van informatie op casusniveau en ervaren dagelijks welke hobbels bestaan in beleid. Deze informatie vertalen naar beleidsniveau is echter vaak lastig. Slimme manieren ontwikkelen om deze informatie op te halen (bijv. door gedeelde informatiesystemen of regelmatige afspraken) is cruciaal.

Wat betekent dit voor FBS'ers?

Ook resulteerde dit onderzoek in drie lessen voor FBS'ers zelf:

1. **Investeer in álle stadia bij het creëren van raakvlakken.** Dit is al toegelicht in bevinding drie. Belangrijk is dat de FBS continu de voortgang op elk stadium evalueert, afweegt waar zich op te richten en zich iteratief door de verschillende stadia heen beweegt.
2. **Gebruik posities tussen grenzen in.** FBS'ers bezitten unieke positie en waardevolle kennis, hebben een groot netwerk en kunnen veel legitimiteit verwerven. Als zij zich continu bewust zijn van de waarde van hun positie in verschillende contexten en op de verschillende grenzen, kunnen ze deze inzetten om hun doelen te behalen.
3. **Erken eigen beperkingen en ondervang deze**. FBS'ers zijn geen superhelden; hun positie kent ook beperkingen (zie bijv. les 3 voor beleidsmakers). Het is belangrijk dat FBS'ers en degenen die met hen werken deze in beeld hebben en kunnen compenseren met de juiste structuren en oplossingen.

PREFACE

This master thesis is the final product of two years of being a research master student and a total of six years of studying at the Utrecht School of Governance. Throughout my studies I was lucky enough to be able to explore many different topics and interests and participate in numerous interesting and fun projects. I discovered to be especially puzzled by settings in which different organizations, processes and people meet and need to collaborate to create public value. Also, I developed a drive for linking (academic) research to practice and contributing to societal issues. Writing this master thesis whilst working as an intern at Andersson Elffers Felix, allowed me to combine both interests and develop myself further. I want to thank several people whose valuable insights, critical questions and support contributed to this process.

First, I want to thank Paul 't Hart for being my first supervisor and teacher. I think the first question you asked me at the start of this thesis process was *"do you simply want to show you are able to write a thesis, or be challenged and learn something new?",* and after me choosing the latter (how else could I?) you made sure that I was. I was lucky to have someone as inspiring, involved and intelligent supervising me. If anyone has mastered the art of 'person-focused' and 'tailored' teaching, it must be you. Also, I will not soon forget our numerous inspiring discussions about this thesis, but also about travels, art or music, or your continuous interest in 'life after thesis' for me and my fellow students. Thank you, I have learned a lot.

Also, I want to thank Joannah Luetjens as second supervisor. Not just your constructive feedback was of great value to me, I also highly appreciated your positive mindset and openness about your own challenges in research, allowing me to learn from them. I especially treasured your advice to *"trust the process a little"* when I still had no idea where this research would take me. Thank you.

Third, I want to thank my colleagues at Andersson Elffers Felix. Especially Sophie, Indra, and Chris for involving me in the Red Carpet Coaching project, but also everyone else who provided me with ideas and feedback on my thesis or allowed me to learn from and with them in any other way. Especially, I want to thank Noortje for being my mentor and specifically for your continuous worrying whether I would get lost in the 'candy shop' of interesting and fun projects AEF has to offer, potentially endangering my thesis process. Of course, I also want to thank all respondents who allowed me to learn about their very special, sometimes challenging and always important jobs, and especially coaches Bart and Gerard and their project leaders, who all perform their jobs with great passion and a strong intrinsic motivation for helping vulnerable youths.

I also want to thank Mirthe, Margot and Lukas for the many, long, very valuable and fun peer sessions and their constant availability for discussing new ideas or challenges. Also, I want to thank Camiel, for never becoming tired of trying to distract me from my work and the loving support when he couldn't. Finally, I want to thank my parents for their support in every way. You allowed me so many opportunities throughout my studies and in life. I could not have done it without you.

Maxime Dekkers | July 2019

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1 INTRODUCTION

> *"I used to have twenty professionals surrounding me and they were all trying to help me. Everything was complicated and messy. My Red Carpet Coach now is the only one that helps me – at least the only one that I still talk to."*
> - youngster about Red Carpet coach

> *"At first I did not want to talk to my Red Carpet Coach. I was in my room, watching a movie. And then he just came in and started talking to me. He said that he could help me, and that he had many contacts to help me with. For finding a job as well. And then I figured, that's a good thing. A light switched on inside my head."*
> - youngster about Red Carpet coach

1.1 Research motivation

Crimes like housebreaking, robbery and violence take a large toll on their victims and (feelings of) safety within our society. While the chances of being caught as an offender are high, the likelihood of repeat behavior (recidivism) of these so-called High Impact Crimes (HIC) remains high as well (Beijersbergen, Blokdijk, & Weijters, 2018). This issue is particularly pertinent amongst the younger demographic, with rates of recidivism reaching 52% in 2017 (Spies, 2017). Most of the HIC-offenders begin their criminal career very early in their lives and are arrested for the first time at a very young age. In 2018, 80% of all street-muggers had already had a run-in with law at least once before 18 years old, as well as 64% of all housebreakers and 66% of all robbers. Also, more than half of all street-muggers are younger than 18, as are 16% of all housebreakers and 19% of all robbers (Beijersbergen et al., 2018, pp. 8–9). Many of these youngsters committing HIC are vulnerable and risk sliding into chronic criminal behavior. About half of them have a mild intellectual disability (MID) – a combination of a low IQ and limited social adaptability. Many of them come from deprived urban areas, have dealt with poverty their entire lives, come from problematic or fragmented families, have little supporting social network and/or may even homeless. These youngsters often feel that they have not been given a fair chance in life, and feel disconnected to society. Despite this, their drive and motivation for being successful in life is often quite similar to their peers (Spies, 2017, pp. 2–7). They are often highly susceptible to external influences and are often found doing the 'dirty jobs' of others in the criminal world.

These youngsters thus – almost without exception – face multiple problems in different aspects of their lives. When confronted with bureaucratic systems, they therefore often have to contend with many different distinct policies, rules, forms of help, counters and professionals – all tackling different aspects of their problems. For example, they need to deal with institutions in the education domain ('RMC' for compulsory school attendance and qualifications and DUO for a study loan), social domain (participation law, debt management), care domain (social benefits as WMO,

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[2] All quotes from research participants in this study have been translated from Dutch to English by the author

(extended) youth care, health insurance law), and the security domain (e.g. (youth) criminal law and (youth) probation). These different social policies all aim to help these youngsters, but all adopt a different focus and have a different area of expertise. Often, each domain has a slightly different definition of and perspective on the target group as well. These do not always align and are often not well-communicated. Additionally, when these youngsters turn 18 and enter adulthood (legally – not mentally), they are confronted with a spate of new rules, policies and professionals, and are expected to deal with a great amount of responsibility over their lives. From the perspective of the youngster, this all too often adds up to an uncoordinated, bewildering and disempowering bureaucracy (Spies, 2017).

The Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security is attempting to break this cycle. It invests in the early detection of these at-risk youths as possible future offenders of HIC, so that they can be supported before the downward spiral takes hold. The ministry together with experts from science and practice conducted research in 2017 on how to prevent at-risk youths from sliding into chronic criminal behavior. The solution – as with many more complex governance challenges nowadays – was found in developing a person-focused collaborative method focused on guiding these at-risk youths towards school or work. The so-called 'Collaborative person-focused program guiding youngsters towards work' *[Integrale Persoonsgerichte Toeleiding naar Arbeid, IPTA],* later rebadged into 'Red Carpet Coaching', was born.

Figure 1: What RCC aims to achieve
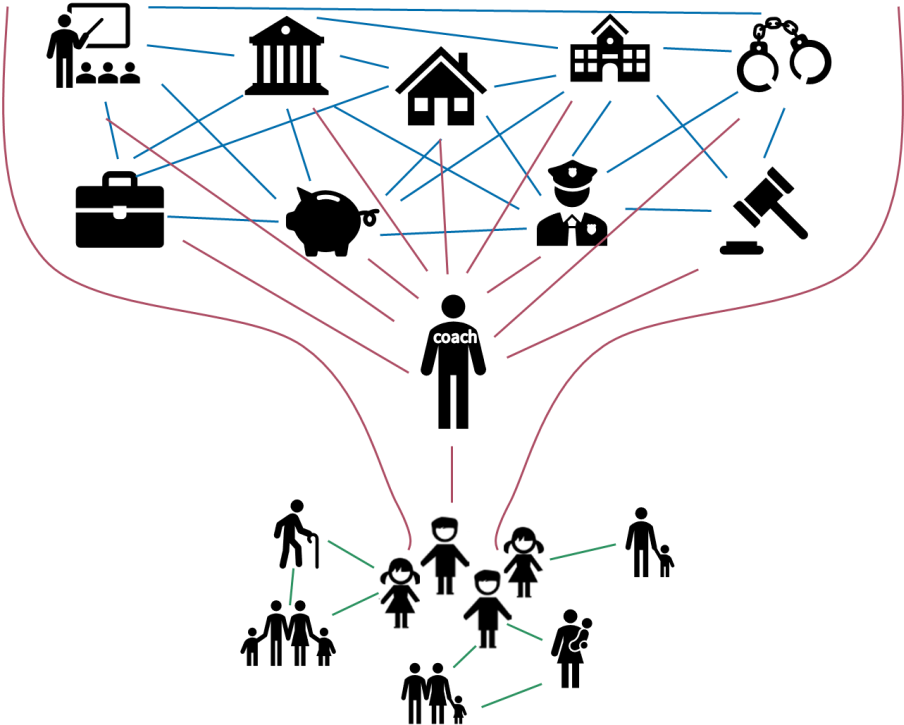
Red Carpet Coaching (RCC) is aimed at at-risk youths between 16 and 26 years old facing multiple problems (e.g. school drop-out or high truancy, having no stable home or network, debts, addiction, and/or having mild intellectual disability (MID)). Each youngster in the program receives *one* Red Carpet Coach, to provide them with a sense stability and consistency. This coach helps

them navigate the maze of different policies, (government) systems and institutions so that their problems can be tackled as effectively as possible. In the metaphoric language of the program: the coach 'rolls out the red carpet' for the youths and helps them in building a future. The quality of this 'red carpet' is determined by the quality of the network of social partners surrounding these youngsters (like school, debt management institutions, police, youth care). RCC therefore has a dual aim: guiding youngsters towards work or school by coaching them through and streamlining their interaction with the many agencies and services they encounter, whilst at the same time enhancing collaboration between these different institutions. This is not a particularly easy job. Although it might seem as if these parties all have the same goal of helping these youngsters and therefore would all benefit from fruitful collaboration and building relationships with youngsters, in practice this does not occur spontaneously.

Four municipalities have experimented with implementing the RCC program as a pilot over the past one and a half years. Although the program has been implemented in many different forms in the different pilots, in all cases it revealed that the *individual* component of the program is crucial to its success. The role of the RCC coach is of pivotal importance. By acting as so-called *boundary spanners at* the center of the network connecting youngsters, service providers, policy makers and other relevant stakeholders, it is upon them to achieve the aims of the program.

1.2 Collaborative and person-centered service delivery: a social policy trend

The RCC program itself is relatively new, but it fits within a broader trend of collaborative person-focused programs in the Dutch social policy domain. Examples of these programs include programs aimed at persons showing mentally confused behavior, programs helping ex-detainees reintegrate in society, holistic approaches to reduce high-impact crime, or integrated care for multi-problem families. These programs (like the RCC program) are designed to be 'client-centered', and thus to move beyond existing segmented approaches and bureaucratic silos. There is a significant group of persons with a multitude of needs, requiring support from many different (governmental) departments, sectors or organizations. Effective collaboration between these parties can enhance the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of care and service delivery. Additionally, these programs often help or monitor a specific person for a longer period of time. This allows for observing their development and/or understanding the history of this person. These types of collaborative person-centered programs can lead to better fitting and tailor-made services, but can also lead to surprising results when obtaining a richer, data-based picture of citizens and their situation (see Box 1).

> **Box 1: CO24DAK as collaborative person-focused program**
> A group of youngsters seemed to be causing nuisance at a main square in the city of Enschede. Different local parties (like the police and Veiligheidsregio Twente) realized they all had different pieces of information concerning these youngsters, but their knowledge was fragmented as they did not connect and systematically analyze this information together. They started the pilot CO24DAK, using an innovative information system in which different professionals could quickly and systematically collect and use (both positive and negative) information on a specific person or case. After monitoring the youngsters for a while, it turned out that all professionals from different organizations had more positive encounters with these youngsters than negative ones, and that these youngsters actually did not cause any nuisance at all. It was just a story that people assumed to be true. This result could only be found because different parties bundled their knowledge and focused on specific persons, instead of tackling the problem of 'youth causing nuisance' in general and fragmented.

The development of these types of programs fit a broader development within the Dutch social policy domain. The 2015 decentralization reforms in social policy implementation moved responsibilities and budgets from central to local governments. This localization was supposed to facilitate a greater client focus and more tailor-made solutions. Likewise, within the security domain the idea of 'integrated' or 'collaborative security' has steadily gained popularity over the past decades, following the idea that contemporary complex issues cannot be solved by siloed approaches and require intersectoral and interorganizational collaboration. An early precursor for this trend was the policy plan 'Society and Criminality' *[Samenleving en criminaliteit]* (Ministerie van Justitie, 1985), which brought in a focus on prevention instead of repression only by applying a care perspective on offenders. In the ensuing decades, this also brought a shift towards a networked approach to crime-fighting. The government is no longer seen as the only and primary actor in preventing criminality, but also the private sector, civil society and citizens, such as family and friends of (potential) offenders are activated as important partners (Van Steden, 2011). This shift to working in networks lies at the core of what public administration researchers have labelled New Public Governance, network governance or collaborative governance (e.g. Ansell & Gash, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Osborne, 2006).

1.3 Making collaboration work: the role of the boundary spanner

Although collaboration in the public sector and social policy domain is gaining popularity and is even deemed inevitable by some, it is not a holy grail or simple tool leading to quick solutions. Organizing and sustaining successful collaboration can be highly difficult – as often many stakeholders are involved with different and possibly even conflicting goals, knowledge and values, who do not always understand or trust each other, and who have different levels of commitment to the collaborative effort. A great body of literature has therefore investigated how and why collaboration or network governance works and what important determinants and conditions are (see e.g. Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012; Provan & Kenis, 2008). However, as Williams (2012) argues, this literature mostly favors macro-analytical

approaches with an organizational and institutional focus, characterized by an underrepresentation of micro-level investigation, of people and individual roles, competences and relationships. Scholars who have done so (e.g. Lipsky, 2010; Schön, 1987; van Hulst, de Graaf, & van den Brink, 2012; Van Meerkerk, 2014), have shown that what happens in practice is not (only) the result of processes, systems or even decisions made by 'strong' actors (van Hulst et al., 2012). Individual persons and especially *boundary spanners* – the persons connecting organizations, departments, processes and people – can thus play a crucial role in shaping and modifying collaboration and partnerships. This was also observed in the RCC program, where the RCC coaches can be typified as boundary spanner at the center of the network.

The concept of boundary spanning originates from organizational science literature, and was initially defined as a role of managing the interface between organizations and their environment (Williams, 2010). From this perspective, key activities involved information-processing and transmitting, external representation, gatekeeping or even influencing external events and controlling threats from the environments (Adams, 1976; Aldrich, 1979; Thompson, 1967). However, nowadays governmental organizations are expected to no longer only seek to *control* and *manage* their environment, but are generally more focused on *collaborating* and *co-creating* with it (e.g. Ansell & Gash, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Osborne, 2006a; Torfing, 2016) . The old-fashioned notion of a boundary spanner as a manager of the environment as 'communication stars' (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981) or 'organizational representative' (Brown, 1983) therefore do not do justice anymore. Nowadays boundary spanning is mostly studied from a *network governance* perspective (e.g. van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014; Williams, 2010) and this field has been growing over the past years (as e.g pointed out by Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2017; Williams, 2013).

Boundary spanning activities are believed to enhance collaboration. Many authors studying network governance have found that good collaborative outcomes like problem-solving, institutionalizing and sustaining the network or the development of innovative new policy programs are highly dependent on factors like parties realizing and acknowledging their interdependency, commitment to the network, the process and its outcomes, and intensive and sustained communication between parties (e.g. Ansell & Gash, 2008). Boundary spanning activities like transferring information and translation across organizational boundaries, mobilizing support and building sustainable relationships between organizations, can play an important role in stimulating these factors (e.g. Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014; Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2017; Williams, 2010). Research has specifically analyzed and indicated the importance of boundary spanners in network *performance* and *trust building* in governance networks (van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014; Williams, 2010). For that reason, boundary spanners are addressed in the literature as key factor in governance networks for building sustainable inter-organizational relationships and organizing successful collaboration (e.g. Leung, 2013; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2003; van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014; Williams, 2010).

There is as yet no widely agreed upon definition of 'boundary spanners' in this network governance context. Yet a 'minimal' definition that captures its essence is that "boundary spanners serve as connection between different constituencies" (Williams, 2010, p. 7). They deal with people on both sides of the boundary and specialize in negotiating the interactions between systems. It can be

agreed that a distinction can be made between boundary spanning as a set of *activities*, processes and practices, and boundary spanners as the *people* engaging in boundary spanning activity (Williams, 2010, p.7). Accordingly, Williams (2010) presents two types of boundary spanners. The first being 'individuals who have a dedicated job role or responsibility to work in multi-organizational / multi-sectoral settings and to serve as a connection between different constituencies' (p.7). The second type of boundary spanner are those 'who undertake boundary spanning activities *as part* of their mainstream job role' (p.7). Research on how these different types play out in their practices and activities, and what other distinctions of types and context can be made, is still limited, as boundary spanner research remains highly decontextualized (Williams, 2012).

1.4 Frontline boundary spanners

The context in which the RCC coaches are at play specifically deserves further exploration. These coaches perform a *special type* of boundary spanning. Next to organizing collaboration between parties, their job is aimed at coaching youths and creating connection between these youngsters and bureaucratic systems. These coaches act on an operational level and at the *frontline* in direct interaction with citizens, like street-level bureaucrats as described by Lipsky (2010). Also their role constitutes elements of connective professionals (Noordegraaf, Van der Steen, & Van Twist, 2014) or reflective practitioners (Van Veelen, Bunders, Cesuroglu, Broerse, & Regeer, 2018, p. 416), and frontline professionals as described by Van Delden (2011). These *frontline boundary spanners* (FBSs) thus perform both horizontal (between social partners inside and outside the government) as well as vertical (between governance levels *and* with citizens) boundary spanning activities. This form of boundary spanning can be observed more often in the Dutch social policy domain, due to the increasing complexity of problems faced in his domain and the rise of collaborative person-centered programs as previously described. Box 2 provides several examples of these *frontline boundary spanning* roles in the Dutch social policy domain.

These frontline boundary spanners have enriched the Dutch public sector in many different shapes and contexts. Some of them have a more individual-focused or even coaching role – like reintegration officers – others act more responsively and to a more aggregate public – like the neighborhood police officer ['wijkagent']. Some act closer to the boundary of a specific organization – like many client directors of care providers – whilst others take position at the center of a network – like the RCC coaches. And possibly many other classifications can be made. Due to this development, enhancing our understanding of the mechanics and dynamics of how this role is embedded and performed is an important research direction within the field of public governance studies as well as for practice.

Box 2: Examples of frontline boundary spanners

The Reintegration Officer [reïntegratie officier]
Four Dutch municipalities are currently experimenting with 'Reintegration Officers' to decrease the amount recidivism amongst former High Impact Crime offenders by supporting them in reintegration in society after imprisonment. In collaboration with local government, police, the probation department and other relevant stakeholders in the municipality, they aim to limit factors restraining successful reintegration and offer support in organizing the five identified 'basic conditions of a stability' – housing, identity card, work and income, debt management and health. Additionally, they explore modes of information exchange between partners concerning these specific ex-detainees.

Family manager
The 'Bureau Jeugdzorg Amsterdam' (BJA) observed that many issues with problematic youths cannot be solved by only helping the youngsters themselves, but also requires involving family and tackling family issues. However, due highly fragmented systems of care, professionals usually only focus on the individual. Therefore Family Managers were appointed, who are in close and intensive contact with families and can involve other professionals when necessary. They use different instruments from BJA collaborating with youth care and health care providers, and collaborate with police, GGD, and other professionals (Van Delden, 2011, p. 26).

Neighborhood police officer [Wijkagent]
The Wijkagent is a police officer with the specific job of creating and sustaining interaction with and between citizens and partners (like local government, schools, housing corporations and care institutions) in a certain neighborhood. Also, these police officers form the link between citizens and the police organization. In Amsterdam the name 'Buurtregisseur' *(Neighborhood Director)* has been used for many years, to illustrate its boundary spanning position (Miltenburg, Van Steden, & Boutellier, 2014; Terpstra, 2019).

City marine [stadsmarinier]
'Stadsmariniers' in the municipality of Rotterdam (and later also in other municipalities within the region) are commissioned to actively tackle problems in neighborhoods in collaboration with inhabitants, entrepreneurs, and government institutions. They are employed by the local government, but operate outside of the city hall and are situated within the neighborhood. They act directly at operational and strategic level, must build a strong network of parties, act as spider in the web and are not situated in *one* policy domain, but are directly mandated by the major. Their job is to connect and speak the language of both state and streets (Scherpenisse, Twist, & Schram, 2017).

Street coaches
Street coaches have the task of decreasing nuisance caused by youths in the neighborhood by acting as a 'new form of surveillance'. They must speak the language of youths and understand them, be available also after office hours and be visible for youths in the neighborhood. They actively get into contact with youths, their families and other inhabitants. They are commissioned by the local government and collaborate with the police and other relevant local parties especially in the social, security and care domain (like professionals from youth care, GGZ, schools, housing corporations) (Loef, Schaafsma, & Hilhorst, 2012).

1.5 Creating common ground

One specifically interesting focus to study the behavior of FBS is the professional practice of 'creating common ground'. At first sight, it might seem odd that organizing collaboration between service providers can be so tricky that a specialized boundary-spanning function needs to be set up in the first place. For instance in the case of Red Carpet Coaches, it would seem logical that every party involved aims to help these youngsters and that every party wants to create 'public value' (Moore, 1995) for both the client and for the larger community. However, this is not as simple as it may seem. Often, different parties have a different understanding of what is 'valuable' and what operationally is required to produce it. Simply assuming that every party has the same goal or understanding of what the problem is and what the solution should be, can therefore lead to disappointing results (In 't Veld & Kruiter, 2014).

For this reason many authors studying collaborative processes highlight the need of developing some sort of 'common ground' (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000), 'shared understanding' (Ansell & Gash, 2008), 'shared vision' (Manring & Pearsall, 2004), 'shared motivation' (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015), 'common mission' (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000), or 'common purpose' (Tett, Crowther, & O'Hara, 2003) as key to a successful collaborative process. However, what this common ground (or any variation of it) exactly entails, is heavily debated. In this research, creating common ground does not necessarily mean that all parties involved abandon their own visions and values to work towards one common/shared goal or consensus. This would, as Klijn & Koppenjan (2016, p. 127) argue, ignore the fact that some perceptions are too hard to change, and that in a dynamic network perceptions are unstable and subject to change. However, to be able to perform joint action, all parties must *realize they are to some extent dependent upon each other* and understand and acknowledge that the collaborative process is not a nice to have but need to have to achieve their own goals.

This can be highly difficult since many potential sources of ambiguity such as multiple and conflicting interpretations and goals, different value orientations, lack of clarity around roles and responsibility, differences in culture and language or differences in knowledge and resources (see also Williams, 2010, p. 29). These provide possible hurdles for collaboration. The boundary spanner must therefore develop 'common ground' which – despite the existence of these potential sources of ambiguity in varying perceptions, objectives, rules and values – enables the realization of joint solutions and co-produced services (based on Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016).

1.6 Research question

This task of creating common ground might be even more challenging for frontline boundary spanners than for other *strategic* boundary spanning roles. These FBS must not only align different organizations and departments, but must also bridge the gap between the 'system world' of service providers and the 'life worlds' of their clients. They face an inherently difficult job of which it seems amazing that they are even able to perform it at all. This raises the seemingly simple question of: *how do they do it?* Additionally, contemporary complex social policy settings have increased the need for these frontline boundary spanner roles and the complexity of their jobs.

Developing our understanding of their behavior is thus highly relevant. This research therefore aims to answer the following question:

How do frontline boundary spanners create common ground between citizens, service providers, policy makers and other stakeholders in complex social policy settings?

To answer this research question, this study aims to first create an understanding of who these FBS are and what they do, to see what potential sources of ambiguity they face between actors and to analyze how they deal with these in creating common ground. To this end, a framework on how FBS create common ground is developed based upon interviews with (frontline) boundary spanners. Second, an illustrative case study is presented describing stories of two RCC coaches in which I use the framework to understand how they create common ground.

1.7 Relevance

This research contributes both theoretically, societally and methodologically, as is described below.

1.7.1 Theoretical contribution

Creating common ground amongst actors in complex and ambiguous collaborative settings is highly challenging but crucial for collaborative success. As previously mentioned, most research on collaborative efforts adopts an organizational or institutional perspective in studying these dynamics. There is a need for balancing our knowledge of explanations on macro and micro level (as acknowledged by many scholars such as Bamford, Gomes-Casseres, & Robinson, 2003, p. 202; Noble & Jones, 2006, p. 891; Williams, 2012, p. 1-2) and for exploring the role of the individual in the forging of common ground in collaborative settings. To interrogate this, I adopt a boundary spanning perspective. In doing so, I seek to bridge these disparate strands by focusing on specific roles and the individuals who encompass them.

Specifically, I add to boundary spanning literature in two ways. First, this research provides a valuable addition by studying the specific type of *frontline* boundary spanning. While literature on boundary spanning is growing, this body of literature is highly decontextualized and little is yet known about differences between types of boundary spanners. Most research on boundary spanners focuses on leaders or managers in a boundary spanning role, leading to e.g. Williams (2012, p.151) raising the question: *"Who are the 'street-level' boundary spanners?"*. These types of street-level professionals have been studied in different fields of research, using different perspectives and concepts with different emphasis and focus of study. Some examples of related concepts are the 'frontline worker' (Tops & Hartman, 2005; van Hulst et al., 2012), 'frontline professional'(Van Delden, 2011), 'everyday fixer'(Hendriks & Tops, 2005), 'connective professional' (Noordegraaf et al., 2014), different types of 'entrepreneurs' (van Hulst et al., 2012), 'connective craftsman' (Binnema, Geuijen, & Noordegraaf, 2013), and the 'critical professional' (Barnett, 1997). Some studies also explicitly refer to the concept of boundary spanning in relation to frontline

workers is (e.g. Rugkasa, Shortt, & Boydell, 2007; van Hulst et al., 2012; Williams, 2013). Research studying these frontline workers from this boundary spanning perspective however is limited.

Second, this research contributes to the boundary spanning literature by focusing on one specific professional practice performed by FBSs – that of creating common ground in complex collaborative settings. Most research focuses on the *effects* of boundary spanning behavior on collaboration, such as the effects on team or network performance (Anconana & Caldwell, 1992; Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014). Some researches have been studying boundary spanning competences, activities and practices (see e.g. Williams, 2012). This research adds to this specific field.

1.7.2 Societal contribution

Collaborative person-centered policy programs including frontline boundary spanner roles have enriched our government landscape over the past years. This research contributes to our understanding of who these frontline boundary spanners are and how they create common ground. As a result, we gain better understanding of the value of frontline boundary spanners, what hurdles they face in organizing common ground and collaboration between partners, and what is needed for them to tackle these hurdles. Lessons learnt from this study can be considered in designing these types of programs involving FBS roles. Directly, this study contributes to the RCC program, by analyzing and supporting the role of the coaches. During this research, I also contributed to the evaluation of the first phase of the RCC pilot and the designing of the second phase with new municipalities as part of my internship at a consultancy firm. I was therefore able to directly use the insights developed during this study specifically in shaping and supporting the role of the RCC coaches.

