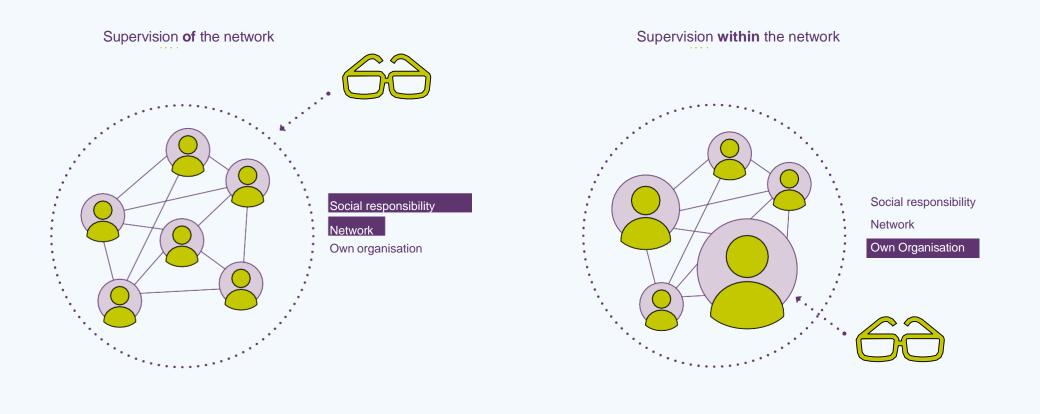
# THE VALUE OF GREATER NETWORK COOPERATION FOR SUPERVISORY BOARDS

Reflection based on 10 'good conversations about supervision'





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# The question: supervision within and of networks

The social challenges facing care and support are becoming increasingly complex. In many cases, an organisation can no longer solve these issues alone. Every care or welfare organisation is faced with an increasing need for cooperation between multiple parties. Cooperation with other parties is not only necessary to create value for people with often multiple care or support needs, it has become unavoidable. To ensure (regional) access to care and support, cross-domain cooperation is therefore no longer optional, but a prerequisite. This confronts every care and welfare organisation with new choices and new dilemmas.

These developments are significant for professionals and managers, but certainly also for the people who fulfil the role of internal supervisor. The current method of internal supervision requires reassessment, enhancement and adjustment. It is not sufficient to supervise only from the perspective of the organisation and its interests. The Healthcare Governance Code also puts increasing emphasis on the social aspect. Supervision from the perspective of an organisation's social responsibility requires a broader and alternative perspective and consequently a greater interpretation of the role of the supervisor.<sup>2</sup>

The good news is that it has been recognised by many organisations and calls for an additional perspective on oversight and perhaps a rethinking of the meaning and possible shift in the core functions of the supervisory board (SB). The original three core functions (Oversight, In the interviews, the terms alliances, networks and partnerships were used interchangeably. In this publication we use "networks," by which we mean horizontal or cross-domain collaborations in which more parties participate. We will not discuss the variety of forms of collaboration in the publication further.<sup>1</sup>

Sounding Board, Employer) require an additional perspective. That perspective is about the role of supervision within and of networks. However, this movement raises many questions and dilemmas about the role of supervision in many a boardroom.

Common questions then are, for example:

- From what perspective and what do we as the SB want to supervise?

- How, when and about what does the director involve the supervisory board in (new) collaborations?

- What room does the director need to realize collaborations and what can and cannot the supervisory board do?

- What gives the supervisory board sufficient comfort to give trust and space?

- Does the supervisory board also have a role in the partnerships and networks in which the organisation is active? And if so, what is that role?

- How do we avoid a piling up of supervision and keep it workable?

This focus on networks in supervision leads to a different dynamic between director and supervisor and thus requires a new toolkit of actions. We are currently seeing that the range of actions and the supervisory vision of the supervisory board in this area are still under development.

There is emerging knowledge available and it mainly requires a joint exploration in the field to arrive at an appropriate way of working and interpretation of roles.

To contribute to this research, Vilans, Levinas Institute and Common Eye started the initiative 'A good conversation about network supervision'. Ten different organisations responded to a call to participate. The results of the sessions have been compiled in this publication, with references to existing literature. The aim is to inspire supervisory boards and boards of directors to start their own initiatives and to offer concrete tools on how to go about it.

This publication explicitly offers a state of affairs and is not a final statement of what should happen because the area of expertise is still developing.

