

Navigating the roundabout

Selected cases collection

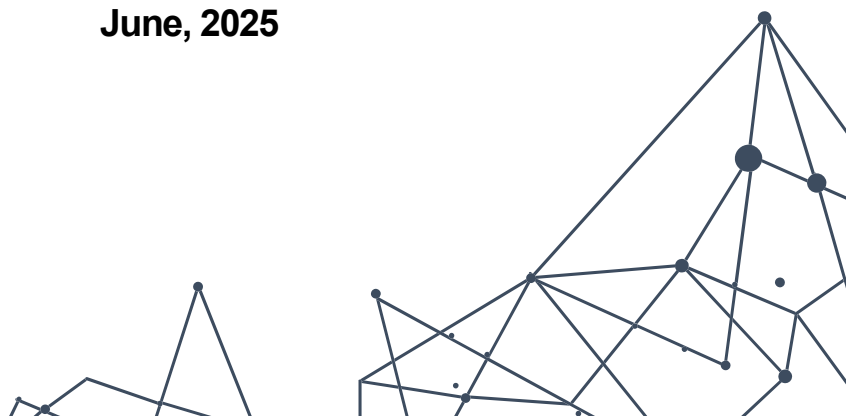
CGC - Roundabouts for Digital Transformation (CGC–DigiTrans) - Professional Guidance & Counselling (CGC) in Multi-Actor-Networks

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Padua

June, 2025



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The creation of these resources has been (partially) funded by the ERASMUS+ grant program of the European Union under grant no. 2022-1-DE01-KA220-HED-000089003.

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1 The case of Anna

1.1 Background

A.A. is a 34-year-old employee living in Italy. She lives with her husband (who works as a food sales agent) and their 2-year-old son. Currently, A.A. is working in a small posturology studio and has a master's degree in physical and sporting activities. Her course of study and work has been overly complex and troubled.

After the bachelor's degree at 24 years old, she attempted to continue her studies to earn a master's degree. At the same time, she continued to work as an employee at a gym in her hometown of which she became manager after a short time.

Reconciling work and study (the university is in a different city from the one in which A. worked) became increasingly difficult, and so A.A, after a few years, she decided to drop out of the university even though she was very close to obtaining her master's degree. Later A.A got married and in the same year decided to restart her studies by enrolling in a telematics university. The following year she became a mother, and this made her unable to finish her studies quickly; she will earn her master's degree only in 2023. Working at the gym absorbed much of her time and did not give her economic stability, so after graduating in 2024 she decided to close the gym and open a small posturology studio that would take less of her time.

1.2 The Roundabout Journey

AA wants to change jobs and become a schoolteacher but to do so she needs to acquire new digital skills, the digital skills required in the specific work role.

AA approached a career counsellor. During the counselling she set short- and long-term goals.

Firstly, she decided to restart her studies: by obtaining a degree she could have the opportunity to get the job she had hoped. Career counselling enabled AA to become more aware of her strengths but at the same time required her to overcome some of her limitations, especially the perception that she was 'too late' in achieving her goals

She realised that becoming a teacher today, compared to the past, requires approaches that take advantage of digital tools. despite the possibility of taking part in some courses for digital skills acquisition, AA feels that they are too difficult for her and that it would be pointless to attend them. She reported feeling that she was not keeping up with the times and the rapid technological changes that have taken over the world of work. AA reported *"when I turn on a computer I panic, because I don't understand what I have to do, and I feel like an old woman."*

The client is strongly motivated by the desire to change jobs and to find a job that allows her to have a fixed and stable economic income over time and that allows her to devote more time to her child. The client herself requested an assessment to better understand the level of her competence. She was cooperative and admitted she did not consider beforehand some competences she possesses and that emerged during the assessment

The counsellor conducted the needs assessment by using an ad hoc created (open-ended) questionnaire that was administered to the client in both the pre and post phases of the process. She also administered the questionnaire on self-efficacy in digital skills, DSE, developed by Ulfert-Blank, A. S., & Schmidt, I. (2022).

