



# INNOVATOR ROLES WITHIN AND BETWEEN PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines innovator roles that can enhance innovation within a public organisation and between public organisations while focusing on the idea generation and idea promotion phase. To this end, we undertook a qualitative research approach, which has allowed us to study innovator roles. In total, 17 semi/structured interviews have been conducted. The sample was composed of 15 innovation ambassadors from the Netherlands Fire Services (NFS) and 2 employees from the Netherlands Institute of Public Safety (NIPV). Our results propose multiple innovator roles that can enhance innovation within an organisation and between organisations. The roles that are proposed in this research are; the *orchestrator*, *idea generator*, *champion* and *gatekeeper*. In addition, multiple personal characteristics and tasks are proposed that can enhance innovation. Based on these findings, we derive recommendations for individuals who fulfil an innovator role to enhance innovation within and between public organisations.

**Keywords:** Innovation, innovator roles, safety regions, public organisations, within a public organisation, between public organisations

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the rapidly changing business environment innovation is needed to solve complex organisational problems and to survive competition (Johnson, 2001; Lukes & Stephan, 2016). Innovation involves effectively leveraging new ideas and this is crucial for organisations to be successful both in private and public sector (Bos-Nehles et al., 2016; Høyrup, 2010). Yet innovating in the public sector is different from the private sector. In the public sector, there are uneven rewards for successful ideas and bigger consequences for failed ones (Borins, 2001). This study focuses on Dutch public organisations as they actively employ innovations to enhance performance, increase effectiveness and improve efficiency (Audenaert et al., 2016; Bysted & Hansen, 2015; De Vries et al., 2016). In comparison to private organisations that primarily innovate to survive competition, public organisations innovate to improve the quality of public services as well as to enhance the problem-solving capacity of governmental organisations in dealing with societal challenges (De Vries et al. 2016). Furthermore, public organisations work together towards shared goals, aiming to enhance overall performance rather than focusing solely on individual organisational gains (Mandell & Steelman, 2003). With this, they aim to enhance public value (Prebble, 2015). Furthermore, the open innovation concept indicates that organisation can reach this goal by getting innovative projects not only from internal sources but also from external sources (Chesbrough and Crowther, 2006). This aspiration can be realized by engaging in the innovation process.

The innovative process consists of three phases: idea generation, idea promotion and idea implementation (Binnewies & Gromer, 2012; Bos-Nehles et al., 2016; Jønsson et al., 2020). In the idea generation phase, a variety of potential ideas are generated. In the idea promotion phase, these ideas are evaluated and refined based on feasibility, market demand, and strategic alignment. Finally, in the implementation phase, the selected ideas are transformed into actionable plans and executed to achieve tangible outcomes (Binnewies & Gromer, 2012; Scott & Bruce 1994). Considering this the connection between the three phases when nurtured through inter-organisational collaboration, offers a pathway to enhancing the innovative performance of firms (Cinar et al., 2022; Faems et al., 2005). It contributes to innovation for several reasons. Firstly, it provides access to complementary assets required for the successful commercialization of innovation projects. Secondly, collaborative efforts with other organisations facilitate the transfer of knowledge (Faems et al., 2005). Research shows that innovation between organisations primarily occurs during the idea generation phase and the subsequent idea promotion phase. During these phases, employees facilitate the exchange of information with other organisations and promote ideas and innovations to potential allies and sponsors (Bos-Nehles et al., 2016; De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Literature shows that collaborations with other organisations are less common during the implementation phase. Therefore, this research focuses on the idea generation and idea promotion phase of the innovation process, as existing literature suggests sharing and promoting innovation outside the organisation is mostly happening during these phases (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017; Mergel, 2015; Pennington, 2008; Walsh et al., 2016).

Building upon this understanding, scholars have designed specific roles within innovation processes that align with individuals' unique characteristics (Dedehayir et al., 2018; Dewar et al., 1986; Mansfeld et al., 2010). These innovator roles, such as innovation champions or idea generators, have long been recognized in the innovation literature (Chakrabarti, 1974; Dedehayir et al., 2018; Howell, 2005; Mansfeld et al., 2010). According to Mansfeld et al. (2010), innovator roles are critical for the success of an innovation. They can serve as guides for new ideas throughout the innovation process within an organisation (Meyer, 1998). In addition, literature shows that employees play an important part in driving innovation within their organisations but also through working together with other

organisations (Mandell & Steelman, 2003). The current literature on innovator roles lacks two essential aspects. Firstly, existing research provides limited evidence about the specific innovator roles that can effectively guide innovation between organisations. An illustrative example can be found in the study conducted by Gemünden et al. (2007). They discovered that as technological innovation increases, the roles of innovators who establish connections between different organisations and the external world become more pivotal than linkages within the organisation. Although this research focuses on innovation between organisations, its primary emphasis lies within private organisations. This leads us to the second aspect. Current studies on innovator roles predominantly concentrate on private organisations, neglecting the examination of public organisations. Together these two aspects create the research gap that this study aims to address. Innovator roles that can effectively guide innovation within and between public organisations. By addressing this research gap, a better understanding is created of innovator roles within public organisations. This not only enriches the theoretical landscape by adding knowledge about innovator roles within and between public organisation, but it also extends practical insights into how employees can generate and promote innovation within and between public organisations.

## 1.1 RESEARCH GOAL AND RESEARCH QUESTION

While important innovator roles such as champion and sponsor are considered crucial for innovation within private organisations, the exploration of innovator roles within public organisations has not been done (Markham et al., 2010). The primary objective of this research is to advance our understating of innovator roles that contribute to the generation and promotion of innovation not only within public organisations but also between them. Furthermore, this research will give deeper insight into innovator roles and how they can be implemented to enhance innovation within the public sector. This is done by examining the characteristics and intentions of these innovator roles and aligning them with the findings collected during this study.

The primary goal of this research is to enhance our understanding of the role of innovators in the innovation process within and between public organisations. This research aims to comprehend the divulged innovator roles undertaken within the idea generation and the idea promotion phase of the innovation process.

### 1.1.1 Research question

To accomplish these goals the following research question is defined:

***What are key innovator roles to effectively generate and promote innovative ideas within and between public organisations?***

## 1.2 THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL RELEVANCE

### 1.2.1 Theoretical relevance

Although research shows information on different kinds of innovator roles within the innovation process, it provides little information about which innovator roles are important for collaboration within and between public sector organisations (Gemünden et al., 2007). This study builds on insights from different kinds of literature about informal innovator roles to determine which innovator roles are important within the idea generation and in the idea promotion phase to enhance innovation within public organisations and by collaboration between public organisations. Illustrations of informal innovator roles that this study delves into are roles like the orchestrator, gatekeeper, champion and sponsor (Dedehayir et al., 2018; Heikkilä et al., 2008; Meyer, 1998).

Through an exploration of the innovator roles that contribute to innovation within and across public organisations, this research gives clarity about specific innovator roles that hold significance in enhancing innovation, particularly in the public organisations. Furthermore, this study presents multiple person characteristics and tasks that contribute to the innovator roles, thereby enhancing innovation within and between public organisations. Having knowledge about innovator roles could lead to better networks, more collaborations, and more successful innovations. In addition, research shows that within the public sector, bottom-up innovation occurs more frequently (Borins, 2001). Therefore, this study will further explore what kind of innovator roles are necessary within the idea generation and promotion phase to promote innovation within the public sector.

### 1.2.2 Practical relevance

By doing this research, public organisations can use the results to design the necessary innovator roles within their organisation. By having insight into the needed innovator role(s) within the idea generation and idea promotion phase of the innovation process it can improve innovation. By gaining knowledge about the importance of innovator roles, organisations use it to improve networks and collaboration between different public organisations. What then can contribute to achieving the public goals of the organisations. In addition, employees can benefit from this research by understanding how their roles can effectively generate and promote innovative ideas.

Ultimately, this research aims to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, enabling public organisations to enhance their innovative capacity and achieve more successful innovation outcomes. By addressing both theoretical and practical aspects, this study aims to advance the understanding of innovator roles and their implications for innovation within and between organisations.

## 1.3 OUTLINE OF THIS PAPER

This paper consists of six parts. First, the introduction to this research is given, followed by the research question & goals and the theoretical and practical relevance. In the next chapter, the theoretical framework will be explained. This consists of key concepts regarding, innovation within the public sector, within and between public organisations and the innovation role of the champion. Chapter 3 contains the methodology, where information is given about the research design, data collection methods, validity and reliability and data analysis. Thereafter in chapter 4, the results of the research will be presented. Lastly, the discussion and limitations are presented.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 INNOVATION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Successful innovations are needed in all kinds of sectors to develop better ways of meeting needs, solving problems, and using resources and technologies (Thénint & Miles, 2013). Innovation can be broadly defined as “the adoption of an internally generated or purchased device, system, policy, program, process, product, or service that is new to the adopting organisation” (Damanpour, 2017; P556). Within the public sector, innovation is seen by researchers as a core activity to increase the responsiveness of services to local and individual needs and to keep up with public needs and expectations (Thénint & Miles, 2013). This is traditionally viewed as innovation coming from the top, also called the top-down approach (Borins, 2001; Gaynor, 2013). With top-down innovation, there are high levels of management involvement, due to leaders taking the initiative, defining the objective and mobilising their troops behind innovative projects (Deschamps, 2005). As a contradiction, there are bottom-up innovations, that can originate from any place and by anyone in the organisation (Gaynor, 2013). Research shows that bottom-up innovation is happening more often in the public sector (Bysted & Hansen 2015). Surveys conducted in the USA show that about half of all innovation originates from middle managers or front-line workers, and the other half from agency heads, politicians, interest groups and individual citizens (Borins, 2001). In addition, quantitative evidence shows that bottom-up innovations occur more frequently in the public sector (Borins, 2001).

Both top-down and bottom-up innovations are attained through the innovation process. The literature exists on multiple forms and stages of the innovation process (Daim & Hernandez, 2008; De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010). Within this research, the focus lays on bottom-up innovations where employees contribute to all the steps of the process (Borins, 2002; Bos-Nehles et al., 2016; Hartley, 2005; Renkema et al., 2021) because studies shows that bottom-up innovation is happening more often within public organisations (Borins, 2001; Bysted & Hansen, 2015). The model consists of the following key components; idea generation, idea promotion and idea implementation. Idea generation is aimed at facilitating work-floor employees to develop ways to improve products or processes or to solve problems, by having those employees use the knowledge of their job. Idea promotion, in which employees promote and champion their idea, to generate support within the organisation. Idea implementation, in which upper management is present with a business case of the initially developed idea on which it must decide to go into the actual implementation of the idea. If approval is granted, the proposed way of doing things will be turned into a routine process to ensure that the innovation becomes a part of the organisation’s work process. The implementation phase is a key part of the innovation process. Organisation’s success or failure in implementing innovations may have a profound influence on the organisation’s survival (Klein et al., 2001).