1.7.3 Methodological contribution

Williams (2010, p. 32) calls for more innovative methods in studying boundary spanners, specifically to generate more in-depth, nuanced agency-centered accounts and explanations of boundary spanning in practice. He calls for more and better qualitative research methods – specifically ethnographic and case study research. This research contributes to both by conducting up-close, abductive research and building grounded theory by conducting interviews, using observation methods and studying documents. Moreover, I provide an illustrative case studying the practices of two RCC coaches as units of analysis. This allows for thorough learning from practice instead of testing existing theory and thereby contributes to the academic field of (frontline) boundary spanning.

1.8 Research outline

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. In the next chapter I begin by describing the research design of this study and specifically the three phases in which this study was carried out. Chapter three presents my observations on frontline boundary spanners based on interviews with different FBS. This includes an overview of who these FBS are, what they do and what sources of ambiguity they face in their job. Additionally, I present a framework grounded in empirical data of

how FBS create common ground between citizens, service providers, policy makers and other stakeholders and provide examples of specific behaviors they use in doing so. In chapter four I add an illustrative case study by describing stories of how two RCC coaches create common ground and use the developed framework to understand their practices and whether and why FBS are (likely to be) able to create common ground. Chapter five presents my conclusions based upon these findings, discusses the limitations of this research and provides suggestions for future research.

2 RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 Research approach

This study aimed to understand how FBSs create common ground between citizens, service providers, policy makers and other relevant stakeholders. To achieve this goal, it was carried out in three phases as depicted in figure 2.
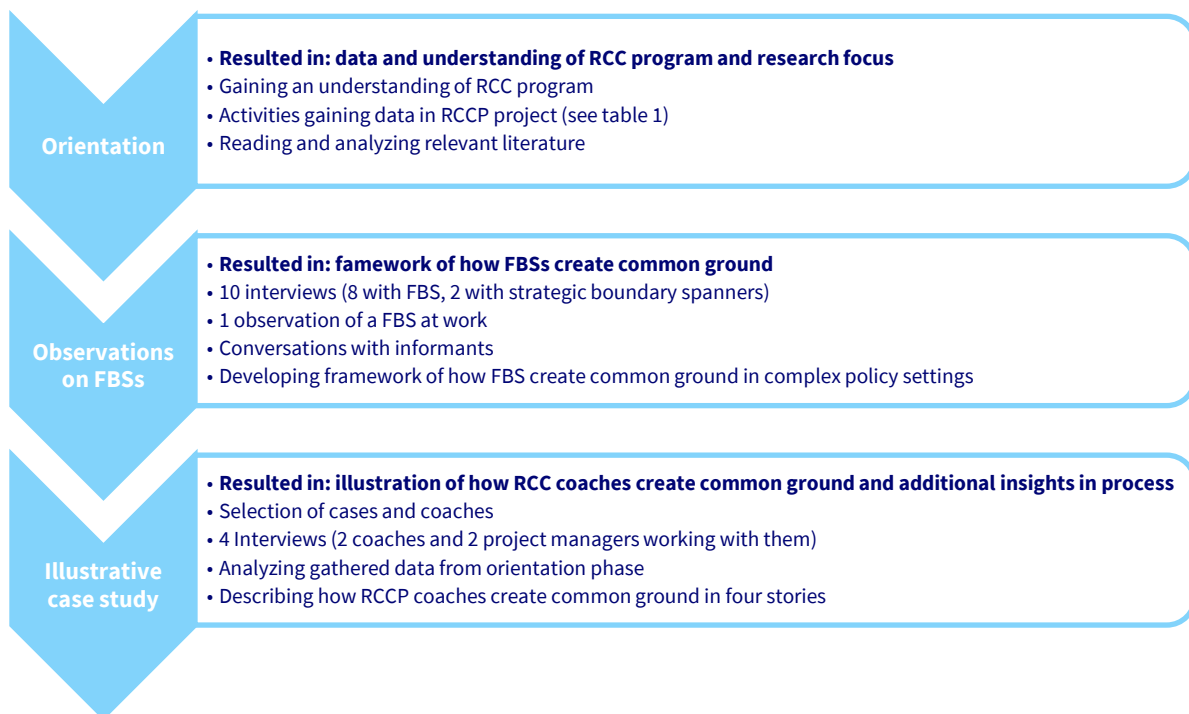
Orientation
- **Resulted in: data and understanding of RCC program and research focus**
- Gaining an understanding of RCC program
- Activities gaining data in RCCP project (see table 1)
- Reading and analyzing relevant literature

Observations on FBSs
- **Resulted in: famework of how FBSs create common ground**
- 10 interviews (8 with FBS, 2 with strategic boundary spanners)
- 1 observation of a FBS at work
- Conversations with informants
- Developing framework of how FBS create common ground in complex policy settings

Illustrative case study
- **Resulted in: illustration of how RCC coaches create common ground and additional insights in process**
- Selection of cases and coaches
- 4 Interviews (2 coaches and 2 project managers working with them)
- Analyzing gathered data from orientation phase
- Describing how RCCP coaches create common ground in four stories

Figure 2: Research process

Throughout these phases, there is a continuous going back and forth between empirical observations and academic literature. This allowed for a two-way, iterative learning process (see Schön, 1987, p. 26; Verloo, 2015, p. 93). My research started from an initial interest in the RCC program and especially in the coaches as frontline boundary spanners. I was fascinated by how they perform their jobs and manage to create common ground at the frontline and between parties. Since this specific type of frontline boundary spanning is relatively understudied, this study has an explorative nature. An inductive approach was therefore chosen, starting from empirical findings and observations, and making sense of these during an iterative and flexible process involving a moving back and forth between data collection, analysis and reflection, working to construct *grounded theory* (Boeije, 2010, p. 32; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Therefore, my first empirical observations directed me towards relevant pre-existing theory, and to the discovery of useful insights and gaps in the literature. At the same time, finding patterns

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in the data also allowed me to develop grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in areas where existing literature did not suffice in the form of a framework of observations on how frontline boundary spanners create common ground. This framework is thus developed based upon an abductive approach of searching for the best way to understand the stories and data gathered. Below, I describe what activities I performed in each phase of my research.

2.2 Orientation

In the orientation phase I participated in the evaluation of the RCC pilot as a consultancy project as intern for consultancy firm Andersson Elffers Felix (AEF). This is where my interest in the program and the role of the coaches specifically was first sparked. Working in this project provided me with the opportunity to access and to become acquainted with the program, the coaches and the people working with the coaches. I collected and analyzed data which was initially gathered for the evaluation research, but which is also relevant for this study and of which I was also given consent to use. Table 1 presents an overview of the performed activities in this phase. My observations of the RCC project, gathered data and reading of relevant literature, resulted in the first idea of studying the RCC coaches as *frontline* boundary spanners. The data gathered in this phase is also used for understanding and describing the illustrative case study (phase 3).

Table 1: Activities orientation phase

Activities performed
Interviews with RCC coaches in 4 municipalities
Interviews with project leaders in 4 municipalities
Interviews with youngsters in 4 municipalities (by phone/personal)
Focus-groups or observations on meetings with social partners (from within organization and outside of organization) in 4 municipalities
Gathering and analyzing documents on RCC program
Analyzing data on results youngsters in RCC program gathered by coaches
Analyzing relevant literature e.g. on collaborative governance, boundary spanning, street-level bureaucrats

The interviews were semi-structured, using a different topic list for every 'type' of interviewee in every municipality. A detailed report was written during every interview. In one of the municipalities I and my AEF colleague joined a regular meeting between social partners as participant observers, in others we had a more leading role and organized meetings as focus groups to evaluate the pilot. During these meetings I took minutes and observed the dynamics between parties present. I myself joined all interviews and focus groups in all municipalities but Dordrecht (due to this 'research day' taking place at the same day as one in another municipality). Most interviews were conducted together with a consultant of AEF, except for some of the interviews with youngsters which I conducted by myself. Moreover, I analyzed relevant documents and qualitative and quantitative data monitoring the progress of youngsters gathered by the coaches, which provided me with an understanding of how the project works, the composition of the target group and what the effects of the program are. The participants were aware of my 'double' role as consultant intern and researcher since I was introduced that way in every municipality, and I was given consent to use the obtained data for this research. These data as well

as data collected in the following phases of this research, were stored using the secured AEF information management system and thereby available to employees of the firm only.

2.3 Developing a practice-based framework

In the second phase, I conducted interviews with (frontline) boundary spanners. I used this empirical data to induce a model of practice capturing what FBS do, what sources of ambiguity they face, and how they go about trying to create common ground. The development of this framework was an abductive and iterative process fitting the grounded theory approach. Via a process of constantly analyzing and comparing findings, in combination with my own use of creative thinking, reflection, theoretical knowledge and knowledge of the field, the framework was developed (Boeije, 2010).

2.3.1 Interviewing

I conducted interviews with ten respondents including two strategic/policy level boundary spanners and eight frontline boundary spanners. These were all selected from the Dutch social policy domain since this study focuses on complex social policy settings specifically. I engaged in purposive sampling of respondents. This means that I selected the sample not randomly but strategically in view of interviewees' relevance to the study's goals (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). In this case, due to the nature of this study this does not mean that this selection is based on an a priori existing body of theory and that the selection of respondents is based upon criteria derived from this theory. I selected respondents based upon information gained from experts in the field, their network and by asking interviewees what types of roles they thought were interesting to consider. Based on this information a relevant selection was made, which is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Respondents (frontline) boundary spanners

	Function	Type of boundary spanner	Specific social domain
R1	Project leader of a ministry	Strategy/policy	Health/social
R2	Secretary of a network	Strategy	Social
R3	Freelance project leader	FBS	Security/social
R4	Neighborhood nurse [wijkverpleegkundige]	FBS	Health/Social
R5	Youth coach / project leader	FBS	Security/social
R6	Youth coach (including half-a-day observation)	FBS	Security/social
R7	Debt coach	FBS	Social
R8	Reintegration officer	FBS	Security/Social
R9	Reintegration officer	FBS	Security/social
R10	City marine [Stadsmarinier]	FBS	Security/social

I used a topic list to structure the interviews which developed throughout the process. In the first interviews the topic list was the most open. Here I asked interviewees about the tasks they performed in their job, what challenges they faced in doing so or what parties they interacted with. At this point, I mainly allowed the interviewees to determine the content and the flow of the conversation. After the first three interviews, I adjusted the topic list to my developed research

focus and earlier findings. Further on in the interview process, I was able to draw a first draft version of the framework and test and compare findings in the following interviews. After I had tested several versions of the framework in interviews, a point close to *theoretical saturation* was achieved (Bryman, 2012; Charmaz, 2006). The last interviews confirmed my ideas and no real new information was gathered (in an ideal situation more interviews could have been conducted for testing and further development of the framework, but due to the limited scope of this research this was not possible). The developed framework appeared to be the best possible way of understanding the gathered data. Additionally, during all interviews with frontline boundary spanners (except for R3) I asked the FBSs to draw out their position in the network. This way I gained insights in where they position themselves within the network of parties, in relation to the citizen and in relation to their 'home organization'. Moreover, this method helped in structuring the interviews towards discussing specific differences or similarities in relationships, practices they used and challenges they faced between different parties.

For each interview informed consent was provided by the interviewee, to protect the interviewee and guarantee his or her awareness that data is collected for this research (see appendix I). Two of the interviews were conducted for both this research as well as for a consultancy project. In these cases, the interviewees were explicitly informed of this two-fold aim of the interview. The interviews were all recorded and transcribed. This enhances the quality of the data, since it allowed me to focus on the interview instead of on making notes, did not force me to make a selection of what to note down during the interview, and made sure no data were lost (Boeije, 2010).

To support the interview data, I also observed the practices of one youth coach who used football practice as method of working with youngsters. I joined him to football practice at a sports club and observed his work during half-a-day. This way I was able to observe his practices in connecting with the youngsters and collaborating with the sports club. Afterwards, I also conducted an in-depth interview to discuss my observations and his role. From this combination I was able to directly link the information from the interview to what I observed him doing in practice. These insights helped in gaining a further understanding of the practices of this coach and FBSs in general.

Additionally, I spoke to several informants. These include an expert in the field of safety, social workers and bureaucracy, an expert in the field of network governance and professionalism and several researchers/consultants working in the social policy domain. These meetings were used to gain insights about the context and discuss and reflect on emerging results. I did not record and transcribe these meetings, but made notes post-hoc. To further enhance the internal validity of this study, I tested my insights including the developed framework with three fellow students from the master program Research in Public Administration and Organizational Science during numerous peer review sessions. Their critical questions and ideas helped me developing new insights and helped tackle any potential bias.

The transcripts of the interviews and field nodes were coded using NVivo software. This helped in structuring and categorizing the gathered data and to discover patterns. Additionally, relevant

theory was studied to help make sense of the data and in developing the framework. As described, I transcribed and analyzed data during the process of interviewing, which allowed for building upon and comparing emerging results in further interviews. This enhanced the process of reaching theoretical saturation and the development and testing of the findings and the framework during the process. In doing so, Hennie Boeije's (2010) strategy of going from data collection, to open coding, to data collection, to axial coding was used. This fits the grounded theory approach.

2.4 Application: A case study

Third, I studied the implementation of the Red Carpet Coaching program in two pilots. These pilots function as illustrative cases of how the RCC coaches as FBSs create common ground between at-risk youths, bureaucratic systems and other relevant parties. The Red Carpet Coaching program provides the context, two municipalities are studied as cases and two coaches are the actual units of analysis (see also Yin, 2003, p. 47). For each coach, I describe two illustrative stories of situations which I observed or which I was told about during interviews. I use the developed framework (phase two) to understand their behavior in creating common ground as derived from these stories. The remainder of this paragraph presents the case study design and methods used in this phase.

2.4.1 Red Carpet Coaching as context

The Red Carpet Coaching program functions as context to study FBSs creating common ground in a complex social policy setting. This program aims to normalize the life of at-risk youths to prevent them from sliding into chronic criminal behavior (see chapter 1.1). As confirmed by the respondents and informants this indeed concerns a complex social policy setting with a highly complicated tasks and high levels of ambiguity due to many involved parties. This program is a particularly interesting context for studying frontline boundary spanning, since it explicitly aims to span the boundaries both between youngsters and systems, as well as between parties within this system and is built on three 'pillars' both on individual and network level:

Table 3: Pillars of Red Carpet Coaching

Pillar	Individual level	Network level
Attention	Intensive coaching for a specific youngster	Prioritizing a specific target group within network
Completeness	Wrap around care – dealing with the entire personal system/network surrounding a youngster (like family, friends) and wrapping services around client's own motivation	Organizing sustainable network of social parties surrounding at-risk youths
Breaking through	Finding creative, tailored solutions for specific youngsters	Organizing administrative backing and escalation path

To reach these goals, coaches are assigned to mentor the youngsters and to provide them with advice and support on all aspects of their lives, to ultimately help them to school or work. In doing so, they need to build a strong network of social parties surrounding these youngsters. These coaches can therefore be typified as frontline boundary spanners.

The theory generating this program was established in the 'IPTA Handbook', which was produced by the Ministry of Justice and Security in collaboration with experts from science and practice. The program was implemented in practice through four pilots in the municipalities of Capelle a/d Ijssel, Dordrecht, Schiedam and Maassluis (and Vlaardingen joined this pilot after the first year) and Zoetermeer.

2.4.2 Case selection

The four pilot programs are each set in their own contexts, adopt particular focal points in the overall RCC formula and have distinctive implementation strategies and practices. In table 4 I present numerous relevant aspects of the implementation of the RCC program in the four pilots, based upon data from interviews, informants and relevant documents (see also orientation phase).

Table 4: Description of RCC program implemented in four pilots

	Capelle a/d Ijssel	Dordrecht	Schiedam and Maassluis (and Vlaardingen)	Zoetermeer
Number of coaches	1	7	2	2
Position of coach(es)	As freelancer hired by municipality, but accountable to municipality. RCC coaching is full job.	RCC coaches are social workers from 7 different social partners. Being RCC coach is part of their job while working for the social partner.	Officially hired via external partner, but accountable to municipality, RCC coaching is full job at Schiedam.	Hired by municipality, RCC coaching is full job.
Brief profile of coach(es)	Primary focus on youngsters, intensive coaching and strong personal experience and intrinsic motivation for at-risk youths. Big personal network of businesses and politicians	Different social workers with both focus on network and youngsters	One of the coaches has recently been replaced

The other coach has a strong network-building focus and a lot of professional experience with the target group. | Two coaches with primary focus on youngsters. Professional experience as youth workers. Outreaching to partners. |
| *Project leader role* | Part time project leader with mostly operational experience (city marine) | One main project leader from policy/strategy level | Two part time project leaders from policy level | One fulltime project secretary and one part time project leader from policy level |
| *Network* | Started from safety domain. Network is strongly established with parties at operational level but is weaker with internal parties and on policy level. | Started from social domain. Network already existed and is strong, and based upon organizations of RCC coaches. Differentiated between first, second and third-circle network. | Started from education and safety domain. Mostly strategic level network, operational network is growing. Network, is growing in strength. Includes collaboration between three municipalities. | Started from safety domain. Network already existed, RCC coaches are added to network as 'spider in the web'. |

	Capelle a/d Ijssel	Dordrecht	Schiedam and Maassluis (and Vlaardingen)	Zoetermeer
Total number of youngsters coached from January 2018 – January 2019	9	21	*Unknown*[3]	12

I selected the cases of Capelle a/d Ijssel and Schiedam, Maassluis and Vlaardingen to study for two reasons. First, the RCC coaches in these two pilots both have a full job as RCC coach and are therefore *dedicated* frontline boundary spanners (see chapter 1.3 and Williams, 2010, p.7) – contrary to Dordrecht in which the different social parties all delivered coaches who execute this role as part of their regular job. Since I wanted to study the RCC coaches purely in their role as FBS, studying dedicated FBSs only provides the most valuable data. Second, I selected these cases because they provide the richest settings for studying the practice of creating common ground. In these cases, the network of parties was relatively weak at the start of the pilot. Therefore the coaches had an active job in building the network from the ground up and thus in creating common grounds between parties – contrary to Dordrecht and Zoetermeer where these connections were already quite strong.

2.4.3 Two RCC coaches: Bart and Gerard

Since this study is specifically aimed at investigating the practices of FBSs, I focus on the RCC coaches as units of analysis within the cases. In Capelle a/d Ijssel, only one coach has been assigned within the RCC program: Gerard[4]. He has been involved since the beginning of the program. In Schiedam two RCC coaches are active, and I chose to focus on Bart, who has been involved since the start of the pilot in Schiedam, Maassluis and Vlaardingen (contrary to the other coach who has recently been replaced). A further description of both cases and coaches is provided in chapter four.

2.4.4 Data collection and analysis

Multiple methods of data collection and data sources have been used to study the cases.

Phase one data
First, data collected in phase one was used to study the case (see table 1 and chapter 2.2). This data was originally collected for the evaluation of the RCC program executed by consultancy firm AEF and I was given permission to use this data during for this research. See table 5 for an overview.

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[3] Due to unclarity in results, this number could not be included here.

[4] Since little anonymity can be guaranteed due to extensive description of the cases and the number of existing RCC coaches being limited, I asked for and received permission to use the real first names of the RCC coaches.

Table 5: Sources of data collected during phase 1

	Source of data	Retrieved from
D1	Reports of interviews with RCC coaches	Conducted interviews RCC evaluation
D2	Reports of interviews with project leaders	Conducted interviews RCC evaluation
D3	Reports of interviews with youngsters	Conducted interviews RCC evaluation
D4	Reports and observations of focus groups with social partners	Conducted focus groups RCC evaluation
D5	Monitoring data youngsters (quantitative and qualitative)	Coaches / AEF

Documents

Second, I analyzed documents on the RCC program as presented in table 6. The monitoring reports are written by consultants of AEF. I have also contributed to the writing of the final monitoring report.

Table 6: Documents analyzed case study

	Source of data	Retrieved from
D6	IPTA Handbook	Ministry of Justice and Security & Inclusivate
D7	Report monitoring baseline	AEF
D8	Report monitoring 1	AEF
D9	Report monitoring 2	AEF
D10	Report monitoring final	AEF
D11	Provisional evaluation report IPTA	Municipality of Schiedam

Interviews

Additionally, I conducted a second round of semi-structured interviews. Here I conducted interviews with the two coaches and the project leaders they worked with. I choose to interview the latter as well, since I expected that asking the coaches themselves to reflect upon their own behavior and practices might be difficult for them and lead to biased results. I found an outsider's perspective to be valuable addition.

To structure the interviews I created four slightly different topic lists. They all included a general part based on the framework developed in phase two. In addition, I included slightly different questions based upon previous knowledge of the cases from phase one and the documents/data analyzed. I adjusted the topic lists by adding and removing specific questions about the role of coach and that of project manager as needed. Mainly, I asked them to describe examples and stories, and reflect on situations I observed before. I chose to ask for concrete examples and stories in the interviews to be able to explore their behavior and reflect upon it and dilemmas they faced. This way I assumed to get as close as possible to observing their behavior in creating common ground in situations in which I was not present myself. Moreover, by asking for detailed stories I hoped tackle the risk of only receiving socially acceptable answers by also asking interviewees to reflect on situations which did not work out the way they had hoped. The framework proved helpful in keeping interviewees on-topic whilst passionately talking about their work and to keep track of how their stories aligned with the practice of creating common ground. I recorded and transcribed all interviews.

Table 7 provides an overview of the interviews conducted during this stage.

Table 7: Interviews conducted case study

	Who	Municipality/Institution
R11	RCC coach	Capelle a/d Ijssel
R12	Project manager	
R13	RCC coach	Schiedam, Maassluis and
R14	Project manager[5]	Vlaardingen

I fully informed all interviewees about my research purposes and they all gave me their consent on record to use the information derived from the interviews for this specific study.

I also talked to AEF colleagues assessing the Red Carpet Coaching Program. These conversations were used to test the emerging results and provide additional insights and context, especially about the part of the monitoring during which I was not present myself.

Analysis

I analyzed all data sources using NVivo software. Based on this coding I first made a short-list of potential stories and then picked four based on criteria of relevance and diversity (see chapter 4). I used the different sources of data to thoroughly understand and describe each story and used the developed framework to analyze and understand the moments.

2.5 Reflection

During this research I worked as an intern at consultancy firm AEF. This firm was involved in the evaluation of the RCC program commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and Security. As AEF intern I contributed to the final monitoring phase. I joined and conducted interviews and observed and reported during focus groups and meetings. This position gave me access to data and contacts which would have been more difficult or even impossible to come by otherwise. On the other hand, this position also entailed a risk. Since AEF was also writing the evaluation report about the program as implemented in the different municipalities, possibly the interviewees wanted to 'show off' their work in order to get a good evaluation. AEF reports to the Ministry of Justice and Security, who subsidizes an important part of the RCC project in the municipalities. A positive evaluation therefore might be viewed as an advantage by the municipalities. This means that interviewees might pretend to be more positive about the pilot and not mention its challenges or hurdles.

In the first phase of this research (during the AEF evaluation) this risk was tackled by organizing the focus groups with social partners to get multiple sides of the story, long-term monitoring of progress and talking to youngsters themselves. Also, it was highlighted that there was not 'one best practice' of the RCC coaching program, but that different forms of implementing it may have different strengths. This allowed the participants to be more open and reflect on the differences. During this phase, I felt that participants indeed could be open and did reflected on hurdles they experienced. Also, they had an interest in sharing their challenges, because the consultants from

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[5] This project leader was involved at the start of the pilot, but started a new job in April 2019. However, in June 2019 she was externally hired by the municipality to coordinate the RCC pilot again.

AEF also were hired to support them in the process and could communicate challenges needs to the ministry.

During the second round of interviews which I conducted with the coaches and project leaders alone and only for this research, I tackled this risk by explicitly stating that these interviews were not part of the AEF evaluation and that I was there as university student writing my thesis. Also, I emphasized that my thesis was not aimed at evaluating the pilot, but was solely aimed at gaining an understanding of the role of the coaches and their professional practice of creating common ground. I feel that the interviewees did not experience any hurdles in freely talking to me about these issues.

Additionally, it must be stated that AEF did not have any influence on the content of this research – other than substantive input and reflection of colleagues during the process when asked in developing my design and analysis.

3 CREATING COMMON GROUND: TOWARDS A PRACTICE-BASED MODEL

During the second phase of my research (see paragraph 2.3) I spoke to ten (frontline) boundary spanners. Through these interviews I learnt how FBSs perceive and perform their role, with the ultimate goal of understanding how they create common ground between citizens, service providers, policy makers and other relevant stakeholders. In this chapter I present my analysis by answering the following questions:

1. What do frontline boundary spanners do?
2. What potential sources of ambiguity do frontline boundary spanners face between actors?
3. How do frontline boundary spanners create common ground?

The remainder of this chapter presents my answers to these questions.

3.1 What frontline boundary spanners do

The practices of FBSs are the primary subject of study here. It is therefore necessary to first establish what this role exactly entails. The quotes below illustrate how four FBSs perceive their role and core tasks.

"You know that there are all kinds of systems and perspectives and interests, but you understand how this system works and you can find your way through it. And you constantly put the citizen at the center." – R3, freelance FBS

"It has to be close to your heart. You must be able to work together with these kids and want to help them. […] And you put this triangle [of parties, red.] around the kid, with the kid at the center." – R5, youth coach

"I think my core task is to organize and coordinate care around a client and with the team. And overseeing that everything goes well. […] And I really feel like the spider in the web." – R4, neighborhood nurse

"I'm like the sheep with the five legs. On the one hand it sometimes is just arranging things like a house or an education program [for a person, red.]. And then where needed it is collaborating with all partners in that field." - R10, city marine

Figure 3: FBSs about their roles

The interviewed FBSs recognized their role in performing boundary spanning activities both between citizens and systems as well as between parties. Many of them work with citizens with multiple and complex problems crossing bureaucratic and sectoral boundaries. Youngsters in the RCC program face a combination of problems like debts, no supporting social network and problems at school. Reintegration officers guide their ex-detainees towards five *basic life conditions*: an id-card, housing, work and income, debt management and care. The neighborhood nurse described her clients not only needing medical care, but also struggling addiction, debts, loneliness, or overworked family care givers. This multitude of needs creates a complex web of parties involved with these citizens.

This shows that spanning the boundary between citizen and system is not as 'straightforward' as it may seem to be at first sight. This *system* consists of many different *system parties* like government departments or organizations, which all have (slightly or substantially) different perspectives, interests, values or goals, and no shared perspective or plans. This creates hurdles in organizing joint solutions or co-produced services for citizens. A strong network between these parties is thus valuable in creating common ground between citizens and these system parties.

This means that FBSs deal with two types of boundaries:

BETWEEN CITIZENS AND SYSTEMS
The FBS connects citizens (and sometimes also their personal network, like family and friends) with bureaucratic systems.

BETWEEN SYSTEM PARTIES
The FBS connects different departments, sectors and organizations within and outside of the government
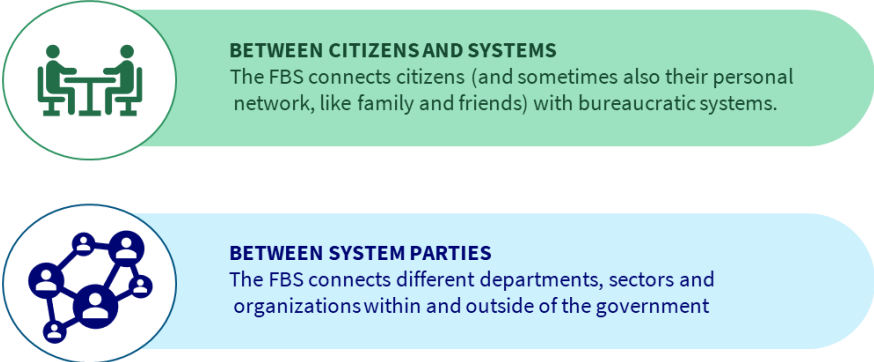
Figure 4: Boundaries FBSs deal with

Notwithstanding significant differences between them, the FBSs I interviewed had certain things in common. By definition, as street-level bureaucrats (SLBs), they all acted in close and direct interaction with citizens (Lipsky, 2010), but with the explicit additional task of actively building a network of parties around a specific citizen or target group. All of them stressed that they must be able to speak the language of both citizens and systems and actively try to engage in translation work across institutional boundaries. All emphasized the importance of independence, autonomy and freedom in their job. They had a strong passion and intrinsic motivation for working with a specific target group due to their own personal and/or professional experiences. Also, most of them emphasized the importance of competences as being a good collaborator and organizer, being creative, assertive and trustworthy.

