sure, all by himself. As Dean puts it, the aim of this arrangement is the “promotion of desirable self-regulation” (Dean 2007), in which the subject subjugates himself under the demands of the world of work and achieves a new state of “worthiness”, in which he starts to assess all by himself, his own behavior in the light of the codes and values of the world of work. The suspension of the legal sanctioning criteria can go quite far and opens up a space of interactive negation of the conventional demands of the labor market that does not stop at behavioral requirements such as “coming too late”, but that can involve specific forms of life-conduct of young people and potentially involves the person as a whole.

6.3. Gate-keeping and the Negotiation of Employability: The Intermediary Function of Motivational Semesters

The SeMo’s are “intermediaries of the labor-market” (Eymard-Duvernay 2006). This means that they stand in between the labor-market (with its specific selection mechanisms, its patterns of standardization, its entry requirements for specific apprenticeships), the young persons, and the state, or more particularly, the funding institution in form of the cantonal employment service. From a microeconomic perspective, the Motivational Semesters work through increasing the market efficiency between supply (of the labor force) and demand-side (the labor-market). They reduce, through pre-selecting and preparing the young persons to the labor-market, the insecurity of recruitment decision of the employers. As described in chapter three, they are a kind of gate-keeper that is “in charge of to assess persons according to criteria which decide on exit and entry from status passages” (Heinz 1992: 11). As described in the previous section, gate-keeping activities are performed in relation to the institutional environment of the Motivational Semesters, they “act on behalf of their institutions and legitimize decisions by reference to organizational reality – that is, to regulations, professional standards, application queues and so on” (Heinz 1992: 11), and have to “take into consideration the interests and interpretations of different actors” (Struck 2001: 30). As such they can take the role of “quasi-neutral” third parties, that balance different interests and standards of appropriateness. The provision of internships within the SeMo analyzed in the previous section gives a good example. To maintain a “good image” in front of employers, and not to jeopardize one’s “neutrality” towards the employers, counselors are keen to send only those youngsters to apprenticeships that are “employment-ready”. In their decisions (for instance, to “send” a young person to an internship in a specific sector), counselors of transition measures must both incorporate the expectations of potential employers as potential gate-keeping criteria (in order to maintain exchange relations with their organizational environment), ensure consistent application of legal standards) and consider – at least to a minimal extent
the biographical plans and preferences of the youngsters. But gate-keeping activities also happen on a more basic level of the Motivational Semester. These different considerations that enter into the frontline agent's gate-keeping activities can amount to pure acceptance or rejecting of participants “as members of institutionalized collectivities” (Heinz 1992: 10-11) in this case – the “world of work”.

### 6.3.1. Exclusion Through Sorting Out

What are then the membership criteria according to which young persons are pre-selected, and which lead to the “acceptance” or “rejection” as members of the institutionalized collectivity of the world of work? What are the tools, instruments, and according to which cognitive categories are youngsters are evaluated? While on the one side, the Motivational Semesters can help to overcome those gate-keeping processes that prevent especially lower educated youth to get invited for a job interview, they act as gate-keepers themselves, and to a certain extent reproduce the exclusion mechanisms of the apprenticeship-market. This is reflected in the membership criteria of the organization: Participation in the Motivational Semester is -- as we have seen in the previous chapter -- dependent on the criteria of “being apt for placement” (which means -- having no bodily impairments or other characteristics that would impede labor-market participation). Youngsters not corresponding to these criteria would be legally a case for invalidity insurance. As we will see below, the categorization system employed by the Motivational Semester can lead to the exclusion of specific youngsters, particularly of those that are categorized as not being compatible with the demands of the unemployment insurance. The sanctioning criteria provide an institutional resource for the exclusion of specific clients.