In Italy, once people become teachers, they are included in rankings from which schools gradually draw workers/teachers for recruitment) that can be climbed thanks to the acquisition of certain types of digital certification formally recognised by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, to meet both the need to acquire basic digital skills and to climb the rankings in the future, it was necessary to enrol the client to a course recognised by the Ministry of Education (rather than to other courses on digital skills that are equally good but not recognised by the Ministry of Education). The Certipass was identified as useful to provide her with basic digital skills for the acquisition European Informatics Passport (EIPASS).

On the other hand, one way to acquire specific digital skills for teaching is to attend a course dedicated exclusively to teachers. One such course is the Disability and Special Needs Support for Teachers course, which includes an area dedicated specifically to the ICT most frequently used in schools. To access this course, it is necessary to possess certain specific requirements (such as a master's degree) and to pass an entry test. It was therefore necessary to gather all the necessary information regarding the timing and content of the entry test and the various locations where both it and (in the case of a successful test) the course could be attended.

The need to have the different actors of the network in a place close to where the client lives emerged because she has a small child and therefore needs not to be too far away from home.

The client identified with the counsellor the different actions necessary to achieve the goals by getting a clearer picture of the different steps. She also decomposed the longer-term macro-goals into short- or medium-term micro-goals that are interrelated and necessary for the success of the professional plan.

The client showed her engagement by beginning to think of many possible solutions to succeed in the process (e.g., *"in order to be able to be present at our meetings I will make sure to arrange my schedule appropriately and find those who can help me with child management"*).

Together the counsellor and AA co-constructed each step of the action plan to achieve the goals of the process (timing, need to balance work, study and family, information research, illustration of possible positive and negative outcomes, etc.) and verified there were no opportunities to access funding to support expenses related to the digital skills courses identified.

It was necessary to clarify what the preliminary steps were to achieve the goals (e.g. studying to pass the entry test and gaining access to the course). It was necessary to find solutions to keep the customer close to home by searching for courses available at the nearest university or providing part of the attendance online. It was necessary to re-plan the user's work schedule. In fact, if the client failed the entry test the actions would

have to be re-planned by scheduling further actions to pass the entry test. In addition, difficulties/delays due to the need to reconcile work, study, and family life (e.g. In the past, the client had already had to postpone her graduation due to the birth of her son).

The planning of the process required several steps to be carried out even at different intervals of time (long-term objectives, e.g.: the course for basic digital skills had a duration of three months; the entry test for the specific course for teachers required three tests and took about two months to be concluded; between the entry test and the beginning of the specific course for teachers took about two months; the specific course for teachers, which is still in progress, has a total duration of about nine months and several intermediate examinations, including the ICT one, before the final qualification is obtained). It was therefore necessary during the process to recall the steps and their objectives over time in order not to overlook any of them.

The organisation provided information on the attendance possibilities that would best meet the user's needs, clarifying the timing, the way in which the courses could be used, and the content of the courses. Attending the course on basic digital skills she could also see that several people, both her age and even older than her and with the same difficulties as her, were approaching the same course. This encouraged her to continue and obtain certification. She also passed the entry test for participation in the teachers' course.

The client repeatedly updated the counsellor on the goals and their achievement. She regained a good sense of self-efficacy about her learning process. She states that she feels extremely happy about her achievements so far *“until a year ago (it has been about 10 months since the start of the process), I would never have imagined that all this could happen....I did not think I could learn new digital skills and catch up with my future colleagues professionally in such a brief time.”*

She obtained the Certipass digital skills certificate and is currently still attending the specific course for teachers that she will complete in April/May 2025. Attending the course allows her to meet many other future teachers and to share useful information on different digital skills and tools that she can use once she is a teacher. She is also currently working, together with a group of other trainees like her, on a small ICT project that she will present at the ICT exam (included within the teachers' course) in a few weeks. She found that she likes working with learning apps “these are fun and easy to use” and learned how to create multimedia concept maps and use tools such as the interactive whiteboard. She states that she has also discovered some apps that can be useful for creating power point presentations. A satisfaction questionnaire has also been used to rate the changes stimulated

The client contributed to the counselling process by showing initiative and adaptation. She accepted the counsellor's advice and thought carefully about the possibilities to be explored to achieve her goals. Despite

some difficulties, she tackled each step with energy and managed to divide her time between work, study, and family. The counsellor and AA often reflected together on the client's personal resources and digital skills that could be leveraged to achieve the desired objectives.