## **Reading guide**

First we discuss the preparation and set-up of the ten meetings. Then we describe the core themes and lessons learned followed by the dilemmas and challenges. We conclude with a call to action and references for more information.

# What's actually happening in practice? A good conversation with 10 Boards

We spoke to 10 supervisory boards about how they are working on this topic, mostly in the presence of the boards of directors (BoD). They consisted of hospitals (2), VVT institutions (6), a VG institution (1) and an organisation for client and patient representation (1). The organisations entered discussions with us on their own initiative in response to the publication 'A good conversation about supervision in networks'<sup>3</sup>. As such, representation was neither guaranteed nor implied. In combination with existing literature, an attempt was made to provide practical guidance.

#### Questions for the Supervisory board as starting point

Supervisory boards recognise the increasing importance of network collaboration and accept that they have a role to play. The goal of "the good conversation" was to enrich knowledge, create shared understanding and provide a framework for action.

The ten organisations clearly understood the need for such an investigation into the role of the supervisory board. As to what exactly that role is? There appears to be different opinions. The range of views on the role of supervisors in relation to collaboration was broad:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1.</sup> Zie hiervoor onder meer: Kaats E. en W. Opheij (2013) Leren samenwerken tussen organisaties; Kenis P. en B. Cambré (2019) Organisatienetwerken.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2.</sup> Minkman, M., Van Berkel Smit, M., Dannenberg, E., Heeren, T., De Jong, M., Laheij, J., Van Ooijen, M., Stegehuis, R., & Waarsenburg, D. (2021). Advies Governance van samenwerkingsverbanden: Niet samenwerken is geen optie meer. Geraadpleegd op 27 februari 2023, van <u>https://www.governancecodezorg.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Advies-governance-van-samenwerkingsverbanden.pdf</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3.</sup> Een goed gesprek over toezicht in netwerken, 2022, Common Eye, Levinas Instituut, Vilans, ondersteund door de NVTZ

#### From:

- Collaboration must deliver something for our own organisation and clients. So, don't do it unless you have clearly identified the added value.
- Supervision of partnerships does not differ substantially from other supervision.

#### To:

- Collaboration is a social necessity and a given.
- As the supervisory board we have a specific social role in these networks (but which one, and how?).

There is unanimous agreement that the social significance must be included in the organisational strategy and also have a place in the role of the supervisory board. This role is widely recognised and was relevant and a topic of discussion for all supervisory boards. For the mandate of the SB, one SB referred to the report of the Legemaate Committee, Mandate and Marsh<sup>4</sup>. This is also in line with the Health Care Governance Code (2022) in which the social responsibility of the organisation is emphasised more strongly. The main question from the meetings was: What is the role of the supervisory board in partnerships and how do I do it well?

#### **MEETING SET-UP**

In preparation for the meetings, we spoke with a representative of the SB and the BoD about the organisation, its context and experiences with partnerships. We then asked them if, we could prepare by receiving a preliminary orientation on existing collaborations, and be briefed on the dilemmas the director currently experiences when it comes to acting in collaborations and networks. That was the starting point of the conversation.

#### The meeting program was as follows:

> Purpose and format of the meeting and getting acquainted;

- > Positioning; in which partnerships are we active, and what are administrative dilemmas (by director);
  - Explanation by the director
  - Discussion about awareness and puzzles

Gaining knowledge about cooperation and networks;

- Conceptual explanation
- Discussion about the significance for the organisation in question and the role of BoM and SB

State of affairs about supervision within and of networks

- Conceptual explanation
- Dialogue on supervisory dilemmas and principles

Implications for management and supervision practice in one's own organisation and network;

Translation into starting points for one's own vision and way of working regarding supervision of networks.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>. NVTZ, Commissie Legemaate, Mandaat en Moeras, over maatschappelijk mandaat als grondbeginsel voor intern toezicht in de zorg Mandaat en moeras.pdf (nrgovernance.nl)

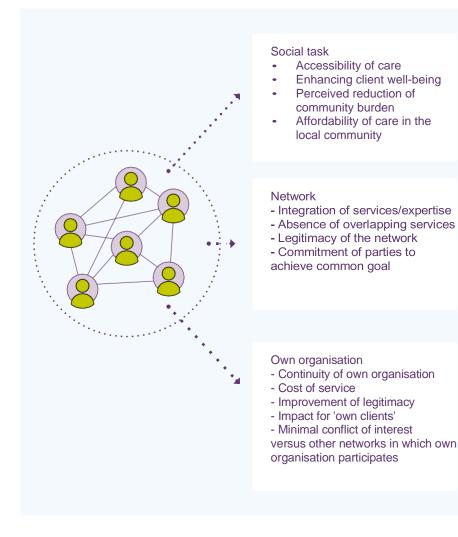
# Themes and lessons learned in conversations

In the mostly lively discussions, a wide range of themes was discussed. Below, we address the themes that provided the greatest guidance for directors and supervisors.