Seen from the overall design of the Swiss transition system, the “administrative exclusion” from the scheme has different functions. Firstly, a gate-keeping function for the different, highly fragmented social insurance systems that deal with youngsters. Access to offers from the office for youth protection (providing measures for young persons under the age of 18 who have specific emotional and/or psychic impairments) requires that a young person is categorized as “non-apt for placement” before offering their services. The Motivational Semesters, through testing the work-readiness of youngsters and more importantly through administratively excluding youngsters, thus performs a sorting according to “work readiness” criteria. The latter is exemplified by the following quote, in which an interviewee describes the practice of the youth protection unit to send youngsters to the SeMo in order to “screen” their labor-market readiness:

“At some point, they were sending us youngsters that manifestly where suffering, that really had other issues than finding an apprenticeship. They came here, with
the official demand of the unemployment agency, that means, not more than one
time coming to late, 2-3 minutes means a sanction – that’s very strict as a demand,
and we had to molest them without them even having a professional project, so
that they had the “stamp” of non-placeability, in order to be entitled to access
other measures on the basis of the youth protection service…” (I. 1. 111-116.)

Secondly, through categorizing and sifting youngsters according to the behavioral
requirements of the labor market, the Motivational Semesters perform a sort of
screening of applicants for potential employers. In selecting applicants from the
pool of participants of the Motivational Semesters, the insecurity of the suitability
of participants for a specific position during recruitment decisions is reduced. This
might constitute a central mechanism for the Motivational Semesters to process
their client towards successful labor-market integration, but this happens at the
price of exclusion of some.

“Finally, I mean, there comes a moment where... the counselor, often together with
the agent from the public employment service think that a sanction makes sense.
Sometimes, it is good for us, because we see that we are outside of our mandate.
This means, if there is a youngster who is obviously at the wrong place, we start a
count-down, and say “ok listen, we are sorry” one, two, three – ejection. We do not
have that many of those, but the sanctioning criteria can come in handy, some-
times” (I.12.:1281-1230).

The sanctioning rules provide an institutional legitimation for the sifting out of
specific youngsters. From the point of view of the organization, this is seen as
useful, as it constitutes a potential lever for “rationing services” (Lipsky 1982: 82)
and for the limitation of access and demand. In situations in which the Motiva-
tional Semesters have a high demand (which is usually after the end of a school
year, when many school leavers are still looking for an apprenticeship) the exis-
tence of exclusion criteria allows the caseworkers to regulate the population in-
flow or to perform some sort of creaming. This stems from the specific subvention
agreement the Motivational Semesters have with the employment agency. Motiva-
tional Semesters are commissioned to provide a specific number of places per year
and are required to maintain a mean yearly filling rate of 92%. If a Motivational
Semester falls short of reaching this threshold, the places commissioned the year
after will possibly be reduced. Due to natural fluctuations in the population inflow,
Motivational Semesters are thus overfilling their measure, while in other periods,
they are working at an occupancy rate far below 92%. Some interviewees suggest
that in such periods, sanctioning criteria are employed much more strictly:

“Sometimes, in fact regularly, we say – when we feel that there is a large group to
manage – the norm is that after four faults, there is a sanction, ok. We can also
apply it quite strictly. What I mean at some point we start to say, we also regulate the population flow” (I. 1.: 127-129).

The latter quote suggests that there the discretionary application of sanctions provide at least a potential possibility of “creaming”, thus focusing the organizational resources on those who are most promising in terms of labor-market integration: confronted with more clients than can readily be accommodated, the Motivational Semesters often choose those who seem most likely to succeed in terms of success criteria. The latter is enabled by the considerable discretion professional dispose of the application of sanctions as this happens under relative withdrawal of supervision by the employment service: “we are not controlled in the very concrete operations. Nobody will look at the attendance list and ask: there have been three absences, why did not you sanction him”. This discretion also leaves ample space in reporting sanctionable behavior to the regional employment office, may it be in order to “keep” participants not corresponding by the strict eligibility criteria, or for the regulation of the population flow in periods of high attendance. Much more the specific financing mode of the Motivational Semester constitutes an incitement for using the tool of sanctions for regulating the population inflow or for eventually “keeping” participants that do not comply with the criteria of “work-readiness”.

“We have a high "occupancy rate", (draws quotation marks with his fingers) in September and then in April we are nearly empty, because we place the young persons and because they find jobs. so, the more effective we are, the more we are penalized because we do not make our participant-days at the end of the year…” (I.8.:267-269).