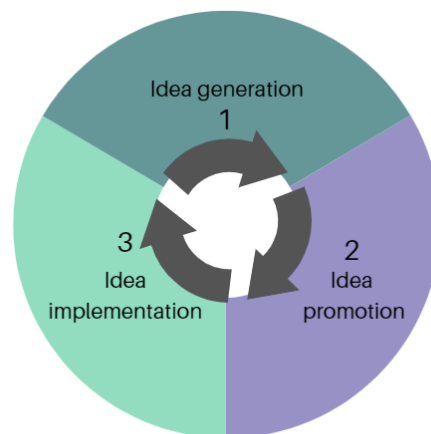


Figure 1: Innovation process



## 2.2 INNOVATION BETWEEN PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS

The open innovation concept challenges the dominant view of closed innovation, which assumes that it is the experts 'within' the company that comes up with the innovations (Chesbrough and Crowther, 2006). Chesbrough defines open innovation as: "a paradigm that assumes that firm can and should use external ideas as well as internal ideas, and internal and external paths to market, as the firms look to advance their technology" (2006, p.1). The open innovation concept shows how innovative projects can not only come from internal sources but also from external sources. Within the public sector, there can be multiple barriers to open innovation. Rigorous regulations and extensive bureaucratic procedures within the public sector may prevent public organisations from promoting various collaborations with external organisations (Yun et al., 2020). To improve open innovation in the public sector the culture of an organisation should embrace efficient, equitable, and accountable values because open innovation in public administration could be used to explore collective action problems and to reveal how to solve them (Ostrom, 2000). Enhancing this culture of multi-actor collaboration in the public sector will allow public agencies to more actively collaborate with external parties (Sørensen and Torfing, 2011).

Open innovation can be analysed at several levels, including inter-organisational and intra-organisational (Morgan et al., 2011). Open innovation facilitates knowledge sharing not only within (intra-) the organisation but also in between (inter-) organisations (Hansen and Nohria, 2004). Inter-organisational collaboration is used to allow information to be automated between organisations to reach a desired common goal (Damanpour and Schneider, 2006; Kyu Kim et al., 2011). Research shows organisations that engage in inter-organisational collaborations are more likely to create and improve commercially successful innovations (Faems et al., 2005). In addition, Alexiev argued that inter-organisational relationships play an important role in affecting the innovation propensity of organisations (2016). These standpoints show that collaboration and innovation are considered to go hand-in-hand (Yan and Azadegan, 2017).

Research shows that inter-organisational networks contribute to the innovative performance of firms by enhancing their innovation opportunities and capabilities (Dagnino et al., 2015). Through boundary-spanning activities, individuals gain knowledge, and information and are becoming aware of new technologies, which may be relevant to their organisation (Swan et al., 1999). In addition, it is important to others within the organisation, because they are convinced of the potential advantages of the innovation and bring together the necessary skills and knowledge needed to implement and appropriate the innovation (Swan et al., 1999).

Public organisations are accomplishing their mission and goals by achieving renewal and innovation by creating methods and work processes (Löfström, 2010). Additionally, research shows that multiple aspects of collaboration are important to success (Cinar et al., 2022; Faems et al., 2005). The first is mutual understanding and shared goals to maintain effective relations. Secondly, problem-solving through collective creativity and learning. And third, collaboration will give the necessary capacity through integrated resources when innovators needed additional technical, financial and intangible resources to operationalize the innovative solution (Cinar et al., 2022). Cinar et al. (2022) adds to this by providing two reasons why inter-organisational collaboration contributes to the effectiveness and efficiency of innovation. Firstly, it provides access to complementary assets required for the successful commercialization of innovation projects. Secondly, collaborative efforts with other organisations facilitate the transfer of both codified and tacit knowledge.

Efforts to develop local authorities often take place through projects, which are used as a tool for achieving change and renewing work methods in the organisation (Johansson et al., 2007). Alternative

studies indicate that collaboration on projects is primarily used as a way for coordinating resources such as time, competencies and funding (Johansson et al., 2007).

## 2.3 INNOVATION ROLES

Employees play an important part in accomplishing the mission and goals of an organisation (Darbi, 2012). Within the context of innovation process theory, the fulfilment of specific key roles is deemed essential for organisational innovation, not only within an organisation but also by collaboration with other organisations. Gemünden et al. (2007) find that innovator roles have a positive influence on innovation success. In addition, they share how innovator roles can bring together the right people and support organisational change utilizing their internal network. Meyer (1998) states that organisational innovation requires the fulfilment of specific key roles that guide a new idea through the innovation process. Overall, the literature shows a wide array of innovator roles. In the scope of this research, a deliberate choice has been made to concentrate on the roles most prevalent and widely acknowledged within the literature.

Numerous studies have established their investigation of innovator roles upon the foundational role theory formulated by Robert & Fufeld (1986). Robert & Fufeld (1986) identified the 5 key roles as “critical behavioural roles”; idea generation, product champion, program manager, gatekeeper and sponsor (Roberts and Fufeld, 1986). Identifying these five roles contributes to successfully achieving innovation. The recurrent appearance of critical behavioural roles in a multitude of studies substantiates their significance (Markham et al., 2010; Roberts, 2007). The first role, that of the idea generator, is described as the creative contributor of new insights that both initiate projects and contribute to problem solutions throughout technical projects (Roberts, 2007). Secondly, there are champions. They take ideas, either their own or others, and attempt to get them supported and adopted (Roberts, 2007). This role corresponds with the value creation supportive role of the champion from Dedehayri et al. (2018). In addition, multiple other studies state the value of the champion in finding and advocating an innovation project (Heikkilä et al., 2008; Mansfeld et al., 2010; Markham et al., 2010). The gatekeeper is the following critical role, who frequently brings information messages from external sources to the project group (Roberts, 2007). Gatekeeper funnels information from the outside world, while they may well acquire the information for their use. They also disperse it to others within the organisation (Macdonald and Williams, 1994). The following required role is the program manager, supplying the support functions of planning, scheduling, monitoring, technical work supervision, and business and financial coordination in relation to the innovation project (Katz and Allen, 2017; Roberts, 2007). The last critical behaviour role is that of the sponsor. The sponsor provides project support, protection, or resources. It refers to a person taking the informal role of providing assistance in demonstrating the potential for projects that are not yet formally accepted by the organisation (Markham et al., 2010a; Roberts & Fufeld, 1986)

In addition to Dedehayir et al. (2018), Mansfeld (2010) also distinguished two major role models in innovation literature: promoters and champions. Promoters are individuals who willingly take on the role of actively and intensively supporting and advancing innovation. On the other hand, champions are those who enthusiastically drive the progress of new product ideas, transforming them into viable innovations, and ultimately bringing them to the market. These role models align with the broader concept of innovator roles and highlight the active involvement and commitment required for successful innovation endeavours.

Meyer (1998) mentioned in their research that there are three roles carried out by members of the organisations, and those are commonly referred to as idea generators, sponsors, and orchestrators.

With the idea generators creating the idea, sponsors (or idea champion) recognise the usefulness of the idea to the organisations and the orchestrator is likely to be a central player in the innovation-related communication networks (Meyer, 1998). The orchestrator can also be seen as a leadership role, as it has multiple responsibilities, like protecting the innovation process, supporting idea generators, finding sponsors for innovations and promoting the trial period and testing of innovative ideas (Meyer, 1998). Overall, the literature shows many innovator roles that resemble each other. Examples of more roles are shown by Heikkilä et al., (2008) that identify the following roles: innovators, champions, gatekeepers, and implementers. Markham also examines innovative roles in the innovation process: champion, sponsors and gatekeepers (2010).

This research expands the first-named five behavioural roles proposed by Robert & Fusfeld (1986) to eight on the basis of continuing studies. Table 2 provides an encompassing overview of the prevailing innovator roles most frequently referenced in the existing literature. The table not only presents concise definitions for each role but also outlines the associated personal characteristics attributed to these roles.

Innovative roles	Definition	Characteristics
Program manager	Supplying the support functions of planning, scheduling, monitoring, technical work supervision, and business and financial coordination in relation to the innovation project (Katz and Allen, 2017; Roberts, 2007).	Strong organisational and planning abilities, attention to detail and time management skills, leadership and team management capabilities, and effective communication and coordination skills.
Implementers	Coordinate the actual operational rollout of the innovation (Heikkilä et al., 2008)	Detail-oriented and task-focused, skilled in project management and execution, strong organisational and coordination abilities, adaptable and capable of managing multiple tasks simultaneously.
Orchestrator	Is a central player in innovation-related communication networks (Meyer, 1998)	Good interpersonal and communication skills, ability to build and maintain relationships, strong leadership and facilitation capabilities, and strategic and holistic thinking.
Gatekeeper	Brings information messages from sources outside of a project group into that group (Heikkilä et al., 2008; Markham et al., 2010; Roberts, 2007)	Ability to filter and assess the relevance of information, bridge-builder between different stakeholders, good communication skills and information sharing abilities, possesses resources.
Idea generator	Contributors of new insights that both initiate projects and contribute to problem solutions throughout technical projects (Robert & Fusfeld, 1986) meyer1998	Creative, ability to identify opportunities and generate new ideas, continuous learning and curiosity.
Champion	Support ecosystem construction by building connections and alliances between actors, interacting between partners and sub/groups and providing access to local and nonlocal markets. (Dedehayir et al., 2018) Advocate and push for change and innovation; they take ideas, whether their own or others and attempt to get them supported and adopted (Heikkilä et al., 2008; Mansfeld et al., 2010; Markham et al., 2010; Roberts & Fusfeld 1986)	Risk takers, socially independent, relation oriented and skilled in building alliances, effective communicator, market and industry knowledge, ability to identify and seize market opportunities.
Sponsor	Supports new venture creation by giving resources to entrepreneurs, financing low-income markets, purchasing and codeveloping offerings of firms and linking entrepreneurs to other ecosystem actors (Dedehayir et al., 2018). A sponsor provides project support, protection, or resources. It refers to a person taking the informal role of providing assistance in demonstrating the potential for projects that are not yet formally accepted by the organisation (Markham et al., 2010a; Roberts & Fusfeld, 1986)	Access to resources and willingness to provide support, ability to identify and nurture entrepreneurial talent, collaborative and partnership-oriented mindset.
Promotor	individuals who voluntarily take on the role of actively and intensively supporting and advancing innovation (Mansfeld et al., 2010)	An active and passionate supporter of innovation, ability to inspire and motivate others, effective communication and advocacy skills, network-building and relationship management abilities.

Table 1: Overview of innovator roles

Fichter (2009: 360) coined the term 'innovation communities', defined as follows: "*An innovation community is an informal network of likeminded individuals, acting as universal or specialised promoters, often from more than one company and different organisations that team up in a project-related fashion, and commonly promote a specific innovation, either on one or across different levels of an innovation system*". The innovation communities can be characterised as the promotor network that can help the promotor with decision-making, additional resources, mutual support and motivation (Fichter, 2009). 'Innovation communities' corresponds with the 'open innovation concept', where projects can be launched from internal or external sources and new technology can enter various stages of the innovation process (Elmquist et al., 2009). Gatekeepers are shown within the research of Tushman (2016) as internal stars who also had a substantial amount of extra-organisational communication. They stated that gatekeepers within the technical service areas may focus their external communication on suppliers, vendors and customers (Tushman, 2016). This logic suggests that gatekeepers may not attend to all external communication areas but may specialize in those external areas most critical to the work of their subunit.

## 2.4 RESEARCH MODEL

The research model is built based on the formulated research question. The literature introduces 8 innovator roles that are utilised within this research. Within this study, a distinction is drawn between innovator roles within a public organisation and roles between public organisations. Furthermore, the focus is placed on two phases of the innovation process; the idea generation and idea promotion phase. These are examined separately for both within a public organisation and between public organisations.