#### **CONVERSATION ABOUT PERSPECTIVE**

In all interviews, one question emerged as a dilemma: are we there for our organisation or for the social good? Despite the urgency to enter into more (regional) collaborations and the awareness of supervisory boards and boards of directors to align the supervisory practice with social responsibility, in many cases the mindset appears to be primarily with the organisation. Supervisors and directors are aware of the importance of the social aspect on the one hand, but - when things get critical supervisory boards look directly at the risks it poses to their own operations. There we see a discrepancy in what is said and how it is acted upon. People want to, but also feel a responsibility for their own organisation, people and employment.

Figure 1 shows how collaborations can be examined from different perspectives, for example, the supervisory board: many supervisory boards still focus on the "organisation", to a lesser extent on the "network" and still less on the "social responsibility".



Figuur 1. Governance perspectieven (Barbara Geurtsen , gebaseerd op Provan, K. & Milward, H. (2001).

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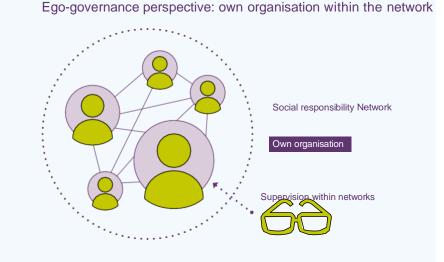
Following this, the distinction between "Supervision within networks" and "Supervision of networks," linked to that perspective, was very insightful. Barbara Geurtsen of the Levinas Institute interpreted this distinction as follows:

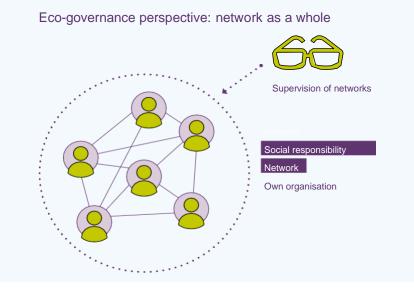
- Supervision within networks: the supervision of the individual organisation acting within collaborations (e.g., a network). This is also called the ego-governance perspective.

- Supervision of networks: the supervision of the new network constellation, which gets things done (or not) within and because of its cohesion. This is also called the eco-governance perspective.

Within supervision, she makes a distinction between responsibility to society, the network, and to one's own organisation. Supervision within the network focuses mainly on one's own organisation, which functions within the network. Network supervision focuses precisely on the client, community and network perspective along with responsibility to the society.

Figure 2 shows this distinction schematically, with the eye-glasses indicating the supervisory perspective.





Figuur 2. Het onderscheid tussen toezicht in het netwerk en toezicht op het netwerk (bron Barbara Geurtsen, Levinas Instituut)

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For example, from the eco-perspective, you would ask the question: how are joint responsibilities, decision-making and liabilities agreed upon? Where are risks and also opportunities for innovation transformation? Instead of (ego-perspective): what risks can and will our organisation withstand? Will we continue to participate or not in the collaboration?

To a greater or lesser extent, supervisory boards are all concerned with supervision within networks (ego-governance perspective). Few supervisory boards are concerned with oversight of networks (eco-governance perspective) and if they do have that in view, there is not yet a common perception of what to do and what not to do and which networks to give much or little attention to, given the multitude of networks in which an organisation can participate.

SBs were all intrigued by the distinction between 'within' and 'of' and would like to focus on it. They don't want to do so on a large scale or make it complicated, but prefer to experiment with the role of overseeing networks - in collaboration with their BoD - without formalising it all at once.