Crucial elements in the counsellor's view were: Supporting AA in managing her emotions and the expectation of the outcomes of the three different steps of the entry test by reflecting together on the possible outcomes and subsequent actions; accepting the client's needs and looking for solutions that would help her achieve her goals; discussing with the client about possible negative outcomes that might have required a re-planning of activities.

2 The case of GC

2.1 Background

GC is 23 years and has a high school diploma in human sciences. In the past she volunteered at a dog shelter, and she undertook a short traineeship at an association assisting young people with disabilities. Currently GC is a university student, and she lives in the city hosting her university for half the week and returns to her parents' home for the remainder of the days. As regard her family, GC is an only daughter, her mother is a teacher of Italian and history at a high school, her father works as a technician at a company that splices and connects cables.

GC requested help by university turning to a tutor as she is currently in the third year of her bachelor's degree in psychology and therefore needs to start writing her dissertation. Specifically, she reports that she is unfamiliar with digital tools and has difficulties both in finding scientific sources online and in using word for writing her thesis. Moreover, she reports that has difficulty using the computer, that she was very slow, that she was always afraid of doing something wrong and that she was afraid of losing or deleting her work. During his university years, she mostly took oral examinations and the few tests that required presentations with slides were done in groups. In addition, she reports that during the Covid period she had a lot of difficulty in managing the online platforms on which lectures were delivered and in taking distance examinations. She has a computer that she hardly ever uses and only studies from books or paper. She has never taken a digital skills course and describes herself as 'self-taught'.

2.2 The Roundabout Journey

GC was curious and cooperative. Despite this she said, *"during the test I realised that I was afraid of making a mistake, it is the same feeling I get when I have to create digital content, I get anxious and confused and fearing to make a mistake I freeze"*.

The counsellor proposed an assessment session where she used an ad hoc, open-ended, questionnaire administered both the ante and post phases of the process. She also used the DSE scale (Ulfert-Blank, & Schmidt, 2022). Assessing digital self-efficacy: Review and scale development. In addition, the client independently performed the digital skills test available on the platform "Digitals skills and jobs platform-European Union".

GC is characterised by a poor sense of self-efficacy developed over the years (even when she possesses certain skills, she tends to belittle them) and to look at new situations with fear, so it will be necessary during the next steps to provide some meetings aimed at implementing personal resources (self-efficacy; risk intelligence; sense of agency). It will also be important to pay close attention to creating a welcoming climate and a strong working alliance, which will enable the student to open and not be

ashamed of the need for support. Furthermore, regarding the organisational aspects of the process it will be necessary to consider that the student does not work and therefore has limited financial resources.

The comments that emerged during the assessment, on her approach to the 'world of digital competences' and more generally to how she relates to others (shyness, shame) underlined the willingness to engage in change: *"I want to change this aspect of myself, and I want to be more autonomous"*.

At the end of the assessment GC realized she had become more aware of the possible steps to be taken and that she had not considered some further intermediate goals. Short, medium and long-term objectives been developed. The client asked for a lot of additional information about possible partners, the timing of the process and the details of the process.

GC and the counselor developed a co-constructed plan specifying each step of the action plan to achieve the objectives of the process together with the client, making sure that they met her real needs and made her feel comfortable.

The involvement of possible partners was analysed together before contacting the selected ones. The options considered did not require funding.

As agreed, they met on a weekly basis, and after the start of the activities periodically to update each other or if it was necessary to share information or the student had doubts or needed support.

Considering the difficulties GC reported and her current course study, it was decided to involve in the counseling process S.B. - a 31-year-old psychologist with a master's degree. Involving a professional psychologist could have been for G very useful to transpose, implement and test the digital skills also in a context and job profile likely close to the one for which she will graduate. Specifically, the tutor proposed GC an internship at the *Social Cooperative Service* and proposed a training project that would provide her with the possibility of participating in the use of digital instruments for the creation of useful tools for the association's activities (e.g. creation of weekly activity plans; creation of online forms for surveying needs; reports on the association's activities; creation of mailing list; trainee rotation sheets; production of multimedia content for the association's website; reports on the association's activities; inventory of materials). Involving a professional psychologist is useful for the student to transpose, implement and test the digital skills also in a context and job profile likely close to the one for which the student will graduate