More particularly, the recent introduction of a case-management system for youngsters (five regional transition counters that register all school leavers “without a solution” of the region – see chapter 2.4.5.) toughens the situation. Just like the legislator intended, youngsters are monitored during the running school year and those that did not find an apprenticeship are directed to different transition measures instantly. The legislator’s intention to “inhibit the insidious raising of the age of transition to apprenticeship” (Nahtstelle 2010: 27) leads to the fact that the mean age of participants in the Motivational Semester has plummeted.

"since the introduction of the case-management, those that arrive here are 15 years old... before its introduction, most were 17, 18 years old, but we could even do better work with those being 20, 21. They have a different maturity level, it (the motivational semester) is simply more appropriate for this age group. The younger ones come directly from school, and a big issue is that they are not at all able to project themselves in the future. And that's a real problem, with whom we have to deal with. [...] And there we are eventually a bit more disciplinary, we
ask them a bit more... we make more use of the sanctions of the employment service because we want to give them sense and tell them "Watch out, in this system, you have not really understood everything, there are specific codes to follow". No problem, we can take care of that, but it is a pity, because they have a right to come here, and it is simply just a bit too early – if they would have come a year later, we would have been much more effective" (I2.:456-472).

The latter quote shows that structurally, the Motivational Semester serves as a "systemic buffer" between school and the labor-market, operating as a rather crude selection procedure according to labor-market criteria. Interestingly, these quotes show that "employability" or "work readiness" is merely a fixed and objective characteristic of persons, but that it is a contingent characteristic that largely depends on the local demand-supply relationship of apprenticeships. Employability, and it’s functionally equivalent organizational category ("being apt for placement") constitutes a relational category: in moments of the year in which many young persons enter the Motivational Semester, the criteria of "placement readiness" are enforced very strictly, in moments where there are few participants attending a Motivational Semester, the application of these rules is handled much more flexible.

6.3.2. Flexibilising Job Aspirations

In their roles as intermediaries of the labor market (Eymard-Duvernay 2006), frontline workers certainly proceed to a "sorting out" of young people according to the evaluative criteria of the labor market. At the same time, they might act as "translators" of these demands for some youngsters, to facilitate a possibility to be selected by potential employers. As we have seen in the previous quote, the Motivational Semesters have a limited scope for action for doing so. The characteristics of clients that enter into focus are not random. Motivational Semesters have neither an impact on the demand side (the number of available apprenticeships) nor an impact on the selection mechanisms of employers. As pure supply-side policies, the SeMo's only have an impact on some characteristics of the young persons, primarily their job-search behavior, their self-presentation, and the individual life-conduct and job aspirations. This is well reflected in the interview transcripts analyzed so far. The frontline agents in the Motivational Semester do not restrict the “readiness” for an apprenticeship to allegedly "objective" evaluative criteria that as would suggest a purely economic understanding of the apprenticeship market. It is not only school grades that count, but it is an understanding and incorporation of the "codes" of the world of work, the existence of an "elongated" temporal horizon, the ability to project oneself in the future, etc. This requires a whole work of secondary socialization which is a central field of action of the Motivational Semester. These criteria are part of the organizational classification system of the Motiva-
tional Semester. Human service organizations need to classify individuals according to their organizational schemes to “treat” them. The individual client is transformed into a subject of that organization and it is transformed into a “manageable case”. In this process of organizational classification, an ambivalent apprenticeship market situation, or more precisely, a structural “mismatch” between demand and supply, but also age-specific characteristics (e.g. a lack of “maturity”) are signified into individualized “employability troubles” that can then be treated through people changing work. These organizational classifications do not only guide people processing, but they constitute “institutional identities” (Gubrium/Hollstein 1998) that act as discursive environments for the self-interpretation of clients. As Hasenfeld describes, “people-processing organizations employ classification-disposition systems that reflect, in part, organizational adaptations to the constraints of their exchange relations with various market units receiving the processed clients” (Hasenfeld 1972: 256). Employers are one of the central exchange units of the Motivational Semesters. As such, those personal psychological characteristics that are changed partly reflect the criteria that employers use for the legitimating their recruitment decisions. Furthermore, the Motivational Semesters have clearly limited mandate, partly reflected in the institutional make-up of the Swiss transition system. For instance, while “having a low educational degree” clearly is a characteristic that becomes relevant for recruitment process, Motivational Semesters do not dispose of a mandate to prepare youngsters for a higher school degree4. Activities related to the enhancement of school-related competencies are legally restricted to 10% of the time per week. Motivational semesters thus do neither have a grasp on the structural imbalances of the apprenticeship market and – due to their intervention being limited in time and scope – nor on those characteristics of persons relevant to the recruitment process that are harder to change. The Motivational Semesters, therefore, limit their intervention to changing those characteristics of persons that are easily treatable and that can be tackled on the level of the Person. To do so, the problems to be treated first have to be established: Barriers to the integration into work have to be resignified into classification schemes that can be processed by the organization of the SeMo and for which specific organizational technologies exist. These classification schemes furthermore “reflect and represent broader moral conceptions sanctioned by the state, by the professions and by other authoritative bodies that give rise to these organizations and legitimate their practices” (Hasenfeld 2009: 98). The “problems” described are not only functional for the people processing and people changing activities of the organization, but they have to resonate within the organizational environment of the organization.