This shows that FBSs are a *distinct type of boundary spanner* since they perform boundary spanning between parties as well as between citizens and systems. FBS scan therefore be viewed as occupying the space in-between *strategic* boundary spanners (SBS) and *traditional* SLBs (see figure 5).
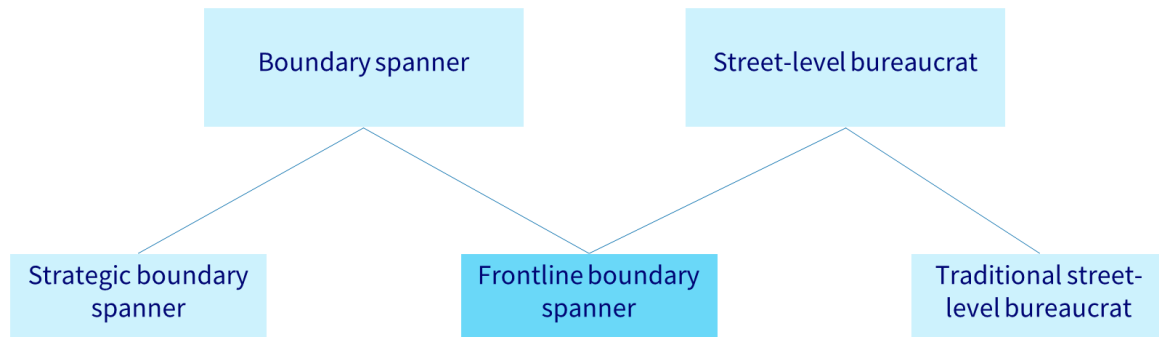

Figure 5: Situating frontline boundary spanners

3.1.1 'Frontline' vs 'strategic' boundary spanning

Boundary spanners in literature are defined as those "serving as connection between different constituencies" (Williams, 2010, p. 7) and are mostly studied performing 'upward' and 'across' boundary spanning activities – between parties horizontally and between different government levels (Rugkasa et al., 2007). They are specialized in interaction between different systems and have the ability to engage and connect with others (see chapter 1). Skills and competences that are crucial to boundary spanners are e.g. networking, collaborating, negotiating, building sustainable relationships, effective communication and translating across boundaries, planning and coordination skills, being innovative and creative, knowledge and experience of different organizational and sectoral contexts, and experience in multiorganizational settings (e.g. Van Meerkerk, 2014; Williams, 2012, p. 128). Below I argue why the FBS indeed *is* a type of boundary spanner, and how this role is different from the *strategic* boundary spanner role.

Frontline boundary spanners *are* boundary spanners
FBSs act as boundary spanners in dealing with the pressing demands of citizens, and in streamlining interaction between different professionals, departments and organizations involved with the same client and in preventing overlap or conflict between their actions. They describe themselves as taking on key positions within the network positioned 'at the center', or 'next to' or 'above' the client. The neighborhood nurse (R4) for instance described herself as *"spider in the web"* and the city marine (R10) as *"sheep with the five legs",* referring to their jobs as network manager or all-rounder. Also, they describe needing similar skills and competences in their jobs as described as boundary spanning skills above. Examples are: *"being good at building trust […], being able to make people see a common purpose"* (reintegration officer, R8), *"being a communicator and organizer"* (neighborhood nurse, R4), *"being able to collaborate with different contact persons […], being good at collaborating with the kids "* (youth coach, R5), *"being trustworthy"* (freelance FBS, R3).

FBSs thus are boundary spanners – they perform boundary spanning activities and need boundary spanning competences. However, they are different from *strategic* boundary spanners in their position and focus.

FBSs are a *specific type* of boundary spanner
The main difference between FBSs and strategic boundary spanners (SBSs) concerns their *position towards citizens.* SBSs primarily focus on connecting different organizations, departments or process. In doing so, they have little to no contact with citizens and have a more aggregate view of citizens as 'target group'. R1 (SBS) for instance showed this tendency while defining several *types* of clients in her work for a program organizing care for elderly:

> *"There are the 'vigorous elderly' who have a dynamic network including neighbors and the general practitioner. Another type is the one who temporarily resides away from home, who's network is situated within a hospital. And then there are the 'vulnerable elderly' who are in a nursing home and have an entirely different type of network altogether."*

When I asked FBSs to draw out their position within the network, they all drew themselves close to and in direct interaction with clients and provided clients with a *special* position at the center of the network. Also, the FBSs alternated between speaking about an *aggregate target group* and using a more *individualized* perspective talking about individual people as real and live cases. They told me stories about specific clients and used many examples by describing the specific problems and hurdles they faced or successes they celebrated. For example, many FBSs described how their clients sometimes take actions incomprehensible to them and how they never fail to surprise them. Like the city marine (R10):

> *"There was this kid and he didn't show up at his daily care program. The day before he had been there, but this morning he didn't shown up. That means I have to make a few calls about what is up […] And then it turned out that [name] again was caught for robbery. While we just started to think he was on the right track!"*

 The reintegration officer (R8) also vividly described the case of an ex-detainee she is working with, which clearly shows her alternating between talking about the broad target group and the specific case:

> *"They do not think pragmatically about the choices they make. He didn't have money, so he started a 'career' in drugs. Oh, and then he also had another baby. It really makes me think, how did you get into this rollercoaster in life? Seriously, you and I wouldn't think of it. It shows the strange ways in which these people think. And regular solutions are just not going to work for them."*

FBSs and SBSs tend to operate in different types of networks. FBSs primarily interact with parties positioned on operational level, while SBSs primarily act on policymaking or managerial level. These different positions generate different effects and challenges. An example of such a challenge at operational level, is that working agreements between parties seem to be heavily dependent on

the people positioned within the network. When organizations or their representatives in the network rotate in and out or when goals and structures within the organizations change, FBSs often have to start building the network again and make new agreements. R8 (reintegration officer) describes how she expects that this too is the case at the policymaking level, but that boundary spanners there at least have more possibilities of anchoring certain agreements in more sustainable policies:

> *"I can make working agreements with parties. But if these are not anchored in policies, they are too much dependent on specific persons. And then it becomes difficult once someone leaves. And I think that at strategic level, you could tackle this better."*

FBSs and SBSs working on different levels not only shows these roles to be different, but also stresses the importance of spanning boundaries across street/operational and policy/strategic levels within the governance systems. This can provide a great challenge for both SBSs and FBSs. R1 (SBS) described:

> *"There should be a feedback loop upwards to strategic level from operational level, not only the other way around. But that is very difficult to organize [...] So what do these people face and what can we do with that?"*

Moreover, FBSs describe *specific competences, skills and experience* required for connecting with citizens. These do not appear to be completely different from general boundary spanning skills outlined before but are of different *nature*. Whereas all boundary spanners pointed out that it is important to have knowledge of and experience with the systems and sector(s), FBSs emphasized experience with interaction with *citizens* to be crucial. Also, FBSs described being able to translate information across the citizen/system and operational/strategic divides. They stressed that the life-world 'language' eludes most people at strategic level - they cannot speak nor understand it. As R3 (FBS) explained:

> *"I often see that in creating connection with the citizen... You really need people with experience from practice, who can get their hands dirty. With all due respect, but a lot of people think they can do it, but when you take them to a resident evening [meeting with inhabitants of the municipality, red.], they walk out crying after five minutes. That is because they actually are not able to do it. They don't speak the language, can't make the connection. It is really a craft, it is something else."*

Another difference concerns the *type of solutions* FBSs and SBSs primarily try to find. Since FBSs have a more individualized view of citizens contrary to the more aggregate view of SBSs, they also tend to look for more creative and customized solutions for specific cases instead of only focusing on building sustainable networks and system solutions for a specific target group. This also means they sometimes try to 'bend' rules, make exceptions and use their personal relationships in doing so. SBSs on the other hand tend to focus more on building sustainable networks or making system changes. This does not mean that FBSs do not build sustainable networks, or that SBSs never look

for customized solutions or help professionals in doing so – but I observed a difference in primary focus.

An overview of the most important differences between FBSs and SBSs is presented in table 8.

Table 8: Profiling frontline and strategic boundary spanners

	Strategic boundary spanner	Frontline boundary spanner
Key task	Bridging differences between parties, building a network and strong system	Coaching/helping citizen and building necessary network between parties surrounding citizens
Position towards citizen	Aggregated perspective on citizen as target group	Individualized perspective on and in close and regular contact with citizen
Arena of action	Primarily network on strategic level	Primarily network on operational level
Boundaries spanned	Mostly across and upward: between departments, organizations, processes and levels of organizations	Mostly downward and across: between departments, organizations, processes, and between system and citizens
Competences	Boundary spanning competences with strategic nature like political sensitivity and experience with multiple systems and sectors	Boundary spanning competences with street-level nature like speaking both street-level and system-level language and being able to interact with citizens
Focus in type of solutions	Mostly sustainable network solutions	Sustainable *and* tailor-made, creative solutions

It must be noted that the difference between strategic and frontline boundary spanners is not always as clear-cut as this table depicts. Some FBSs also actively (try to) organize connection with strategic level. For instance, the city marine acts on both strategic and frontline level. The defining aspect of the FBS in comparison to the SBS is therefore the direct interaction with individual citizens as substantial part of the job.

3.1.2 Frontline boundary spanners vs 'traditional' street-level bureaucrats

Street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) were originally described by Lipsky (1980;2010, p.3) as "the civil servants who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs and have substantial discretion in the execution of their work." SLBs therefore *operate at the boundary* between bureaucratic organizations and citizens. They must constantly make decisions on how to act in view of specific cases and whether and how to apply and interpret rules. Due to limited resources and reality being way more complex than (possibly) imagined by legislators, SLBs must constantly invent new approaches and use their discretionary power. Lipsky therefore argues that they are more than only policy implementing agents – they become policy *makers* as well. Policy thus comes alive at the street-level.

FBSs *are* street-level bureaucrats

All interviewed FBSs considered regular and direct interaction with citizens to be a core part of their jobs and in that sense viewed themselves as SLBs. Also, they all stated to experience substantial discretion in their jobs and stressed that freedom and autonomy are some of the most crucial conditions for executing their jobs. As the neighborhood nurse (R4) describes: *"I really like experiencing that much freedom in my job. Of course, there are certain protocols and rules to follow,*

but besides that I can perform my job freely". I observed amounts of freedom and autonomy to differ among specific types of FBS positions. Furthermore, many FBSs recognized having a more policy making role instead of only being an implementation agent. Some of them even exercised this role more actively and consciously than the 'traditional' SLBs as described by Lipsky. I elaborate on this and other differences between traditional SLBs and FBSs below.

FBSs are a *specific type* of street-level bureaucrat
The main difference between FBSs and the 'traditional' SLBs as described by Lipsky, concerns their *stance towards boundaries*. When I asked FBSs about their core tasks, they not only named their job in interacting with citizens, but also their role in connecting parties, managing networks and/or spanning boundaries. This means that while the SLB mostly *deals* with the boundaries as they are given and has the bureaucratic organization as frame of reference, the FBS actively spans boundaries and views the network surrounding the citizens as frame of reference.

An interesting side note is that among different FBSs, different views and positions can be observed in terms of how much weight they attribute to each side of the two-fold task. Some of them primarily focus at coaching or interacting with *individual persons* and see organizing a network surrounding that person as facilitating to create the best possible situation for that person and to create more sustainable and effective solutions. Other FBSs prioritize the building of the *network,* to help as many of cases as possible and use their regular interaction with citizens as input in doing so. Of course, every combination or position in between exists as well. In practice, these different perspectives may for instance influence the amount of time a FBS spends on a certain task, the strategies or behavior chosen or even the size of the caseload. These can be viewed as two different ends of a spectrum of interpretations on how to perform the FBS role different from the SLB role.
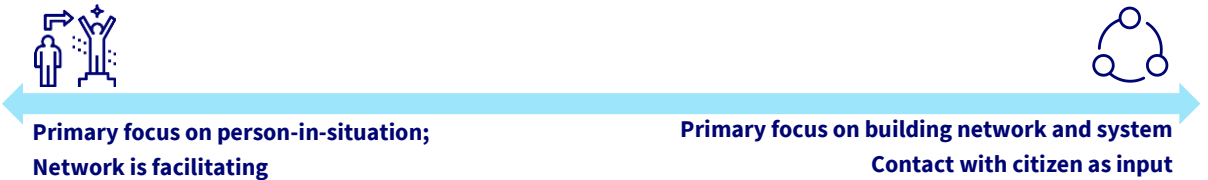

Primary focus on person-in-situation; Network is facilitating   **Primary focus on building network and system Contact with citizen as input**

Figure 6: Spectrum of primary focus in FBS's two-fold task

Whilst Lipsky described the traditional SLB as having a more *indirect* policy making role, some of the FBSs were given (due to their function and/or based on higher authority) or took a more *direct* and *active* role in policy making and signaling hurdles in policies. Some of them actively organize ways of tackling these hurdles, and try to find ways to anchor the creative and tailored solutions they find into structural policies. As the reintegration officer (R8) e.g. describes:

> *"I think I also have a signaling role towards policy level. When I experience certain policies or certain protocols or processes to be lacking in supporting the target group, then I must find possibilities for communicating that."*

I observed some FBSs to be more successful in taking this role than others.

I also observed FBSs to identify different *key challenges* than those traditionally described by Lipsky in his work on SLBs. According to Lipsky, SLBs are particularly challenged in having to deal with limited resources and complex reality. FBSs on the other hand mainly described challenges emerging from potential sources of ambiguity amongst actors, like in varying values, goals or interests. I will further describe these potential sources of ambiguity in chapter 3.2.

Table 9 presents the main differences between FBSs and *traditional* SLBs.

Table 9: Profiling frontline boundary spanners and traditional street-level bureaucrats

	Traditional street-level bureaucrat	Frontline boundary spanner
Frame of reference	Bureaucratic organization	Network surrounding citizen
Boundaries	Dealing with and being influenced by horizontal and vertical boundaries	Actively connecting and creating common ground between parties on different sides of boundaries
Key challenge	Dealing with limited resources and complex reality vs. bureaucratic systems	Dealing with potential sources of ambiguity in e.g. varying goals, interests, values and languages between different parties and citizens
Source of legitimacy	Rules and protocols	Acknowledgement from parties within network
Competences	Competences needed for interaction with citizens	Street-level competences in combination with boundary spanning competences

FBSs thus take an active role in the formation of networks and organizing collaboration between different parties. This fits within the broader trend of society and governance becoming increasingly network-focused. Many street-level workers increasingly realize their dependency on other parties and need to collaborate with other professionals delivering services to the same clients. Boundary spanning has thus become an integral part of the current public policy paradigm and will increasingly become part of professional's jobs (Williams, 2013). However, that does not mean that *every* contemporary street-level bureaucrat is – or should be – a boundary spanner. Many professionals will still continue to work primarily within one particular area of specialized knowledge, expertise and profession with a primary focus on the organization instead of the network. This also shows what clearly sets the FBS apart from other more traditional types of SLBs: FBSs as studied, truly identify boundary spanning activities and building networks as *primary* part of their job (next to interacting with citizens).

3.1.3 Towards a typology of frontline boundary spanners

Frontline boundary spanners can thus be viewed as occupying the space in-between *strategic* boundary spanners and *traditional* SLBs. Just as there are many different types of SLBs and boundary spanners, there are also many different types of jobs and roles that can be typified as FBS roles. When I told interviewees which other people I was going to speak to, they sometimes were surprised by the diversity of roles. However, in comparing given answers and asking whether they recognized themselves in certain behavior and patterns I had found, many similarities became apparent – also to their own surprise.

The list below provides an idea of the types of distinctions that can be made:

1. FBSs acting as 'life coach' and thereby coaching citizens on all different aspects of their lives (like the reintegration officer or RCC coach), and FBSs coaching citizens on a single issue or aspect and spanning boundaries needed to tackle this issue (like the debt coach or neighborhood nurse).
2. FBSs with a primary focus on helping the situation of a specific individual (within a target group), and FBSs with a primary focusing on building a sustainable network and system for and by helping/using input from a specific target group (see 3.1.2).
3. FBSs only interacting with parties on operational level, and FBSs also actively trying to span the boundary to the strategic/policy level.

This is not a complete list, but provides a fuller understanding of the types I came across during this study. Additionally, FBSs seemed to adopt many different *styles* in performing their role, providing an even greater variety – which I will not elaborate on here.

> **Box 4: Inherent challenges in the FBS role**
> Many FBSs described an inherent challenge in the FBS role concerning the *balance* in the two-fold task of boundary spanning between parties and between systems and citizens. FBSs I spoke to mentioned two different aspects of this challenge:
>
> 1. **Attention scarcity:** time and attention can provide a challenge in balancing the two parts of the FBS job. FBS describe having little time to perform part of their two-fold role because one part is already highly time consuming. For instance the neighborhood nurse (R4) described sometimes having the feeling of missing out in helping clients when her coordinating role takes up a lot of time. Also a reintegration officer (R8) describes sometimes finding it difficult to perform her task of connecting parties when she is busy *"putting out fires"* for the ex-detainees she is working with.
> 2. **Competences scarcity:** in a conversation I had with a partner working with a FBS, she described that finding one person with competences and skills for both connecting citizens and systems and connecting different parties can be quite a challenge.

3.2 Potential sources of ambiguity frontline boundary spanners face

To understand the ways in which FBSs create common ground across different boundaries, first exploring what potential sources of ambiguity[6] they encounter both between parties as well as between systems and citizens is helpful. These potential sources of ambiguity may form hurdles for common ground and hinder joint action.

Box 5: Overview of potential sources of ambiguity faced by studied FBSs

| Interests & values | Goals | Timing | Language | Knowledge | Rules |

Interests and values

Many FBSs described divergent *interests and values* among actors to be among the most important potential sources of ambiguity on both boundaries.

Between parties. Involving many different organizations and departments, also means involving a great variety of interests and values. R7 (debt coach) described how she came across these differences while working with both public and private parties simultaneously:

> "There is a huge difference. Private parties aim for profits. You must deal with their commercial interests, and debt management is booming business, of course. The same goes for debt collectors, they have their own business case. When you are working with municipal departments however, you are dealing with public money – and they want to help the client as effectively as possible and as quickly as possible. I see a great difference there."

A youth coach (R5) also provided an example of experience different interests between parties. He described how his program aimed to help as many at-risk youths as possible, but that sometimes schools he collaborated with seemed to have different interests:

> "Sometimes they say to me, 'sure, you can come to our school to recruit kids', but then it turns out that they only really wanted to flaunt our program at their open house. To show parents that they participate in social projects."

In this case, this attitude and mismatch of interests resulted in little commitment from the school to the program: *"And then we tried to pull and pull to make it right, but we couldn't stop the team's*

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[6] I use the phrase 'potential sources of ambiguity' to emphasize that these do not *always* and *automatically* lead to friction or conflict between parties. Also, they are more than simply neutral 'differences' between parties, because these are the specific aspects I observed to *potentially* cause friction between them.

progress from stagnating". These different interests and values may thus pose great challenges to FBSs in getting things done, as R3 (freelance FBSs) explained as well:

> *"I also see it happening within one municipality. For example, I joined this meeting and expected to be at the table with THE representative of the municipality. But I sat there, and one policy maker wanted me to go left and another wanted me to go right. So also within one big organization, it can already be quite a challenge".*

Between citizens and systems. FBSs also stated to face potential sources of ambiguity rising from divergent interests and values between citizens and system parties. R8 (reintegration officer) described needing to deal with conflicting values and perspectives on what is 'right' between her clients and institutions:

> *"On the one hand, I do understand these professionals telling my client 'you must do as I say, because I know what is best for you.' I do understand it, because there are all types of interests at play. But I also understand this kid. For example, this morning I asked him whether we should visit a debt coach together so we could set up a plan on how to spend his weekly 60 euros. And he just exploded, because he didn't want to. He is fed up with all professionals and different types of care he has been dealing with his entire life. And he just doesn't see the use of paying off his debts anyway […] If I would tell a person sleeping under a bridge that it's not normal sleep there, because WE think it is normal to sleep in a house or an apartment. That simply will not work. Because he has figured, due to all kinds of experiences and disorders, that that is a safe place for him."*

Goals

Another potential source of ambiguity – which is closely related to interests and values – concerns actors pursuing different *goals* (often emerging from their interests and values). This not only concerns substantively different or even contradicting goals, but also differences in how results are measured and priorities are set.

Between parties. FBSs describe how different parties seemingly having the same interests, can still pursue different goals because of how priorities are set. As R10 (city marine) described:

> *"It also has to do with priorities. For instance, for the police tackling High Impact Crimes [her focus, red.] is an important topic. But so is cyber. And so is terrorism. Then you really need to make sure to continuously emphasize this goal together."*

She also experiences difficulties when parties measure results for their set goals differently. She describes a case she recently encountered in her work to illustrate this:

> *"I for instance experienced this in working with account managers. I called one of them and he stated, 'I am the money guy, I need to settle the bill'. And I pleaded if he could please not do so for this one particular case. But I do understand it, because he and those parties are assessed by the number of people he gets out of social benefits. But this client, this kid, he*

didn't show up at his social program. And if you don't, your social benefits are cut back. And then indeed, he was kicked out of social benefits. For the account manager this meant: mission accomplished, box checked – because it was one more person getting out of social benefits. But I had a gigantic problem. Because where is this kid now? And what is he going to live from? I can predict it already, because I know the type. So there you see that our targets and goals do not match. I would rather have this kid in social benefits for three more years, and with three more years of coaching and protection. That would be a better result for me than stopping his benefits and not knowing where he is."

In this case, results being measured in different manners caused friction between parties.

Between citizens and systems. FBSs also described how citizens and systems pursuing different goals can also form potential sources of ambiguity. R7 (debt coach) described how she experiences this in her daily work:

> "*Sometimes you resolve one small thing for a client, and then the urgency is gone for that person. And then he sits back and you never see that person again […] Imagine I helped someone who was declined from gas, water and electricity. I would make some arrangements with the energy company and then his problem is solved for the moment. Then possibly this client thinks, 'this is enough for me, my problem is solved'. But that is only one small aspect of the problem. And that of course is not the goal of the municipality, or my goal, because I want him to enroll into the debt management program, or at least start working on his issues. But you cannot force it. Making decisions is difficult for people with debts, they often make decisions which we would not consider to be clever. But they don't see it that way.*"

This also clearly shows how goals of citizens emerge from their values and perspectives, which may differ from those of the systems as previously described. In this case, the moment the client thinks the problem is solved is different from the result the municipality wants to achieve, causing ambiguity between them.

Timing

Differences in *timing* also produce potential sources of ambiguity between actors. This concerns differences in how time is valued, perceptions of timing or in rhythm or 'opening hours'. Although FBSs mostly described this ambiguity to exist between citizens and systems, ambiguity may rise between parties as well.

Between parties. FBSs mostly describe divergent ways of *valuing timing* as potential source for ambiguity between parties. R7 (debt coach) for instance encounters this in working with different (public and private) parties:

> "*An appointment with [name public party] and the client can easily take up to two, three, four, or five hours. With [name private party] there is a certain limit depending on how much*

has been paid for the trajectory and how much time you can thus spent on it. So there is a real difference there."

Although it was not explicitly discussed with the FBSs studied in this research, it is plausible that different parties also have different 'rhythms' or 'cycles' during the year. One might for instance think about election cycles or organizations experiencing a flow of peaks and lows throughout the year. I did however not touch upon this issue in the interviews as such.

Between citizens and systems. FBSs described experiencing timing to be a potential source of ambiguity between citizens and systems mostly in terms of *rhythm or 'opening hours'* and *perceptions of time.* Most (government) organizations have set opening hours. The lives of citizens and the problems they face do however not fall within these time boundaries, leading to FBSs being called by them during all times of the day. R5 (youth coach):

> *"This one time, a crying boy called me at night. He just needed to tell his story to me. I was just in bed, but of course, I'll talk to him about it."*

FBSs also described perceptions of time varying greatly between systems and citizens. A waiting period can be viewed as rather quick or normal by a government institution, but may seem to take forever from the perspective of a citizen. This can lead to frustration and mismatches. R10 (city marine) provided an example: *"It takes eight weeks before you receive money after requesting social benefits. Do you know how long eight weeks is for an adolescent? Anything can happen."* Differences in perception of time may also entail differences in long-term or short-term goals, and with that different views of what is needed at a certain moment in time. R7 (debt coach) described the following about her clients:

> *"People's brains start to work differently when they have debts, they adopt a short-term focus. What happens tomorrow or the day after is no longer interesting. They only consider where they can sleep that night, whether they will have food that day, whether there will be more debt collectors. And these short-term goals do not always match what we and the program consider best in the long-run. And then you aree not able to make any agreements and appointments together, and have different ideas of what is the next best step."*

Language
Different use of *language* is primarily named as potential source of ambiguity between citizens and systems, but could also occur between parties. This not only concerns use of language as such, but also the interpretation of procedures.

Between parties. Divergent use of language and frames as potential source of ambiguity between parties was mostly mentioned by strategic boundary spanners (R1 and R2). They for instance emphasized friction due to different types of administrative language used, or how the use of certain frames for meetings or the network itself could work beneficial or cause friction between parties. Although it did not often come up during interviews with FBSs, some of them implicitly mentioned language as a source of ambiguity between parties as well. A reintegration officer (R8)

for example described how she first experienced difficulties in involving the probation office [reclassering], because at first her title was going to be 'probation officer'. She explained that the probation office felt threatened and could not see her added value due to this title. Also, the issue sometimes came up in discussing the use of information systems and formats which did not match between parties. Also more implicitly the city marine (R10) discussed how she felt annoyed by policy makers stating to *"have nothing to do with the execution of policies" ['ik ben niet van uitvoering']"*, because she perceives this frame as ignorant and feels it shuts the doors for collaboration.

Between citizens and systems. FBSs stated to often encounter differences in use of language as source of ambiguity between citizens and systems. This concerns two main aspects: *interpretation* and *recognizability and framing.* Systems and system language can be highly difficult for (certain) citizens to understand. R7 (debt coach) illustrated this by describing the previously-used debt management program of her municipality:

> *"Before, we expected a client to produce a complete file by himself, according to a set structure we had developed. The client could hand-in that file and if it indeed was complete, he could enroll in the coaching program. But these people with debts, they don't even have a clue on how to pay their own bills. So, completing this file was way too difficult for them. Threequarters of the people receiving this file, had no idea what to do with it and just threw it in the bin. And then the client was gone."*

Also, problems with recognizability and framing illustrate how language can be a source of ambiguity between citizen and systems. As the city marine (R10) described:

> *"Getting into touch with these youngsters is really difficult, especially as government institution. Because these kids have all kinds of enemies, and we definitely are one of them. So, if we come in with our municipal logo and state 'I am from the municipality and I am going to help you', that doesn't work. You need to consider that does not go well with everyone ['bij iedereen lekker ligt']."*

The city marine hereby shows that certain language or images – like the logo of the municipality and announcing 'I will help you' – can be viewed positively by people working in the system world but might evoke different associations with certain citizens.

Knowledge

Knowledge differences may form a source of ambiguity both between parties as well as between systems and citizens, in terms of both quantity and quality.