In addition, it was decided to connect GC to a more experienced university peer tutor who attends the master's degree course in psychology will help G. in using the office suite (word, excel, ppt) and

bibliography search platforms such as google scholar. The specific digital peer training course was proposed to GC because as an alternative to paid courses for the acquisition of basic digital skills, peer tutoring is offered free of charge by the university. Moreover, it contributed to creating an informal environment in which the needs and experiences of GC can be mirrored by those recently experienced by the peer tutor. Peer

tutoring, in contrast to paid courses for the acquisition of basic digital skills, is offered free of charge by the university. Moreover, it creates an informal environment in which the needs and experiences of GC can be mirrored by those recently experienced by the peer tutor.

GC was supported in every step through continuous sharing of progress updates and information sharing. Several meetings were also held on sense of self-efficacy, risk intelligence and sense of agency. Both organizations involved made themselves available to seek the most satisfactory solutions for the client's needs and cooperated. In addition, the counsellor supported the designing of the internship project.

GC is happy for having been able to complete the internship professionally and to have discovered new areas of application for their digital skills. Currently, she received the first revision of her thesis from her supervisor, who congratulated her for the work she has done. She will graduate in June 2025. In addition, the peer-student involved in the actions reports a more positive attitude towards reaching goals. A process satisfaction questionnaire and some feedback questions proposed to GC also confirm these findings.

The choice of the stakeholders to involve was motivated by the need to find a low-cost solution to paid courses for the acquisition of basic digital skills. Peer tutoring is offered free of charge by the university. Moreover, it creates an informal environment in which the needs and experiences of CG can be mirrored by those recently experienced by the peer tutor.

The goals achieved can certainly be considered a good starting point to build up new and more complex skills and work-related goals.

3 The case of Naomi

3.1 Background

Naomi W., a 55-year-old woman, completed Lower Occupational Education (*Lager Beroeps Onderwijs*) in Suriname. She has around 20 years of experience, primarily in the cleaning sector. Originally from Suriname, a former Dutch colony, Naomi moved to The Netherlands approximately 30 years ago. Over the past two decades, she has worked in cleaning services for multiple employers in the Amsterdam region.

Currently, Naomi is employed by four different cleaning companies, handling both domestic and office cleaning contracts. She is a single mother with four adult children, aged 22, 24, 27, and 29.

Naomi expressed a strong desire to develop her digital and communication skills. Her educational journey is now in its final stages, and she is expected to complete her training by the end of the year.

Although she works for multiple employers, Naomi explicitly requested that they would not be involved in her development process. She cited a lack of trust in her employers and described the cleaning industry as a "Wild West cowboy business." She expressed concerns about the industry's lack of commitment to providing a safe and supportive environment for professional growth. Naomi feels that if she performs her duties without complaints, she is merely tolerated rather than valued. This distrust led her to exclude her employers from her career development trajectory.

Given Naomi's concerns, the counselor decided to involve NHA (Nederlandse Handels Academie), a private educational institution established in 1930. NHA offers a wide range of vocational and academic courses, both online and onsite, including bachelor's and master's programs. The flexibility of NHA's learning options - individual distance learning and group-based training - made it an ideal choice for Naomi.

NHA's involvement was crucial, as its collaboration was required to provide the necessary documents for RAS (the Council for Labour Relations in the Cleaning and Window Cleaning Industry) to approve funding. Additionally, the counselor engaged 'Schoonmakend Nederland', a branch organization that supports both employers and employees in the cleaning sector. This organization has a contract with the career service of the labour union, an organisation providing guidance on employment, learning, and professional development. They provide a dedicated training budget aimed at increasing employee mobility. Schoonmakend Nederland played a key role in connecting the career service and RAS, ensuring that the funding for Naomi's training was secured.

As the funding body for the cleaning sector, RAS covered Naomi's training expenses at NHA. While RAS does not impose strict training requirements, its primary goal is to enhance both internal and external mobility within the sector.

3.2 The Roundabout Journey

Beyond her role as a cleaning employee, Naomi is actively involved in the one of the larger trade unions, where she serves as an executive. She takes on various responsibilities, including administrative work,

organizing meetings, and taking minutes. Despite her experience in the cleaning sector and her leadership role in the union, she sought support to further develop her skills and expand her career prospects.