4 In contrast, the German BVJ (Berufsvorbereitungsjahr/preparation year for work) grants – at least principally – the possibility to obtain a school degree.
"Inadequate job aspirations" constitute a central client categorization applied in the SeMo. As the education-occupation link is regulated by the demand-supply relationship on the apprenticeship market, the propensity to get selected for a job is partly based on a "realistic" self-assessment on one's own "market worth". If employers can select from a wide range of applicants, they rather choose those from general secondary schools than those from intermediate or upper secondary schools. Apprenticeships can, in fact, have very different pre-requirements in school competencies. Furthermore, as described in chapter two, on an overall level, there seems to be a structural mismatch between the job aspirations of youngsters and available apprenticeship places: In specific apprenticeship sectors (traditionally the building sector, sales and manufacturing industries) apprenticeship places remain unoccupied, with some youngsters remaining without an apprenticeship place. It is clear that the Motivational Semester does not have a direct impact on the demand-supply relationship on the apprenticeship market. In turn, job aspirations of youngsters seem a first focal point of the people changing technologies of the Motivational Semesters:

"Some youngsters come with desires that are not, that are hardly realizable, hardly realizable mainly because of their school level. We have many of them and it is truly the first part of our work to say... let me give you an example: A young person enters the office, we ask them "what do you want to do? What motivates you in your life"? etcetera. and sometimes they say, "commercial apprenticeship" while she barely has the level of an upper secondary school degree" (I.6.: 230-236).

In this case, the inadequacy of the "desires" of the youngsters with the realities of the labor-market is depicted as a lack of knowledge of oneself, as an inadequate assessment of one's own capacities. While the job choice itself is largely conceived as a biographical self-project that is rooted in the "inner motivations" ("what do you want to do? What motivates you in your life?") of a person, the realization of this self-project requires that the job aspirations are in line with the requirements of specific apprenticeships and situation on the apprenticeship-market. The category of "inadequate job aspirations" seems to become a particularly urgent problem in cases in which young people show a lack of flexibility in their job aspirations and where they are merely willing to adapt their "desires" to institutionally feasible pathways. As such, many of the counselors reported cases where a young person's where not willing to adapt their job aspirations to the realities of the market.

"One of my youngsters went to middle-upper secondary school, but she did not have a final school degree – and she aimed for a commercial apprenticeship – and while upper secondary school is adequate, without a certificate it’s really hard, actually, it is a sign that you do not have the required competencies. And for five months, it was like "commercial apprenticeship and nothing else". After that it
was a pharmaceutical assistant. Actually, in that profession too they do not take lower upper secondary pupils anymore because the level required in Mathematics is quite high. I do not know where she got that idea from, but again that was a project that could not work, a project that does not work well with her competencies. So, we made her do a psychometric test to show her that her level was not upper secondary school, you know with this test we can show that those that do not have a certificate they still have the same level of competencies” (I.8:736-745).