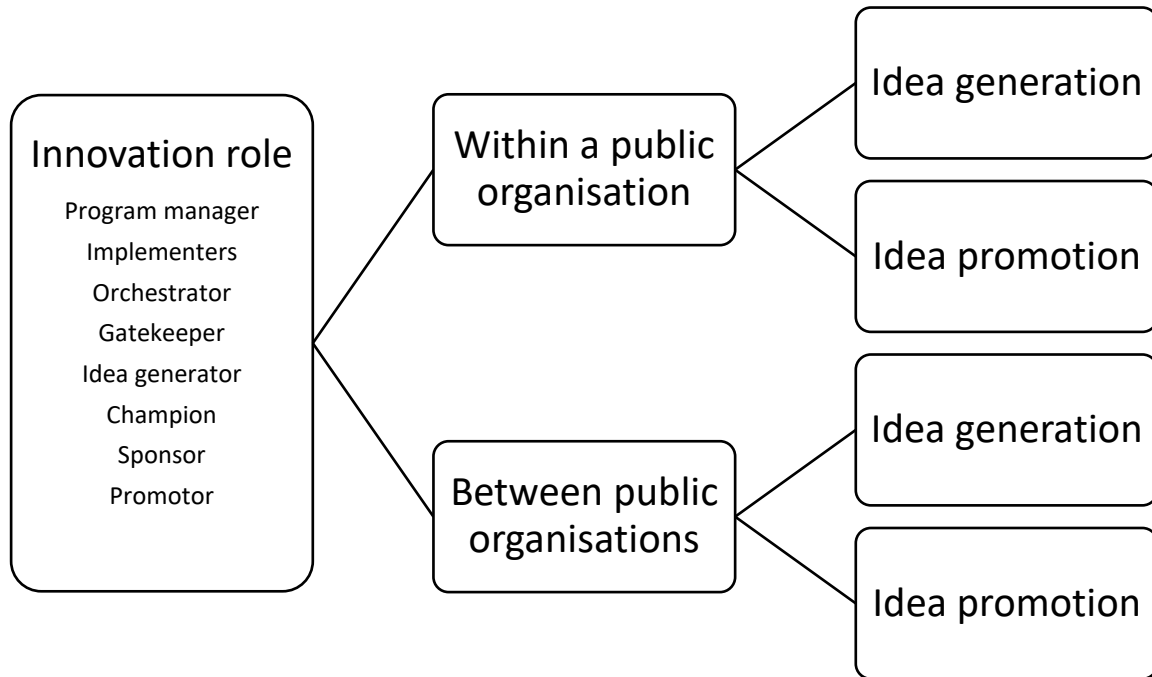


Figure 2: Research model

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

To answer the research question “*What are key innovator roles to effectively generate and promote innovative ideas within and between public organisations?*” a qualitative approach to data collection was used. The qualitative approach was chosen for the fact that it helps provide rich descriptions of phenomena (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021). It enhances understanding of the context of events as well as the events themselves (Brigitte et al., 2015). Within this research, this is critical because it is unclear which role or roles are of importance within public organisations. In addition, qualitative methods can help to identify patterns and configurations among variables and to make distinctions (Sofaer, 1999). A case study has been conducted to find an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in the observed situation (Heale & Twycross, 2018).

The case that is chosen for this research is the Netherlands Fire Services (NFS), due to its alignment with the objectives of this study. Within the Netherlands, there are 25 safety regions, each representing a specific geographical area. These regions are dedicated to ensuring the safety of the residents and visitors within their respective areas. Every safety region consists of multiple services. Examples of these services include the fire service, medical assistance organisations, crisis partners and municipal services. These organisations work together to coordinate assistance and can properly manage in case of a crisis or a disaster. This study focuses on the NFS because it can be seen as an independent organisation within every region.

Although the NFS functions as an independent organisation, they are also integrated with other regions. This integration allows for collaboration and coordination between the regions when addressing safety concerns that extend beyond individual boundaries. Despite being separate organisations, the NFS collaborate for innovation and effective safety management. Each region also has its innovation ambassador. This individual connects within their region and on a national scale via, for example, innovation Friday, the innovation platform and ambassadors days. All activities are organized by the NIPV (Netherlands Institute for Public Safety). By collaborating with other safety regions, safety regions can access a diverse range of knowledge, expertise and resources, enabling them to address safety challenges more effectively and develop innovative solutions.

Most innovation ambassadors work for the Netherlands Fire Services (NFS), however, a few ambassadors work for crisis management. The case of innovation ambassadors of the NFS is suitable for this study because it provides the opportunity to look at the role of the ambassador within the region (Intra), but also between (Inter) different safety regions. It allows for an examination of their role during the idea generation and idea promoting within a public organisation and between public organisations. Of the 25 regions, 15 regions are used as a case.

### 3.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In this research, the primary data collection method involves conducting in-depth interviews. Within this research, in-depth interviews offer a path to discovery and greater understanding. The interviews were designed as semi-structured interviews (Kallio et al., 2016). These interviews are characterized as purposeful interactions, wherein the investigator aims to gain insights into the interviewees’ knowledge, experiences, thoughts, feelings, and the significance or meaning attributed to the topic under investigation (Arthur et al., 2012). While, these important topics are discussed during the interview, there was plenty of freedom to explore other essential subjects that were not originally included.

For this research, 15 innovation ambassadors of 15 safety regions of the NFS were interviewed. Thus, in the end, 15 of the 25 safety regions participated in the research. In addition, two employees of the NIPV were interviewed to gain more insights into the ambassador role. In total, this leads to 17 conducted interviews. This number of interviews is deemed sufficient to gather substantial data that can comprehensively address the research question at hand, due to the limited acquisition of new information during the final interviews. By conducting 17 interviews, the researchers obtained a diverse range of perspectives, insights and experiences from the innovation ambassadors. To ensure the reliability and validity of the interviews, several selection criteria were adhered which the innovation ambassador had to meet. These criteria were:

- Ambassador as job function

Based on these criteria ambassadors were selected and approached. Approaching the ambassadors is done through email. In addition, two other employees involved with innovation within the safety regions were interviewed to collect data from a different perspective. These individuals were selected because they possess valuable insights into the innovation ambassador role, as they are associated with the NIPV, which introduced the function of innovation ambassadors to the safety regions. The NIPV employees have a comprehensive overview of all the innovation ambassadors and can provide valuable information on any bottleneck or challenges that may exist with the innovation ambassadors. An example of this is the innovation program manager of the NIPV. For these interviews the following criteria are of importance:

- Experience with innovation projects in the region
- Responsibilities within and between regional innovation

Upon contacting the employees, interviews were promptly scheduled based on mutual availability. Due to the geographical dispersion of the interviewees, the interview was conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams. To ensure accurate documentation and analysis, all interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The primary objective of these interviews was to provide an opportunity for innovation ambassadors to openly share their knowledge, insights, and experiences related to their roles.

<b>Number interview</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Duration interview</b>
1	NIPV	25 min
2	Ambassador	50 min
3	Ambassador	30 min
4	Ambassador	30 min
5	Ambassador	55 min
6	NIPV	30 min
7	Ambassador	47 min
8	Ambassador	40 min
9	Ambassador	42 min
10	Ambassador	38 min
11	Ambassador	30 min
12	Ambassador	65 min
13	Ambassador	42 min
14	Ambassador	65 min
15	Ambassador	35 min
16	Ambassador	48 min
17	Ambassador	45 min



### 3.3 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH

Within qualitative research, reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigour and quality. It is also through this association that the way to achieve trustworthiness of research gets affected from the qualitative researchers' perspectives which are to eliminate bias and increase the truthfulness of a proposition (Maxwell, 1992). Within this research, multiple strategies are used to assure the trustworthiness, rigour and quality of the research. Such strategies include: meticulously maintaining records that demonstrate a clear decision-making process and ensure that interpretations of data are consistent and transparent, verbatim descriptions of participants' stories to support findings, in addition, respondent validation that includes inviting participants to comment on the interview transcript and whether the final themes and concept created adequately reflect the phenomena being investigated (Noble and Smith, 2015).

In addition, the collected data is studied to establish a deeper understanding of the participant's perspectives and experiences. This involved spending significant time reviewing and analysing the data to develop a comprehensive interpretation. Moreover, the use of triangulation was adopted to strengthen the validity and reliability of the research (Flick & Flick, 2017). This is done by not only interviewing the innovation ambassadors but also two employees of the NIPV. By doing this conclusions drawn were supported not only by ambassadors but also by other sources. Deriving conclusions from multiple sources not only aids in addressing the research question comprehensively but also enhances the overall trustworthiness of the study. This approach not only helps in answering the research question effectively but also contributes to improving the overall reliability and credibility of the findings. By implementing these measures, the research aimed to establish the trustworthiness of the study.

### 3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews conducted were transcribed using Amberscript. Amberscript is a transcription software known for its accuracy and efficiency. However, to ensure the highest level of quality, all transcriptions were carefully reviewed and improved by relistening to the interviews to correct any errors. Following the transcriptions underwent coding using ATLAS.ti software, enabling systematic and comprehensive analysis of the qualitative data. The data analysis technique employed in this research is a template analysis (Brooks et al., 2015). The analysis of data is done through a hybrid approach that consists of a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. Inductive analysis, as described by Strauss and Corbin's (1998: p12), involves starting with the study area and allowing theories to emerge from the collective data. This approach aims to identify information not covered in the existing literature. On the other hand, deductive coding was employed by developing a codebook based on relevant literature and connecting the identified codes from the interview transcript. First, deductive coding was used to generate codes based on knowledge of existing literature. The coding process facilitated the organisation, interpretation, and analysis of the data. Three overarching themes were identified for coding purposes: (1) Innovator roles within and between organisations, (2) Innovator roles within organisations, and (3) Innovator roles between organisations. Additionally, a distinction is made in these three themes between the idea generation and idea promotion phase. Figure 3 presents the coding scheme specifically for within and between-region innovation, which also served as the selective code. Selective codes were generated based on existing knowledge derived from the literature. Initially, the selective codes focused on the innovator roles within and between organisations. followed by codes specific to only the innovator roles within organisations and innovator roles between organisations. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the importance and dynamics within and outside the region. Additionally, it provided the opportunity to compare and contrast the findings across the three distinct contexts. By utilizing this coding strategy,

the study was able to explore the significance of innovator roles within and between regions while also examining them individually.

Furthermore, axial codes were made based on the two different phases of the innovation process, see Figures 4 and 5. Additionally, axial codes such as role and characteristics were selected to align with the existing literature on innovator roles. Following this, inductive coding was conducted to identify information that is not adequately addressed in the current academic discourse. These open codes represented specific concepts or ideas that emerged from the interviews. Examples are seen in Figures 3, 4 and 5. In the discussion section of this paper, the finding of this study is compared to the existing innovator role literature. This comparison aims to provide insights and answer the research question proposed in this stud. All the codes together are displayed in a codebook in Figures 3, 4 and 5. In total this codebook shows 34 open codes, 16 axial codes and 3 selective codes.