The counselor successfully established a relationship with Naomi based on transparency and security, addressing her concerns and agreeing on a structured plan. These efforts were highly effective, with all key aspects rated 4 out of 5 in terms of clarity and engagement.

The counselor worked with Naomi to assess whether other actors had already played a role in her development and whether additional collaboration was possible.

Naomi's motivation to improve her digital competencies stemmed from her union responsibilities, which involve administrative work, organizing events, and managing social media. She hoped to incorporate these skills into her future career. However, her current job in cleaning had become physically and mentally exhausting. While her colleagues recognized her strong organizational and communication abilities, Naomi felt limited due to her lack of formal education.

One major challenge was her demanding work schedule - she worked nearly 50 hours per week across multiple cleaning jobs to support her family. This made it difficult to allocate time for education and career development.

Despite these obstacles, Naomi was eager to participate in the process and openly shared her background and aspirations. However, her reluctance to involve her employers - partly due to her active role in the union - added complexity to the process.

The counselor conducted two additional guidance sessions with Naomi, focusing on assessment tasks. These sessions provided insights into her thoughts, skills, preferences, and career aspirations.

While no formal digital skills assessment was conducted, Naomi demonstrated a strong understanding of her own abilities. The only related activity was her participation in an online career counseling session, which she used to explore training options.

The counselor played a key role in helping Naomi clarify her career goals and identify relevant training opportunities; in supporting her through structured questioning, planning actions, and ensuring the approach aligned with her mindset and circumstances; in addressing any unresolved questions and ensuring that Naomi had all the necessary information to move forward.

The intake process took place over two separate conversations. During these discussions, Naomi actively participated in clarifying her situation and career aspirations.

The primary challenge remained her unwillingness to involve her employers, which complicated network communication. However, collaboration with training providers and funding bodies was smooth and effective.

The counselor respected Naomi's decision, ensuring she felt heard and valued in the process.

The counselor assisted Naomi in completing the application forms for funding and securing financial support from RAS. In addition, the counselor showed availability in providing guidance on the training process when needed.

Naomi's independence in problem-solving, the strong collaboration among stakeholders, and the counselor's professional network all contributed to the success of the process.

Throughout the training, the counselor maintained regular contact with Naomi. Since her course is still ongoing, she has not yet taken additional steps. Once Naomi completes her training and graduates, the counselor will schedule a follow-up session to discuss future career opportunities.

At this stage, Naomi has not requested further career guidance, as she is focused on completing her studies. No formal documentation of results has been made yet, as the training is still in progress.

Naomi is performing well in her training and remains enthusiastic about the course content. Her results so far are promising, and no major obstacles have emerged in her career counseling journey.

Throughout the process, Naomi and the counselor regularly discussed the steps taken, reflected on the outcomes, and identified the resources that contributed to her progress.

After every session, the counselor ensured that Naomi had the opportunity to ask any remaining questions or request further clarification and provide feedback on the quality and effectiveness of each session.

On a networking level, the team also evaluated experiences in similar cases and reported on the quality of collaboration within the stakeholder network.

4 The case study Mrs. RK.

4.1 Background

R. Kazem is about 35 years old. She obtained her university entrance qualification (Abitur) in Iraq. She did not complete any further education after leaving school. Mrs. Kazem married young and had children. She is now a single mother of five children, four of whom are minors, one of whom is over 18 years old. She is not currently working. However, she is pursuing the goal of working now/soon. In this context, she lacks digital skills that could qualify her for an office job.

Most recently, Mrs Kazem took part in job-search and training measures. Mrs Kazem is in contact with Mrs Ehrmann - she would like to employ Mrs Kazem as a school attendant. Mrs Ehrmann is the Head of Coordination for School Attendants in the municipality. The aim was first, to check whether there was a vacancy for a school counsellor and second, to clarify whether Microsoft Office skills were required in addition to further training as a school attendant.

According to the counsellor, it made a lot of sense to involve the employer, Mrs Ehrmann. The counsellor and the client were able to clarify what the need for further training was and the counselling could be carried out in a targeted manner.