As we see in this quote, the adequacy of professional choice with the personal characteristics of the young person constitutes a central evaluative framework brought forward by the counselors. In this case, the counselor employs the criteria of not disposing of a “certificate” as a sign for not having adequate competencies or a specific apprenticeship position. In doing so, he uses the lack of a certificate as a signal for non-readiness for a specific apprenticeship. This argumentation pattern legitimizes the decision to “guide” the young person towards an alternative apprenticeship sector. In this case, the counselor of the Motivational Semester corresponds roughly to the same argumentation pattern that a potential employer would refer to. The classification pattern employed – serving as a tool for “pre-selecting” applicants – constitutes an “external assessment criteria” (Meyer/Rowan 1977: 350) that is derived from the institutional environment of the Motivational Semester. As described in the previous chapter, this results from the fact that the Motivational Semester as an institutionalized organization is particularly inclined to become sensitive to and employ external criteria of worth. As such this classification pattern does reproduce to a certain extent the mechanism of statistical discrimination that is active on the labor-market and that equates the characteristic of “being without a certificate” with “being an unproductive employee”. In contrast to the anonymized process of applying for an apprenticeship where employers select on the basis of an application file, the categorization work in the Motivational Semester results in specific organizational responses that feed-back (through various channels, e.g. personal interaction, expertise, the contact with employers in internships, internship evaluation forms) the way characteristics of the person are evaluated by the employment system. As such, they individualize the requirement to flexible one’s own job aspirations and confront the young person to the “realities” of the labor-market. In case in which the capacity of a youngster to successfully apply for an apprenticeship is questioned, specific technologies are applied to “make fit” their aspirations to the realities of the market. A central part of the work of the counselors consists of “flexibilising” the job aspirations of the young persons. In doing so, they restrain themselves to authoritatively prescribe what sector the young person should perform their job choice (see below). Nevertheless, the Motivational Semester disposes of whole range of tools with whom the young people obtain feed-back on the realizability of their job choice. The “people changing
work” involved in flexibilising job choices seems to play a central role in many of the interactions of the Motivational Semester. Nevertheless, the reported tenacity of young persons surprises. For them, the process of finding a profession involves dealing – based on their own aspirations, wishes for the futures and aspirations of self-realization through work – with often limited structural options. As such, the SeMo’s are dealing with a central societal conflict: the disappointed promises of social participation, of status preservation and of self-realization through work of young unemployed that are confronted with a specific way of organizing the education-occupation link that fixes life-chances at a very early age and in which young persons, especially those with lower economic background, are not always aware of the consequences of low educational credentials at the age of transition into work.

6.3.3. Dealing with Disappointed Expectations and the (Re-)Construction of Viable Job Aspirations

This is reflected in the main categories used by street-level bureaucrats to differentiate participants. A main distinction is drawn between “good clients” (those that simply need a hand in their application process) and “complex clients” (those that have too high standards and demands regarding their social position within a firm or regarding their job application). In assessing the “viability” of a specific job choice, a wide range of organizational technologies is used: psychometric tests, internship reports, numerous feedbacks by different institutional representants. The used arsenal of organizational technologies amounts to a constant confrontation on the realities of the world of work by different persons and through different devices and tools. This can be interpreted as organizational work at specific status passages, in which classification work does not only fulfill a function for the organisation but also becomes relevant for the self-interpretations of the young people themselves and acts at the hinge between macro and micro-processes of institutional classification. In sum, these institutionally mediated classifications “add up” to biographical self-descriptions, they are resources for specific self-constructions of the participants that one can refer to as “institutional careers”. These careers, as Jenkins states, “are as much the products of categorizations as of self-identification and self-determination” (Jenkins 2002: 12). The likely futures of the young persons in transition partially result from the “categorization work done by strategically placed others” (ibid.).