Between parties. Many FBSs described running into differences in (levels of) knowledge between parties. I observed this to both concern *knowledge of different parties/sectors* and *information on the target group/specific citizens*. R3 (freelance FBS) described a case she recently encountered while working on a project organizing care for people showing mentally confused behavior, which illustrates a knowledge gap between parties:

> *"The police had been called, because a person was directing traffic in his underwear. The police again called the crisis office of the GGZ. What went wrong here, was that the police figured, 'we notified the GGZ, they can solve it now.' But they forgot that if an autonomous citizen is able to explain why he is directing traffic in his underwear, a psychiatric cannot simply take him in for involuntarily psychiatric hold. That can only be done when someone is a danger to himself or his environment. So, if this person does not want any help, he is sent home again. And when I asked the police, they knew exactly by what kind of rules and protocols they work themselves. But they had no idea about the GGZ's. They assume because they can't help this person, it must be the GGZ's job to do so."*

In this situation, parties lacking knowledge about each other's rules or protocols caused friction between them and hampered effective joint action. The same FBS also described a very clear example from the CO24DAK approach (see box 1), illustrating how different parties sometimes have different pieces of information concerning a specific citizen:

> *"Imagine this: a neighborhood police officer sees a frequent offender passing by carrying a blue sports bag. The police officer can't simply demand him to open the bag, but it is an interesting observation. This fact is then stored inside the head of the police officer. But then it turned out that another party already knew that just before, a robbery had taken place and the offender had been carrying a blue bag. So we figured: if these bits of information are added up, the police officer would recall he just saw someone passing with a blue bag – and then the case could be solved'."*

During the interviews, I have also heard examples of FBSs observing municipal departments working with a specific client in one care program, and being unaware this same client is enrolled in another care program at the same municipality within a different department. Moreover, they described knowing some parties are more experienced and have more knowledge on a certain target group than other. FBSs are thus continuously confronted with parties having different or even contrasting knowledge, potentially causing friction.

Between citizens and systems. FBSs also described differences in terms of knowledge to be a potential source of ambiguity between citizens and systems. This works both ways. On the one hand, obtaining information from and about specific citizens or target groups may pose a great challenge to (governmental) organizations and professionals. What drives them? What are their needs? How can they be helped? On the other hand, citizens do not always know about (or understand, as described before) rules and possibilities for care as provided by the system world. For instance, in the context of debt management, R7 (debt coach) described how her clients often simply do not know how to pay their bills or how to make payment arrangements – or even that this is an option. The reintegration officer (R8) also observed that her clients do not always know what to ask for in meetings or which institutions they should contact e.g. for social benefits or a postal address. This lack of knowledge may prevent them from using help which they would have used if they had known about or understood the system.

Rules

Finally, divergent *rules* may be a source of ambiguity between parties, and in some form between citizens and systems as well.

Between parties. Different parties may work by different rules and protocols. The neighborhood nurse (R4) provided an example showing how these differences may cause friction in her work when collaborating with general practitioners:

> *"If we want to execute a certain procedure and treatment, we need to have an execution order. But general practitioners do not need it, so they don't mind arranging it later in the process. But we as nurses must have this formal order to be allowed to execute this treatment."*

In this case, differences in rules lead to different parties setting different priorities in work, causing friction in the process.

Between citizens and systems. Citizens and institutions may also have different rights and different rules to follow. R7 (debt coach) for instance described how she as debt coach employed by the municipality is allowed to make payment arrangements with creditors, but that individual persons are not. Also, as a youth coach (R5) described, arranging subsidies can be easier as institution (e.g. as foundation) than as individual youngster due to different rules applying. These differences may cause friction, hindering joint action.

3.3 Frontline boundary spanners at work

During the interviews I asked FBSs what they perceived as the main task or goal in their role.[7] Almost all immediately related this task to bridging and creating connection on one or both boundaries. Some of them put more emphasis on boundary spanning activities between citizens and systems, others primarily stressed their coordinating role within the network of parties. Their answers all showed that *creating common ground* on both boundaries is a main professional practice of FBSs.

Although interviewees acknowledged the importance of creating common ground on these two boundaries, many also emphasized that *common ground* does not mean that all differences between actors disappear. Citizens do not completely take over the values and goals government systems want them to have (or vice versa). Also, parties do not forget about their own interests once shared goals are formulated. Creating common ground according to FBSs is about making actors realize they are interdependent and therefore need to perform joint action, despite these differences. It is not about completely transforming parties or inventing something new, but about building on what already exists. Common ground can thus be defined as *that what enables joint action between actors despite potential sources of ambiguity between them.* The actors in this

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[7] Some of their answers are presented at the start of this chapter.

definition are those on either side of the boundary – e.g. a citizen and a service provider or two organizations or departments.

FBSs told me many stories about the nature of their work, the clients they worked with, the different parties involved and the fault lines that ran between those parties. They described their practices as being focused on creating common ground across these fault lines so as to enable joint action. It became clear to me that 'creating common ground' is not something that happens overnight and takes much time and energy of the FBSs, citizens and parties involved. Creating common ground must be viewed as a process involving three stages for both boundaries, with each stage building upon the others.

The first stage involves what I call *setting the scene*. In this stage common ground is not yet created, but the FBS outlines *who* he or she is dealing with, what potential sources of ambiguity exist between the actors and where the possibilities are for common ground. This stage functions as crucial preparation for the actual creation of common ground.

The second stage concerns *finding a shared motivation*. This is the first step of actual forging common ground. The FBS aims at creating a feeling of interdependency at both sides of the boundary and outlines *why* actors must feel the need to perform joint action (see also Emerson et al. 2012).

Shared motivation is not enough to enable joint action as various forms of ambiguity between parties might still prevent actors from effectively taking joint action. In the third stage of the process FBSs therefore work on *aligning practices and building the right conditions.* Here the FBS drafts *how* actors can perform joint action.
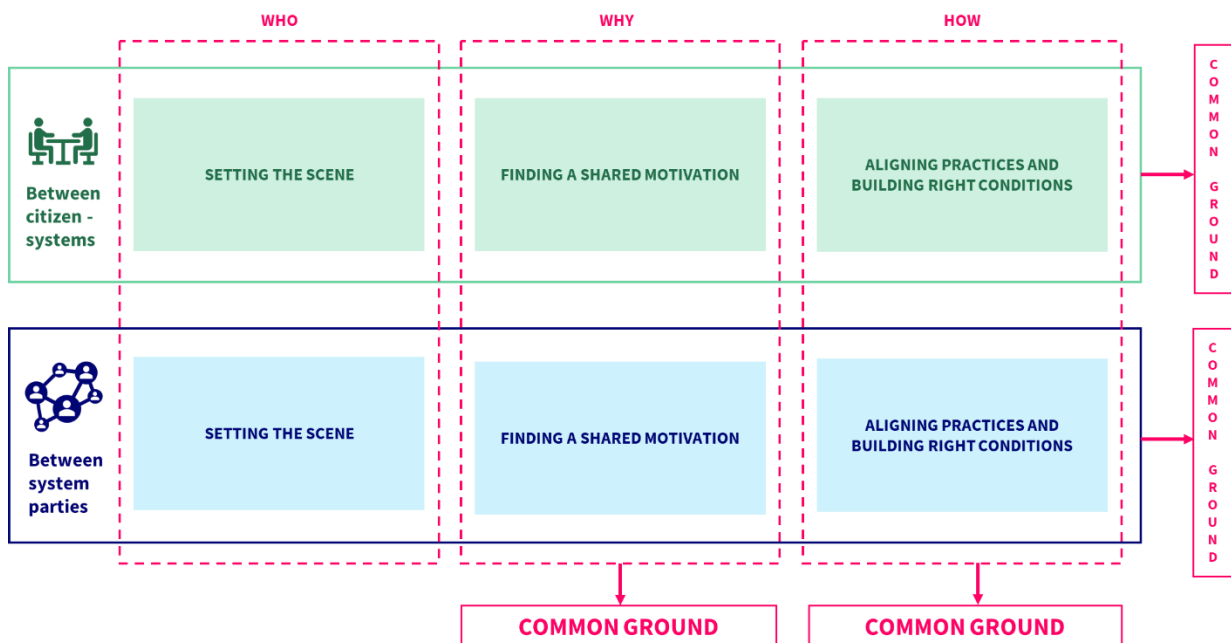
This process is presented in the scheme below.

Figure 7: How FBSs create common ground

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It must be noted that this framework concerns FBS activities only. The presumption is that the *reason* for why citizens and systems and different system parties must be connected, has already been established. Usually this reason comes from the observation of a certain *problem*. For example, the reintegration officers were employed because municipalities observed a high level of recidivism amongst HIC offenders and therefore made the policy decision to organize better aftercare for ex-detainees. Since this involves an entirely different cycle of policy and decision-making, in which the FBS is not (always) involved, this part is considered outside the scope of this research. Note that this reason is (or may be) different from the shared motivation developed in stage two. While this first reason might be established by one party only, the shared motivation often needs involvement and support of other parties.

A step beyond this scheme could be the organization of parties in a new shared form or community (see Lee, Horth, & Ernst, 2014). Here for instance shared values, a shared identity or a shared image like a logo can be developed. In this research, this however is viewed as a step beyond creating common ground. A shared form is not *necessary* to enable joint action, but can be helpful in a next step. This is however not included in this research.

Due to the limited sample size and scope of this research, I do not make any claims about this being a workable model for every case or in every context. However, it did prove helpful in structuring and making sense of the stories I heard during this research (see chapter 3 on how this framework was developed and chapter 5 for a full discussion on the value of this framework). However, this does not mean that all FBSs studied here perform this practice in this particular order (consciously). Stages may overlap in practice, or there may be iterative loops between them. Also different factors like contextual conditions, styles and experience of specific FBSs might lead to differences in practice. The illustrative case study (chapter 4) provides more insights in how FBSs create common ground in practice.

In the remainder of this chapter I describe the process of creating common ground as practiced by FBSs on the two boundaries. I will first explain how FBSs create common ground *between citizens and systems* by discussing each stage of the process on this interface. Thereby I describe several FBS behaviors I observed contributing to these stages. Second, I will describe the process of creating common ground *between parties* in the same manner. Box 6 provides instructions on how to read the remainder of this chapter.

3.3.1   How common ground between citizens and systems is created

The primary and ultimate goal of many FBSs is to help (specific or a target group of) citizens. To do so, they need to create common ground between citizens and systems despite potential sources of ambiguity (chapter 3.2). Below, I describe every stage as depicted in the framework and discuss several types of behaviors I observed of FBSs contributing to these stages.

Stage 1: Setting the scene
The first stage of creating common ground between citizens and systems is *setting the scene.* Here I observed FBSs performing two overarching types of behavior: (1) creating a thorough understanding of the specific citizen and target group; and (2) taking position as FBS between citizen and system.
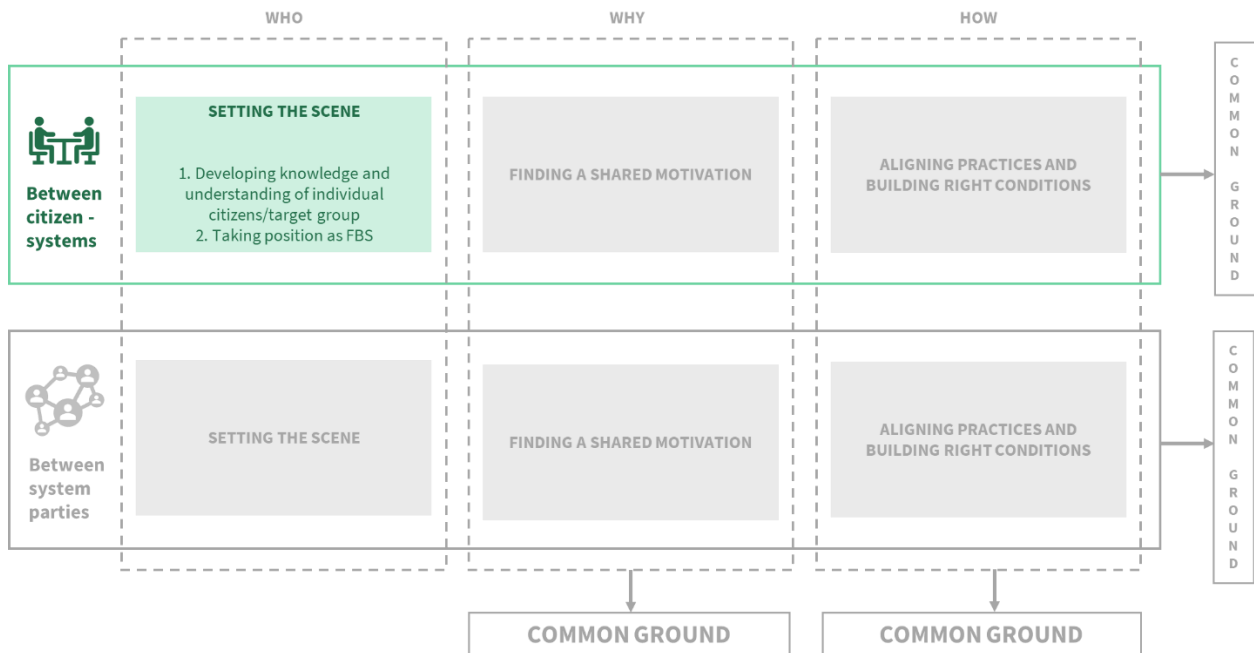

Figure 7: Setting the scene between citizen and systems

1. **Developing knowledge and understanding of individual citizens/target group**

FBSs studied stated that *developing their knowledge and understanding of individual citizens and target groups* is crucial to set the scene. Their position in direct contact with citizens allows them to get to know the individual person. Many FBSs therefore stressed looking beyond the 'file' and beyond the 'issue' but see a real and live *person*. R7 (debt coach) explained why she considers this to be important:

> "Preferably you coach someone from the start to the end. You make sure you are not just dealing with a file, but with a client. You try to discover what motivates the client and what his actual question is. You find the essence of what has prevented him from managing his debts before, what he can or cannot do, what motivates him. In the end the goal is being debt free, of course – but there is so much more to it. Someone may want to find a job, get a degree, take the train to Maastricht, feed his dogs – it can be anything […] So it is about empathy and understanding a client's needs and goals, instead of only solving the debts."

The debt manager described how her understanding of the individual helps her in finding possibilities for common ground – especially hinting at using this for finding a shared motivation (stage 2). Other FBSs also stressed this understanding to be important for finding tailor-made solutions (as I elaborate in the paragraph on behavior 3: *wrapping services around the citizen*). Moreover, FBSs pointed out that this understanding helps in knowing which parties to involve in helping a certain citizen or target group.

Below I describe several examples of behavior I observed performed by FBSs, contributing to developing their understanding of individual citizens and target groups. These include: (a) regular contact; (b) monitoring; (c) researching target groups; (d) outlining and acknowledging the multiplicity of problems; and (e) literally bringing the systems to the streets.

➔ **Regular contact.** According to R10 (city marine), it is impossible to perform the job without regular contact with citizens: *"You do it for the people in this city. And if you never see them and never speak to them, how would you know what to do?"* Regular contact allows FBSs to quickly grasp a person's problems, monitor a citizen's progress and to immediately notice when something is off. I discovered this mechanism when I observed a youth coach (R6) during football practice. He meets his kids twice a week, and told me he therefore always knows what is going on in their lives and immediately notices when something is wrong with one of them. We were sitting just outside the football canteen before the training started, and at that moment the kids started coming in one by one. He immediately noticed that one of the kids appeared to be a bit down, and asked what was going on. During the conversation it turned out he was not feeling so well, since he was practicing Ramadan. It was a hot day and he had not eaten or drunken anything. It struck me how quickly this coach had noticed something to be wrong. When I asked him about it, he told me that he was able to do so since he sees the kids very often, has known them for a while and always pays close attention to their well-being. Moreover, he pointed out that this regular contact helps in building trust between him and the youngsters. In time, they tell him more about themselves which again grows the coach's understanding of them.

→ ***Monitoring***. All FBS described ways of monitoring their clients. One example of the potential benefits of monitoring has already been provided in Box 1 (the Co24DAK case). This case showed the dangers of pre-conceived ideas and institutions failing to recognize the individual in the story, and how bringing together fragmented knowledge and different systems can lead to new insights. The youth coach (R6) I observed, provided another example. He showed me a file he uses to collect details about his kids:

> *"I keep track of all kinds of things. For example, I ask them, 'what do you do when you get home?' One says, 'my mum always makes me walk my dog, but I never want to'. Another says, 'I always play videogames'. And another kid tells me, 'I never really do anything when I'm at home'. Additionally, I keep track of whether they come in with a smile, say good morning, look a little sad. I note it all down."*

Monitoring not only helps him to grow his understanding of the kids and track their progress, but also in the process of building trust:

> *"I keep track of everything because I can't make any mistakes. If I do, they might lose their trust in me. Then they don't show up anymore and go hanging around the streets again. That would be a waste, because they really need the help".*

One FBS (R9, reintegration officer) also stressed the importance of considering a person's history: *"It is important to consider a client's history. That tells you a lot about the results of the person. Where did he come from?"* Monitoring provides a systematized method of creating an understanding of citizens and their progress. Moreover, it provides a way of gathering information that is understandable at system-level as well and helps the FBS in translating information across (as is explained in stage 3). Monitoring methods used by FBSs vary greatly, from Excel sheets used for personal use only, to advanced IT systems with files about individuals automatically shared and updated by multiple parties (e.g. CO24DAK).

→ ***Researching target groups.*** Some FBSs use research about their target group to enhance their understanding of these citizens. R10 (city marine), for instance uses research on criminals' motives in her work:

> *"We research why people do it. We for instance found out that very young kids commit these crimes because it is part of their 'career path'. That means it is not about this one specific robbery, but it is about the entire drug chain. And this specific crime helps them take the next step in this chain. And recently we investigated the motives of loverboys specifically. That turned out to be all about drugs as well."*

This type of research about citizen's motivation is useful in stage 2 of creating common ground as well (finding a shared motivation). Research can also be used to understand what type of practices work for this target group e.g. in communication, as R10 explained:

> *"We bring them a letter in person. Not in the mail, because they would never receive it. But still, they don't even open it. And that was also shown by research. We conducted social marketing research and it was acknowledged by all of them."*

Conducting and using research on a specific target group, might thus provide insights in what sources of ambiguity exist and how common ground can be forged.

➔ ***Outlining and acknowledging multiplicity of problems.*** All FBSs spoken to primarily worked with (vulnerable) multi-problem clients. As R7 (debt coach) pointed out: *"Often, it doesn't start with debts. The first problem is something else. In nine out of ten cases you deal with multi-problems."* Even the neighborhood nurse – who primarily works within one domain – experiences this:

> *"Essentially, we meet a client for one issue specifically. We get a notification from the hospital for a certain treatment. But then you get there, and you suddenly see a real and live human, and its entire context. Sometimes there is an overworked family care giver, or no network at all. Or sometimes you meet someone with addiction problems".*

This multiplicity of problems also shows the necessity of involving many different parties with different capabilities and expertise:

> *"You need so many parties. It is bizarre what kind of problems these kids all have. They all at least have three different problems in every space of their lives. And that involves so many different parties* (R10, city marine).

FBSs therefore emphasize the necessity of acknowledging this multiplicity of their client's problems. This helps to create a picture of a full *person* instead of a file or one issue, and stresses the interdependence of citizen and system, as well as between different parties within the system. Furthermore, clearly outlining the different aspects of the problem helps in making these problems 'fitting' or 'understandable' to the system and in knowing which systems and parties to involve and how to divide roles.

➔ ***Literally taking the system to the streets.*** R10 (city marine) provides another example of how she stimulates colleagues from the system world to obtain a better understanding of citizens:

> *"I bring my colleagues here to [street]. Then they finally cross that bridge and get to the other side of the Maas, and they must drive entire *** way to get here. And yes, then they find out that real people are living here […] Because we are situated in the neighborhood. We could walk outside now any minute and I could really show you what is happening. I can tell you so many stories. And I really think that is of great value to understand who we are talking about. I don't understand why other people don't do it automatically."*

She believes taking people from the city hall out to the streets helps them understand who these citizens are, talk to them and observe the problems they face. Moreover, this helps her to translate her street-level information to system-level (stage 3).

2. Taking position as FBS between citizens and systems

A second important activity contributing to setting the scene, is *taking position as FBSs between citizens and systems*. FBSs' regular contact with and understanding of citizens provides them with a sort of 'representative' status – they are then ones able to advocate the interests of the citizen to the system. On the other hand, they also position themselves as the sole contact person between citizen and all system parties. This key position provides them legitimacy from both sides of the boundary helping to create common ground. Below I describe two examples of behavior I observed contributing to taking this FBS position: (a) role-framing; and (b) gatekeeping.

→ ***Role-framing.*** FBSs pay careful attention to how to frame their position since many of their clients have bad experiences with (governmental) institutions. Framing their position as representative of such a (network of) institution(s) might generate resistance. On the other hand, FBSs also emphasize the importance of clarity about who they are and what they can do. I observed different ways of how FBSs approach this. As R8 (a reintegration officers) states:

> *"I never say 'I'm employed by the municipality and collaborate with the police' during the first meeting. That scares them away. I want to approach them as an equal, by for instance stating, 'let's just grab a coffee together' [even een bakkie doen samen]."*

Another reintegration officer (R9) uses a different approach. He does not position himself as an equal to his clients, but emphasizes being employed by the local government and his rich network of parties. He believes this provides clarity about his role towards the citizen and to the parties within the system.

→ ***Gatekeeping.*** Many of the FBSs I spoke to actively try to position themselves as sole 'gatekeeper' between citizen and systems. This provides their clients with stability since they only deal with one professional as contact person, and provides clarity for system parties as the FBSs functions as representative of the citizen. The neighborhood nurse (R4) explains this distinguishes her role from other professionals:

> *"I really feel like the key player. I mean, I don't think a general practitioner is going to stick to a patient's side that closely, and then for instance contacts the occupation therapist if the patient no longer knows how to dress himself – even if the patient did not particularly ask to do so. So I really see a distinct role for myself."*

Stage 2: Finding a shared motivation

In the second stage of the process of creating common ground, the FBS aims to find a *shared motivation* between citizens and systems for joint action. A shared sense of interdependence or responsibility is therefore crucial. FBSs often pointed out that this interdependency between system and citizen is always there in theory. On the one hand municipalities are responsible for taking care of their inhabitants:

> *"In the end, the municipality is responsible for taking care of its inhabitants. Whether someone has a MID, does or does not have a house to live in, or is completely insane. He or*

she is still an inhabitant of your municipality, and thus you are obliged to take care of this person." (reintegration officer, R8).

On the other hand, citizens also (often) need systems to achieve their goals and solve their problems. FBSs pointed out they however do not always realize this or want to acknowledge it. They feel they must or can solve their problems by themselves (due to their own values or perspectives, as described in 3.2). FBSs therefore mostly describe having a job in clearly outlining *why* citizens and systems need each other, to on both sides emphasize this interdependency and make this more tangible. I observed two overarching types of activities performed by FBSs contributing to this stage, which I will elaborate on below: (3) wrapping services around the client; and (4) developing shared goals.
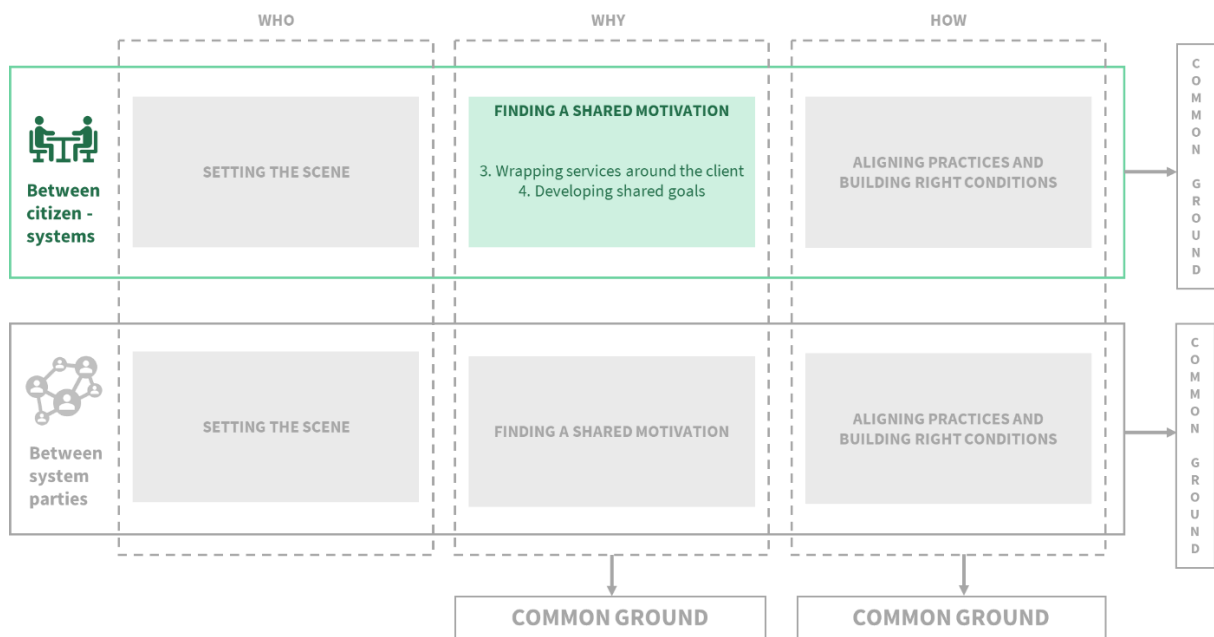

Figure 8: Finding a shared motivation between citizen and systems

3. Wrapping services around the client

FBSs showed that *wrapping services around the client* is one way of finding a shared motivation between citizen and systems. They stated that many 'regular' professionals too often talk *about* what is the best solution for a citizen, instead of *to* citizens about what they themselves deem best. According to them, system parties too often depart from their own perspectives and capabilities, are internally-focused and thereby lose sight of the citizen's interests. As R3 (freelance FBS) argued:

> *"I constantly have to make sure that the system's interests of do not win it over the interests of the citizen, that all possibilities and opportunities within the system are used for them […] Because these worlds do not understand each other, and I think that is mostly due to the self-interest of these institutions. Because I think it is perfectly normal for citizens and clients to focus on their own interests only."*

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Interestingly, this was acknowledged by a strategic boundary spanner as well (R1):

> *"From this very abstract administrative, strategic level, it is sometimes really difficult to reason back to why and for whom you are doing it. Our minister always says, 'What's in it for grandma?' and I think he does that to bring it back to the street-level. Are we still doing the right thing for the elderly? That remains a big challenge."*

Therefore, FBSs emphasize putting the citizen's interests at the center. They depart from the client's goals and needs (based upon their knowledge from stage 1), involve the right parties and wrap these services around the client. If this citizen-centered approach is successful, the motivation of citizen and system are aligned because they are centered around citizen's interests. As acknowledged by many FBSs, this requires a whole different (person-centered) paradigm within the public sector. It can therefore be quite challenging for one FBS to accomplish this. They try to tackle this challenge in several ways. First, I observed them trying to find creative and tailor-made solutions and bending rules to find possibilities. Also, FBSs try to translate the information obtained from citizens to strategic level (see stage 3) to identify hurdles in existing policies. Third, they use the backing of executives and other parties, sometimes even with direct mandate from strategic level or even the mayor (like the reintegration officer) to get things done. I have also spoken to several FBSs who are positioned in a more pilot or project setting (like the youth coaches or reintegration officers). Within this setting, it can be easier to achieve this 'special' position for the citizen. However, translating this to more standard procedures and policies can again provide a challenge.

4. Developing shared goals

Another activity performed by FBSs to find a shared motivation, is to explicitly *develop shared goals*. This can be via formal and structured plans on paper, more implicitly through conversation or by developing more broad goals like 'getting citizens' lives back on track'. I observed two examples of FBS behavior contributing to the development of shared goals: (a) involving citizens; and (b) forging goal alignment.

→ ***Involving citizens.*** The FBSs I observed were engaged in putting client-level goals on systemic agendas and in finding the right parties to involve for achieving these goals. All highlighted to set goals together with the citizen. A youth coach (R5) provided an example:

> *"At the start the kids receive a 'passport'. They note down all kinds of things, like personal details, agreements and goals we formulate together. Sometimes they start off with simple goals, like, I want to become a better football player. But then I help them a little bit by saying, 'okay, that's fine, but what other goals could you think of? Like goals at school, at the streets, with your parents? And then we also formulate these goals together and make agreements about them. And then I can address these goals every time. That is how we involve them in the process of mentoring."*

Involving the client is not standard for professionals working with citizens, as the debt coach (R7) described:

> *"In the old system, someone enrolled in the program and we as professionals would make all debt arrangements and the client was standing at the sideline. There was the file, the professional would work on the issues and the client was not involved in any way."*

→ **Forging goal alignment.** Some of the FBSs highlighted that systems and citizens having different interests, does not necessarily mean that no shared goals can be forged between them. R7 (debt coach) describes this vividly: *"Creditors have very different interests than clients. They just want to see money, they have a commercial interest."* However, *"creditors are always willing to talk and cooperate."* She explains that they do so because cooperation means there at least is a slight chance of getting a certain percentage of their money back which they had not expected to see returned at all anymore. FBSs are able to use these interests, because of their developed understanding in stage 1.