Astra-Lernen is involved as training provider. The organisation offers further training on digital topics, including Office application. Together with the client, the counsellor was able to determine criteria that were relevant for the selection of the training provider. In addition to the fit in terms of content (training on Office applications), it was important that Mrs Kazem could easily reach the learning location. It was also important that the training could be attended part-time, as the client has to look after her children in the afternoon. It was also important that the learning programme takes place on site in person.

At the end of the counselling session, the counsellor considers it very useful that the training provider was involved, as it specialises in this area of training, offers tailor-made services and was able to provide information on the relevant issues.

4.2 The Roundabout Journey

During early phases of the counselling process, the counsellor succeeded in establishing a good working relationship with Mrs Kazem, creating transparency about the process and providing the necessary reassurance. The client's questions were clarified. The further procedure was discussed and there was a common understanding of the work in the counselling process (contract).

It was discussed with Mrs Kazem that other stakeholders, in particular the potential employer and a suitable training provider, should be involved. It also became clear that activities are already undertaken. Mrs Kazem would like to complete the training or further training to become a school attendant in order to get a job with the employer. The counsellor approached both parties and clarified their willingness to work together.

Mrs Kazem assumes that she needs to build up digital skills. She is motivated for the potential job, and she knows that the job also requires documentation. This is often done in Office, which requires knowledge.

In conversation with Mrs Kazem, it became clear that she also has concerns and worries. The counsellor and her first had to cope with her fears of the new technology. For a long time, Mrs Kazem was solely responsible for bringing up her children. She is worried that she might be overwhelmed by starting work. In order to reduce the client's existing fears, the counsellor would like to take a closer look at the job description of "school attendant". She would then like to discuss with the client how digital programmes can be used sensibly here and make her work easier.

According to the counsellor, success factors for the client were communicating a positive attitude towards the use of ICT; identify possible obstacles to the success of the counselling process; access to hardware (PC). The counsellor emphasises that clarifying the client's unanswered questions was particularly beneficial.

Moving to the assessment phase, the discussion about the client's situation highlighted the following key points: Mrs K. wanted to learn how to use the Office application, as it was essential for her job, but she was uncertain about her ability to do so. The counsellor encouraged her to reflect on her digital skills, which she found reassuring. She was pleased to have her competencies assessed. Building on this, the counsellor introduced a structured planning process. Mrs K. found this approach highly beneficial, as it provided her with a clear understanding of her current digital skill level and the requirements for her future role. She was pleased to gain insight into her position and the steps needed for further development.

The counsellor used targeted questions to determine the competences and competence requirements. No other method was used to assess competences. In addition, the counsellor used her knowledge of the profession in which Mrs K. would like to work, and the counsellor was able to describe the future requirements so that Mrs K. understood the importance of further training for her digital skills. The counsellor informed the client of her assessment of her skills requirements and showed how they related to her professional activity. In the counsellor's opinion, this approach was appropriate for the client.

During this phase, the counsellor was able to contact the potential employer and involve them in clarifying the requirements. Questions were used to carry out a self-assessment of Mrs K.'s skills.

Success factors were explaining the rationale behind proposing skill assessment, access to the client and establishing trust.

When moved to planning, the counsellor and the client had already identified the client's primary goal in the situation analysis. The consideration of further training in digital competences is a step towards being able to pursue the desired profession well. The goals are therefore clear and transparent. Mrs K. was very open-minded and motivated. On this basis, a decision could be made in favour of further training. The counsellor contributed to the success of this phase with her knowledge of the profession, her search strategy (database search) and her contacts and network. She was also able to contribute her knowledge of possible financial

support for further training. The counsellor was able to find a funding agency and a suitable training provider and suggest them to the client. The counsellor invited the client to a further meeting and agreed with the client that she would get in touch again.

From the counsellor's point of view, it made sense to speak to training providers at this stage in order to offer the client a choice. Two suitable training providers were identified and contacted for this purpose. Attention was paid to various criteria that were important to the client, in particular accessibility and geographical proximity as well as the possibility of completing the training part-time. The counsellor also identified possible funding options for the training and suggested these to the client. Identifying a funding organisation was particularly important, as Ms K. would not be able to finance the training herself. The employer was involved in order to check the feasibility and realistic realisation of the goals. Thanks to her knowledge of the profession that Ms K. would like to pursue, the counsellor was able to make a good assessment of her professional needs and provide her with the best possible support.