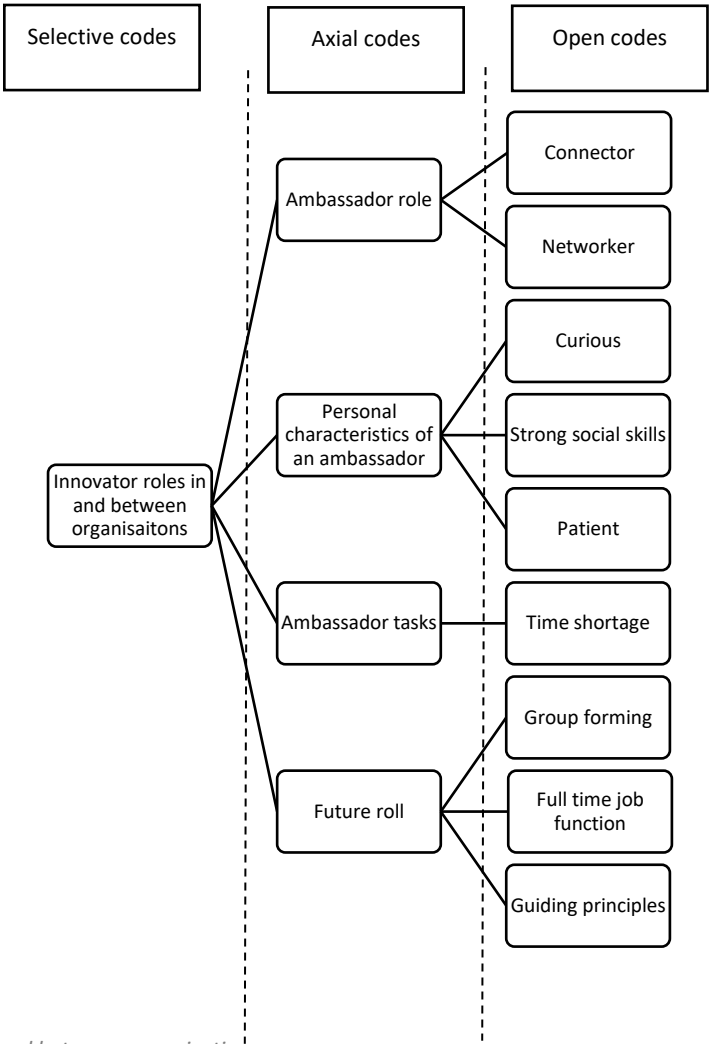


Figure 3: Innovator roles in and between organisations

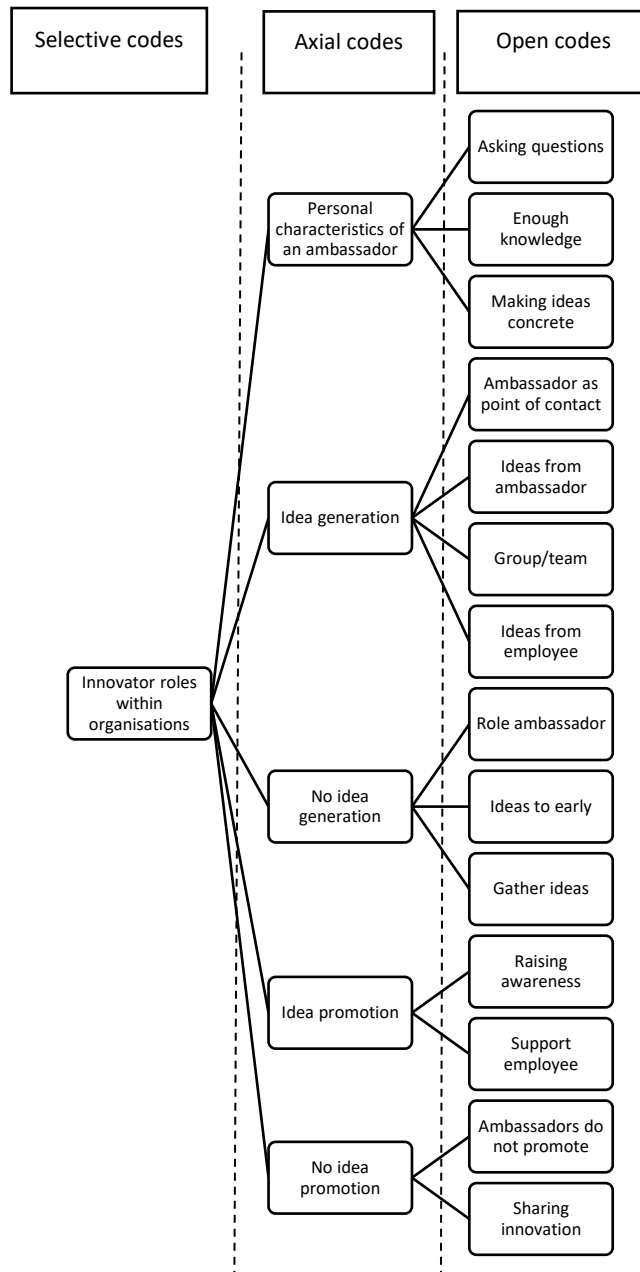


Figure 4, Innovator roles within organisations

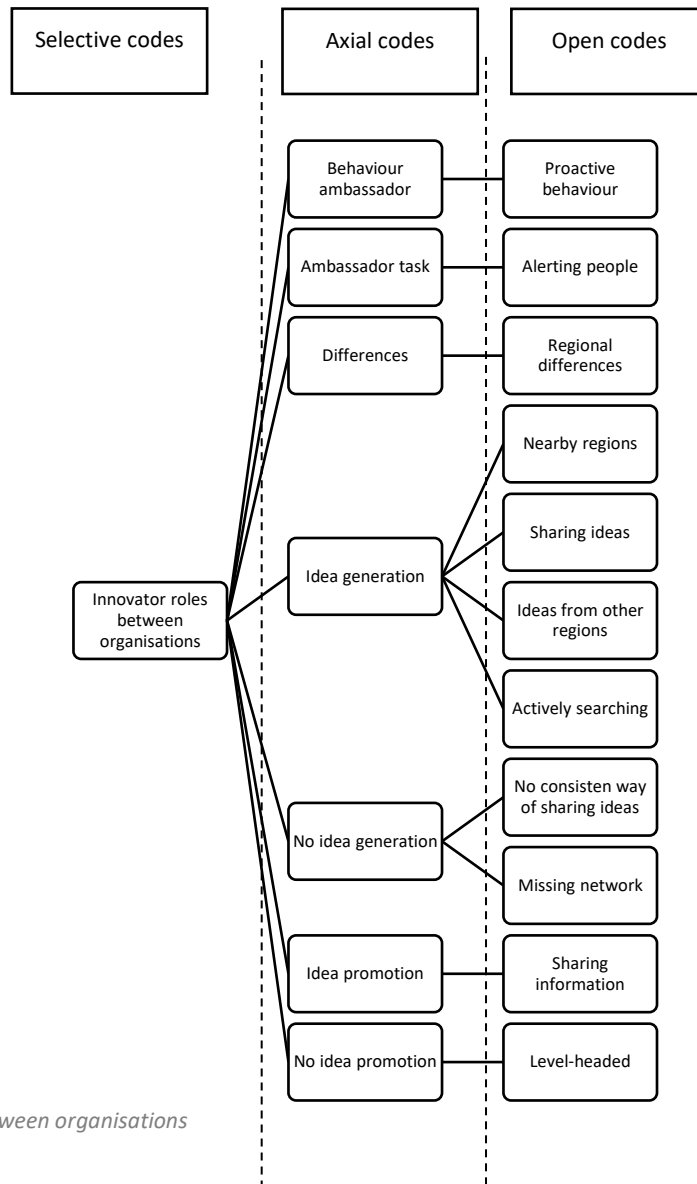


Figure 5, Innovator roles between organisations

## 4. RESULTS

In the following part, the findings of the research are presented. First, the results for innovation roles in and between organisations are discussed. Followed by the result of innovator roles within an organisation. At last, the results for innovator roles between organisations are discussed.

### 4.1 INNOVATION ROLES IN AND BETWEEN ORGANISATIONS

In this subchapter, we delve not only into the codes associated with the ambassadorial role but also explore the personal characteristics of an ambassador, along with the tasks they undertake. This approach allows us to provide a more in-depth explanation regarding the multifaceted role that innovation ambassadors fulfil.

Axial	Open Codes
Ambassador role	Connector
	Networker
Personal characteristics of an ambassador	Curious
	Strong social skills
	Patient
Ambassador tasks	Time shortage
Ideal role	Group forming
	Full-time job function
	Guiding principles

#### 4.1.1 Role: Connector and Networker

Two role attributes emerged as significant during the interviews. The most frequently mentioned role attribute is the *Connector*. Ambassadors describe their role as individuals who foster connections, not only among people but also between innovative projects and individuals. When observing individuals within their region in search of specific resources, ambassadors actively strive to assist by connecting them with other employees inside other regions. Ambassadors can facilitate this because they develop knowledge that is occurring in various regions.

*“I try to connect and put away meaningfully.”* (Int. 17)

*“I am also a sort of connector. I bridge the gap between various innovative initiatives because I am familiar with them and because I know that they are actively involved. I engage in discussions with them about what is happening in this country.”* (Int. 5)

Another role attribute that goes together with *Connector* is *Networking*. Networking is seemed very important for ambassadors. They use their network to connect people with each other. Moreover, the network holds substantial importance for ambassadors, as it enables them to establish connections with individuals who can contribute to their ideas or innovations. The network seems not only important to connect within the region or with other regions but also with other companies, schools or universities. These institutes can help by doing research or to develop innovations.

*“More like a networking role to connect other people with each other.”* (Int. 3)

*“You must be a networker. That's one of the most important things, I think.”* (Int. 8)

Ambassador 4 shared the types of ideas and innovations they have shared within their own region as well as with other regions. Ambassador 4 does this to ensure that crucial initiatives can be actively

pursued and ultimately make a valuable contribution to fire care. Initiatives that are shared are mostly from the central government of the VNG.

*“What I often relay are national developments, essentially initiatives originating from the Central Government, aimed at disseminating them more quickly to the regions. However, I also share developments that may be occurring at the municipal level, sometimes through channels like the VNG (Association of Netherlands Municipalities), which represents more overarching organizations.” (Int. 4)*

4)

#### **4.1.2 Personal characteristics of an ambassador: Curious, strong social skills and patient**

The interviews showed many characteristics of ambassadors that were important for not only the role inside the region but also outside the region.

The findings from the interviews indicate that the majority of ambassadors possess extensive networks within the region, and some even have substantial networks outside the region. These networks consist among other things of regions that are geographically close by or employees they have worked together with in the past. However, despite the size of their networks, it was observed that some ambassadors believe their networks are underutilized. Furthermore, the results reveal that most ambassadors do not actively include other ambassadors within their networks. Although ambassadors may occasionally encounter each other at events organized by the NIPV, they do not perceive themselves to be in close contact with one another. While not all ambassadors perceive this as problematic as they possess expansive networks outside the region, they do not perceive the necessity of networking specifically with other ambassadors to fulfil their needs. They demonstrate awareness regarding which colleagues are working on specific subjects in different regions, and therefore, they opt to directly contact the individuals they require.