#### WE PARTICIPATE IN A LOT OF NETWORKS, I CAN SPENT MY ENTIRE DAY THIS WAY

We asked directors in advance to map out their collaborations and identify their dilemmas. For many SBs, this overview in itself was insightful. They sometimes discussed collaborations but had no overview of the total. A very common dilemma heard from directors was, "There are so many. I can fill my day with them. But choosing is also difficult." For supervision within networks, it is useful to map out which are the alliances that they participate in. In doing so, it helps to:

- Make an overview of the collaborations. Who participates, what is our role, how much impact does the network have on the social responsibility? Categorize these (strategic- tactical-operational level, is it sector-oriented or cross-domain related, etc.). In almost all organisations, this overall overview led to new insights. It provided insight into the number and diversity of networks in which an organisation engages and facilitates dialogue on what role supervisors (should) have in which network.
- In addition to the organisational strategy, make explicit a strategy on collaboration and align it with the collaboration strategies of the partnerships in which it participates. Ensure, as depicted in Figure 3, that these interact and fit together. Given the important role of the SB in strategy development, this link to collaborative strategy is in itself very obvious, but it does not yet happen often.
- Next, also give the organisation's collaboration strategy (see middle box in Figure 3) a place in the supervisory vision of the SB. Supervisory boards are increasingly aware of the supervisory vision and this is often a starting point and a benchmark for their actions and self-evaluation. Including a paragraph on the collaboration strategy and the role of the supervisory board in it therefore helps in determining what to look for in the networks. Of course, this can always be adjusted after experimentation. For example, in an annual evaluation meeting of the supervisory board.

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Supervision of networks requires an approach that's exactly the opposite:

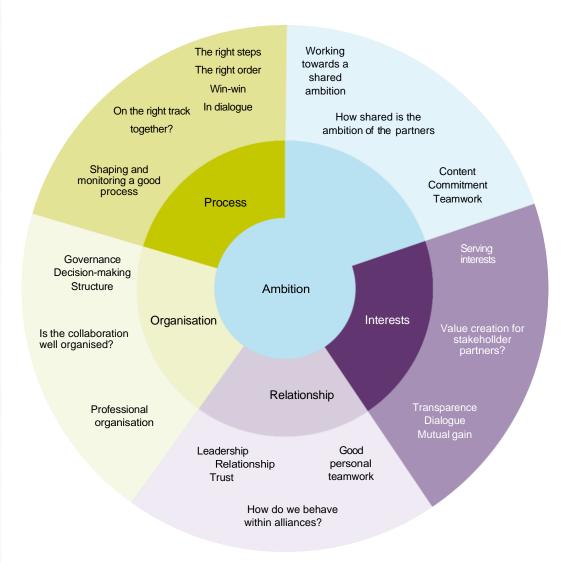
- Make an overview of the social issues that are relevant to the organisation and then, together with the supervisory board and the board of directors, use that overview to see which cooperation partners you need. In this way you can also determine where to focus your energy because you recognise an important role for your organisation.
- Together as a supervisory board and board of directors, jointly build up knowledge of network governance by including knowledge about networks when recruiting members of the SB and the BoD.

#### **HOW DO YOU DISCUSS NETWORKS?**

In many supervisory boards, a network was discussed at the time when things were not going so well, or when a formal decision (in terms of form of cooperation) had to be made. All supervisory boards felt the need to be more involved in the exploration and in forming the collaboration. They often came up with the following suggestions for approaches:

 Periodically discuss 1 to 2 (formal and informal) networks that are most strategic and evaluate them periodically with the BoD and the SB. In doing so, you can explicitly discuss values and perspectives, to go beyond the question "what does it get us?". At that moment, for example, dilemmas of directors or the supervisory board in the functioning of partnerships can be used as a starting point for a good discussion. A tool can be Common Eye's 5 conditions for collaboration: Ambition, Interests, Relationship, Organisation and Process. (There are 5 conditions for promising collaboration - Kaats and Opheij).

For example, one of the SBs from the meetings annually discusses those networks with the board of directors from the starting points: what are concerns, what are opportunities, what are developments and threats and where are the blockages, and how do we deal with them?



Figuur 4. Condities voor kansrijke samenwerking (Kaats en Opheij 2013)

#### **GOOD EXAMPLES**

The quotes below provide some examples of how BoDs and SBs are currently involved with supervision within and of networks:

"Based on an overview of networks, we determine starting points that make sure we know what kind of cooperation we would like to talk about."

"As supervisory board and board of directors, we are going to experiment, practice supervising networks and we will discuss that in the supervisory board meeting of our own organistion. Based on this, we will adjust our working methods so that together, we can learn which of the networks we want to put on the agenda and what items."