Stage 3: Aligning practices and building right conditions
Even if citizens and systems understand they need to perform joint action, sources of ambiguity may still cause hurdles preventing them from working together. In stage three, FBSs try to eliminate these hurdles by *aligning practices and building the right conditions* for joint action. I observed three more FBSs activities specifically contributing to this stage*: (5) translating information across system/citizen boundary; (6) building trust; and (7) bridging temporal logics.
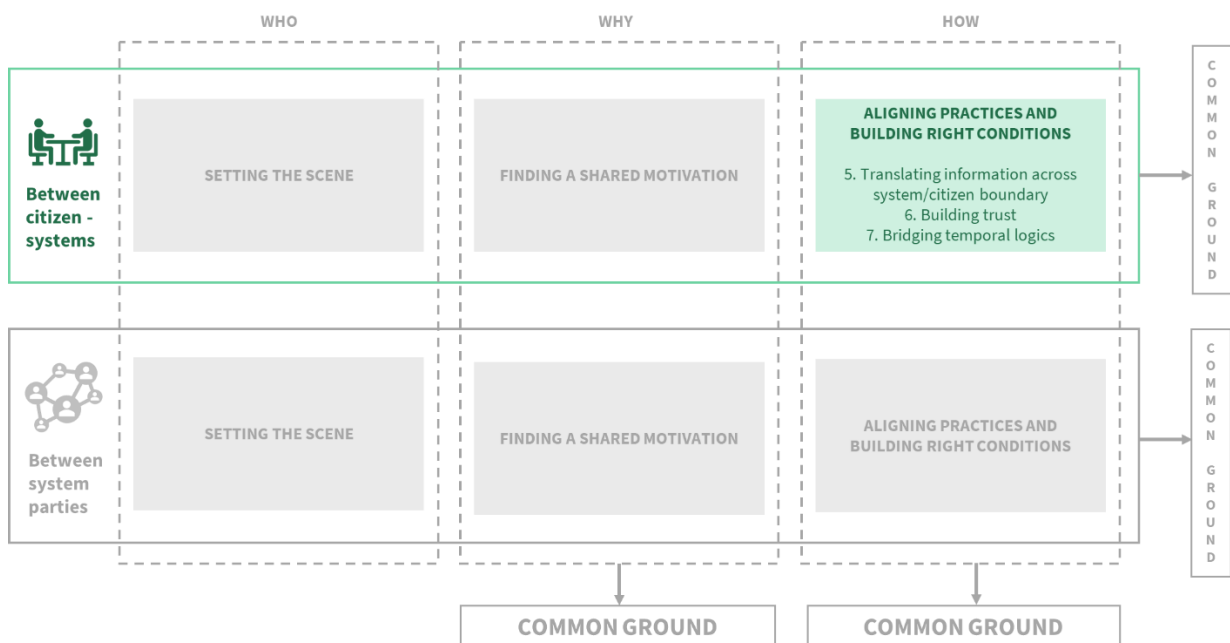

Figure 9: Aligning practices and building right conditions between citizen and systems

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5. Translating information across system/citizen boundary

As described in 3.2, divergent knowledge and language may form potential sources of ambiguity between systems and citizens, e.g. by leading to miscommunication or not having a full picture and therefore taking the wrong actions. FBSs aim to eliminate these hurdles by translating information across the boundary between citizen and system. Below I describe several examples of FBSs behavior I observed contributing to this activity: (a) using understandable and fitting language; (b) using appealing stories; (c) making systems navigable; (d) translation work towards policy level.

→ ***Using understandable and fitting language***. System language may be difficult to understand for citizens. Also, ill-suited language can scare citizens away when conflicting with their values, like in an example provided by a youth coach (R5):

> *"At first our program was known as a 'behavior intervention' for youths. That formulation was produced by the ministry and emphasized its aim of preventing criminal behavior. But when I tell parents their child is participating in a behavior intervention, the first thing they say is 'what is wrong with my child? It is the perfect child, so why?' So, we stopped calling it that way and named it a 'sports intervention'. Now we say to them, 'your kid can join a sports program for free'. And for people with a low income that is a big deal, you see their eyes light up. And then slowly you start to explain it is more than just sports. It is a mentoring program, it helps their kid. And you name the things you know about their kid, like how he has difficulties in making friends. And then you really see something happening."*

The phrase 'behavior intervention' which worked in selling the program at the ministry, worked counterproductive in helping the youngsters and in communicating with their families. Therefore, the youth coach changed the phrase. Also, he uses recognizable information he has about the kid in persuading the parent. The coach is able to do so, because of his developed understanding of the kids and their family (stage 1).

R9 (reintegration officer) also described having an almost literal translating role between systems and citizens. He often works with clients with a MID, who have trouble understanding complicated questions. He describes an example of him accompanying one of his clients to a meeting with a social worker. This social worker needed specific information about the client, specifically on his progress in finding a job. Therefore, he asked the client why he had not been hired when he applied for a certain job opening. However, as the reintegration officer explained, this person due to his low IQ had difficulty linking causes and effects together. He therefore simply could not understand the question. This led to continuous miscommunication between them. The reintegration officer in this situation functioned as 'translator' of both the questions and the answers given. This shows that using the right language also means using fitting and understandable language for *systems*. I elaborate this in the paragraph on *translation work towards policy level.*

→ **Using appealing stories.** Additionally, FBSs describe they know exactly what stories or approaches to use to appeal to the citizens they work with. For instance, the youth coaches studied tell stories about their own personal lives and what they have been through, and use sports as an appealing method for kids. As R6 stressed:

> "With all due respect, but if you are Peter from Blaricum and you grew up in a nice rich family, and you have no affinity with the target group, then you are never going to achieve anything."

R5 (youth coach) explained how they use 'ambassadors' in their program and showed me a picture of different professional sportsmen:

> "Do you know them? They are famous professional football players, also a street football player. The kids recognize them and think they are cool. These ambassadors also tell the kids about their own roads in life, where they are now and how they got there. So that is really an inspirational talk for them."

They know what is appealing to these kids, based on their professional and personal experience, and because of their understanding of them (stage 1).

→ **Making systems navigable.** Also trying to make systems more understandable and accessible for citizens helps in enabling joint action. I already described (in 3.2) how clients in the debt management program before needed to complete a file about their debts, and how that was highly difficult for them. The debt coach (R5) explained how they eventually changed their coaching system:

> "It is entirely different now. You just sign up and the file comes later – or not even at all. Now we just have a conversation, we ask how they are, what they face, what their problems are. Just a conversation. And then we use that information to start the program."

The debt coach uses easy and understandable conversation methods to obtain information from the client. The client does not have to translate this information into a file that is understandable to the system himself, but can use his own language in talking to the coach. The coach then again translates the retrieved information towards the systems, to help the client.

→ **Translation work towards policy level.** FBSs also translate citizen-level information into policy or strategic level language. I observed some FBSs explicitly aiming to change the system, to create more possibilities for tailor-made approaches, or to communicate about hurdles they face while executing their street-level work. This task can be a great challenge, as R10 (city marine) described:

> "We are not organized in ways that allow for easy and successful translating [information from street-level, red.] to policy changes. Still, policy level needs to solve the hurdles we run into at street level – I work at case level and they must make sense of it. But how do you get that information to them? That is THE challenge. How do we organize that, without having to

fill in all kinds of systems and sheets […] If we really want to show the importance of these kind of projects, we have to find a solution for this challenge."

Three main challenges can be identified in this task: (1) being able get through to actors at the strategic level; (2) being able to translate information in a manner that is understandable for them; (3) making them act upon the information. I observed different approaches in tackling these challenges. Some of the interviewed FBSs had a team supporting her or him with people situated at a more strategic level. Others had one executive with whom they had (sometimes very close and regular) contact on these matters. Others had an explicit mandate from the mayor or other strategic players or an 'escalation path' embedded in the bureaucratic organization (like some of the reintegration officers, or the city marine). Furthermore, some of the FBSs organized meetings with strategic level actors to get their information across:

> *"As coach you see a lot of things happening, and every now and then that slowly comes through to the policy makers. And then the question is – how can we together accomplish something? […] One way we try to do this, is by organizing these 'breakfast sessions'"*(R7, debt coach).

In translating information, the interviewed FBSs seemed to use two main strategies. On the one hand, FBSs objectify information gathered at street-level. The CO24DAK case (R3) provides an example, in which the FBS tried to make the 'story' going around about the youngsters causing nuisance more factual by gathering objective facts from different parties involved. The neighborhood nurse (R4) also explains using objective information:

> *"I try to make it as factual as possible. For instance, I observe that someone cannot take care of himself because I see expired meals. Or I note how much kilograms someone is losing in a certain period of time."*

She thinks this is important since this is the type of language other parties understand and take seriously:

> *"They understand it, they can take concrete actions based upon it. And I also feel taken more seriously, because they can see for themselves that this is a serious problem, and not just a sense or feeling I have".*

Many FBSs therefore also point out that concrete numbers, results and research serve as information that is understandable and usable on a strategic level. R10 (city marine) however points out that subjective stories can also be a valuable addition to this factual information:

> *"I provide examples of what is happening. I encounter beautiful and sad moments in my work. I communicate these directly to the director. I tell stories. That really works with the mayor as well, because he reuses them and then I run into one of my stories again somewhere else later. So I really try to illustrate, I use examples"*

She continues to stress that these stories only work as addition to factual information, because no policy change should occur based upon one person's problem solely. Therefore, she also uses facts and investigates whether a problem is more widespread. However, this shows that illustrative stories are valuable as well in translating information towards strategic level and in campaigning for policy changes (as the mayor reuses her stories in public debate).

6. Building trust

Trust between citizens and systems is an important condition for joint action, as was emphasized by almost all FBSs studied. This concerns trust between the FBS and the citizen, of the citizen in the system, but also trust of the system in the citizen. As R10 (city marine) described:

> "You only have one try to do the right thing. Their trust in us is very low. So if you have finally built a good relationship, you really have to live up to it. But our trust in them is low as well, because we know they often reoffend."

I observed several examples of FBS behavior contributing to building trust between citizens and systems: (a) taking responsibility over the citizen; (b) managing expectations; and (c) being transparent and open. These are discussed below.

→ **Taking responsibility over the citizen.** One way in which FBSs try to build trust from the system in the citizen, is by taking some form of responsibility over the citizen's actions. An example is provided by a reintegration officer (R8) who tried to arrange a postal address for a client, so he could request social benefits and health insurance. She however faced resistance from the social worker who needed to arrange this.

> "She said she had tried it before, to make an exception. But then the letters came in the mail and the person never showed up to collect them. And then we as municipality were left with a pile of brochures and a lot of hassle, and letters no one ever came to collect."

This social worker did not trust the reintegration officer's client to actually show up and collect his letters based on her previous experiences. Thereby the reintegration officer had found out what the exact problem was of this social worker. She responded by taking over some of the responsibility:

> "So I said to her, 'if you give this ex-detainee a postal address, I will be able to help him.' And then I promised that I would be in charge over his mail, that I would make sure he comes to collect his letters. And that he will show up to appointments every week. And that I would arrange housing for him at short-term [so he has his own postal address, red.]."

She thus understood the system's concerns and took these away by taking over responsibility. Another example is provided by the debt coach (R7). She explained that in some cases the municipality becomes accountable for a loan of a client. This allows creditors to make arrangements with the municipality instead of with the client. Since they have good faith in the municipality as organization, they can make other types of arrangements with them. Also, FBSs

pointed out they took over tasks such as calling institutions or accompanied clients to appointments, not only as translator (as explained before), but also to show the institution that the person is being coached – which helps in creating trust.

→ **Managing expectations.** FBSs emphasize the importance of being trustworthy and living up to their promises. This also means they need to manage expectations and never promise too much to their clients, because they are dependent on other parties as well in living up to them:

> *"I always do as I promise. So that means I do not promise a lot. I can't say to a partner 'you have to do this because I promised it to a client'. I can only tell the client that I will ask the partner if he wants to arrange something. That is the only thing I can promise."* (R8, reintegration officer).

This also shows why creating a strong network of parties is valuable:

> *"For this target group it is extremely important to make sure that what is needed, can actually be done. And thus you must also live up to your promises. And then it helps if the network and collaboration is strong"* (R9, reintegration officer).

R10 (city marine) on the other hand describes that she deems living up to her promises so important, that she is even willing to go beyond the regular rules:

> *"Once you have a stable relationship with one of them, you really have to live up to it. And that can be difficult within a system […] And that means you sometimes have to go beyond the system rules."*

It must be noted that here that the city marine has a highly independent position and is directly mandated by the mayor. Her position directly allows and encourages her to sometimes bend the rules if she deems it to be necessary. This is not possible for every FBS.

→ **Being transparent and open.** Many FBSs see transparency and openness as important factors contributing to building trust. However, there are differences in how FBSs approach these. As I described in the paragraph on *translation work towards policy level*, some of the FBSs pointed out that they do not always immediately mention who they work with or for during the first meeting, but first invest in building a trustful relationship with the client. However, it is then still pointed out, that in the end openness and transparency is necessary:

> *"I am always open to my clients eventually. I tell them that I talk to the police, I talk about them to people. I am always transparent about it"* (R8).

Others are stricter from the beginning:

> *"I am very clear from the start. I tell them that I work on behalf of the mayor. I am going to help you, you get a priority position. But if it goes wrong, your problems are only going to be bigger".*

This shows there are multiple ways in using transparency, and which one is used appears to depend on the personal preferences and style of the FBS.

7. Bridging temporal logics

As described in paragraph 3.2, timing can be a potential source of ambiguity between citizens and systems. Bridging these temporal logics may therefore be important in creating common ground. Below I describe two examples of FBS behaviors I observed aimed at bridging temporal logics: (a) not having a 9 – 5 job; and (b) aligning perceptions of time.

➔ ***Not a 9 – 5 job.*** Many of the FBSs spoken to explicitly stated to not have (or pursue) a 9 to 5 job. Some of them went as far as being available 24/7, others did try to set some boundaries in timing, but still have people calling them outside of regular office hours. As the neighborhood nurse (R4) describes:

> *"People call me at any time of the day, there are not always set time restrictions. And even if there are, there are people with cognitive issues who do not always understand them. And they might call me 70 times at night. That is difficult to deal with."*

Even though this constant availability is sometimes described as a challenging part of the job, many describe it as necessary since the lives and problems of citizens do not fall between set time boundaries. FBSs described to feel that not answering the phone at night or not helping someone during the weekends when necessary, might damage the carefully built relationship. Moreover, it might cause a client to seek an answer somewhere else (and sometimes in the wrong places) or make problems even bigger in a short amount of time. Also, FBSs describe it does not 'feel right' to not be available outside of office hours due to their strong intrinsic motivation for helping their clients. For instance, the youth coach (R5) who described being called by a crying kid while he was in bed, stated: *"Of course, I'll talk to him about it. What else could I do?"* This availability beyond regular office hours of institutions, bridges the gap that citizens would have faced without the FBS.

➔ ***Aligning perceptions of time.*** The perception of whether a certain time period is long or short can differ between citizens and systems. Eight weeks waiting for social benefits might seem normal in the 'system world', but can be experienced as an interminable agony for citizens (R10). FBSs describe that overcoming this difference can be a challenge, but that sometimes it is helpful to inform both sides about this difference in perception. In the system, if this is a reoccurring and somehow solvable problem, this might lead to a change in policy (as described earlier). Also, FBSs try to make special exceptions for citizens or find creative and tailored solutions.

3.3.2 How common ground at the systemic level is created

As described, the system world is not as straightforward as it may seem at first. It comprises many different systems, organizations and departments, all with different interests and values, language, knowledge, etc. (see 3.2). Creating common ground between them is crucial to enable joint action. Below I discuss each stage of the process of creating common ground as practiced by FBSs at system level and describe FBS activities I observed contributing to these stages.

Stage 1: Setting the scene
The first stage in creating common ground between parties is *setting the scene*. In this stage I observed FBSs perform two main activities contributing to this stage: (1) understanding parties and acknowledging their differences; (2) taking position as FBS within the network.
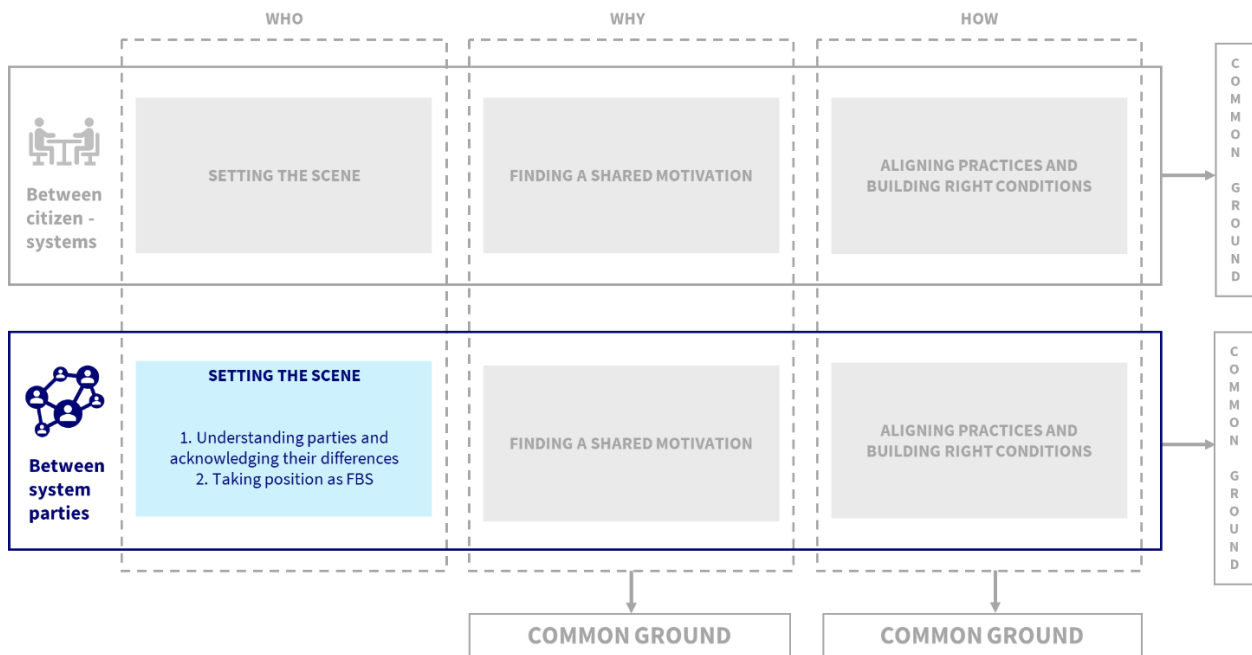

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Figure 10: Setting the scene between system parties

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1.   Understanding parties and acknowledging their differences

FBSs first need to develop their understanding of the different parties, and especially outline potential sources of ambiguity and for common ground. R3 (freelance FBS) described how this understanding helped her in the CO24DAK case:

> *"I knew that this project would only be a success if all parties actually contributed. And they won't if they have something to hide, for instance because there actually is nothing going on and they don't want that to be revealed. So it is really important to understand that these parties all have their own agenda. To know what they are and what they are not open about. Or whether there are legal capabilities or constrains to do what is expected. I think it is important to be able to evaluate that."*

Here she explains how this understanding helps her to see the potential hurdles for joint action and detect possibilities for common ground. Moreover, acknowledgement of these different

perspectives is highly important for parties. A sense of safety is created when they know their perspectives are considered and taken seriously in the process, as R3 stresses:

> *"If you want to connect different parties and start formulating goals together, it is important for these parties that you consider their different perspectives. So you must know about them and understand them."*

Below I describe two examples of FBSs behavior I observed aimed at developing this understanding of different parties: (a) using experience and relationships; and (b) explicate differences among parties.

➔ ***Using experience and relationships.*** FBSs state that their professional experience with different organizations or sectors provides the basis of their understanding of them. Many of the interviewed FBSs had previously worked for different organizations in the field and therefore know the ins and outs of these organizations, and what rules and interests are at play. R3 (freelance FBS) for instance described having worked with and for many different organizations in the safety and care domain:

> *"An important competence for connecting parties horizontally, is to have knowledge of and experience with their different points of view. You must really know and understand their different perspectives and frames […] I have worked in many different sectors and for many organizations. Therefore I know the capabilities and constraints of these different parties."*

This experience and knowledge of the sector and organizations also results in having a broad network of contact persons and knowing the 'social map' as the neighborhood nurse (R4) described: *"I know the social map. I know who to call for what situation."* R10 (city marine) also explained how her personal network helps her in her work:

> *"You seek the right allies. With whom are you going to play the game? Who is going to hinder you? How will you arrange that? So you know why and when to ask which person. You have to be a little bit strategic about it."*

These contacts can help in organizing legitimacy and support, but also act as informants about the different parties to get to know their differences.

➔ ***Explicate differences among parties.*** Many FBSs are not simply trying to build a network around one citizen or around him or herself as FBS, but aim to create a network with strong internal ties as well. Therefore it is important that not just the FBS understands the different parties, but also creates an understanding *among* the different parties. R3 (freelance FBS) explained that this is crucial, because parties often have different expectations of each other. I already described an example of her working on a project providing care to people with mentally confused behavior, in which the GGZ and police did not know about each other's protocols and rules (see paragraph 3.2 on knowledge). The client was sent home, because both organizations expected each other to take care of the situation. In this case the FBS took an active role in tackling

this problem. She organized a meeting between the care institution and the police. She let the director of the care institution describe their legal capabilities and constraints at the police office. *"That was a real eye opener for many people"* (R3). Moreover, she created a more neutral setting in which the parties could openly speak to each other and get to know each other, instead of *"shoving around the hot potato and fighting"*, as she stated it.

2. Taking position as FBS within network

FBSs state that in *setting the scene*, they must also establish their own position as boundary spanner within the network. Taking this position as network manager or key contact person helps in creating a sense of urgency and provides clarity between parties. Below I describe two main FBS activities which I observed contributing to taking this FBS position: (a) autonomy and honest brokerage; and (b) presenting self as connector.

➔ ***Autonomy and honest brokerage.*** All FBSs have a certain 'home' organization by which they are hired and paid, and by which they can be held accountable for their work. The neighborhood nurse is linked to a care institution, the city marine to the municipality (specifically the mayor) and the freelance FBS to whichever organization hires her. Still, many FBSs describe the importance of taking a very independent and free position within the network to create common ground between parties. As R4 (neighborhood nurse) describes:

> *"I experience a lot of freedom. Of course, I work for [name care organization], and there is some kind of hierarchy. But I feel completely self-steering. You are completely loose from the organization. So, I am hired by them, there is a connection, but I am still independent."*

Here she describes two important aspects: freedom to use her own time and execute her job as she deems necessary, and the independence from the organization, both allowing her to focus on the network she is crafting and coordinating. Although she as nurse must follow a schedule for part of her time, her contract also explicitly states a number of hours free for executing coordinating tasks. This freedom allows her to make her own judgements about what is necessary at that moment, and allows her time to invest in relationships. She describes how not having any specific targets for these free hours is valuable, since investing in these relationships is difficult to measure but highly important for creating connection. Additionally, I observed FBSs taking an independent position from the 'home' organization as helpful in creating a network *amongst* parties – especially in securing their different perspectives are considered instead of FBS's organization being the primary actor. As R3 explains: *"I use my independent position to allow other parties to be fully appreciated."*

➔ ***Presenting self as connector.*** Some of the FBSs also stated to explicitly present themselves as being the connector or network manager. R4 (neighborhood nurse) provided an example:

> *"A while ago we started a campaign of being the 'visible link' between parties. So the role of neighborhood nurse was presented as the link between different disciplines and the neighborhood and clients. And by now, all kinds of parties know where to find me and know that I am the neighborhood nurse of this area [...] So if I go to a care institution, then they*

immediately know about my position and we talk about how we can help each other. We exchange business cards, and then it is really clear that I as nurse have the contacts with the different disciplines."

Due to her clearly presenting her role as 'link between parties and with the client', other parties know to find her when wanting to become involved in the network – and in finding connection with the client. Being visible and known as boundary spanner, therefore creates a central point for parties to find each other.

Stage 2: Finding a shared motivation

The second stage in the process of creating common ground between parties is finding a shared motivation for *why* parties should perform joint action. Parties must feel a sense of interdependency and urgency for working together. The main FBS activities I observed to contribute to this stage are: (3) developing shared goals; (4) creating commitment and responsibility. I describe these below.
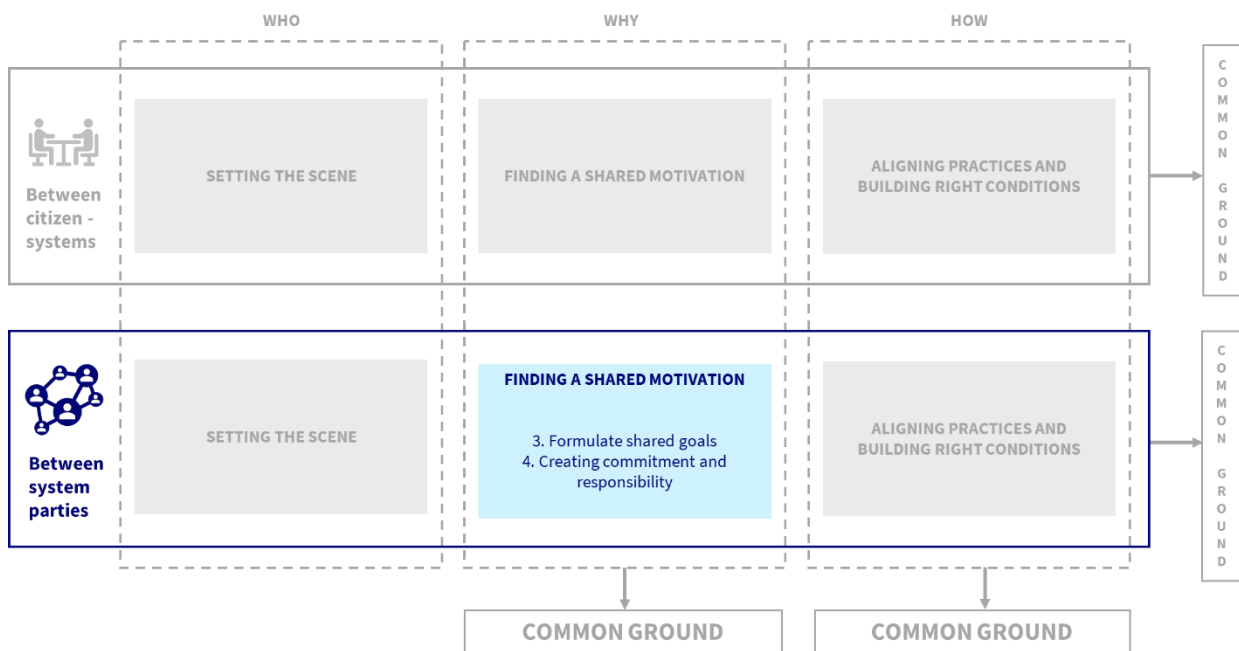

Figure 11: Finding a shared motivation between system parties

3. Formulate shared goals

Many interviewed FBSs stated that explicitly formulating shared goals helps in finding a shared motivation. Below I describe two examples of FBS behavior I observed to contribute to formulating these shared goals: (a) framing joint challenges; and (b) harnessing interdependence based on different interests.

