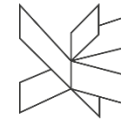


# **New routes? Different ways of cooperation between SLBs and employers**

**5th Street-Level Bureaucracy Conference  
Copenhagen  
Session 8A: STREAM 3.1 –  
Unemployment Arrangements and Policy Delivery at the Street-level  
19th of June 2024**

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## Content of the presentation

- 1) Background
- 2) Theoretical Perspectives
- 3) Empirical Findings
- 4) Conclusions

## New routes? Different ways of cooperation between SLBs and employers“

### starting points/observations

- non-neglectable amount of people with barriers to labor market integration (vulnerable groups) in all three countries
- hard to reach for SLBs
- the pandemic has strengthened this difficulties
- different options and policy models are possible and conceivable

(Jørgensen/Schulze 2024):

- carrots and sticks (fostered activation)
- more investment in human capital
- **organizational changes (e.g. the interface and cooperation between SLBs and employers)**
- e.g. model regions in Germany (with high long-term unemployment and new concepts)

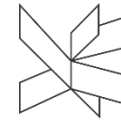
## New routes? Different ways of cooperation between SLBs and employers“

### starting points/observations



- SLBs often separated in services

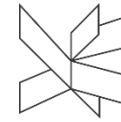
- policy shift towards employer-oriented integration, particularly for the long-term unemployed  
> *from train then place to place then train* (Dall et al. 2023)
- leads to service and organizational innovations and change the work of the SLBs
- Research project:
  - 12 case studies in job centers in Denmark, Germany, and Austria with the focus on these innovations



## Content of the presentation: 2. Theoretical Perspectives

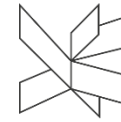
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## 2. Theoretical Perspectives



### Street-level-bureaucrats/organizations

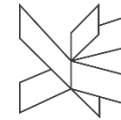
- our focus:
    - interested in the relational dimension, set up from and within local employments service organizations ('organizational context' van Berkel 2020)
    - relational coordination and cooperation between different professionals in local employment services
    - opens up for the re-systematization of the empirical material with Gittells Relational Cooperation Approach (Bolton et al. 2021)
- results presented are based on an initial analysis of the material
  - reflect a work-in progress status
  - analysis will be further deepened and developed



## Content of the presentation: 3. Empirical Findings

- 1) Background
- 2) Theoretical Perspectives
- 3) Empirical Findings:
  - a) increasing alienation in all three countries
  - b) Cooperation formats to overcome alienation and organizational boundaries
  - c) The work of SLBs, support and qualification offerings
- 4) Conclusions

### 3. Empirical Findings (I)

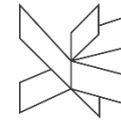


#### (a) increasing alienation in all three countries

- increasing alienation between employer-oriented and job seeker-oriented SLBs
- outdated and inaccurate system information > no match or unsuitable applications and job placements
- led to mutual accusations of inadequate work performance and lack of motivation
- seniors/superiors criticize lack of innovation and willingness to change:
  - jobseeker professionals are seen as slow and ponderous
  - jobseeker professionals struggle with innovation with regards to concepts and work descriptions
- organizational separation and separation of tasks, goals, logics, and pressure result in frictions and mutual accusations
- Technical/technic-based matching > dysfunctional for vulnerable job seekers



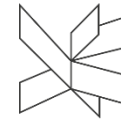
### 3. Empirical Findings (II)



#### (b) Cooperation formats to overcome alienation and organizational boundaries (I)

- four different ways of responding to the described challenges:
  - a) strengthened communication
  - b) joint projects between the employer service and the job seeker teams, which do not imply any organizational changes.
  - c) organizational changes in the form of new special functions between the two departments: “boundary spanner”
  - d) fundamental organizational changes

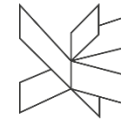
### 3. Empirical Findings (III)



#### (b) Cooperation formats to overcome alienation and organizational boundaries (II)

- a) Strengthened communication as a key for integration into the labor market:
- DK: communicative interaction among three different groups of employees: job seeker-centric department, the team of company advisors and the team of recruitment consultants communicate along the integration process
  - GE: foster cross-departmental communication > specialists from all areas then are placed in a common hallway > proximity is intended to stimulate everyday informal exchange; also “Marketplace” > SLBs exchange without executives
  - AT: strengthened communication between labor administration, employers and job seekers via a digital job portal (presentation of the companies and the jobs; but also job fairs for certain sectors, interviews with jobseekers)
- **Overall: communication formats create a closer link between jobseeker- and employer-oriented departments**
- **improve mutual knowledge and cross-functional cooperation, reduce mutual accusation**