*“Network is one of the tracks though, but I feel like we need to leverage the network more at the moment when we are working on a specific topic rather than in the broad it makes sense to network very much.” (Int. 14)*

*“Outside of those moments, I actually have no contact with innovation ambassadors.” (Int. 12)*

Being *curious* is seen as a crucial characteristic of ambassadors. Being curious is beneficial because it cooperates with the knowledge of the ambassadors. By being curious ambassadors encounter innovations, ideas, and other people. In addition, they are very interested in what a product or process is doing, how it works and if it will benefit their region. Within the region, the curiosity contributes by having the desire to understand ideas from other colleagues. Moreover, the curiosity of ambassadors drives them to be open and receptive to new ideas, fostering a desire to learn and understand how innovations and ideas from various sources function. As Respondent 7 exemplifies, curiosity is regarded as a crucial characteristic of an ambassador. This curiosity enables ambassadors to expand their knowledge and expertise.

*“AI is kind of an item right now, what is that? and how does that play out? and how can we use that? So, looking around, and being curious, I think those are important qualities and then knowing how to translate that. What does that mean for the safety region? And for the fire department?” (Int. 7)*

*Social skills* are crucial attributes for ambassadors. They need to maintain a strong network to have the competence to connect people within their region to other regions. In addition, they are often in different departmental groups with other regions. Here they use their social skills to build a network. Furthermore, they promote ideas in and outside the region. To make this successful it demands good communication and social skills.

Ambassadors claimed it is importance to be *patient*. Innovations do not happen overnight. It takes time to concretize an idea. An idea must go through multiple phases to become an innovation. Within an organisation, the budget must be allocated, and often multiple people need to see the added value of the idea to the organisation. Ambassadors must possess the essential quality of patience, as highlighted by respondent 5. This is primarily because the realization of certain ideas and initiatives within the ambassadorial context often requires a significant amount of time and cannot be accomplished within a single year.

*"Therefore, as an ambassador in my role, I said, "You must have patients. I am certain that the ideas we are currently working on are good, but not all of them will become a reality this year." (Int. 5)*

#### **4.1.3 Ambassador tasks: Time shortage**

None of the interviewed ambassadors perceive the role of ambassador as a full-time job. The time dedicated to ambassador tasks varies significantly among ambassadors. For some ambassadors, their existing role already involves working on innovative projects, resulting in a natural alignment between their work and ambassadors' function. Many ambassadors experience flexibility granted by their work to allocate time for ambassador tasks. This flexibility exhibits variation, ranging from a few hours a week to complete autonomy over time allocation. However, dedicating entire workdays solely to their function as ambassador would not be appreciated by their managers. Time constraints are an often-cited phenomenon, with priority given to daily tasks over ambassador task. This shows on ambassador days organized by the NIPV. Devoting an entire day to being an ambassador is seemed like a major impact on ambassadors. Particularly considering the time required for travel, which outweighs the perceived benefits of being present for some ambassadors.

*"I also cancel easily. If networking days are organized. Then the regular agenda is leading." (Int. 15)*

*"Above me, there's only the commander, so I do have control over my own time. However, I admit that it's indeed demanding. So, there are times when I have to make choices, especially when there are meetings involved, that I can't attend. It's not like my full-time job." (Int. 17)*

In addition, Ambassador 17 offers an example of a task they haven't been able to take on due to time limitations. This task involves adding the innovative practices they're working on or have already implemented in their region to the NIPV platform. The ambassador also acknowledges the potential for contributing innovation to the NIPV but clarifies that they have not been able to carry it out.

*"NIPV is also trying to have a website that showcases the innovative efforts happening in different regions. We haven't managed to populate it effectively and consistently yet. So, I do believe that if we were to do that, you could also contribute more on a national level." (Int. 17)*

#### **4.1.4 Ideal role: Group forming, full-time job function and guiding principles**

The role as ambassador did not come with an explanation of tasks and responsibilities. Interviews showed that some ambassadors could deal better with this than others. Most ambassadors have a clear vision of how they envision the ambassador role. Some have manifested this vision more concretely than their counterparts within the region. These ambassadors are already working in the way that they would like. Others do have an idea about how the aim that the role should be. However, are still searching for what they need to do and what their responsibilities are as an ambassador. These ambassadors are missing some guiding principles. Furthermore, ambassadors that are working in a way that they have envisioned mention that events that are organized by the NIPV are often too non-committal. They go there, and communicate about subjects with each other. However, never clear agreements are made. Interviewees are sharing that they are missing some guiding principles for the role.

Besides guiding principles, interviewees are sharing more visions that they have for ambassadors. They share that innovation is not something that is done by one person. Within some regions, innovation groups are formed. In one region there is a group formed that can support the ambassador in making decisions. In addition, groups are formed to look for innovative improvements within the region. Furthermore, some ambassadors do share that more contact with other ambassadors is wished for. To form a little community with other ambassadors. Interviewee 17 shared that within this community it is important to know that ambassadors cannot know everything in the region. However, having other ambassadors as contact persons could help to get started with networking with other regions.

*“Creating a sort of community of practice, where you say: those people are in a group and even though we know they can’t know everything, you could start with those people.” (Int. 17)*

*“There aren't frameworks for it right now, but I think that's very helpful, that they help, that they put a4 with some principles there, for example.” (Int. 4)*

Results show that many ambassadors do not have the time available to work on their ambassador task. These interviewees have the vision that the ambassador task would be more successful if it would be a full-time job. However, not all ambassadors share this vision.

*“Not a whole lot, but I don't need a whole lot at the moment either.” (Int. 16)*

## 4.2 INNOVATOR ROLES WITHIN AN ORGANISATION

This subchapter focuses on distinguishing between idea generation and the absence of it within an organization, as well as the differentiation between idea promotion and the lack thereof within the same organizational context. This differentiation aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ambassador's role during these innovation phases. Furthermore, this research delves into the personal characteristics of ambassadors, contributing to a more thorough exploration of their role.

Axial	Open Codes
Personal characteristics of an ambassador	Asking questions
	Enough knowledge
	Making ideas concrete
Idea generation	Ambassador as a point of contact
	Ideas from ambassador
	Group-team
	Ideas from employees
No idea generation	Role ambassador
	Ideas to early
	Gather ideas
Idea promotion	Raising awareness
	Support employee
No idea promotion	Ambassadors do not promote
	Sharing innovation

We found that the role of the ambassador is more active within the region than outside the region. Most ambassadors have a clear idea of what they are doing within the region. One ambassador even shared that their focus lay on their region.



*“Mostly intern, I work for our organisation.” (Int. 12)*

#### **4.2.1 Personal characteristics of an ambassador: Asking questions, having enough knowledge and making ideas concrete**

Additionally, the interview revealed several significant attributes that are important for ambassadors, particularly within the region. Among these, the ability to ask questions emerged as the most frequently mentioned characteristic. When employees approach ambassadors with ideas or concerns, it is crucial that the ambassador possesses the capacity to *ask the right questions* to assist individuals with their proposals, but also to assess the potential contribution of such ideas to the region. It is essential that innovation represents an advancement in either a product or a service. Thus, the ambassador must engage in questioning to prevent potential developments that have already been encountered in the region.

*“I think of the important role could be that of the ambassador. The ambassador’s role involves inspiring, explaining, and showing interest by asking questions, even if the idea may not have been initially received with enthusiasm.” (Int. 16)*

*“You also need to be able to ask and dare to ask critical questions, whether it will contribute at all.” (Int. 3)*

The *knowledge* of the ambassador also seemed as important to interviewees. Not only the knowledge of innovation outside the region. But also, that the ambassador has general knowledge of what is going on. One interviewee mentioned that an operational background is important because the ambassador speaks the language of employees that work in the operational part. In another region, they have a designated person as a point of contact, especially for employees that is also working as a firefighter. This person focuses on innovation projects one day a week besides doing the operational work. Within this region, this person is an easier point of contact for employees that have ideas on an operational level.

*“That person should have an operational background or even be involved, still in the operation, because then they speak the language.” (Int. 13)*

Ideas are often a bit obscure for people within an organisation. Interviewees often mention the skill of an ambassador to make an idea or *innovation concrete* for someone. They use this to make ideas that employees have more concrete for others. By effectively translating abstract concepts into relatable terms, ambassadors help employees understand the practical implications and benefits of new ideas. They highlight the added value that innovations can bring to the organisation. Respondent 16 presents illustrate how the process of translating an innovation can stimulate individuals to think creatively and explore their surroundings. By effectively communicating the essence of ideas, ambassadors can inspire individuals to think outside the box.

*“An innovation can be translated into what it concretely means in a situation or how it can be applied to a situation. It involves looking at your initiative from different perspectives and attempting to encourage people to think outside the box and explore their surroundings.” (Int. 16)*

*“That’s what you’re mainly looking for, so to speak, and if you can contribute to that, you try to make that translation, from what you have observed to the safety region. And, to make it concrete because ultimately you can explain it well to employees, to your organisation, so that people can understand and get on board with it.” (Int. 4)*

#### **4.2.2 Idea generation: Ambassador as a point of contact, ideas from ambassador, group-team and ideas from employees**

The interviews show that the ambassador has an active role during the idea generation phase. Especially *as a contact point for employees*. Multiple interviewees mentioned that employees seek out the ambassador to share their ideas. In addition, interviews highlighted the employee's awareness of the ambassador within their region. The ambassadors themselves attributed to this because they are already working in the region for a long period or because of their current function. Employees that maintained close working relationships with the ambassador, such as being on the same team, exhibited more engagement with the ambassador and presented their ideas more often.

*"At this moment personally, because they know who I am, what I do, because I communicate about what I'm working on." (Int. 5)*

In addition, by getting ideas from other employees, some ambassadors proactively engage in idea generation themselves. They demonstrate proactive behaviour by actively approaching other employees, engaging in discussions with them, and inquiring about their projects. Moreover, ambassadors often have an awareness of market trends and developments, not only within their region but also in other markets. By doing this they aim to identify opportunities and see if innovation could be adopted within their region.

*"To talk with colleges." (Int. 11)*

In many regions, ideas are generated by specific groups. One region has a group that consists of multidisciplinary teams from different departments that work together to generate new ideas. Other regions mentioned that they have groups that look at incidents that happen and reflect on those. From this, ideas also come forward to improve the current situation or process. What can result in innovations.

*"We have a group of people who work in a networked manner within the organisation, who also meet once a week or once every two weeks from various departments, all of whom want to think about how we can do things in an innovative way and not just for the sake of being innovative." (Int. 17)*

*"I also evaluate after an incident. That's where we gather additional insights and information." (Int. 9)*

Ambassador 9 shares how evaluating after an incident helps with getting ideas for innovations.

*"Also from evaluations that we conduct. With us, it's not exactly an obligation, but there is a strong emphasis on it. Let's just say that all incidents from a significant event, such as a major fire or a substantial rescue operation, are assessed by evaluators, and a lot of valuable insights are derived from these evaluations." (Int. 9)*

A shortage of ideas within a region is not seen by ambassadors. If you have the resources to collect them. Some regions do this by having a place where employees can send an email to. Others post a challenge they are dealing with on Intranet, to ask if employees have ideas for a specific challenge.