→ *Framing joint challenges*. FBSs explained that formulating shared goals is easier when parties view an issue as a joint challenge. In doing so, it helps to frame a situation as being threatening to the individual goals, interests or values of the parties involved. For instance, the debt coach tried to picture a joint challenge for both municipality and creditor. She outlined it to be problematic for

the municipality if someone is not able to pay taxes and is dependent on social benefits, and for the creditor if no bills are being paid. A reintegration officer (R8) showed to frame joint challenges as well in trying to arrange housing for ex-detainees. She problematized the situation for the housing corporation as well – if no housing could be found for her clients, she would not be able to guarantee safe living conditions in the area. If parties feel *owner* of a problem, shared goals are set more easily.

→ ***Harnessing interdependence based on different interests.*** FBSs emphasized that the sheer fact that parties have different interests, does not necessarily mean that they cannot find a shared goal (just as between citizens and systems). In fact, different interests can even provide a valuable basis for finding shared goals. If parties realize they can best serve their own interests by signing up to shared goals, this enhances their commitment to a collaborative way of working. A youth coach (R5) provided an example by explaining how he uses the interests of different parties to organize sports training for at-risk youths. Different interests were at play, e.g.:

> *"The football clubs for example see the good cause of the project, but they also just want to grow and increase the number of members. They have an interest in that."*

Also he describes how schools want to stimulate their kids, but also want show off their participation in social projects. The municipality as well has an interest in attempting to prevent criminality by taking care of at-risk youth. In these different interests, the youth coach finds a shared goal of preventing crime and helping at-risk youths recruited via school by coaching them via a sports intervention at the sports clubs. Having outlined the different interests also helps in outlining what the added value of each party is. In this case the municipality provides a subsidy, the sports club provides fields and material and the school enrolls the youngsters. This also shows that a thorough understanding of all parties and their interests (stage 1) is needed.

4. Creating commitment and responsibility

Creating commitment and responsibility over the goals and the process is important, as a reintegration officers acknowledged (R9): *"You can't establish an integrated approach all by yourself. If you don't involve the partners, you will continuously find walls. They must become co-owners".* Below I describe three examples of FBS behavior I observed contributing to creating commitment and responsibility: (a) outlining parties' different roles and added values to the network; (b) being seen to be involved; and (c) finding committed persons.

→ ***Outline parties' different roles and added values to the network.*** FBSs describe that clearly outlining the different roles of parties within the network and with that their (different) added values to it, is crucial for creating commitment and responsibility. This explicates what all parties can bring to and gain from the network and thus helps them realize why they are interdependent. Also it helps in creating clarity on roles and respect between parties. Some of the FBSs spoken to encountered situations in which these roles were still unclear or seemed to overlap. R8 (reintegration officer) for instance encountered a situation in which the probation office was suspicious of her role as reintegration officer, because from their viewpoint there seemed to be a lot of overlap with their role. The added value of the reintegration officer therefore was unclear.

Moreover, she was dealing with a neighborhood police officer who was also already greatly engaged in the aftercare of ex-detainees. Because she first clearly outlined what roles and tasks the other parties had (or should have), she could find the gap in which her role fitted. As it turned out, there was no party that could offer real intensive contact and coaching of a client and involve all the different government systems. By taking this role, her added value was clear. In this example, the FBS filled the 'gap' herself, but she could also have chosen to involve another party to fill this gap. FBSs also pointed out that when parties eventually see how the established network and different parties add value to the shared goal, they are also more likely to be committed to the process. When asked how he creates commitment, R9 (reintegration officer) answered: *"By eventually showing them what you can do, and thereby showing what the added value is to the other parties. And thereby focusing on the positive effects."* To do so, it is important to have a good understanding of parties and their possible roles, as R9 (reintegration officer) described: *"You have to understand the interests of all parties, in order to be able to create added value for all*."

→ **Being seen to be involved.** Some FBSs also mentioned that showing to be involved in the process themselves and demonstrating that other parties are involved, also helps to create commitment with other parties. R10 (city marine) for instance joins police actions for this reason:

> *"Every now and then, I join their operations or actions. Of course, I cannot really catch any thieves, but it shows them that I perceive their work as important for me and for our goal together. And that really helps."*

A youth coach (R5) also described a situation in which he himself was not involved enough, and how that led to unsatisfying results:

> *"There was this sports club and it was far away, outside of the Randstad, so I must admit that I did not go there that often. But then at some point, it turned out that this trainer was just sitting at home every day. And then also school wasn't involved anymore. And then the school director had no idea what I was talking about."*

→ **Finding committed persons.** FBS described that the level of commitment is also closely linked to individual persons, as R6 (youth coach) explained:

> *"It is highly dependent on who becomes involved in the project. For instance if at first a team leader is involved and then pushes the project to a PA teacher and he becomes responsible… Than this PA teacher also really has to like the project. And that really differs."*

The neighborhood nurse (R4) described she therefore always carefully assesses who she wants to involve, based on previous experiences and stories from others:

> *"For instance, you have heard good stories about working with this one care institution, so we ask them. Or we involve a certain general practitioner with whom we had a positive experience in a collaboration before."*

These committed persons are crucial to the process and can help in spreading the word within their and other organizations. FBSs however also noted a challenge here, because creating commitment this way is highly dependent on key individuals – which might be a risk if someone changes position and entails the risk of the rest of the organization not being involved. Possible ways to tackle this issue are by also thoroughly assessing the position of the person involved within the organization, or by trying to make more structural agreements via these persons. However, FBS are not always able to completely influence this.

Stage 3: Aligning practices and building the right conditions

To take the step from *wanting* to take joint action to actually *enabling* joint action, FBSs must *align practices and build the right conditions* between parties. I observed two main FBS activities contributing to this aim: (5) building trust; and (6) enabling effective communication. I describe these below.
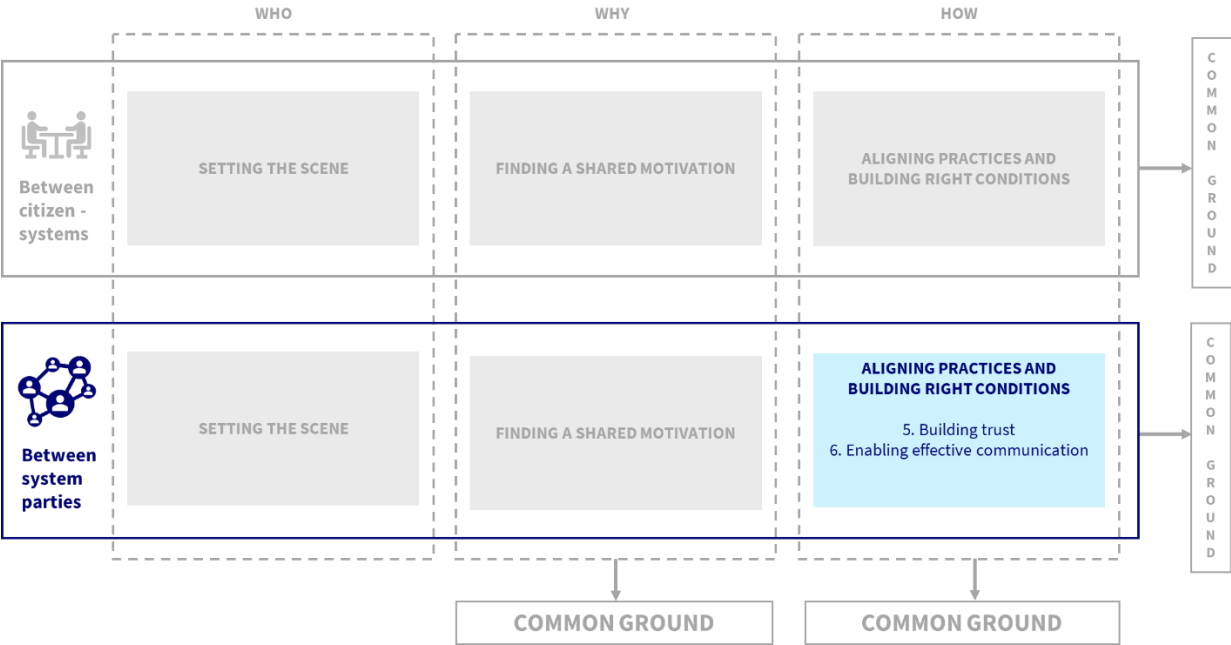

Figure 12: Aligning practices and building the right conditions between system parties

5. Building trust

FBSs often depict trust as an important condition for common ground between parties in terms of trust amongst parties, in the process, and in the FBS itself. The neighborhood nurse (R4) for instance described: *"The way to do it is to be very open and enthusiastic. And always make sure agreements are met. That is very important. Create a trustful relationship."* The debt coach explained how building a trustful relationship between parties is essential in her job:

> *"Creditors just want to see money. Even if it is only a small percentage of the debts. And if the municipality is involved, then also debt managers and creditors know that that's being worked on. And they know it is much more likely that agreements are met and things will work out."*

Creditors trust the municipality, and due to its involvement are more likely to make payment agreements with the citizens. This building of trust however does not only happen at institution-level, but more often at individual and personal level. FBSs therefore invest a lot of time in building personal relationships, which can be a slow and time-consuming process. R3 describes this:

> *"If you go to the police for the first time and they have no idea who you are, of course they are not going tell you everything. But for me it is crucial to have their information. So building trust is highly important, really at a personal level".*

Below I describe two examples of FBS behavior I observed in building these trustful relationships: (a) delivering on commitments; and (b) investing in relationships.

→ ***Delivering on commitments.*** R3 (freelance FBS) described building trust to be all about: *"telling people what you do, and doing as you say".* She points out that this might seem obvious, but that it still surprises her that many of the people she works with have trouble keeping their promises:

> *"It is in the simple things. If you have an appointment, you make sure to be on time. If something comes up, you communicate about it. And a lot of people just don't do that."*

This not only concerns the more practical aspects, but also in considering the different perspectives and values of parties. If agreements are made which are highly important for certain parties, living up to them is key for a sustainable trustful relationship. This however is not always easy. Due to different interests of different parties, FBS sometimes describe being 'pulled' to different sides. This can provide a great challenge, and in coping with them FBSs mainly describe situations of being as open and transparent as possible.

→ ***Investing in relationships.*** This concerns both relationships between parties as well as the relationships between the FBS and parties. FBSs described facing hurdles in organizing collaboration between parties when parties do not know each other, have no direct channels of communication or had disappointing experiences in the past. R3 provides an example:

> *"I wanted to involve another municipal department in the project, but they said, 'no, we'd rather not do that, we don't really have good experiences with them' – about a department within their own municipality!"*

One way in which FBSs invest in relationships between parties is by organizing (formal and less formal) meetings. These meetings can serve as ways to exchange knowledge or discuss the process, but also help in getting to know each other and building trust between parties. Also, FBSs themselves state to schedule time for relationship building and plan coffee meetings with parties to get to know each other and discuss the process. A side note here is that some FBSs perceive it as challenging that this investing in relationships can be very time consuming without immediate visible pay-off. This can be difficult in having to communicate results, especially if FBSs are not as free in their role or accountability provides a challenge.

6. Enabling effective communication

Effective communication is key to enabling joint action, according to FBSs, especially when many potential sources of ambiguity exist among parties. The debt coach (R7) for instance described collaboration to be challenging when no direct channels of communication exist:

> "The biggest hurdle for me is when people are not accessible, as is the case with some institutions. That really is the bottleneck of this entire debt management process [...] Some people just don't call you back. Or you can't find their phone number anywhere. Or there are very long waiting queues. If everyone was just reachable, then a big part of all debts would have been solved already."

Effective communication helps in bridging differences, building trustful relationships, or in knowing which parties to involve in the process and sharing information. R7 explained this:

> "Many clients enrolled in this program are involved with other service providers simultaneously. But I can't always simply call such an institution and have a one on one conversation with a professional. For instance when I call social services, I must first know the name of the right person there. And even if I do, the name often does not ring a bell with the person I am speaking to. That makes it really difficult. [...] So it already helps if you know who is involved. If you know a client is with social services, then you already know more about him. And if you are able to communicate directly with this professional."

Below I describe three examples of FBS behavior I observed contributing to enabling effective behavior: (a) creating shared insights; (b) organizing regular meetings; and (c) creating direct channels of communication.

➔ ***Creating shared insights.*** Different parties often have different knowledge (as described in 3.2) and use different information systems. The neighborhood nurse (R4) provided an example of this challenges her in her work:

> "Communication with general practitioners can be quite challenging. We have this digital file about clients in which the clients themselves and the family care givers can read along. But the practitioner does not read this file. [...] They are allowed to read it, but they don't want to. Because then they would have to read so many different systems and files on clients from different parties. So it is understandable, but makes coordination more challenging."

Shared information allows for quick communication since all parties are up to date about the latest information. The C024DAK case (box 1) already provides one example of how creating shared information systems can enable joint action. Here all parties had the same knowledge concerning citizens, action could be taken quickly if needed. Shared information systems are thus one way to create shared insights (the neighborhood nurse also described a system she used in a previous job which worked well).

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→ ***Organizing regular meetings.*** Many FBSs organize or take part in many different types of meetings with different parties to exchange information. For instance, the neighborhood nurse organizes 'multidisciplinary meetings' ['MDOs'], reintegration officers described different types of case meetings or take part in a 'breakthrough team' ['doorbraakteam'] within the municipality, and the youth coaches also engage in regular meetings with school and other relevant parties. These meetings allow the exchange of information, building trust, gaining new ideas and knowing who to involve.

→ ***Creating direct channels of communication.*** Some of the FBSs studied created direct channels of communication to enable effective communication. R7 (debt coach) for instance described how she together with other parties set up internal email addresses: *"We set up general email addresses, like an internal helpdesk. So if I want to contact social services and I have an emergency question, than there is this email address that I can contact. So that is really a short line."* Also other FBSs describe exchanging email addresses or telephone numbers with professionals they regularly work with and also between them, in order to create short and direct channels of communication.

3.3.3 Creating common ground: A model of practice

In this chapter I described how FBSs create common grounds both between citizens and systems, as well as between parties at system level. I found that this process consists of three stages involving many different possible activities to be performed by FBSs. In the first stage, FBSs set the scene to know *who* they are dealing with, what potential sources of ambiguity exist and where possibilities are for common ground. Then the actual process of creating common ground starts in finding a shared motivation *(why)* and in aligning practices and building the right conditions *(how).* The specific activities I observed and described in this chapter are summarized in the figure below.
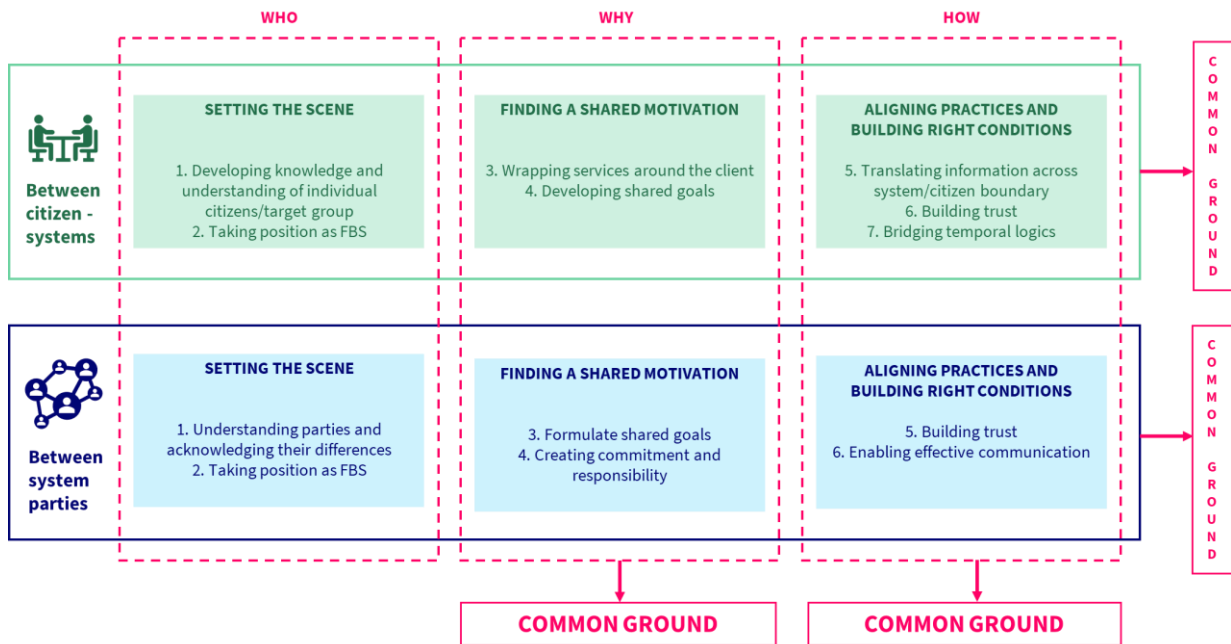

Figure 13: Observed behaviors of FBSs creating common ground

4 CASE STUDY: RED CARPET COACHING

This study aims to answer the research question: *How do frontline boundary spanners create common ground between citizens, service providers, policy makers and other stakeholders in complex social policy settings?* To answer this question, I developed a framework depicting how FBSs create common ground between citizens and systems and between parties (see chapter 3). To further illustrate how FBSs create common ground in practice and to show how this framework helps to understand this behavior, I use the implementation of the RCC program in two pilots as illustrative cases. As described, the implementation of the RCC program is an exemplary case because the RCC coaches in the pilot have the explicit task of both spanning the boundary between at-risk youths and systems, as well building a network of government systems and other relevant parties surrounding these youngsters. The RCC coaches can therefore be typified as FBS.

The first part of this chapter presents a description of the cases and coaches studied. Second, I describe four stories of the RCC coaches creating common ground derived from interviews and observations, using the framework to understand their practices.

4.1 Introduction to cases and coaches

I selected two cases to study: the pilot in Capelle a/d Ijssel and the RCC pilot in Schiedam, Maassluis and Vlaardingen. Specifically, I study the practices of the two RCC coaches called Gerard (Capelle a/d Ijssel) and Bart (Schiedam, Maassluis and Vlaardingen). To create a full understanding of the illustrative moments, the contexts and characters at play, I below first describe the cases and its main characters – the two RCC coaches.

4.1.1 Capelle a/d Ijssel

The municipality of Capelle a/d Ijssel launched the RCC pilot at the end of the year 2017. At that time, the number of HIC in Capelle was decreasing slower than the Dutch average and the number of juvenile street robbers increased. Moreover, regular preventive approaches proved ineffective. Increased attention to at-risk youths specifically in relation to HIC was deemed necessary. Right at the start of the pilot freelance coach Gerard was hired and the goal for the first year was set at him coaching a maximum of fifteen at-risk youths. Capelle a/d Ijssel explicitly chose a very 'heavy' target group: youths with high-levels of multi-problems and mostly already showing criminal behavior. The project leader in Capelle a/d Ijssel is the city marine ('stadsmarinier') for youth crime. He and Gerard together built the RCC network from their own professional and personal network. This network operates primarily on operational level with partners from the police, safety house [Veiligheidshuis], youthwork, district teams, social services (youth department, debt management), center for Youth and Family [centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin/CJG] and schools. Regular RCC meetings are organized with these partners to discuss relevant issues and occasionally individual cases. On the other hand, collaboration between different departments within the city government continues to be challenging due to the cultural differences (the *"DNA"* as the project leader stated). The limited experience of both coach and project leader with working on policy level makes bridging these differences more difficult.

Coach Gerard

Gerard never finished school, but has worked his entire life and has experience in many different roles, organizations and sectors. He has worked as mechanic in the harbor, as security guard, developed container homes for students, worked as job coach and has founded many different other foundations and businesses. He also gained ample experience working in projects for the police and in working with at-risk youths. He has a strong passion and intrinsic motivation for working with vulnerable youngsters and invests a lot of time in building strong trustful relationships with the kids. Also, he is highly assertive and unafraid to (in his own words) 'kick' the system if necessary or use different, quick and less conventional roads to the top. Due to this attitude, his personal charisma and passion for his work, he effectively builds and maintains trustful relationships – but he also is unafraid of antagonizing people he perceives to be hindering his work. Gerard has a wide professional network that includes local companies and politicians. He has learnt to work with bureaucratic systems and networks because he knows he can accomplish more when using them, but states he primarily 'is there for the kids'. He mostly practices his job based on his experience with the target group, passion for his kids and strong intuition and 'gut feeling'.

"I'm just Gerard, I am the way I am. […] I don't let anybody tell me anything. Nobody restrains me. And of course, I have learnt some things. In the past, I used to be really rude. There was this civil servant and I just told him that he was a ***. But you don't really make any friends that way, and these people can really give you a hard time. So now I try to involve people, try to find a compromise. But still if you really give me a hard time – then I do make sure to have the private phone numbers of the aldermen. And at some points, I just feel that they must change policies. And then I am very quick in finding my way up."

"Don't ask me how I do it, it is just a feeling I have. I can't tell you how that works, it's very strange. But I must never do something that doesn't feel good."
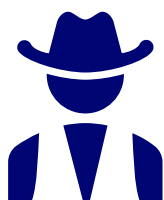
"At first I thought Gerard was just there to help me find a job. But he did so much more for me. He helped me with school and with getting funding for sports, also for some of my friends. And the other day my phone was broken and then he said he had an old one lying around the house which I could have. Now I know I can call him for anything."

"I'm here talking to you to do something for Gerard as well. If I would have to do that for the professional from the probation office or so I wouldn't have done it. That is not really someone I trust, because you continuously get a new one. But there is only one Gerard, and that really helps."

4.1.2 Schiedam, Maassluis and Vlaardingen

Schiedam and Maassluis first started the Red Carpet Coaching pilot (named Supercoach/IPTA) in November 2017. The initial interest for joining the program came from the observation that the regular programs for comparable target groups (like school drop-outs) proved ineffective, and a group of at-risk youths was 'left out'. Two coaches were hired via an external organization. One main project leader from the Education department was engaged as well as one additional project leader from the Safety department (both from policy level). The aims set at the start of pilot were two-fold: (1) to enhance the lives of at least twenty at-risk youths in the first year by active and intensive coaching towards work or school and taking away possible hindrances in their lives to prevent them from sliding into criminal behavior, and; (2) to identify hurdles in the network of social partners surrounding at-risk youths and enhance collaboration between them. The ultimate aim was to structurally improve the existing policies concerning (at-risk) youths. A steering committee was formed with representatives from strategic level of relevant partners as: the district teams (WOTs), the Regional Service Point Coordination [Regionaal Meldpunt Coördinatiefunctie / RMC] Rijnmond, Stroomopwaarts (social partner guiding people towards work, income and debt management), and the internal municipal departments of Education and Safety. Additionally, the coaches collaborate with other parties like the Youth Intervention Team [Jongeren Interventie Team / JIT] and Youth Probation office [Jeugd Reclassering /JBRR]. After a year also the municipality of Vlaardingen joined the pilot.

Coach Bart

Bart has ample experience in working with and coaching at-risk youths and ex-detainees. He has a strong personal vision on how the role of coach should be performed and on what works best in dealing with this target group. He practices his role very consciously and continuously reflects on lessons he has learnt and how to apply these. Bart is passionate about his job and likes to think along with policies and the development of similar programs on strategic level. He is strong in building relationships, and has a thorough understanding of systems and youngsters. His main focus is on discovering the talents and goals of his youngsters and using these in coaching them. Bart always wears a suit to emphasize he is different from the youngsters he works with, and to show other parties he is not just 'any' social worker. He emphasizes his main aim is not to become friendly with the kids, but shows he is trustworthy by being very clear and strict with them. During the course of this study, Bart also became a reintegration officer in addition to his job as RCC coach.

"I always do as I say. And I make these kids feel that what they say and what they want is important. I acknowledge their own goals and their existence. And then I see how we get these things done."

"I'm always very clear about who I am and what my role is. That what you see is what you get. So I'm not wearing a different hat with a youngster as with the municipality, or justice department. I'm transparent. So I state I am on the right side of the line, and if you want to get there I will help you. But if you don't then you have a problem because I am onto you as well."

"Bart lives up to his promises. He arranges things for me, and makes it all seems so easy, without any problems. When I needed to do it myself it all seemed so much more difficult. He just knows how to deal with people, he is really businesslike."

"We use WhatsApp to talk about small things. But I know I can always call him, and it doesn't matter what time it is."

4.2 RCC coaches at work

In the remainder of this paragraph, I describe four moments that illustrate how coaches Gerard and Bart as FBSs practice creating common ground between citizens and systems and between parties. For both coaches I describe two illustrative moments each. I selected these moments based on method of data collection, relevance and diversity. For each coach I included one moment elaborately discussed during interviews. This allowed me to gain insights in moments in which I was not (and could never be) present, but which provide highly interesting illustrations. The other story I derived from my observations of RCC meetings. This allowed me to thoroughly analyze what happened in practice instead of only trusting information gained from interviews with the coaches and project leaders. Picking one moment from interviews and one moment from observations therefore allows me to use 'the best of both worlds' in combining strengths of these two sources of data. Also, I describe at least one moment for each coach in which they perform boundary spanning activities both between citizen and system as well as between system parties, since these provide the richest settings to analyze the practice of creating common ground on both boundaries. Moreover, I have picked moments that show different stages of the creating common grounds process and cover both successful and less successful practices.

I begin by describing two stories from the Capelle a/d Ijssel case with Gerard and continue by describing two stories from the Schiedam, Maassluis and Vlaardingen case with Bart.

4.2.1 Setting the scene for coaching

During an interview Gerard described to me his usual process of coaching youngsters as well as a case in which he was not successful in doing so. I found this description to particularly illustrate why Gerard believes first *setting the scene* is crucial in creating common ground between citizen and system. To paint the full picture, I first describe Gerard's usual process and then describe the unsuccessful case.

Gerard is very clear about what the first step of coaching a youngster should be: *"I don't care who you bring to me. But I do have one demand: I must meet the kid at least once before we start the process."* During this first meeting Gerard does not ask the youngsters any questions about themselves, but starts by telling him about himself.

> *"In the first meeting I only want to know their name, address and phone number. That's all. And then I tell them who I am and where I came from. I also came from the streets and have not finished school. I know about life, I have been through a lot. But the big difference is that I have always worked to earn money. And I tell these youngsters that they won't be able to do that by going down the criminal path. If needed I can also take them to meet the big guys of the criminal world – those who are trying to get out of it but now have everyone and every institution working against them."*

Gerard here clearly uses stories and language appealing to the youngsters. He shows them he can relate and understand them, based on his personal experience and experience with the target group. Also, he describes his own role to them:

> *"I tell them what I can do for them, that I will help them with everything. I can help them with finding out which institutions they need to go to, help them with complicated forms or accompany them in meetings with professionals. But I also tell them I don't have a magic wand to solve all of their problems – I support them but they have to do it themselves. Also, I tell them that I have many useful contacts and relations to help them find a job or go back to school."*

Here Gerard clearly positions himself as FBS between youngster and system. He becomes a source of stability for the youngsters by being their only contact person and acts as connector and translator. He does not solve their problems for them, but creates common ground between the systems and youngsters allowing for joint action between them.

However, before he is able to help a youngster, he states it is crucial to first get to know the individual in addition to his knowledge on the aggregate target group:

> *"You first really have to get to know someone. Otherwise I can't do anything. Look, if I met you and I were to help you, and you have all kinds of problems. If I then I just tell you: 'I have a job for you – you can start tomorrow and go and wash dishes. Good luck with it.' How would I then ever know that you are suited for that job? I must first know who you are, what drives you. I would not do that to a kid. But also, I would not do that my contacts at the businesses. They know I am always really careful and accurate. I am not going to risk that by bringing them someone I don't know. Why do you think they always call me again with new job openings?"*

Gerard therefore always first creates a thorough understanding of a youngster, before taking real action. This knowledge and his accuracy based upon that knowledge, are a source of legitimacy and trust from other parties, which is why his contacts at businesses continuously send him new job openings for youngsters. Also, this understanding helps him to discover possibilities for common ground to help the youngster, as well as to identify potential hurdles to the process:

> *"I know what kind of difficulties they run into. For example, these kids need to go to social services. They just always have a different excuse of why they won't go there. It really is a big and difficult step for them, so if you don't take that into account, they won't go. Therefore, I accompany them. I pick them up, drive them there, go with them and bring them home".*

Here Gerard takes away some of the hurdles hindering joint action between them and service providers. He understands that for these youngsters going to the city hall and understanding what is expected of them is a big step, and functions as translator and brings them to the right location. Gerard's states he is able to create this thorough understanding of his youngsters, by building a trustful relationship with them:

> *"I try to build a strong connection, so I try to help them with everything. They can call me night and day. I don't care because I will always help them. And they first have to learn that that really is the case and that takes some time. Eventually they will know, and they will tell me about their problems as well."*

Here Gerard builds the right conditions for joint action. He sees building a trustful relationship as a necessary condition and takes away temporal hurdles by being available 24/7.