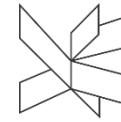
### 3. Empirical Findings (IV)



#### (b) Cooperation formats to overcome alienation and organizational boundaries (III)

- b) joint projects between the employer service and the jobseeker teams, which do not imply any organizational changes of the basic dual structure
  - DK: national **project funding as “window of opportunity”** to develop a company-oriented effort, especially for vulnerable groups (lower staff ratios and new methods), through cooperation of employer- and job seeker-oriented professionals
  - GE: introduction of a **special room** to bring together jobseekers, SLBs and employers (**extra building in the city center**, rooms for talks, job interviews and to write applications, special support for application for “Bürgergeld”, “protected room”
  - AT: **job fairs with an escalating interview cascade**: Job-seekers will follow a line of interviews with SLBs from different departments. If all job offers or measures proposed will be rejected, a sanction review follows. Due to this, time does not pass from one conversation to the next; customers must decide and justify themselves directly.
- **Overall: different projects bring together jobseekers and employers**
- **SLBs gains mutual insights into the work and requirements of the other side**
- **work motivation of SLBs increases, because they observe placement successes**

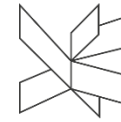
### 3. Empirical Findings (V)



#### (b) Cooperation formats to overcome alienation and organizational boundaries (IV)

- c) organizational changes in form of new special functions between the two departments: “boundary spanner” (Williams 2002, Bolton et al. 2021)
- DK: **project coordinator** position was established to ensure learning outcomes from innovation projects on a permanent basis, involves coordinating and disseminating project experiences across different departments and leadership
  - GE: **Interface Manager** located in each employee service team are the link between the joint employer service department and the job Centers employment service, their main task is to place motivated applicants with the employer service and joint applicant events
  - AT: **multipliers** in the sense of the personified mediator of other logics are active in AMS employment teams, their task is to repeatedly point out the preparatory and follow-up work of job fairs.
- **Overall: “boundary spanner” fills the gap between different domains (simplifies communication and collaboration across organizational boundaries)**
- **personalized communication is crucial (to raise the awareness of the mutual concerns of the employer service and SLBs in employee teams)**

### 3. Empirical Findings (VI)

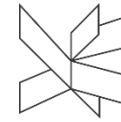


#### (b) Cooperation formats to overcome alienation and organizational boundaries (V)

##### d) fundamental organizational changes

- DK: merging the administration of social and employment services under joint leadership  
> closer collaboration between these two groups of professionals
- GE: decentralization of the employer service, centralized employer service has been decentralized, SLB assigned to job service teams in the job centers, organization via zip codes and not branches, criticism and upheaval
- GE: new teams within the employee service department: (1) new customer team: directly (re)integrate new customers closer to the market; (2) a long-term unemployed team: address private employers and develop new counselling formats for their clients. The latter teams consists former employer- and employee-SLBs; the new customer team is made up only of EMS SLBs but cooperates closely with the employer-service teams. Their team leader suggests to merge both teams.
- **Overall: isolated logics should be replaced by a more integrated approach**
- **fostered cooperation within (not across) a department/team is more suitable**
- **Merged teams in addition to normal structures/regular divided teams (Sonderteams/special teams/ særligt teams)**

### 3. Empirical Findings (VII)

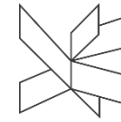


#### (c) The work of SLBs, support and qualification offerings (I)

##### work of the SLBs changed:

- most job seeker-oriented SLBs are seen in their roles as rather supplying suitable candidates only
  - mutual blame games diminished; mutual understanding of each other's activities rises
  - doesn't happen automatically > cooperation and learning mostly described as additional workload and new job content
  - activities and learning often remain limited to directly involved individuals, their job-satisfaction rises
- **understanding of tasks, work methods, clients, and constraints of the respective "other" was enhanced**
- **departing from the familiar focus on one's own work is challenging the professionalism of all involved**

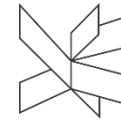
### 3. Empirical Findings (IIX)



#### (c) The work of SLBs, support and qualification offerings (II)

- **Covid-19:** generally, a driver of digitization, but no catalyst for new coordination or cooperation formats
- **support and training:** no reports of a particular need for learning and qualification among professionals and managers in Austrian and German cases
- only in DK: for newly hired employer-oriented professionals from outside the job center need for further training in counselling and social law

→ **professional experience in the field combined with motivation and innovative willingness seem to be sufficient for jobcenter-experienced professionals**

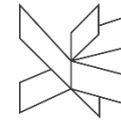


## Content of the presentation: 4. Conclusions

- 1) Background
- 2) Theoretical Perspectives
- 3) Empirical Findings
- 4) Conclusions