*"If I keep my ears and eyes open, there are always colleagues with great ideas." (Int. 5)*

*"We have an Intranet page that states clearly that we have an innovation working group. People can also submit things there, so it's not only limited to ideas coming from a third party. In practice, that is usually the case, but there is also a designated email address associated with the entire working*

*group. You can email ideas there, such as if you've seen something at a trade fair or heard something from someone, and so on.” (Int. 9)*

#### **4.2.3 No idea generation: Role ambassador, ideas too early and gather ideas**

On one side ambassadors implies that employees proactively approach them with ideas. However, several ambassadors have expressed that their ambassador function lacks sufficient visibility within the region. Ambassador 11 specifically mentioned the lack of clarity surrounding their role, expressing uncertainty about their responsibilities and the need to disseminate information about their new function to the region. Furthermore, ambassadors indicate that employees that they work with go towards them with ideas and know that they are the ambassadors. Furthermore, they indicate that their ambassador role is not known by other employees within the region. Consequently, employees remain unaware of the existence of ambassadors in the region.

*“I don't really have handles yet to really sell it within my organisation.” (Int. 11)*

*“But if you ask any employee here, who is the innovation ambassador in the organisation, they wouldn't know.” (Int. 17)*

Employees do not always go towards the ambassador with ideas. Interviewees mention that they must have an active role in getting ideas from employees. They must take the step to collect ideas and ask questions to employees about things that could be improved or that are problematic at the moment.

*“You really have to pick them up.” (Int. 11)*

Besides the active attitude to get ideas from other employees. Employees also submit multiple ideas. These ideas are not suitable for the organisation. Some ideas are highly innovative, so innovative that a region does not have the resources to use them or to make them work in the quick future. Ambassadors mention that they do not like to reject innovative ideas. Especially when it is a good idea, but it is just too early for the organisation to handle it. Sometimes these innovations are just put on hold, other times these innovations walk to a dead end.

#### **4.2.4 Idea promotion: Raising awareness, supporting employee**

Idea awareness within a region is crucial for advancing ideas through the innovative process. Several ambassadors have mentioned that they are involved in this process. By championing ideas among relevant individuals and through appropriate channels. Ambassadors possess a comprehensive understating of innovative activities in a region. Ambassadors recognize the significance of raising awareness for ideas. Their knowledge of the activities in the region and their network enables them to promote idea visibility within the region.

*“I am also convinced that picking up a good idea is important, so I try to raise awareness among the right channels and people.” (Int. 16)*

*“But also, as an ambassador to ensure that what is going on within the organisation also comes to the surface.” (Int. 8)*

While trying to get awareness for ideas ambassadors also try to get support from employees. These could be all kinds of employees within the organisation. Employees that can help further develop an innovation but also employees that are open to working with innovation. By getting the support of multiple employees an innovation has a bigger chance for success. Ambassadors use their network within the organisation to find the right employees to connect to an innovation process. Ambassadors recognize the importance of getting support from other employees. When there is a

good innovation however it does not get the support within the region that it needs, and innovation will not be implemented in the end.

*“Over time, I have naturally learned that if you, well, if you don't find allies somewhere, then you also have to make your own choices and look at other things from different perspectives.” (Int. 14)*

**4.2.5 No idea promotion: Ambassadors do not promote and share innovation**

Multiple ambassadors have expressed that promoting ideas is a task that is within their purview. According to their perspective, a good innovation possesses the qualities that will enable it to generate promotion. However, the ambassador does think it is important that every idea gets a fair chance. On the other hand, they share that the responsibility of promoting an innovation lies within the department of employees from who the innovation is. Respondent 17 shared how they promote ideas as little as possible. This should be done by the people that working on the idea.

*“Frankly, I try to promote ideas as little as possible, but leave it there with the people doing it and promote it.” (Int. 17)*

Results show that some regions are actively working on sharing innovation activities within the region and with the rest of the employees within the region. This is facilitated through various means, such as communicating innovative projects on Intranet, having an email address that employees can context and having a point of contact. However, it should be noted that not all regions adopt this practice. One ambassador highlighted that sharing innovative projects within the region is not common. Consequently, ambassadors and employees face challenges in gaining visibility into innovation projects in the region.

*“Another challenge we face is that we don't share everything within our region. It's really difficult to, when you're working on something, also share it with others.” (Int. 14)*

**4.3 INNOVATION ROLES BETWEEN ORGANISATIONS**

This subchapter centres around the innovator role between organisations. It delineates the differentiation between idea generation and the absence thereof, while also highlighting the distinction between promotion and the lack of promotion. Moreover, it sheds light on ambassador behaviour in relation to their tasks and makes the differences clear between different organisations.

<b>Axial codes</b>	<b>Open codes</b>
Behaviour ambassador	Proactive behaviour
Ambassador task	Alerting people
Differences	Regional differences
Idea generation	Nearby regions
	Sharing ideas
	Innovation/ideas from other regions
	Actively searching
No Idea generation	No consistent way of sharing ideas
	Missing network
Idea promotion	Sharing information
No idea promotion	Level-headed

**4.3.1 Behaviour ambassador: Proactive behaviour**

When different safety regions work together on projects, it is common for one region to take the lead. Innovation ambassadors do not see this as an extensive problem. However, when other regions

do not show any proactive behaviour, this could lead to annoyance. What in the long run will not help the collaboration between regions. Therefore, ambassadors must demonstrate proactive behaviour when working together with other regions. One ambassador suggested that it would be beneficial if regions take turns in being the leader of a project. In instances where a region indicates constraints that prevent them from taking the lead, another region should step forward and be willing to take over the leadership position.

*“You also need to give those regions some space if they are dealing with internal issues that may hinder their focus on innovation. They should be given some consideration. Just like in friendships and family, not everyone needs to be at the forefront all the time.” (Int. 17)*

#### **4.3.2 Ambassador task: Alerting people**

A task that is important for an ambassador is to inform individuals within their region about external developments taking place outside the region. Ambassadors often possess extensive networks, enabling them to stay informed about innovations occurring in other regions and markets. Consequently, it becomes their task to notify individuals within their region when noteworthy advancements or opportunities arise elsewhere that could benefit their region.

Ambassadors often have a good understanding of innovation. By demonstrating ongoing developments that are occurring in other regions and even in other countries to the employees within their region. It allows employees to gain insight into ideas, trends, and developments outside their region. By alerting individuals within the region, ambassadors contribute to fostering awareness about developments and potential collaborations with other regions.

*“It primarily involves showing colleagues the developments taking place in other regions or the rest of the world.” (Int. 12)*

#### **4.3.3 Differences: Regional differences**

Significant differences exist between regions in terms of innovation. Some regions are further in terms of innovation than others. This is partly due to the fact that there is a varying level of support provided by the region or organisation in which the ambassador operates. In certain regions the support consists of the financial area, ambassadors have a budget specifically intended for innovation. These regions experience more favourable conditions for testing out innovation. In contrast, other regions have limited resources, which results in restrictions on their capacity to pursue innovation. Some regions also benefit from having multiple employees available that can focus on innovations, in addition to the ambassador. Furthermore, variations exist in the levels of tolerance for making mistakes within different regions. Innovation projects do not always yield the desired outcome during a testing phase. Regions that have a budget and a higher level of tolerance for making mistakes are often further in terms of innovation developments in contrast to other regions.

*“But there are regions that are a little bit more frontrunner anyway in innovations. Because they either have more money or more manpower.” (Int. 6)*

#### **4.3.4 Idea generation: Nearby regions, sharing ideas, innovation/ideas from other regions and actively searching.**

Idea generation is happening in various ways between regions. One specific way stood out, sharing with regions that were nearby. Safety regions are often already in contact with each other for various projects. These contacts consist mostly of nearby regions. Regions are grouped, example is 3-North

which consist of Groningen, Friesland and Drenthe. Ambassadors shared that the contact with the regions that are in the same group is better, it is for ambassadors more approachable. These regions already see each other for other subjects, so the step to share innovative ideas is easier. In addition, results show that even if you are not in a group together is easier to share with a region that is close by. Often the ambassador already has some kind of network in that region that makes it easier to share ideas with the region.

*"I mean that there is a group of regions that meet more frequently in various aspects, and that also helps." (Int. 16)*

*"That are the regions that are closer by." (Int. 11)*

Interviewee 16 provides a notable example of how the regions connected through East-Five are already collaborating across multiple councils, addressing subjects such as learning development, business operations, and risk management.

*"So, there is East-Five, which includes the Gelderland and Overijssel regions. That group of regions interact more frequently in various areas, and that's helpful too. So, we're also part of different professional councils. These councils cover professional topics, learning and development, business operations, and risk management, as well as incident response." (Int. 16)*

Multiple regions engage in *sharing their innovations* with other regions. A way how innovations are shared is through an event called "Innovation Friday" which is organized by the NIPV. This online event provides safety regions and crisis partners with the opportunity to present their innovations. Additionally, some ambassadors choose to upload their innovations onto the NIPV innovation platform. The platform aims to create insight and connection in all ongoing initiatives. Furthermore, ongoing developments should become visible to safety regions. To make this aim reality safety regions must post their innovations on it. However, not all safety regions fully utilize the innovation platform due to various reasons, including time constraints and a perceived lack of added value in sharing innovations. Another common factor why ambassadors do not use the platform more is because they only want to share an innovation when it is fully complete. Innovations that are still in progress or not yet fully realized are less frequently shared on the platform. Despite suboptimal utilization of the innovation platform, ideas continue to be shared through alternative channels. These include Microsoft Teams, LinkedIn, through the personal network of the ambassador and already existing partnerships.

*"By sharing it and for example with a recent Innovation Friday our game is presented, and I also put it on that website." (Int. 11)*

Regions are not only sharing ideas they are also get inspired by ideas from other regions. Getting ideas usually goes through the same channels as sharing ideas. However, the results show that sharing innovation is often easier than getting innovations from other regions. Two ambassadors share that regions often want to do their tests instead of adopting innovation from a different region. Nevertheless, the region still gets ideas from outside the region. Not only from other regions but also from other markets. Interviewee 5 shared how the initiative he gets from outside the region should contribute to what is happening inside the region.

*"Go outside, bring the outside in. It should naturally contribute to what we as a region are doing." (Int. 5)*

In addition, this ambassador shares that he would like to help colleagues inside the region by getting initiatives outside the region.

*"When it comes to innovations, I like to bring them in to help my colleagues." (Int. 5)*

Frequently, ambassadors come across ideas, which they subsequently bring back to their regions. Nevertheless, some ambassadors proactively seek out initiatives from outside their region. Ambassadors demonstrate a high degree of openness in sharing their ideas and insight with individuals they have extensive contact with. Interviewee 16 provides insights into how the acquired information is utilized within their region.

*"That person is actively seeking information. Yes, as soon as I think, 'Oh, it has something to do with the information,' I send it their way" (Int. 5)*

#### **4.3.5 No idea generation: No consistent way of sharing ideas, missing network**

The results demonstrate that ideas are shared through various channels and methods. Consequently, there is an absence of a standardized approach to sharing ideas. Ambassadors not sharing their ideas due to uncertainty about the appropriate manner to do so. The NIPV innovation platform is a designated way to share ideas, but it lacks specific guidelines regarding the format of the submitted innovations. Ambassadors are unsure about the desired format, frequency, textual information, and images they should include or exclude when sharing innovations. The lack of guidelines regarding idea and innovation sharing makes a barrier for the ambassadors to share ideas.