“We try not to crush the dreams, to really watch out – because that would be horrible…. In contrast, we try to confront them with the reality to tell them… for instance we have a young person that is convinced, really convinced that she has to do aesthetician, and she has a really narrow vision, she has finished the lower
track of upper secondary education, but that’s not the school level required for that profession. Then we told her... I think there are at least 5-6 people that told her the same thing, we all had the same kind of discourse. So, we asked her: “why do you not want to do something else”, try “assistant-level” there the required level is perhaps a bit lower,... “no, no I want directly have to deal with the patients, no I want to do the technician track. Her internship reports they were not that good either – we showed her the internship reports and we told her: we will do everything so you can find something in the profession you want but now it’s already three years that you are looking for something in that profession and you have not found anything, so perhaps you should question your choice, do you not have better things to do with your life-time? Rather try to do something else beforehand so at least you will have a diploma, you take a short detour and then you might try again afterwards?... That one left the motivational semester without a solution” (I.5.:404-413).

The last quote does not only give insight into the whole range of evaluative apparatuses that are harnessed to compel the participant to flexibilise his job aspirations, but it also gives insight into the contradictions involved in “changing aspirations”. There seems to exist on the side of the counselors a certain reluctance to “crush the dreams” of youngsters, respectively, to unilaterally prescribe the choice of a profession. It seems as if the institutional norm of the choice of a profession as an “individualized self-project” and the norm of “self-realization” through work that is harnessed in many ways to “motivate the young people” (Who are you? What motivates you in your life?) must be respected – at least superficially, ceremonially. The counselors conceive their work as nearly unconditional support of the plans of the young people (“we will do everything, so you can find something in the profession you want...”) and as such display attention to expressions of a will of the young persons. The individual self as an author of one’s Biography is respected, even actively promoted. Young people are in a certain way invited to explore by themselves what “professional project” they are willing to pursue and what kind of profession and apprenticeship “fits” their proper inclinations. At least rhetorically, young persons are thus “invited” to explore themselves. It is presupposed that the client wants to make something of himself. As one counselor describes: “I am not inclined to direct them to a specific job or sector, I do not know if they like the job, I mean one has to like it still. Personally, I could not work in the construction sector in the winter and all this, I would be a complete dork, the boss would never let me do an apprenticeship and probably send me home after a day” (I.8.:918-920). For this counselor, the subjective appreciation of a job thus seems to be equally important than it’s feasibility reason why a too “directive” approach is rejected. Another counselor used the wording: “I told her if I would be her, I would try somewhere else in order not to lose too much time” (I.7.:551-552). These quotes indicate that despite the inevitable “reality test” that is involved in assess-
ing a professional project, the individual wishes and wants of the young person are considered, at least considered to a certain degree, even if they are deemed “unreasonable” or “irrealistic”. In a certain sense, the norm of self-realization through work and the idea of a choice of a profession as an individual self-project is maintained as an institutional ideology even against counterfactual reality.

As described in chapter three, the life course is both an institutional program and a subjective construction (Kohli 1985). On the macro-level, this is characterized by the institutionalization of time-tables for specific transitions and the entry requirements for the access to specific societal functional subsystems. The described sorting-processes are an example of the social regulation of the life-course. But life-course transitions are not restricted to macro-structural, state-sanctioned age norms of appropriate transitions age, but also must be enacted on the micro-level, thus into life-course decisions and biographical actions of the transition-ing individuals. As the next chapter will show, the Motivational Semester does not only sanction the compliance with specific transition-related age norms and behavioral expectations but operate a “pedagogical”, people-changing work leading to the entrenchment of these norms on the individual level. The age norms are so to say translocated from the organizational dispositive into the dispositions, the identities and the self-interpretations of the youngsters in transition. The latter implies the emergence the “stimulation”, or even the “injunction” (Kohli 1994: 221; Duvoux/Astier 2006) of a specific “biographic” self-understanding, meaning a relation to oneself and to the world that finds its source in an individual self and that is “temporally structured” (Kohli 2007: 221) and that suffices the actual labor-market demands. It is the latter contradiction that is treated by the institutional work of flexibilising professional aspirations while maintaining the ideology of institutionalized individualism. The work of “flexibilising aspirations” thus does not amount to a prescription of possible pathways. The people processing activities involved in flexibilising job aspirations amount to techniques of responsibilisation that amount to an injunction of biographical reflexivity by the institutional agents. The young persons are asked to produce narratives about their selves that on the one side inform the institution about the interiority of the person and that induce the person to become aware of the problems and limitations a certain job choice implies. The disclosed self is made public by the individual and evaluated by the public agent from a pre-defined horizon of meaning. This leads to specific processes of subjectivation that are described in the last section of this chapter.