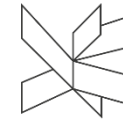


## 4. Conclusions (I)



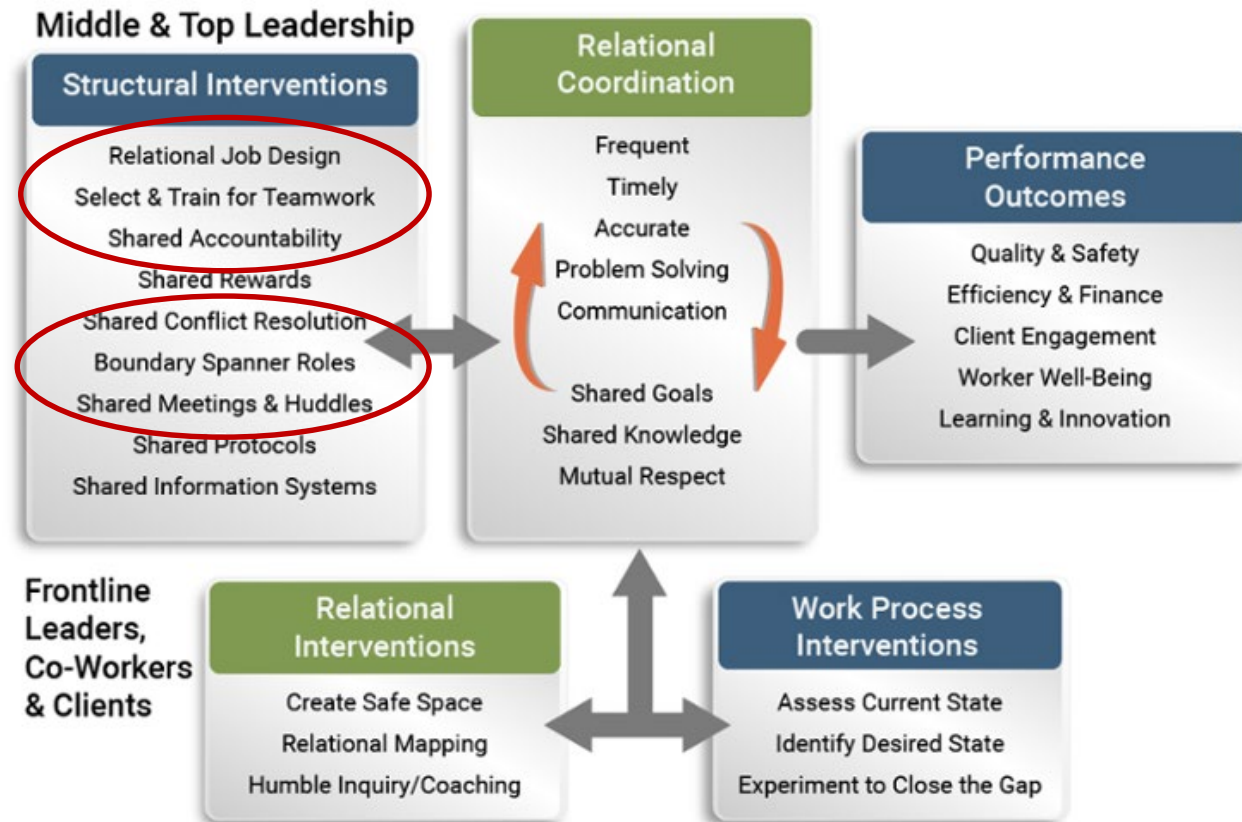
- organizational changes to overcome organizational restrictions to labor market integration of vulnerable groups
  - separate departments and teams combined with technically based merging seems to be dysfunctional for vulnerable job seekers
- new services for job seekers and employers
  - result: an intensified and more binding integration process
- work of SLBs changed
  - mutual understanding and job-satisfaction (for them directly involved)
- managers and SLBs shape the “organizational context”
  - SLOs create policy and can “function as strategic locations for initiating changes in the boundaries of the welfare state” (Brodkin 2013: 5)
  - SLOs as manufacturers of reforms, but also targets of governance and managerial reforms
- new communication, organizational formats, and individualized services follow the "professionalization approach" of van Berkel (2013)

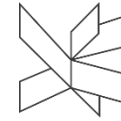
## 4. Conclusions (II)



### further steps:

- re-systematize our findings with Gittell's **Relational Cooperation Approach** (Bolton et al. 2021)
- systematic approach to review our findings with focus on the structural interventions  
> fill in the 'organizational context' of van Berkel?





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**Thank you for your attention!**