*"Now, for example, we have an innovation platform where everyone can report or showcase their projects. However, there are plenty of projects happening in regions that are not fully represented in such an environment. So perhaps we should consider setting a minimum requirement of five projects to be reported per year or one project per quarter." (Int. 4)*

Moreover, it is notable that certain ambassadors have limited contact with ambassadors from other regions, as they predominantly focus on their region rather than actively engage in idea exchange with other regions. In addition, some ambassadors do not frequently attend ambassador events organised by the NIPV. Which contributes to having a smaller network and fewer opportunities to collaborate and share knowledge with ambassadors from other regions. Furthermore, the contact with regions that are not adjoined to their region makes idea generation outside the region even less common. Interviewee 16 shares that it requires additional time for ideas to transfer to other regions. Especially if ideas are coming from regions that are geographically further away.

*"If something smart is developed in Amsterdam, it takes a while for it to reach Oost-five. Because you don't come across each other as often, unless there is, of course, a network in place." (Int. 16)*

These results show potential challenges that ambassadors can face while establishing idea generation with other regions. It can slow down the exchange of ideas across geographically boundaries.

#### **4.3.6 Idea promotion: sharing information**

When innovation is successfully implemented within a region, there is often a willingness to share it with other regions. Interviewee 16 illustrated wherein an innovation was previously investigated in Friesland, this captured the attention of their region that was planning to implement the same innovation. As a result, they contacted Friesland to leverage their insights. The ambassador experienced this contact very beneficial. As Friesland already researched the innovation, resulting in knowledge transfer. Friesland shared documents and results about the conducted research. What facilitated the regions' ability to explore and implement the innovation effectively.

*"Pretty well nice, because that is already being researched in the Friesland region in particular. So, then I contacted that was kind of nice because they had all kinds of documents, which helped us with how best to figure that out." (Int. 16)*

Multiple regions would like to achieve enhanced collaboration with other regions so that innovation does not have to be tested again in each region. Instead, certain regions could conduct tests, and their findings could be shared with other regions. Another example that is frequently cited pertains to the regulation of firefighter clothing, which currently lacks nationwide standardization. Regions often possess distinct preferences or prefer to assess and test the clothing individually, even if the supplying company can demonstrate the safety of the clothing.

Ambassadors recognize the advantages of socialising and networking with other individuals. For example, during Ambassadors' days or Innovation Friday. During these events organised by the NIPV, ambassadors engage in networking activities, encounter new acquaintances and exchange information with individuals outside their region. Despite acknowledging that dedicating an entire workday to such events is a big investment, and not all presentations are useful for their region. Ambassadors value the socialising and networking. However, their ultimate desire is to get information that they use within their region.

*"I also see the value of inspiring and socializing and just chatting, but ultimately I also want it to produce something tangible." (Int. 14)*

#### **4.3.7 No idea promotion: level-headed**

The overall findings indicate that most ambassadors do not actively engage in promoting innovation beyond their region. Some ambassadors express that innovation does not receive significant attention within their region. Regions where innovation is prioritized, often have the perception that the innovation that is developed is not remarkable enough to share with other regions. In some cases, these regions do not even consider the solution to the solved problem as an innovation. Interviewee 16 provides an example; they see themselves as quite *level-headed*. They do not easily categorize something as an innovation. In addition, multiple ambassadors accentuate that they are level-headed and do not like to brag about developed innovations.

*"Sometimes we are also quite level-headed. So, then we don't think something is an innovation." (Int. 16)*

*"It's not that spectacular what we're doing. It's just a bit of muddling through." (Int. 14)*

Results suggest that some ambassadors seem to have a modest approach to innovation, with the habit to downplay the innovations that are developed within their region. This cautious attitude may contribute to the limited idea promotion by ambassadors outside the region.



## 5. DISCUSSION

The goal of this paper is to gather further insights into innovator roles within and between public organisations, employing a qualitative approach to comprehend the innovator roles within this context. The question that will be answered within this chapter is: “*What are key roles of innovators to effectively generate and promote innovative ideas within and between public organisations?*”. This inquiry is pursued through an examination of the innovator roles across three scenarios: in and outside organisations, in the organisations and outside the organisations. This chapter establishes a coherent link between our findings and prior research on innovator roles.

### 5.1 INNOVATOR ROLES IN AND BETWEEN ORGANISATIONS

This research did not unveil numerous innovator roles. This is because multiple innovator ambassadors are uncertain about their role. Some have assumed the position of innovation ambassador out of necessity due to a lack of alternative candidates. Others have assumed the role of innovation ambassador only recently. Consequently, they are still in the process of determining how to effectively fulfil the responsibilities of the role. The absence of an available job description further compounds this challenge. To comprehensively examine the roles that are accessible, this study also scrutinized the characteristics and tasks that hold significance for ambassadors. These findings hold value to this research as they are associated with innovator roles.

Based on the theoretical investigation of several academic articles, multiple innovator roles are presented that play a part in the innovation process. During the interviews, multiple personal characteristics, tasks, and improvements for innovation roles came forward. The results show multiple critical role attributes that ambassadors should have to enhance innovation in and outside the organisation. With the most important being *Connector*. To enhance innovation within the region but also beyond the border of the region, ambassadors have to connect different individuals with each other. A role attribute that goes with this is *Networker*. Ambassadors can connect individuals because they possess an extensive network. An ambassador needs to invest time and effort in building this network. These role attributes fit with the innovation role introduced by academic articles, named the *Orchestrator*. The Orchestrator is a central player in the innovation-related communication network (Meyer, 1998). The communication network that characterises the Orchestrator fits well with the innovation ambassador. Research shows that orchestration can build and manage innovation networks (Ritala et al., 2009). This is also seen as important within the interviews. Furthermore, research shows that multiple individual level capabilities play a fundamental role in the process of the networks of the Orchestrator. One of these is social qualifications like communication skills (Ritala et al., 2009). Our research likewise showed that good social skills are necessary to enhance innovation in and outside organisations.

The literature reveals that personal characteristics play a significant role in supporting the effectiveness of individuals in their innovator roles (Mansfeld et al., 2010). Our results highlight the importance of two characteristics, being *curious* and *patient*. Being curious is important for an ambassador, because of this characteristic an ambassador is open to ideas within the region, but is also interested in innovations that are happening outside the region. The following characteristic that is important for the ambassador is patience. Innovation projects take time and do not happen overnight. When looking at the literature on the role theory these two characteristics are less mentioned. Being curious is a characteristic that is also important for the *idea generator*. However, these results do not extensively find the importance of this role. In addition to that, the idea generator contributes to new insights that both initiate projects and contribute to problem solutions (Meyer, 1998; Roberts & Fusfeld, 1986). Being patient is a characteristic that is not yet found in

literature about innovator roles. However, within this research it is mentioned as important by multiple interviewees. Interviewees consider patience to be significant, as innovation is frequently a process that unfolds gradually rather than rapidly. Furthermore, the innovation ambassador must exercise patience to sustain support for the innovation process, while simultaneously sustaining motivation to ensure the success of the innovation.

Our results showed beside role attributes and characteristics, tasks and elements that are important to improve the current innovator role. Many interviewees indicated that the time they could spend on their ambassador function was limited. Some ambassadors even mentioned that the ambassador role would improve if it was a full-time function. In addition, interviewees shared that various individuals in and outside the region are essential to innovate. This correlates with a term introduced by Fichter (Fichter, 2009) about 'innovation communities'. Fichter explains that innovation communities can be characterised as promotor networks that can help with decision-making, additional resources, mutual support and motivation. In some regions, innovation communities are already formed. In one region an innovation group is formed to support the ambassador in decision making. Other ambassadors express a desire to establish innovation communities within their regions. Moreover, some ambassadors aspire to create a collaborative community among themselves, enabling mutual support and enhanced collaboration opportunities.

## 5.2 INNOVATOR ROLES IN ORGANISATIONS

During the conducted interviews it became clear that ambassadors play a highly active role within their region, particularly during the idea generation phase. Ambassadors have a central role for other employees in matters of innovation. Ambassadors perceive themselves as an accessible point of contact, whom employees can approach with various ideas and engage in discussions about innovation. Several characteristics were highlighted that align well with the outcomes of idea generation. Employees approach ambassadors with ideas, some of which are not clearly defined by the employee themselves and some that already exist. Ambassadors need to possess the skill of asking questions. This allows them to assist in advancing the idea or innovation within the organisation. Among the various innovator roles, one role stands out as most aligned with these findings; the *idea generator*. Idea generators create innovative ideas that could be of potential use to the organisation (Meyer, 1998). In addition, they possess the capability to reformulate a particular problem through a creative perspective that they are willing to promote within the organisation. Ambassadors must possess the ability to ask questions that aid in reframing the problem or idea, thereby facilitating its progression within the organisation. In contrast with the idea generator role of the ambassadors, interviewees also shared that the ambassador role lacks visibility within the region. Ambassadors mentioned that employees do not know who the ambassador is. This partly comes due to the uncertainty about the role and responsibilities of ambassadors. More clarity about the role and the responsibilities will clear this.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed the significant role played by groups within the region in the process of idea generation. Ideas are generated collectively by different groups, that concentrate on incidents that occur within the region and explore ways to enhance them. Additionally, some groups focus on fostering innovation within the region. These groups consist of like-minded individuals who on one hand, are improving the approach of first aiders during incidents and on the other focusing on the role innovation can play. They also monitor the ongoing activities in the region and respond proactively with innovative solutions. This observation aligns with the concept of innovation communities proposed by Fichter (2009). Employees within the region form groups on various subjects to enhance the situation and find solutions to problems. By coming together, these groups

demonstrate a shared commitment to driving innovation and addressing challenges within their region.

Interviews showed that idea awareness is crucial for advancing ideas through the innovation process within the region. Ambassadors do this by championing ideas among relevant individuals and channels. These results fit clearly with the *Champion* role presented by the literature. Champions advocate and push for change and innovation. They take ideas, whether their own or others and attempt to get them supported and adopted (Heikkilä et al., 2008; Markham et al., 2010; Roberts, 2007). Results show ambassadors recognize the significance of raising awareness for ideas. While raising awareness ambassadors try to get support for innovations from other employees. However, not all ambassadors take an active stand for the Champion role. They are confident that good innovation will promote themselves and their role is not necessary within the process.

### 5.3 INNOVATOR ROLES BETWEEN ORGANISATIONS

The findings indicate that the role of the ambassador is less developed outside the safety region; however, several outcomes emerged from the study. Firstly, ambassadors establish connections with other regions, predominantly those that are close geographically. Ambassadors use these connections to exchange innovative ideas with other regions. Besides sharing ideas from their region, they also receive ideas from other regions. Multiple ideas and innovations are often shared during events organised by the NIPV. Ambassadors must possess the ability to filter the innovations and determine what is relevant for their region. A relevant innovator role that aligns with this is that of the *gatekeeper* (Heikkilä et al., 2008; Markham et al., 2010; Roberts, 2007). The gatekeeper functions as a conduit, bringing external information into the organisation. Several ambassadors described this as a crucial aspect of their role. They filter and prioritize information shared by other regions, and use that information that is beneficial for their region. Furthermore, gatekeepers require strong communication skills and the ability to share information. The ability to share information was also identified as an important attribute for ambassadors when enhancing innovation for other regions. Results show that there is no consistent way of sharing ideas which has a negative effect on idea generation outside the region. In addition, results also show that sharing information is not only important for idea generation but idea promotion.