Knowledge of professions and the labour market as well as educational opportunities is an advantage where particularly relevant in this phase as well as the counselling taking place on site, in person: telephone or virtual counselling would have been difficult for this client

The action phase started with Mrs K. active participation in a further training programme. If needed, she contacted the counsellor again during the training or sought advice from the training provider. The counsellor and the training provider looked at the job description of the future occupation together in order to increase the fit of the content of the training. This meant that the staff at the training provider chosen by Mrs K. knew what goal Mrs K. was aiming for and were able to tailor the training precisely.

She also remained in contact with her employer. From the counsellor's point of view, further support with the contract with the training provider or for financing was not necessary, as the client was able to initiate these steps herself and overcome the challenges.

The client's willingness to work towards her own goals highly contributed to the action

During the training Mrs K. and the counsellor remained in contact, with the client repeatedly reporting how well she was coping and the progress she was making. No further action was required. The client indicated to the counsellor that she felt secure and was confident about the next steps. For the counsellor, it was both important and rewarding to see that her work had led to success and that she could learn from the experience. From her perspective, further contact with other stakeholders was not necessary at this stage. In case of difficulties, the counsellor would have offered additional support, such as assistance in finding another training provider.

Success factors were the willingness to continue in the program and the meaningfulness of the learning outcomes. Central to lasting contact was "access" and the relationship with the client.

From the outset, the process was characterised by the client's concerns and goals. By "getting involved" in the counselling process and the resulting further training in Office applications, the client contributed to the counselling process and the results. By successfully completing the further training, Mrs K. now has the opportunity to undertake further training as a school attendant.

The counsellor guided reflection and evaluation during the interview. She was open to the client's wishes as well as to suggestions and, if necessary, criticism. She says: "*In counselling, we should always listen to the client and be open to criticism, this is the only way we can learn from every process*". So far, there has been no opportunity to pass on experiences from this case to other co-operation partners. If difficulties had arisen in the learning process, the counsellor would have made further offers and looked for another training provider. The other stakeholders were also not involved in the reflection or evaluation process; from the counsellor's point of view, this was not necessary in this case.

In general, a good initial discussion to "*take stock*" is important in order to know where we are heading. In some cases - depending on the client - on-site counselling could be particularly important.

5 The Case of Robert

5.1 Background

After completing high school, 51-year-old Robert pursued a bachelor's degree in environmental science at Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences in The Netherlands. Over the years, he further specialized in the legal aspects of environmental science through additional courses and professional training.

At 23, Robert began his career at the Regional Council for the Environment. Starting as an assistant, he quickly progressed to a senior policy position within five years. His role primarily involved working with the Environmental Act, assessing and granting permits, and contributing to various projects. However, legislative changes - specifically the introduction of the Environment and Planning Act - rendered his role nearly obsolete. As a result, he needed to reassess his career path and update his digital competencies. Robert is in a registered partnership but is unmarried and has no children.

Recognizing the need for career transition support, a counselor from the labour unions career service was assigned to assist him. Initially, Robert had the freedom to independently explore career development opportunities. However, his team leader at the Regional Council later expressed interest in participating in the process. Despite this, Robert preferred to keep the process individual and free from direct organizational influence.

To support his transition, the counselor engaged NCOI (Nederlands Commercieel Opleidingsinstituut), a training institution that offers an HBO Project Management program with PRINCE2® certification. This partnership was crucial for equipping Robert with state-of-the-art project management skills and securing financial arrangements for the training.

Additionally, the Water Board of the Middle Netherlands was brought into the process. As regional organizations responsible for managing the quality and safety of Dutch waterways, the Water Boards were undergoing significant transitions due to climate change. This created a growing demand for project-based work and inter-organizational cooperation. During the action phase, their involvement became vital as they offered Robert a secondment position in project management, providing an opportunity to apply his new skills in a practical setting.

5.2 The Roundabout journey

Robert personally funded his career counseling services. One of his primary challenges was experiential concentration - despite his passion and extensive knowledge, his expertise was narrowly focused on environmental law. This made it difficult for him to transition into other areas. While he had comprehensive knowledge of the Environmental Act, he lacked competencies beyond that domain. His redundancy left him unsure about the next steps, making career counseling essential.