"We want to look not only at the hard side, but also at the soft side - think culture and shared values - of the networks. For example: what is the relationship like, how is the cooperation going?"

"As SB, we want to play an ambassadorial role towards networks if desired. If we go to a meeting about a network, we always go together with the director."

"When we in the SB discuss a network, we always want to include the value for the client. For example, by asking the question: what's in it for the client? Who do we actually represent in this network?"

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"We ask our director to prepare an information evening for our most strategic network together with the other directors. We then invite delegations of supervisors and get to know the other directors and other supervisors and hear how they talk about cooperation. If it's nice and educational, I'm sure there will be an interesting follow-up."

"We engage in further discussion with each other about the question of how, as an SB, you ensure that you are informed, without sitting in the director's chair. We will make the information question explicit: what do you need as an SB and from whom does that information come?"

"From now on, we are also going to talk about the elephant in the collaboration room. The personal relationships that can make and break collaboration."

#### DILEMMA'S AND CHALLENGES

We asked about dilemmas in the meetings and based on these, combined with existing knowledge, formulated a number of issues, concerns and lessons. These are outlined below.

- Beware of stacking supervision. Some SBs tend to look primarily at structure when overseeing collaborations. The risk in formalising a new body to oversee a collaboration is that it threatens the flexibility that characterises collaboration. In fact, try to look at where you can add value as an SB. Think carefully, once the collaboration portfolio is in the picture, what role you want to take as an SB for what kind of network. Considerations such as (the extent of) the social interest, the impact on employees, sparring needs of the director and what is required in terms of a formal supervisory function can all play a role in this.
- Be aware that the transformation to this new and complementary
  perspective on supervision takes time. This is true for the director:
  because they must think about how to relate to the supervisory board
  when it comes to collaborations and must always pause to consider
  "where do I involve my supervisors and when." That is a different
  situation than conventional reporting only when multi-year collaborative
  relationships of great impact are entered into. It also applies to the SB:
  because you are going to define a vision for collaboration together.
  This can be a good step and provide guidance for both supervision and
  management; when do we work together and from which governance
  principles do we want to do so? It can also mean that your span of
  attention expands as a result. From now on, you look at the (regional) joint
  role and all the residents of a region or wider, instead of just the patients or

Be aware of the "old way of looking" at new issues, such as collaboration. For example, we see collaboration being approached as if the goal and problem definition are already fixed, while there are often multiple perceptions about this. This is also called the "logic of hierarchy" and the "logic of the network." The two logics are extremes and, of course, there are many combinations and hybrids. The point is to be aware of the different perspectives on steering. One point of interest is that networks are often looked at as if "the logic of hierarchy" is at play. But in fact, there is mutual dependence. This requires awareness that these two logics differ and are easily mixed-up in a conversation. This leads to verbal confusion. Table 1 shows these two logics side by side.

#### Logic of the hierarchy

#### vs. Logic of the network

There is one leading party

There is interdependence

- There is a problem (defined by leading party)
- Objective is reference point (defined by leading party)
- Information is robust and objective
- After decision, the course is fixed
- Implementation: problem
   and goal are identified
- Norm: goal realisation leading party

Problem
Objective is currently appropriate

There is a perceived

- Information is intersubjective and constructed
- After decision, there is a new round with new
  - opportunities
- Implementation: one is alert to new opportunities
- Norm: effects and tolerance sorted

As a next step, we have seen that for the SB, it is searching for a new balance between the eco-perspective and the ego-perspective. Both are in play, but the trick is to find a balance, depicted in Table 2 below. For example, it is important to balance between the values of the organisation and the values of the network.

#### Learning to balance

#### Supervision challenges

| Social goal-setting organisation | $\leftrightarrow$ | Shared social responsibility            |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Organisational interest          | $\leftrightarrow$ | Network interest                        |
| Organisational values            | $\leftrightarrow$ | Network values                          |
| Compliance                       | $\leftrightarrow$ | Social returns                          |
| Goal attainment                  | $\leftrightarrow$ | Movement, environment/<br>opportunities |
| Control                          | $\leftrightarrow$ | Reflect, learn and develop              |

Tabel 2: Leren Balanceren, (Barbara Geurtsen, Levinas Instituut)

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Tabel 1: Logica van hiërarchie en samenwerking, (gebaseerd op De Bruijn en ten Heuvelhof (2017)