Another, innovator role proposed by the literature that aligns well with the obtained results is that of the *orchestrator*. The orchestrator is a central player in the innovation-related communication network (Meyer 1998). This network holds significance for ambassadors as they share their ideas and innovations, as well as gather ideas and innovations from other regions. Furthermore, the ambassadors network can enhance idea promotion beyond their region. The results demonstrate that ambassadors need to exhibit proactive behaviour when collaborating with other regions. By taking proactive initiatives, innovation can progress more smoothly. Additionally, working together with other regions results in a positive collaborative experience. These findings are consistent with the responsibilities associated with the orchestrator role, which involves the ability to build relationships and maintain them. Ambassadors, acting as orchestrators, are instrumental in facilitating effective communication and collaboration across regions, thereby fostering innovation.

Overall not all innovator roles proposed by the literature are found within this research. However, that does not mean that they are not there. This research focused on the idea generation and idea promotion phase of the innovation process. The roles that were not identified in this study may still play an important role in other stages of the innovation process or different contexts. This research has identified multiple roles introduced by the literature, such as the gatekeeper, orchestrator and

idea generator. These roles were found to play significant roles in enhancing innovation based on the conducted research. Additionally, various characteristics and tasks were also identified as contributing factors to improve innovation. Besides playing a role to enhance innovation within and between organisations employees can focus on performing certain tasks and seeing how characteristics can improve innovation. This comprehensive understanding of roles and characteristics provides valuable insights for organisations seeking to foster innovation within and especially between organisations.

Figure 6 shows the improved research model, distinguishing among three 3 concepts: within and between organisation, within a public organisation and between public organisation. Firstly, this research has focused on innovator roles within and between organisation. The model illustrates that the ambassador role, as a connector and networker, clearly points towards the innovator role of the orchestrator. Additionally, this study highlights being *curious* as an important personal characteristic of an ambassador, which aligns with the idea generator innovator role. Secondly, the models depicts innovator roles within a public organisation, featuring the idea generator role in the idea generation phase and the champion role in the idea promotion phase. Lastly, the model presents innovator roles between public organisations, specifically the gatekeeper and orchestrator role. These roles are found to be active in both the idea generation and idea promotion phases of the innovation process.

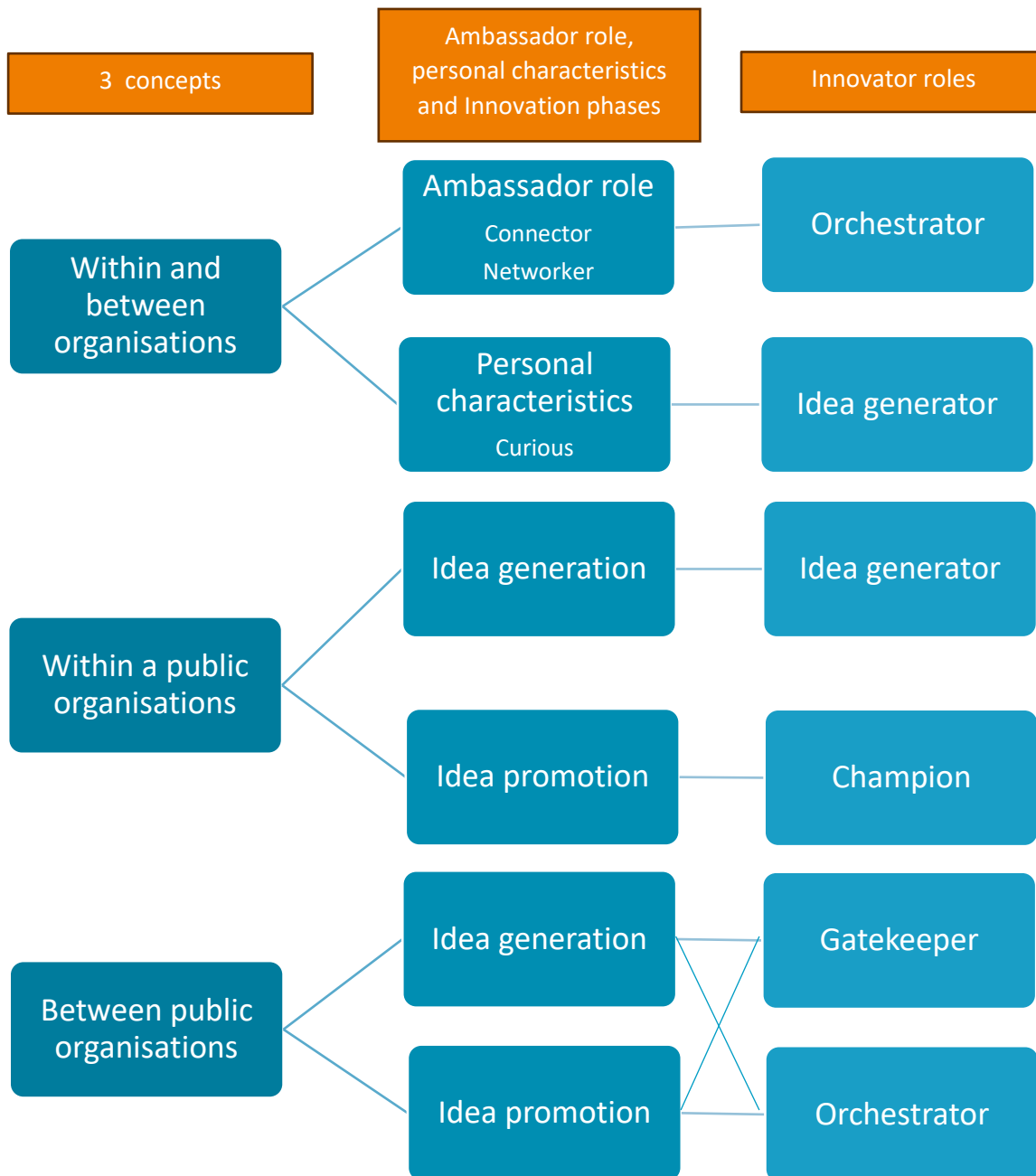


Figure 6: Improved research model

## 5.4 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature about innovator roles, specifically by examining the innovator roles within the idea generation and idea promotion phase. It contributes to the various roles that individuals can play in and between regions during these two phases of the innovation process. The findings highlight the importance of innovator roles during the idea generation phase, especially within an organisation. Moreover, this paper identifies the key personal characteristics and skills that are important for ambassadors to effectively fulfil their role to enhance innovation.

The main contribution is the innovator roles that play a role outside the region. Current literature shows us ways in which innovator roles play a part within the innovation process. However current literature does not look beyond the boundaries of an organisation. In this study, a qualitative research approach was employed to investigate innovator roles that play a part beyond the boundaries of an organisation. This approach has enabled the collection of more comprehensive insights than a quantitative study could offer. This research has identified aspects such as personal characteristics and ambassadorial tasks, exemplifying the valuable outcomes derived from this qualitative approach.

Previous literature shows the role of the gatekeeper in filtering and bringing information messages from outside sources towards the organisation (Heikkilä et al., 2008; Markham et al., 2010; Roberts, 2007). This study expands upon the understanding of this role, demonstrated by ambassadors, as gatekeepers, who filter and prioritize information and innovation from other regions. In addition, this study shows that ambassadors, as gatekeepers, also have the ability to share innovation with other regions.

The orchestrator role is the second studied and introduces in the context of ambassadors. Previous literature shows the orchestrator as a central player in the communication network facilitating the flow of information and ideas (Meyer, 1998). Within this study, the ambassador, acting as orchestrators, aligns with the literature. The ambassador establishes and maintains relationships with other regions, in addition, they play an important role in creating and sustaining a network that enables the sharing and promoting of ideas across the boundary of the region. This study provides insights into the role of ambassadors as facilitators that enhance collaboration and idea exchange, contributing to the understanding of the orchestrators in the context of innovation beyond the boundaries of an organisation.

This research has identified aspects such as personal characteristics and ambassadorial tasks, exemplifying the valuable outcomes derived from this qualitative approach. In addition, these aspects are important when working with other organisations. The importance of networking is highlighted but also the importance of proactive behaviour and communication skills of ambassadors while working with other regions. This points out the interpersonal aspects of their roles, which add to the role literature. The theoretical implications suggest that successful idea generation and innovation are not only dependent on individuals but also on groups within the region and their ability to build and maintain relationships, foster communication and engage proactively with other regions.

Overall, this study has theoretical implications by providing deeper insights into innovator roles that contribute to idea generation and promotion in and outside public organisations. The findings enhance the understanding of the gatekeeper, orchestrator and idea generator role while emphasizing the importance of interpersonal skills like proactive behaviour, networking and communication skills to facilitate innovation within and across borders.

## 5.5 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main practical implications of this study are aimed at the NIPV and the innovation ambassadors and the 25 safety regions within the Netherlands. The results of this study can be used to better fill in the ambassador role. It will help the NIPV by better describing the role to potential new ambassadors but also for existing ambassadors. Additionally, these findings can assist ambassadors in critically evaluating their role and devising strategies to enhance their impact within their respective regions, incorporating one or multiple roles introduced in this study.

Short-term actions that could be undertaken by the NIPV and/or ambassadors to enhance innovation within and beyond the region include:

- More clarity about the ambassador role. This includes expectations of the NIPV and the types of tasks that align with this role. This study shows that there is still a lack of particularly among new ambassadors. When establishing expectations about the role, several factors must be considered. Firstly, ambassadors undertake these tasks in addition to their existing responsibilities, which often results in limiting the time that they can invest in ambassador tasks. Their primary job comes before the ambassador tasks.
- Collective mission and vision. Some ambassadors expressed their desire for certain innovations to be regulated nationwide. A collective mission and vision can provide a common understanding and direction for innovation efforts across regions. Furthermore, by having common goals and aspirations, knowledge sharing can be promoted. In addition, the collective mission and vision can potentially enhance collaboration and innovation. In addition to having a collective mission and vision, all ambassadors must agree upon and share that mission and vision. When ambassadors are aligned in their understanding and commitment to the mission and vision, it strengthens their cohesion and their ability to work together towards common goals.

Long-term measures that can be implemented by the NIPV and/or safety regions to foster innovation are:

- Building innovation communities is crucial, as this research demonstrates that innovation does not occur through the efforts of a single individual. Any regions have already established or are in the process of forming an innovation community. Encouraging the development of such groups within the regions will enhance idea generation, promotion, and collaboration with other regions. By involving multiple employees in the innovation process, the burden of responsibility does not only rest on the innovation ambassador. These communities can concentrate on specific innovations, address regional challenges, and provide support to the ambassador when needed. Establishing clear pathways for innovation within each region will also facilitate improved collaboration with other regions.

## 5.6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As all research has limitations, the limitations of this research will be displayed in this chapter. This research focused mostly on the perspectives of ambassadors. Interviewing employees that work closely with ambassadors could have confirmed if the experience of the ambassadors is in line with the experience of other employees within the organisation. Furthermore, they could have shared their wishes for the ambassador role within the region. An example of this could be, that employees would like to get more support from the ambassador in helping their idea move through the organisation towards higher levels. In addition, multiple views could have contributed towards a more extensive view of the innovator roles. Future research could focus on multiple stakeholders like employees and managers within the regions to capture diverse perspectives and uncover potential discrepancies or complementarity among them.

This research highlights the significance of innovation communities. However, it does not extensively explore this subject. Future research could go deeper into the concept of innovation communities and their potential to support innovator roles. Furthermore, researching the role of innovation communities within public organisations to enhance innovation could be an interesting avenue for future exploration.



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