The counselor identified digital competency gaps as another challenge. Robert's specialist background left him with limited experience in modern software applications outside his field. Though this gap was not yet critical, it could become a barrier if he had to shift industries entirely. Updating his digital skills was a necessary step in his career transition.

Robert was highly detail-oriented and conscientious, which, while beneficial in his work, sometimes made it difficult for him to be flexible with himself and others. This characteristic occasionally created workplace challenges in terms of teamwork and adaptability.

Initially, there were discussions about an internal reorganization within Robert's organization, but this never materialized. Instead, the Council internally restructured tasks and roles. Unfortunately, due to political influences, no alternative position was available for Robert. Consequently, the organization allocated a budget for him to invest in career counseling.

While Robert was open to a competency assessment, he believed he had a strong understanding of his skills. He did not request additional support in scheduling the assessment. Through discussions and self-analysis exercises, Robert and his counselor developed a personal profile and search profile. They first explored potential opportunities within his current organization, but when no viable internal options were found, they shifted focus to external opportunities.

In the orientation phase, Robert identified potential career paths, including roles as an assistant project leader or project management supporter. He targeted large organizations engaged in energy transition, such as local government agencies, energy suppliers, and spatial planning consultancy firms. These roles allowed him to leverage his existing expertise while acquiring new skills, including knowledge of additional laws, regulations, and project management tools such as AFAS, Trello, PRINCE2®, AI, and large-scale data analysis systems.

Robert independently researched job openings for assistant project leader positions in relevant organizations. However, no single training program comprehensively covered both his environmental expertise and the necessary ICT skills. As a result, he considered two separate courses. The Spatial Planning and Environment Course (offered through e-learning by the Academy of Governance) to broaden his substantive knowledge and the HBO Project Management Program with PRINCE2® Certification (offered by NCOI) to develop practical project management skills. This six-month course offered flexibility with both virtual and in-person evening classes.

While the counselor did not explicitly introduce the Roundabout Framework, he followed a structured process like the company's standard approach. Robert actively engaged in discussions, detailing his goals and plans with support from the counselor.

During training enrollment, Robert occasionally reached out to the counselor for clarification on minor issues. The counselor also liaised with Robert's team leader (with his approval) to arrange for part of the training to be completed during work hours. With financial support from the Regional Council, Robert successfully enrolled in the HBO Project Management course at NCOI.

Additionally, the counselor helped Robert identify organizations where he could apply his expertise. This led to a secondment opportunity at the Water Board of the Middle Netherlands, where he secured a position as an assistant project leader in a dike maintenance project in the Dutch province of Gelderland.

Robert initially attended physical classes but later switched to an online format to balance his studies with his internship and personal life. A month after starting his training, he officially began working at the Water Board as an assistant project leader for service contract upgrades in the Rhine Delta region.

Currently, Robert remains on secondment at the Water Board. While there are no immediate vacancies, his profile is in the candidate database for future openings. If a suitable opportunity arises, he could receive a fixed-term contract, potentially leading to a permanent role after a probation period. Until then, his salary continues to be covered by the Regional Council.

A key factor in the success of Robert's transition was the strategic involvement of both his current employer (Regional Council team leader and HR department) and his future employer (Water Board project manager). However, the main risk to his long-term career security remains the availability of suitable vacancies at the Water Board. Given his strong performance and the growing demand for water management professionals, Robert is optimistic about his chances.

Throughout the process, Robert and his counselor regularly reflected on progress, evaluating the effectiveness of the career transition steps. After each session, the counselor ensured Robert had the opportunity to ask further questions and provide feedback.

On a broader level, the counselor assessed the quality of collaboration within the network and involved other stakeholders in the evaluation. While no final evaluation has been conducted yet, a multi-actor online session was held with Robert, his counselor, and representatives from both his current and prospective employers. Employer involvement was carefully timed - during the initial assessment and goal-setting phase, the employer was not included. Once a structured plan was developed, the employer's role became critical in securing financial and logistical support.

The counselor identified two primary risks. The Limited vacancies at the Water Board - Robert's ability to secure a permanent role depends on market demand; and the balancing training and workload - while Robert successfully adapted to online learning, managing multiple commitments remains a challenge.

Despite these uncertainties, Robert has made significant progress in his career transition, and his engagement in both training and work placements positions him well for future success.

List of references