An unsuccessful case
Gerard recalls a recent situation in which he was not able to follow his usual process. There were different interests at play within the municipality for helping a specific youngster to work quickly:

> *"There was this kid, and he was in all kinds of trouble and could not get a job. And then even mayor Aboutaleb was involved at some point and he promised this boy he would help him. And then they called me if I could do so. But of course, there were all kinds of political interests at play, different people saying different things and it had to be quickly arranged."*

In this specific case, there were different parties with different opinions about what should happen with the boy and which problems should be solved first. There was political pressure on getting the youngster a job as soon as possible. Gerard also explained there were differences between parties' goals – some (including himself) wanting to help the youngster thoroughly but at his own pace, others aimed for quicker but possibly less sustainable solutions.

On this occasion Gerard was unable to create common ground between these parties within the municipality, failing to obtain alignment between their various goals, rhythms and practices. He had little time to get to know the youngster and could not position himself as FBS between client and system. According to Gerard, the process went much too quickly here:

> "They had already found this place for him in this special working program and immediately registered him there. But I did not know the boy, and he did not know the project. So I didn't know whether he was suitable for the project. And then it turned out that he wasn't and it ended badly and we lost him. Then I really think: just let me do my job. These kids just say things to be done with all the help, but they actually have no clue what they want themselves."

In this case, Gerard did not get the chance to *set the scene* and the youngster left with a feeling of not being understood. He lost trust in the system, and the system was frustrated because the youngster did not take the chance it thought it had offered.

This shows that taking time to 'get the ducks in a row' is crucial in the process of creating common ground. The RCC project leader acknowledged the importance of this stage as well:

> "The first contact is crucial. If that goes well, then Gerard really is able to build a trustful relationship with a youngster. It really is a difficult target group with difficult kids and the regular programs don't work for them. But he really has this attitude which works with them."

According to him, Gerard takes a special FBS position between the youngster and the systems and uses practices that are appealing to the youngsters. The project leader sees this position as vital, especially for this target group for which the regular programs do not work:

> "For 90% or even 95% of the people the regular policies and other programs work fine. But for this specific target group it is not enough, it is too difficult. And that's where Gerard comes in."

He points out that Gerard therefore needs an autonomous and independent position to do as he considers best and must be able to take as much time as needed:

> "It is impossible to say: we start with a kid, the first three weeks we work on building trust, then the fourth week we meet again and find a job. You take time, judge the situation per person. And there are great differences between individuals as well, depending on how damaged a kid is."

Gerard thus needs time and freedom to successfully position himself as FBS and gain understanding of the youngsters.

This story illustrates how the *setting the scene* stage is crucial for Gerard as FBS in creating common ground between youngsters and systems. Gerard describes how he first needs to get to know a youngster and position himself as FBS between youngster and system. He uses his understanding of the youngster and his position to find possibilities and identify potential hurdles for common ground, as well as to claim legitimacy from other parties like his business contacts. The unsuccessful case also shows that if Gerard is not able to thoroughly set the scene, creating common ground is highly difficult. Moreover this story shows that a free and independent role and legitimacy from other parties are crucial conditions for Gerard to successfully create common ground.

4.2.2 An operational-level RCC meeting

I joined one of the RCC meetings in Capelle a/d Ijssel as a participant observer. Here I observed how organizing these meetings contributes to the forging of common ground. Also, I observed a specifically interesting moment in a discussion about setting a new goal for the network. Below I first describe the setting of the RCC meeting I joined and how these RCC meetings are important in the process of creating common ground, and continue by describing the specific discussion.

The RCC meeting in Capelle a/d Ijssel is a monthly meeting between coach Gerard, the RCC project leader and relevant social parties (mostly from operational level) which Gerard regularly works with. The meeting I joined that day was chaired by the RCC project leader. Normally the project leader and Gerard themselves together provide the full agenda for the meeting. This meeting however was a special edition, since my colleague and I from AEF joined the meeting to observe and evaluate the pilot. Part of the agenda therefore was filled with our evaluation points that day. This included a SWOT-analysis of the pilot, discussing what each party at the table *gained* from the network and *brought* to the network, whether there were 'missing partners' and we discussed further ideas/points that came up during the meeting. This created a setting in which all parties at the table were encouraged to reflect on the process, the network and each other's roles within it.

At the table that day were: a police officer, a school attendance officer, a school support coordinator [ondersteuningscoördinator] from a school in the district, a youth care worker, a social worker from the center for youth and family, a PGA officer from the municipality, and a worker from the Work and Income domain of the municipality. The meeting took place in a classroom at the school where the school support coordinator works, which is the usual meeting location for the group. An interesting side note is that at the end of the meeting it was suggested to rotate meeting places from then on, so all parties would familiarize with the different organizations involved.

The RCC project leader chaired the meeting and Gerard took a seat in between the partners. Although Gerard did not chair the discussion, it struck me how the different parties all continuously focused on Gerard, clearly knew him well and continuously referred to him in their stories. For instance when someone formulated an idea, many of participants looked at Gerard to

ask his opinion about the matter, what his experiences were or whether he agreed. It appeared to me that Gerard had clearly positioned himself as the binding factor of the group. Also, his understanding of the youngsters provided him with legitimacy from the other parties in taking a leading role as they took his opinions and experiences with the youngsters seriously. It must however be noted that also the RCC project leader had a big facilitating role in bringing parties together and in chairing the meeting. Gerard is therefore not the *only* boundary spanner within the RCC network and strongly relies on the project leader in organizing connection between parties as well. He is however the one acting on the frontline in contact with the youngsters and thus the FBS.

The organization of these meetings is highly important in creating common ground for several reasons. During the meetings the parties get to know each other and learn about each other's capabilities and constraints. During an interview, the RCC project leader explained:

> *"If you would have an overview of all possibilities and different programs for youngsters, it would blow your mind. And all parties at the table know about different ones. But real connections between these programs are difficult. What do we really know about each other? I think the only way to accomplish such a thing is by organizing regular meetings."*

He thinks there is more than the substantive function of learning about each other to these meetings. He also views them as opportunity for creating commitment, building trust between parties and as a way of organizing direct and quick contact between parties:

> *"These meetings work really well, they help to make sure all parties stay committed and involved. I actually think that it is not really about the meeting itself. We do indeed set up an agenda and all, but it is more of a meeting place actually. After and during the meeting, all kinds of informal contacts take place. Like could you maybe do this, or maybe we could do that. And I think that may be even more important than the meeting itself."*

This also shows that the meetings allow for building strong internal ties within the network. This helps parties to also find each other, even without Gerard in between as boundary spanner.

Additionally, during these meetings the RCC project leader and Gerard together are able to continuously find and emphasize shared goals and the urgency of these goals, as the project leader described:

> *"So on the one hand it is bringing together the network which is really important. But I think there is more to it. I think as project leader and as coach you must really be intrinsically motivated to help the target group. And I think you should use that feeling to create a sense of urgency within the group. There is a reason why all partners still join every time. They think these meetings are important."*

He thinks Gerard is especially able to create this sense of urgency because he directly works with the youngsters:

"So there was this youngster and the coaching went really well. And then yesterday, he again appeared at a suspect monitor. And that really hurts me. And I didn't even directly work with the kid, but Gerard did. And when he talks about that during a meeting, I think that helps."

Here Gerard uses his position between the youngster and systems to create a shared motivation for joint action between parties. He uses storytelling in a way that is understandable to the parties and helps to get them on the same page. Here the two boundaries he deals with as FBS clearly work together. His position as representative for the youngsters between youngsters and systems, helps in creating common ground between parties.

The organization of these meetings thus is important in setting the scene, in finding a shared motivation and in aligning practices and creating the right conditions for joint action between parties. Moreover, Gerard uses his position between youngsters and systems for telling stories to create a sense of urgency and find a shared motivation between parties. Below I describe a discussion observed during the meeting I joined.

Setting a new goal

During the meeting, a discussion arose on whether the network should set the new, additional goal of taking part in the very early identifying of at-risk youths. One partner pointed out that many of the youngsters enrolled in the program had already been involved in criminal activities before starting the program – while the initial aim of RCC had been preventing criminal behavior. Although that was not seen as a problem as such, it was pointed out that this network could be very helpful and have the right access for early identifying at-risk youths. A reconstruction of the discussion[8]:

> Partner 1*: The youngsters in the program are already quite far down the criminal path. We should start earlier, more up front in the process. School could for instance be a right place for early identifying at-risk youths. And also other partners are relevant in helping them.*

> Partner 2*: However, these parties often cannot offer a complete and broad view like Gerard can. And for some of these youngsters that is exactly what is needed, otherwise It will not work.*

> Partner 3: *Also, on what grounds should we do that? Often the problem is that there is no 'call for help' from these youngsters. And many of these institutions need that to be able to help. And that is where it all comes to a standstill.*

> Partner 1: *But there is the obligation to report when you observe a youngster having problems.*

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[8] These are not literal quotes from a transcript of a recording, but based upon a detailed discussion report which I wrote during the session.

Partner 3: *But then the problem is: where to draw the line? Because you often only draft a report about someone when the problems are already quite far developed. So what do you do with youngsters before that stage? The ones you only have your doubts about?*

Partner 4: *And to what extent can we talk about these cases in this setting? With the new privacy law, it has become really difficult. We can come here and collect information, but you cannot note it down. That also makes it difficult to take action and makes it really dependent on the persons present here. Also, I can only start making an official file when a kid is skipping classes, not when I have doubts only.*

Partner 2: *And what can we do with an early-signaled youngster? Who is in charge then? Because Gerard's caseload is full already.*

From this discussion, multiple aspects can be observed. First of all, one of the partners proposed a new goal for the RCC network: that of early identifying at-risk youths. All parties quickly and without much discussion acknowledged this as suitable goal for the network. Also it was noted that the parties needed to pursue this goal indeed were part of the network already. The shared motivation between parties therefore seems to be strong: parties do have a sense of why they are there and why they need each other, and thus are able to quickly establish whether a new goal fits this motivation.

A second aspect to observe from the discussion as described above is that the partners quickly moved to discussing *how* this goal could be achieved. In other words, they discussed whether the right conditions existed and whether the practices of different parties aligned sufficiently for joint action on this goal. Derived from this discussion, different sources of ambiguity seemed to exist possibly preventing parties from taking joint action. A first possible source of ambiguity concerned divergent rules of different parties – specifically on what grounds a partner is able to identify or report a youngster. One party refers to needing a 'call for help' from the youngsters themselves, another refers to 'reporting obligation', another again needs to observe a youngster skipping school before being able to draft a report. Second, a potential source of ambiguity rises from a difference in values. One party asks where the line should be drawn on when a youngster has 'enough' problems to help him. The answer to this question might differ amongst parties. Third, knowledge forms a possible source for ambiguity. The question comes up to what extent parties are allowed to share information during this meeting due to the new privacy law. Also, a way must be found to transfer knowledge from and about these youngsters to these parties. Fourth, language seems to be a source of ambiguity between the youngsters and parties. One party points out needing a 'call for help' – while youngsters do not always know how or want to ask these service providers for help.

However, it could also be observed that parties *are not yet sure* whether these aspects will ultimately form hurdles for joint action. This shows that parties do not have a full understanding of each other's capacities and constraints yet and unclarity remains. Also, parties seem to heavily depend on Gerard to draw upon them within the network and use them in his work. The internal

ties are not always strong yet and parties do not always have a sense what value they can add to the network themselves.

This was also established during the next part of the meeting, when Gerard asked the group whether the parties thought he involved them enough in coaching the youngsters (which can be viewed as behavior fitting the *setting the scene* stage). He also asked what else they had to offer the youngsters and him as coach, encouraging parties to think in terms of possibilities. This resulted in interesting revelations. For instance, the school worker at first stated she felt she could not add that much. This was immediately countered by another partner asking why she could not have a more proactive role especially in the early identification of at-risk youths and bringing this information to the network (thus spanning the citizen – systems boundary). From these moments it was then concluded that it was not yet clear what value each party could bring in. Possibly, this was due to the primary focus of the meetings being a 'meeting place' and building the right conditions as trust and commitment (as the RCC project leader stated them to be) and less on the substantial part of learning about each other. As the RCC project leader later concluded: *"Maybe we assumed we knew everything about the partners, but we should have made our knowledge more explicit."*

Another interesting moment was observed directly after the meeting. Gerard then walked up to the school partner who had provided an example of a girl about whom she had her doubts. There was no direct cause or problem for her to report however, so she could not take any action. He asked her to give his contact details to the girl and tell her she could call him for help and that they could have a chat. This way Gerard used his free and independent position to be able to create common ground between the systems and youngster, in the way the systems itself could not do.

From this illustration it can be derived that these operational-level RCC meetings have multiple functions in creating common ground. They help in developing an understanding of the different parties and potential sources of ambiguity between them, and in creating a clear shared motivation and commitment. Moreover, they help in aligning practices and building the right conditions, like trust, effective and direct communication and shared information. During this meeting I also observed how parties, Gerard and the project leader tried to align practices and build the right conditions, but could not yet do so because unclarity remained at the *setting the scene* stage. Furthermore, this illustration showed that Gerard had claimed his FBS position within the network and legitimacy from the parties based upon his knowledge of the youngsters and of the parties themselves. A next step would be to also establish stronger and more structural internal ties within the network, since the network now seemed to be highly dependent upon Gerard and the RCC project leader.

4.2.3 Moving between boundaries

Bart and I met at a coffee bar for what was going to be an hour and a half long interview. At that point we had already met a couple of times, so I knew already more about his vision and ways of working. We discussed his role and practices in creating common ground. He described an interesting story about clearly using his position between both boundaries in creating common

ground – and about finding a shared motivation between parties and between his youngsters and service providers.

Dual fault lines

Bart clearly realizes that as RCC coach he engages in two forms of boundary spanning. First, he describes dealing with the citizen – system interface:

> *"On the one hand it really is about helping the RCC youngsters. Examining who they are and what problems they face. What we observed here is that the regular school system just doesn't work for this group of youngsters. They drop-out and the school attendance office would send them different letters, which they never received or opened. Of course, that did not help. They fall into a gap, without diplomas or anyone to support them. And then we only find them again two years later when they are arrested. So that was a big problem we observed."*

Bart here observes friction between youngsters and service providers. They do not fit the regular programs and communication methods (letters) do not align. He therefore first creates an understanding of the youngsters and of what drives them: "*So then you try to understand: what do these kids want themselves? You start helping them.*" At the same time, he realizes he needs to create a network of relevant parties and thus is dealing with the interfaces between different actors in the service delivery system:

> *"You coach a few youngsters successfully, people notice that and therefore you claim legitimacy from other parties. And that is the other side of the story. At the municipality and other institutions, you have to find the right key persons to become your 'ambassadors'. Those who want to work with you. So you look at the institutions you need, and find the right people that like your way of working and want to become part of it."*

He thus carefully picks the right persons working at different institutions in building his network and treats them as 'ambassadors' within their own organization.

Bart sees a strong connection between both boundaries in his job. Due to the complexity of the problems of the youths not falling between bureaucratic boundaries, he needs to build a network of different parties to be able to create common grounds between youngsters and systems. On the other hand, he also claims legitimacy from these system parties based on his knowledge and understanding the youngsters. Bart describes a case of how he uses his position on both boundaries, specifically in *finding shared motivation.*

Finding shared motivation

Bart describes how he deals with many different parties in coaching youngsters. These parties all have their own perspectives on the youngster's problems and their own ideas on how to solve them. He describes joining a meeting at the 'safety house' [Veiligheidshuis] in which a case was discussed. Many partners he works with as RCC coach were present. At the table were workers from

the police, school attendance office, prison, youth care, safety domain of the municipality, debt management and GGZ. He described what happened:

> "We discussed this case of a specific youngster. The first response at the safety house was to talk ABOUT the case. They found a bunch of problems, like he didn't go to school, there were problems with his family, debts, and much more… And then for instance as soon as the word 'truancy' is mentioned, immediately the school attendance officer jumps up and has an opinion about this specific part of the problem. And his mother is unemployed – and immediately someone from social services jumps up, and then someone from debt management. And then one person states a solution and then someone else has a different idea. So you end up with 6 or 7 organizations involved with this kid, with 8 or 9 different solutions. Possibly you then end up organizing care for him for about 30.000 euros right there at that table. Without anyone ever having talked to this kid!"

Bart here vividly describes a setting in which he is dealing with multi-problem youths and therefore with many different parties involved. He observes all these different parties have their own perspectives on what is best for this youngster, based upon their own knowledge, goals and interests. Moreover, he observes that the different parties do not involve the youngster himself, but only talk about the case – and cannot agree on it. According to him, these parties have no idea what the perspective, values or goals of this youngster himself are. Without understanding the youngster, it remains unclear where possibilities lay for common ground between service provider and the youngster. Here Bart sees an important role for himself as coach and FBS, rooted in first creating an understanding of the youngster:

> "I go over there and talk to the kid. I see who he is and where he lives. Then I for instance also notice his house is not really clean either. Upon arrival the first thing we do is talk about his problems, talk about his debts, but also about his own goals – which is often a very difficult step for them. And then I say to him, 'We plan a meeting to talk about debt management next Wednesday, but then I also expect you to clean your apartment and to solve this and that. And then next time, we proceed again. And he has already set some first steps as well."

Bart here thus first creates an understanding of the youngster and immediately also sets the first steps in coaching. In doing so, he also comes to understand sources of friction between the youngster and system:

> "And this kid was and telling me that this other guy from social services was a *** for telling him he should take a job at a certain place. I told him I agreed with this guy that he must work, because he is old enough and he is perfectly capable of working. But I don't agree that he should just take any kind of job. So I see two types of interest there, the municipality's, who wants him to work, and his own interest of not wanting to be forced into something or talked to in such an authoritarian manner. So the way it was discussed now, created resistance on both sides."

Here differences in use of language and lack of knowledge about each actor's interests, created hurdles for joint action between the youngster and social worker:

> *"So do you see that at that moment, the system and this kid could not find each other? While actually, the solution was really simple. Because this kid never said that he did not want to work. And then it is my task as coach to show that."*

Bart then uses his knowledge on these different interests and ways of communicating of both parties to find a shared motivation between them: helping the kid to find *the right* job instead of forcing any job.

Bart continued to explain how he uses his position between youngsters and systems and his understanding of the youngster for finding a shared motivation between parties. As described, all different parties have different opinions on what the best solution for this one youngster would be. Bart however tries to use the motivation of the youngster *himself* in creating a shared motivation between parties, by claiming that this should be the central aim.

> *"So I make a plan together with the kid. And that should be a realistic plan of what he can do. I set the goals, together with him. And then I find the parties needed to achieve those. I then show them why I need them to achieve that goal, and how they can add something. And because there are so many different ideas on how to deal with this kid, why would the plan set up with the kid himself not be the best one?"*

He acknowledges that it is not always easy to bring together these parties around this one goal. He cannot force these parties to collaborate and simply take over this goal. These parties still have their own goals and interests:

> *"If I tell someone from debt management: 'I have this kid with debts, so you should do this and that' – then I never get anything done. I will only find resistance. So I tell them about my candidate, I involve them in the problem, and then they usually say 'oh that not so much of a problem, I will help you fix it.' I make people think that they thought of the solution themselves."*

Bart thus tries to make these parties become involved in helping the youngster and make them feel ownership over this goal as well. This goal therefore becomes a shared motivation between parties for collaboration. To do so, Bart needs to thoroughly understand and acknowledge the perspectives and interests of the different parties:

> *"You have to acknowledge the existence of parties. Otherwise you can't communicate with them. So if I would tell debt management that they should stop bothering my candidate with their crazy and unfair approaches, then I never get anything done. So you mustn't ignore them or portray them as unfair and unwilling, but try to influence them."*

Bart explains how he then creates a shared motivation between parties by outlining what they can add to the goal and what they get out of the collaboration. He makes the interesting statement that this works the same way between parties, as with the youngsters:

> *"Parties will only move if there are benefits to them of doing so. That is the case for the youngsters, but also for the municipality, or other institutions. It might sound crazy, but there always has to be some sort of profit in it for everyone."*

Bart thus subtly moves different parties in the direction he wants – ultimately based on the goals he set together with the youngster – by clearly outlining the added value *by* and *for* each party. By showing the added value, he is able to make parties owner of this motivation: *"If parties feel ownership of the solution later, then you get them moving"*. These parties should thus adopt this shared motivation themselves, in order to move to the aligning of practices and building right conditions.

This story illustrates how Bart uses his FBS position to find a shared motivation between youngsters and systems and between parties he is dealing with. He puts the interests of the youngsters themselves central and tries to make other parties adopt these as shared motivation for joint action. In doing so, he also uses his legitimacy as coach gained from his understanding of the youngsters. Also, this case again shows the importance of setting the scene first. His position as FBS and understanding of both the youngsters as well as of the different parties, is crucial for finding a shared motivation.

4.2.4 A strategic level RCC meeting

At a RCC meeting in Schiedam I observed Bart in his position as FBS (primarily) acting as boundary spanner between youngsters and system level.

Contrary to the meeting in Capelle a/d Ijssel with participants from operational level, the RCC meeting in Schiedam included representatives of parties from strategic level. At the table that day were two participants from Stroomopwaarts (social partner guiding people towards work, income and debt management), three partners from the district teams of Vlaardingen and Maassluis, a partner from the school attendance office, the RCC project leaders from the Education and Safety departments of Schiedam, and two RCC coaches (including Bart). The meeting took place in Schiedam's city hall.

The meeting was chaired by the two RCC project leaders who had also drafted the agenda (which was rather similar to the agenda of the meeting in Capelle a/d Ijssel). During the meeting the project leaders presented the first-year results of the RCC pilot, there was an interactive discussion on what all partners *gained* from and *brought* into the network, whether there were 'missing partners', and priorities for the next year were set together. This created a setting in which all participants together reflected on their roles within the network and on the pilot.

This meeting is not the usual arena of action for Bart as RCC coach. In his daily job, he mostly works with partners on operational level. The RCC project leader however thinks that building this network at strategic level as well is an important condition for success for the pilot:

> "You have to make sure to organize coordination at policy or management level to really involve parties. And that is a continuous investment, otherwise the network will fall to pieces at any minute. However, that is something we cannot leave up to the coaches only."

She states that building the network at strategic level cannot be done by the coaches themselves only and perceives her own role as project leader and strategic boundary spanner as crucial. However, at the start of the project she had expected the coaches to take a more proactive role in boundary spanning at strategic level as well:

> "We misjudged that a bit at the start. Bart is a really experienced coach and has a wide network, so we thought that he could also play a role in that. And if we now put him in the right setting he indeed really has the right input and influence. But for creating that right setting at this level, he really needs other people. And looking back, that also makes sense for a coach. The coaches know the cases, the youngsters. They know the social map at operational level. They know what is needed for these youngsters. But they do not have the position to tell these policy people or managers to come to the table because they have something to say to them."

According to her, Bart thus mostly is a boundary spanner at operational (frontline) level, but not so much at this strategic level since he does not have the position, legitimacy or network to bring together these strategic level participants. He needs the RCC project leader to do so. She does however see an important FBS role for him during these meetings rooted in his position between youngsters and system parties. He for instance clearly takes part in translating information from the youths towards the systems:

> "He is very important in providing good examples of what works and what doesn't work. I view the system around at-risk youths as a marbles track. You only know how it works once you put a marble in and see where it becomes stuck or drops out. That is how I view the network. And the coach has a couple of nice marbles in his pocket. And he throws them in there and then knows where they get stuck and for what reasons. And then he knows who and what to tweak to make it work."

Bart thus clearly brings information from the youths towards the system by showing what works and what does not work in the system. These insights are hard to obtain without Bart as FBS: *"You see that people really have a system point of view only. And then [due to the information gained from Bart, red.] they start to see the perspective from the youngsters."* Bart thus mostly functions as boundary spanner on the citizen – systems interface in this strategic level meeting.

Frontline boundary spanner in a strategic level network

I observed a specifically interesting moment illustrating how Bart uses his position between youngsters and systems to create common ground on this interface, when parties discussed priorities for the next year during this meeting. One of the priorities set was to 'create easily accessible services for youngsters'. Different parties proposed different ideas on how to do this, e.g.[9]:

> Partner 1: *We could create a service point for practical questions concerning school, work or money for youngsters who do not have their own supporting network for these kinds of questions.*
>
> Partner 2: *We should also use what already exists at other institutions. There for instance is the 'starting point GO!' for youngsters with information about schools, work, income and debts.*
>
> Partner 3: *Or we could create an app for this kind of information, because that is much more accessible for youths nowadays.*

Here Bart intervened, stating that based on his experience in working with these youngsters and his understanding of them, he did not expect these solutions to work for this specific and highly complicated target group. He felt these youngsters would never go these service points themselves, even if placed at a very easy and central locations like within their own neighborhood. Also he pointed out that some of his youngsters did not even have a smartphone, contrary to most other kids their age. This started the discussion on what *is* easy accessibility for this RCC target group and how to find out what is. Here Bart offered his help and input in creating these services. This clearly shows how Bart uses his understanding of at-risk youths to align practices between them and systems to in the end provide better care for them, in ways the system parties could not have done themselves.

During the meeting, most parties seemed to acknowledge Bart's position as FBS between youngsters and systems. Also a shared motivation seemed to exist for setting this priority of creating easily accessible services for youngsters. Therefore the discussion seemed to be primarily focused on how to find a shared motivation between youngsters and systems and on how to align the practices on this youngster – system interface.

However, there were some hurdles to overcome with one of the parties involved. This party did not completely see the added value of the RCC coaches next to its own role of helping youngsters with work and debts. Also this party did not seem to fully acknowledge Bart's position as FBS. This created a sense of suspicion with this party, unclarity on roles and a fear of parties getting into each other's way. This for instance became clear at a certain point in the discussion when the

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[9] These are not literal quotes from a transcript of a recording, but based upon a detailed discussion report which I wrote during the session.

project leaders tried to clearly outline the different roles of different parties within the network and even a 'network map' was proposed illustrating the different roles and tasks of organizations. This party was framed as being the party 'in the lead' for helping youngsters with debts. The person from this organization quickly stepped in and stated to also engage in other activities like helping youngsters finding work or in arranging forms of income – and thus this party did not want to be 'in the lead' for helping with debts only. This showed some forms of ambiguity and suspicion existed within the network regarding different roles and responsibilities.

A discussion followed concerning the phrase 'being in the lead'. Parties feared for being responsible and therefore accountable for a certain task and did not want their task to be narrowed down to one aspect only. It appeared as if parties did not want to lose their legitimacy based upon certain tasks and did not fully trust that their own goals and perspectives would be considered sufficiently. Here the conditions thus did not seem to be right for parties to take joint action. The boundary spanners (both Bart as FBS and the project leaders as strategic boundary spanners) could not seem to create common ground and create the right conditions because their position was not established and unclarity still existed on e.g. interests, values and goals of different parties.

In Schiedam, RCC meetings are organized at strategic level while Bart himself mostly acts on operational level in his daily practices. Bart's role during these meetings therefore primarily seemed to engage in boundary spanning at the citizens – systems interface. I for instance observed him translating knowledge from and about youngsters towards the system level and thereby also being able to set first steps in aligning practices and building the right conditions for joint action. I also observed that Bart experienced hurdles in doing so when his position as FBS was not fully acknowledged by all parties and ambiguity remained within the network.

4.3   Creating common ground in RCC: a reflection

This case study illustrates how the RCC coaches perform the FBS role in practice. They act in close contact with youngsters in coaching them and need both street-level and boundary spanning competences in their job. Also, they primarily focus on the individual youngsters themselves and the network surrounding at-risk youths, instead of the bureaucratic organization and primarily act on operational level in their daily boundary spanning activities. Their key challenge is dealing with differences and ambiguity between parties and the youngsters and they have an active task in creating common ground on these boundaries despite this ambiguity.