- Another topic of discussion during the meetings was: On what basis do you put a network on your agenda? This is a journey that the board of directors and the supervisory board will have to undertake together. This too will be a dynamic issue because networks may become more important over time and may have more or less impact on the social responsibility. So here too, resist the temptation to formalise this too much. However, it is good to agree on certain starting points, so that the board has a handle on it and does not have to discuss afterwards why a network was unknown to the supervisory board.
- If you, as the supervisory board, start looking at collaborations, also realise that agreements in these networks can have consequences for many different parts ofyourown organisation. See the knowledge product "Zo regelje samenwerkeninzorgnetwerken" (vilans.nl) as a starting point. Examples are administrative pressure of the board of directors spending the necessary time outside the organisation and mandating delegates. But also: who are these delegates to the organisation and what do they need? That also requires collaboration skills and tactical and strategic understanding. You could monitor that in your own organisation.
- A less tangible but also important point is what are the underlying values in collaboration. It is not only about structure and social purpose, but also about how to deal with: what is important and how to manage when underlying values clash? How is the hierarchy of values, what is most important, what comes afterwards?

Research shows that it makes sense to make these values explicit, both in one's own supervisory board and within a joint forum. This can also be important in cooperation between directors. For example, if there is a network in which 'larger and smaller' parties play a role; how do you ensure that everyone's voice continues to count and also that justice is done to the different values and interests?5

Finally, an important point of attention is the relationship between the board of directors and the supervisory board. Who does what in networking? You want to make sure that the supervisory board joins every network. We also sometimes saw BoDs keeping the SB at arm's length – collaboration - that belongs to the BoD, right? Directors may perceive the presence of an SB member as "controlling" when the purpose is different. This needs to be explicitly discussed. Traditionally, an SB member (only) joins when there is 'something going on'. In these times of complex social issues, supervisors can no longer just stand by and watch. Of course, the director is ultimately present at the network meetings, but it is important to discuss this openly with each other. Think about the (regional) common objective and what contribution your organisation can make. What is needed to oversee this well?

Welke waarden een rol spelen bij integrale zorg. (2019, 1 oktober). Vilans.
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## Conclusion: pick up the gauntlet

In closing, we would like to end this publication with two calls to action.

#### NETWORKS ARE THE ORGANISATIONAL PLATFORMS OF THE FUTURE

(Cross-domain) cooperation is the new normal, and if, as a healthcare organisation you do not anticipate this, you will automatically be confronted with collaborations in which you may not be able to make your own deliberations. There is a danger that when faced with threats (such as financial ones) you will look inward and focus on the short term, whereas that is precisely the time to step up and take up the gauntlet together. The fact remains that cooperation must lead somewhere and limited time, resources and people must be used appropriately.

The transition takes time. Learning to balance between social responsibilities and own organisational interests is an essential and important task of the board of directors and the supervisory board together.

Much importance is attached to this theme, and a lot is still unknown. The mindset we saw in the year 2022 appeared to be mostly focused on the organisation, despite all the attention to networks and regional cooperation endorsed in policies such as the Integral Care Agreement and the WOZO programme. This requires an additional perspective. The main question is: how? Supervisors and managers are looking for sound operating guidelines and inspiring examples, and that is what we have tried to contribute to with this publication.

Our call to directors and supervisors is therefore:

pick up the gauntlet and jump in the deep end by acting, learning and exchanging experiences in network practice!

# WHO WILL OVERSEE THE NEW ORGANISATIONAL PLATFORMS: YOU?

We see networks becoming the new platforms for realising social value. From that perspective, social supervision, which goes beyond the supervision of the partners in the network. After all, the network has its own dynamics, which - if all goes well - extends beyond the sum of the partners.

# Our call to the administrative tables and other networks in the region:

Make sure that when you agree on cooperation, you think about the further development of supervision and decide how you want to set it up. What do you need from the supervisory boards of the participating partners? Do you know each other, what is required and what form fits? Start a good discussion about this with the social responsibility as a shared starting point.

As mentioned, supervision **within** and **of** networks is a journey. This is where, first of all, "A good conversation" helps.

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14 | The Value of Greater Network Cooperation for Supervisory Boards

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## This is Vilans

Working together to make care work better is Vilans' social objective. To do this, we bring and keep knowledge in motion, in the field and with other partners in long-term care. As a knowledge organisation we want everyone in need of long-term care to be able to live the life they want as much as possible.

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