The four stories described above are illustrations of how coaches Gerard and Bart create common ground. Their practices of creating common ground seemed to fit the stages as depicted in the framework developed in chapter 3. Also, both coaches and project leaders recognized the stages of the framework, even though they acknowledged that in practice the RCC coaches were not always successful in creating common ground along these. The developed framework (chapter 3) proved helpful in understanding how and why the coaches were able to create common ground, and also in understanding why and when they were not able to do so.

The case not only provided an illustration of how FBSs perform their role in practice and showed that the developed framework is useful in understanding their behavior. It also led to several additional insights on FBSs creating common ground. Below I reflect on several lessons learned from this case study.

A first lesson to be derived from this case study, is that in practice the different stages of the framework often are at play simultaneously and in different orders. This is due to the complex setting in which the coaches act. RCC coaches for instance described already starting to build the right conditions and align practices between parties, even if there is not yet full understanding of all parties and their differences. That however meant that the coaches sometimes needed conclude that their understanding of the capacities and constrains of all parties was not yet sufficient to be successful in doing so (as e.g. described in the story in 4.2.2). The same goes for creating common grounds between the youngsters and systems. Sometimes the coaches can quickly move to aligning practices for instance by using fitting language and stories. They can do so because of their experience in working with the target group and their gained understanding of at-risk youths in general and therefore know which language and stories are appropriate. However, paragraph 4.2.1 also tells the story of the system moving too quickly to aligning practices and finding a job for a specific individual, before the RCC coach was able to *set the scene*. This led to the coach not being able to create common ground successfully. It can therefore be concluded that although the different stages of the framework often are at play simultaneously and in different orders in practice, still paying attention to all stages is crucial to successfully create common ground. The RCC coaches showed to be unsuccessful if they did not.

A second lesson is that the observed behaviors of the coaches in creating common ground are not (always) consciously aimed at contributing to one of the stages or levels of the framework specifically, but often contribute to multiple stages and levels at the same time. Organizing the RCC meetings for instance proved to be fruitful in both setting the scene, finding shared motivation and aligning practices and building the right conditions (see 4.2.2). Accordingly, the coaches showed to contribute both to creating common ground between citizens and systems and between systems simultaneously. This also shows that the RCC coaches are not consciously walking through the stages and levels as depicted in the framework, but based upon their experience and the context use different behaviors they deem necessary for creating common ground at that point, ultimately contributing to one or multiple stages or levels of the framework.

Third, the coaches not only contribute to multiple levels simultaneously (and unconsciously) by performing specific activities, but actively *use* their special position on each boundary to create common ground on the other. As e.g. described in 4.2.3, the coaches use their understanding of the youngsters' abilities, goals and desires as basis for finding a shared motivation between parties. Also, coaches claim legitimacy for their position based on them being the youngsters' representative and therefore are able to jointly move parties in the necessary direction. They are different from other professionals in that sense, because they act as 'life coach' on behalf of the youngster instead of on behalf of one organization dealing with one aspect of the youngster's life. On the other hand, they also use their position as boundary spanner between parties in building trust and aligning practices between youngsters and systems. This position helps the coach to

know what is feasible based upon the strength of the network. If the network is strong, helping the youngsters and creating common ground between their life worlds and the system world becomes easier. Furthermore, the RCC coach as boundary spanner within the network has a thorough understanding of all parties and knows how to use them. This allows the coach to function as sole contact person between youngster and system, providing stability for a youngster which other professionals from institutions cannot provide. This helps in building trust and aligning practices in helping the youngsters.

Fourth, the case examples suggest that the RCC coaches are strongly dependent upon the backing of the RCC project leaders. Since both coaches primarily act on operational level, they did not have the position, network or experience to substantially perform boundary spanning activities at strategic level of their own accord. Establishing and securing the network at strategic level however is important for its sustainability and strength. In Schiedam e.g. the project leaders were able to create connection with policy and strategic level as well, but in Capelle a/d Ijssel this connection was more difficult and provided hurdles in helping youngsters. As the RCC project leader pointed out himself, this was also due to his own lack of experience and knowledge on this strategic and policy level and his primary focus on operational level. This backing from a strategic level boundary spanner who is able to create a strong network on this level and even forge political support, can be very valuable for the RCC coaches working on the frontline.

Fifth, the case study shows the importance of time and autonomy as conditions for the RCC coaches in performing their role as FBSs. The process of creating common ground takes time and when forced too quickly, the FBS is not able to contribute to all stages of creating common ground thoroughly (as e.g. described in 4.2.3). Moreover, the RCC coaches having a free and independent position allows them to create common ground in ways the regular systems cannot do. They for instance showed to be available 24/7, to help youngsters even though there is no formal call for help and to mentor youngsters on all spaces of their lives and are thereby not restricted vy bureaucratic boundaries.

A final lesson concerns the personal styles and personalities of the coaches. Both coaches studied are very different and unique individuals. They however were similar in how they both explicitly stated to always be themselves in every situation – even if that meant that they are the odd ones out. This implies that FBSs do not (necessarily) have to be 'chameleons' (as was sometimes wondered by experts talked to) adapting themselves to fit both at street-level as well as at system-level. This also suggests that there is not one style or personality most suitable for the FBS role, but that FBSs use behavior fitting to their own preferences and personality in creating common ground. This however was not the focal point of this study, so I am not able to draw any further conclusion on this point.

5 EMPOWERING FRONTLINE BOUNARY SPANNERS: CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Frontline boundary spanners (FBSs) like the Red Carpet Coaching (RCC) coaches have enriched the Dutch public landscape in many shapes and forms over the past decade. They face the inherently difficult task of *creating common ground* between the life worlds of citizens and the system world, as well as between different departments, organizations and sectors within this system world in complex collaborative settings. Still, academic research has mainly focused on strategic level boundary spanning as performed by leaders and managers offering little understanding of nor guidance to these boundary spanners at the frontline. This research therefore aimed to explore how these FBSs create common ground between citizens, service providers, policy makers and other stakeholders in complex social policy settings. The following research question was formulated.

How do frontline boundary spanners create common ground between citizens, service providers, policy makers and other stakeholders in complex social policy settings?

I have sought to answer this research question in two ways. First, by using an abductive research approach developing a framework on how FBSs create common ground, grounded in empirical data from interviews with (frontline) boundary spanners. Second, by providing an illustrative case study on how RCC coaches as FBSs create common ground in practice using the framework to understand their behavior. In this chapter I first answer the research question by presenting my findings and conclusions and discuss the implications of these findings for both theory and practice. I continue by discussing several limitations of this study and conclude with suggestions for future research.

5.1 Findings and conclusions

Creating common ground: a three-stage process

FBSs seek to enable joint action on two types of boundaries: between citizens and governance systems and between parties within those systems. This is an inherently complex task since the relations between these actors are riddled with potential sources of ambiguity, like varying interests, values, goals or use of language. To enable joint action, FBSs must create common ground between these actors despite these potential sources of ambiguity. This research showed that this professional practice of creating common ground is a process involving three stages. These stages all build upon each other and are aimed at answering three relatively simple questions: (1) *Who* are we dealing with?(2) *Why* should they perform joint action? And (3) *how* can they do so? This three-stage process is depicted in the framework below.
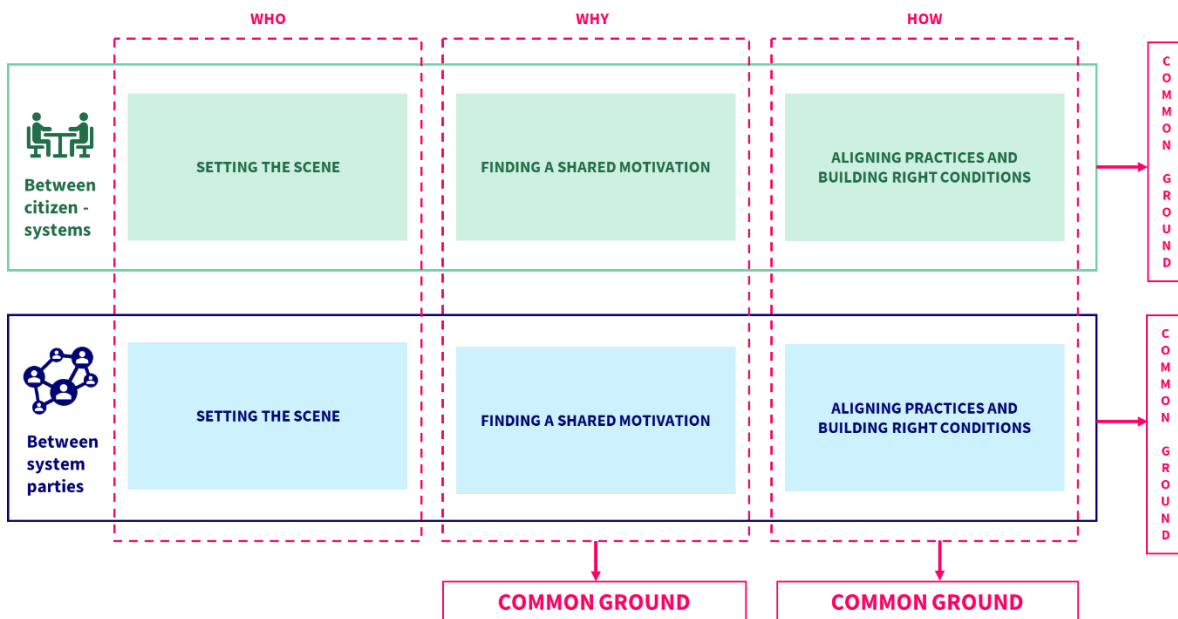
Figure 14: How FBSs create common ground

The first stage involves *setting the scene* and functions as crucial preparation stage for creating common ground in which FBSs outline *who* they are dealing with. They create a thorough understanding of parties and citizens involved and the potential sources of ambiguity and common ground between them, and position themselves as FBS within the network and between citizens and system. The second stage concerns *finding shared motivation* and is the first step in the actual forging of common ground. FBSs aim to create acknowledgement of interdependency among actors by laying out *why* actors should feel the need to work together. In the third stage, FBSs establish *how* actors can perform joint action by trying to eliminate any further possible hurdles by *aligning practices and building the right conditions*.

In practice, as was illustrated by the RCC case, these stages may overlap or there might be iterative loops between them due to the complex settings in which FBSs operate. Accordingly, this must be viewed as a continuous process: even though a network of parties may grow stronger and more sustainable over time, there will still be a continuous changing of persons, interests, rules and (political) environment. Consequently, a continuous investment and performing of boundary spanning activities is required. Between citizens and systems this process continuously starts over when a new citizen is involved, but may become quicker and easier once the network grows stronger and the FBS gains experience.

Keys to successfully creating common ground
This research aimed to understand FBSs' behavior in creating common ground, but was not set up as 'success study'. I did not exclusively study FBSs in situations in which their practices were successful, develop criteria of what successful common ground entails nor study success factors specifically. Still, from the case study it could be concluded that framework is not only a useful instrument for analyzing FBSs' behavior, but also in understanding part of whether and why FBS are (likely to be) *successful* in creating common ground. By observing moments in which the RCC coaches did not manage to successfully create common ground, it was found that in these

instances the coach had not been able to sufficiently invest in one of the stages. This implies that *paying close attention to all stages* is crucial for the coach's success in creating common ground. Additionally, the case study revealed several important conditions for the RCC coaches as FBSs for creating common ground: (1) the backing of project leaders for internal and strategic boundary spanning; (2) sufficient time to contribute to all three stages thoroughly; and (3) an autonomous and independent position within the network. These findings provided first insights in how FBSs successfully create common ground and what is needed for them to do so. Further research is needed to derive (more) success factors and critical conditions for FBSs creating common ground, for instance by conducting a comparative case study involving successful cases and unsuccessful cases, by using causal process tracing methods (see Blatter & Haverland, 2012), or by further exploring the relation between strategic and frontline boundary spanners as condition or success factor.

5.2 Implications

In this paragraph, I discuss several key implications of these findings. I thereby primarily focus on making a practical contribution by first discussing one implication relevant to both theory and practice, and continue by outlining practical lessons for policy makers and practitioners (FBSs) based upon this study.

Boundary spanning is different at the frontline
If anything, this study revealed that it is relevant to make a distinction between *frontline* boundary spanners and *strategic* boundary spanner roles by showing these two types are inherently different and that this difference is relevant. While strategic level boundary spanners (SBSs) operate in networks on strategic or policy level, frontline boundary spanners primarily operate in networks on operational level and at the frontline in direct interaction with citizens. Consequently, SBSs perform boundary spanning activities between different organizations, sectors and governance levels, while FBSs primarily perform boundary spanning across parties on operational level and between this system level and the life worlds of citizens. This study also showed that FBSs sometimes find it to be more challenging to create connection with and on strategic or policy level and hence need the backing of strategic boundary spanners (as the RCC coaches needed their project leaders). Moreover, I found that while strategic boundary spanners mostly look for sustainable solutions for an aggregate target group, FBSs additionally search for tailor-made, creative solutions for individual citizens they work with. These differences mean that FBSs show different types of behavior, act in different arenas and need different competences.

For this reason, taking into account the specific context of FBSs' activities is crucial in studying them, and failing to do so can lead to missing or misinterpreting results. This conclusion is specifically relevant since most current research on boundary spanning is highly decontextualized and mostly studies leaders and managers in strategic boundary spanning roles. Future research should therefore explore these FBS roles specifically and in different contexts (e.g. public and private, different types of collaborations and networks, internationally) and focus on specific FBS's activities, competences and challenges, using a diverse set of methods (e.g. by conducting large-N studies, as well as via using ethnographic research and case studies). Especially since in

contemporary complex social policy settings many more FBS roles having populated the Dutch public sector landscape, further developing our understanding of this specific role and treating it as inherently different from the SBS role, has become highly important.

Distinguishing between these two types of boundary spanners is not only important for academic research, but also in practice for example when considering what type of person to hire, what to expect from a person in each role or understanding what challenges they face. Failing to do so may lead to disappointing results, as happened in the RCC case – where one of the project leaders had expected the coach to perform more active boundary spanning on strategic level, but only later realized that this could not be expected of him and would require a different type of person with a different position, network and competences.

Building on this argument, I continue by outlining several lessons about this specific FBS role for policy makers and for practitioners.

Lessons for policy makers

Multiple lessons can be derived from my findings relevant to policy makers who are drafting policies and (consider to) include a FBS role:

1. **Use FBSs in the right context.** Although a network-focus has become an integral part of the current public policy paradigm, not all professionals need to be FBSs nor does each policy field need a FBS role. This research shows that FBS roles are specifically valuable in settings that require close and intensive contact with clients, involve many different service providers from different sectors and high levels of ambiguity and a network approach is needed, and demand tailor-made solutions moving beyond regular programs[10]. Only employing FBSs when they are most necessary, helps in equipping them with the right instruments and a special position needed as explained in point two below. I found pilot settings to be especially rich for first experimenting with these types of roles, because these stimulate a sense of urgency amongst parties and provides the FBS with a more free and strong position within the bureaucratic organization and the network.

2. **Create space, autonomy and strategic backing.** FBSs operate in dynamic and complex settings. Assigning them discretionary space and autonomy to be able to make quick decisions based upon their own evaluation of situations is crucial, as well as supporting these decisions via strategic and administrative backing even if these deviate from regular policies. Balancing this space and autonomy with clear conditions, ground rules and limitations is thereby essential. Moreover, this research showed that it is valuable to allow FBSs freedom to carefully contribute to all stages of the creating common ground process following their own, their client's and service provider's paces and to treat this process in an iterative manner if needed. Moreover, FBSs were found to be most successful when they could strongly and independently position themselves within the network and between

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[10] Multi-problem approaches e.g. provide settings in which FBSs roles are especially valuable.

client and system. Providing them with a role 'loose' from the bureaucratic organization helps them create this position and allow the network to be the primary focus. Also establishing escalation paths within the bureaucratic organization helps FBSs in building this position and obtaining legitimacy from other parties, and moreover provides a way of breaking a deadlock if needed.

3. **Organize structures for retrieving street-level data.** FBSs possess a rich pool of information about clients and systems and are directly confronted with hurdles in existing policies and systems while executing their jobs. Translating this street-level information towards policy level is crucial to create more structural solutions, but is viewed as a great challenge by many FBSs as well. Organizing structures to retrieve this information is therefore crucial. In this research I encountered examples like the development of shared information systems or the organization of regular meetings between FBSs and policy makers.

Lessons for practitioners
Additionally, several lessons for FBSs as practitioners can be derived from this study:

1. **Invest in all stages of the process of creating common ground.** This research showed that sufficiently investing in each stage of the process of creating common ground is crucial to its success. I observed situations in which FBSs failed to do so, leading to unsuccessful and dissatisfying results (see paragraph *successfully creating common ground* and chapter 4.3). Thereby treating the process in an iterative manner by continuously evaluating progress in each stage and moving between stages in different orders, is common practice and can be very valuable.

2. **Use position between boundaries.** FBSs have the special position of acting between boundaries – they are both representative and sole contact person between citizens and systems, as well as network manager and connector between parties. This means they possess unique information and contacts, and allows them the possibility of building legitimacy on both sides of the boundary. FBSs must be constantly aware of the value of their unique position in different contexts and use this in achieving their aims.

3. **Recognize own limitations and find solutions**. FBSs are no superheroes[11]. Their position has many perks, but also weaknesses and limitations (also grounded in their own personality or experience). I already described an example on translating information towards policy system above (see point 3 – lessons for policy makers). Acknowledging these limitations of the FBS position and organizing solutions and the right conditions to compensate them (like setting up information structures), is crucial for success.

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[11] As was (metaphorically) suggested in the newspaper article *'Superman' moet voorkomen dat Dordtse jongeren terugvallen in criminele circuit* from the Algemeen Dagblad, May 5th, 2019, retrieved via:
https://www.ad.nl/dordrecht/superman-moet-voorkomen-dat-dordtse-jongeren-terugvallen-in-criminele-circuit~a59cbe2d/?referrer=https://www.google.com/

5.3 Limitations

It is important to consider the conclusions and implications as discussed above in view of several limitations of this research. First of all, the choice for conducting qualitative and small-N research involves certain limitations. I have only spoken to a limited number of (frontline) boundary spanners and used purposive instead of randomized sampling. This study's *external validity* – to what extent my findings hold for cases which were not examined – might therefore be questioned (as is common criticism for this type of research, Boeije, 2010, p. 180). In this view I must note that I did not aim for statistical generalization as is common in quantitative research, but for a form of *theoretical generalization* (Boeije, 2010, p. 181). I followed the grounded theory approach in developing the framework and continuously tested provisional findings and observed patterns with a new sample of interviewees. This iterative process allowed me to continuously refine, expand and correct the developed framework. After arriving at a point close to theoretical saturation, I used the framework in studying an illustrative case and showed how it was useful in understanding the behavior of these (not previously studied) FBSs in creating common ground. This allows me to believe that the framework is a useful tool for understanding how FBSs create common ground in complex social policy settings, also for cases which have not been studied.

Additionally, there are several limitations considering the *internal validity* of this study, and I here specifically discuss ways in which my case study data could have been even richer. First, I was only able to observe one RCC meeting between parties for each case, while I initially aimed at using more ethnographic research methods – like shadowing the RCC coaches in more and different settings e.g. in interaction with youngsters or in joining meetings between youngsters, coaches and other institutions. This was not possible due to limited time and caution in intervening in the carefully built trust relationship between the coaches and youngsters for ethical reasons. Second, I could have interviewed more people involved in the implementation of the RCC program in the cases – specifically partners from service providers or other relevant stakeholders – to gain more insights about their perceptions of the RCC coaches' practices. Obtaining a full picture would however have involved speaking to a great number of parties, which was outside the scope of this study. Third, the meetings I observed took place at the start of my research process (due to the timeline of the evaluation project) when I had not yet developed a clear and specific research focus. This means I did not use a detailed observation scheme based upon prior ideas providing focus during these observations. Since I knew this was the case, I tried to take very detailed minutes of the discussions and systematically noted my observations on the interaction and dynamics between parties during the meetings, and organized my notes right afterwards. Also, my AEF colleagues (who had already known the case for about a year by then) and I always immediately discussed our impressions of the meetings afterwards and they checked my notes later on allowing them to correct or clarify parts. Still, it is possible that I missed out on data which I possibly had gathered if I had conducted these observations at a later stage.

5.4 Where next with frontline boundary spanning?

This research opened many doors for future research on the FBS role and the practice of creating common ground (some of which I have already hinted at throughout this chapter). Below I discuss several directions for further developing this study's findings for both academia and practice.

Moving beyond person-centered programs
In this study, I primarily focused on FBSs working with individual citizens in person-centered approaches and explored the process of creating common ground between these individual citizens and systems. However, these clients also have their own personal network and environment, or *client system,* of family, friends or the neighborhood in which they live. In some of the interviews I already touched upon issues FBSs face when ambiguity and conflicts exist within this personal network, potentially causing hurdles for creating common ground and helping the individual citizen. Also, in the Dutch public domain (and internationally as well), there has been more attention for *family-centered* or *client-system based approaches*[12]. In these approaches the professional not only aims to help one specific individual, but also (parts of) its network. Likewise, *group-focused* (e.g. in Rotterdam's approach for tackling criminality in youth gangs) or even *situation* or *domain-focused* approaches (e.g. with a focus on specific neighborhoods) have become more common in the Dutch public domain (De Groot, Steketee, Boutellier, Braam, & Tierolf, 2007, p. 75). These tendencies allow for at least three potentially relevant directions to further develop this study's insights and the developed framework:

1. To what extent is the framework useful for studying FBSs creating common ground in the context of these system or family-centered approaches, and in group-focused or situation-focused programs? What different factors are of influence? What kind of behaviors do FBSs show? Future research could contribute by studying theses settings via case studies.
2. How can FBSs deal with ambiguity and conflict within the client system or *use* the client system in helping an individual citizen and creating common ground? The framework could be developed further to also include these dynamics within the process of creating common ground.
3. Is there a difference between FBSs in a more coaching role towards one individual citizen or one family (like the RCC coaches or family managers), and FBSs focused at a wider target group or a certain neighborhood (like the neighborhood police officer) in the process of creating common ground? To what extent do they use different approaches or show different behavior? Are there different success factors or critical conditions? This could for instance be studied via a comparative case study design studying two (or more) types of FBSs.

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[12] for example through the implementation of family managers or the 'one family – one plan – one worker' approach of the Youth Protection Amsterdam Area (see e.g. Busschers, Boendermaker, & Dinkgreve, 2016).

Towards different styles of frontline boundary spanning

A second potential direction for development was pointed out by some of the interviewed FBSs and experts. They stated to be interested in a further exploration of different FBS *styles* in creating common ground. During this research I sometimes touched upon these differences in studying FBS behaviors in creating common ground, and I found different FBSs to show different types of behavior and approaches. Some seemed to adopt more cooperative styles, while others acted more transformational or adopted a more autocratic style. These different styles appeared to be stemming from their personal values, experience, personalities or preferences. Future research could contribute by developing different FBSs profiles and styles adopted in creating common ground, by studying the effects of these different styles on the process, by showing which style is most effective in which context or by analyzing FBSs switching between styles in different settings or in interaction with different actors. Multidisciplinary research using not only an organizational or governance perspective, but also psychological, sociological and anthropological frames would be especially interesting in this regard.

Dealing with dilemmas

In creating common ground between citizens and systems and between parties, I observed FBSs to continuously face dilemmas or choices to be made (see also the study of Van Veelen, Bunders, Cesuroglu, Broerse, & Regeer (2018) who clearly outline several dilemmas in the work of family managers). They for instance face a dilemma in wanting to find tailor-made, demand-driven solutions for individual citizens, but also trying to develop more sustainable system solutions and having to deal with supply-driven care and being bound to budgets. Also, they face a dilemma in choosing for either risky out-of-the-box, but customized solutions, or choosing for well-known and quick solutions but possibly less fitting to the needs of the specific citizen. Another dilemma may rise in choosing how to position themselves within a network, for instance in taking a strong controlling and central 'spider in the web' position by functioning as leading contact person for all parties, or by also focusing on creating strong internal ties between parties within the network. Further research could contribute by studying the dilemmas FBSs face in the different stages of the process of creating common ground and by analyzing ways in which FBSs cope with them. This could for instance be studied via ethnographic research methods observing FBSs in their work; via up-close, medium-N case research e.g. by studying the trajectory of 20-30 clients FBSs work with and seeing what dilemmas FBSs face in helping these clients; or via following up with large-N studies and survey methods by asking FBSs which are the most common, important or challenging dilemmas they face in their job and what coping strategies they use in dealing with them.

Developing a practical tool

A very practically relevant way to use this study's insights, is by transforming the framework into a tool useful for FBSs practicing their job of creating common ground. This tool could include numerous questions or considerations for FBSs in each stage of the process. For example, in the stage of setting the scene between citizen and system, questions could be included like 'Do I know what motivates my client?', 'What parties are involved with my client and how is their relationship?' or 'Do institutions involved with my client see me as representative of the client?'. This tool and the questions could help FBSs in evaluating whether they have sufficiently contributed to each stage of the process. Moreover, this tool could help monitor the FBS's progress

both with individual citizens, as well as in developing the network of parties. At different moments in time the FBSs could track to how many of these questions an answer could be given or how well they can be answered, and monitor whether this number increases, stagnates or even decreases. Moreover, this tool could contribute to training FBSs by outlining what aspects they have to consider, skills they have to develop and by monitoring their personal development. This is highly relevant, since many FBSs pointed out the limited availability education or guidelines for this specific type of role (there are some exceptions, the neighborhood nurse for example pointed out that she experienced her education – specifically focused at becoming a neighborhood nurse – to be very helpful in preparing her for the job).

Concluding note

The directions of future research as described above, could substantially contribute to both the knowledge on and the practices of FBSs, who hold – in my opinion – one of the most interesting and important roles in the social policy domain. All FBSs I spoke to have a very strong personal drive for bridging the gap between government and (often less fortunate) citizens and building a strong network of systems. The RCC coaches specifically always seemed to be able to find new, creative solutions for helping their youngsters, are available 24/7 for them and know how to use the network to provide them with new opportunities and stability in ways no governmental institutional ever could by itself. I believe it is not only important to study their role so that we can empower them with more research-grounded insights – it is a privilege that we can learn from them in doing so.

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APPENDIX I: INFORMED CONSENT FORM (IN DUTCH)

Toestemmingsformulier

Voor deelnemers aan het onderzoek:

- Dit interview wordt afgenomen voor een **afstudeeronderzoek** in het kader van de master Research in Public Administration and Organizational Science van de Universiteit Utrecht en **stage** bij adviesbureau Andersson Elffers Felix (AEF). Het doel van dit onderzoek is het begrijpen en analyseren van de rol van 'frontline boundary spanners' ofwel 'verbinders op de frontlijn'.

- De verzamelde data wordt opgeslagen in een **beveiligde omgeving** via Microsoft Sharepoint bij Andersson Elffers Felix en wordt bewaard voor maximaal 2 jaar. Enkel de onderzoeker en indien nodig scriptiebegeleiders hebben toegang tot de data.

- U heeft ten alle tijden recht om zich **terug te trekken** van het onderzoek, zowel tijdens als na het interview. Ook kunt u ten alle tijden vragen de data te **verwijderen**. Contacteer daarvoor Maxime Dekkers (m.c.dekkers@uu.nl).

Ik wil meedoen aan dit onderzoek.

Datum: _____

Naam: _____   Handtekening: _____

Voor de onderzoeker:

Ik verklaar dat ik deze deelnemer **volledig heb geïnformeerd** over het genoemde onderzoek. Als er tijdens het onderzoek informatie bekend wordt die de toestemming van de deelnemer zou kunnen beïnvloeden, breng ik hem/haar daarvan op de hoogte.

Datum: _____

Naam: _____   Handtekening: _____

FRONTLINE BOUNDARY SPANNERS
by Maxime Dekkers