6.3.4. “Selling” Young Persons to Employers: A Process of Valuation and Mediation

The Motivational Semesters institutional processing activities can only be understood within the specific organization of the “occupation-education” link of the
Swiss apprenticeship system. The SeMo's are “intermediaries of the labor-market” (Eymard-Duvernay 2006), which means that they stand in between the labor-market (with its specific selection mechanisms, its patterns of standardization, its entry requirements for specific apprenticeships), the young persons, and the state, or more particularly, the funding institution in form of the cantonal employment service. From a microeconomic perspective, the Motivational Semesters can reach their aim (the integration into a secondary education) through increasing the market efficiency between supply and demand-side. They reduce, through preparing the young persons to the labor-market, the insecurity of recruitment decisions of the employers. The state has delegated secondary education to companies and firms. Firms define themselves their need apprentices and the access requirements to a specific position. This allocation-mechanism of apprenticeships through the “free hand” of the market leads to the fact that still many young people are left without upper secondary education. The employers, who must rely on incomplete information when recruiting apprentices, use “signaling” characteristics to reduce insecurity regarding the abilities of the young persons. These include, for instance, the school grades, the visited school type. Employers use these characteristics as (imperfect) signals indicating if a young person will be a good worker and if he will be successful at the professional school.\(^5\) Labor market economists have described the underlying mechanisms of labor-market exclusion: According to Thurow (1975) the access to the labor market is defined through the position of the applicant in the labor queue – which in turn is defined through (imperfect and fallible) proxies of the presumed productivity of the young persons as an employee. In short, individual characteristics – or more particularly characteristics of certain groups of young people may act as negative signals for recruitment decisions (especially youngsters coming from a lower school pathway or having low school grades). This leads to the fact that under the condition of a structural scarcity of apprenticeship places, these young people are having lower chances to find an apprenticeship as they find themselves at the end of the labor-queue. Research has shown that other “proxies” play a crucial role as well (Imdorf 2011)\(^6\), during the recruit-

\(^5\) The dual apprenticeship system consists of a combination of work-place training and of school-based training. The school-based part constitutes a risk for employers as young people who fail apprenticeship examinations will have to prolong their apprenticeship by one year.

\(^6\) Imdorf (2011) shows through the lens of the E.C. that the relevant Orders of Worth for the attribution of apprenticeships are not restricted to the “market” or the “industrial” order of worth. During the recruitment process, the “Greatness” of potential apprenticeship-candidates is also characterized by expectations from the „domestic“ OoW (in which the value of uprightness, reliability and character are highlighted) or the world of inspiration where the motivation and vocation of persons leads to greatness and that come into effect for recruitment decisions.
ment process, (amongst others, the age of the applicant, familial background, as well as gender and migration variables). The role of “low” educational achievement for the exclusion from the apprenticeship market can also be explained by Spence's (1974) signaling theory. According to this theory, the fact of being a “low achiever” in school could act as an absolute exclusion criterion (Kohlrusch/Solga 2012), insofar employers, based on “statistical discrimination” (that means they impute that a group of persons independently of the individuals within that group) disposes of a low productivity and do not even consider them for a position. The young participants at the SeMo have a whole range of subjective reasons for being at the SeMo, some even using it as an institutionalized prolongment of the youth moratorium to dispose of more time for choosing a profession. Nevertheless, the biggest part of the population attending the SeMo is composed of young people who did not pass these “gate-keeping” activities of the employers. This may, in fact be due to their having some of the characteristics which act as a negative signal, leading to a statistical discrimination as described above, or to the fact that they have “in-appropriate” educational aspirations regarding their capacities and competencies, leading to the fact that they have not been selected by the employers.

As will be shown below, the Motivational Semesters are able to partly overcome these selection mechanisms of the labor-market. On the one side, they can open “back doors” to employment for young people which otherwise would not have been selected by the regular recruitment mechanisms, for instance through providing internships to the young persons, or through performing a pre-screening of candidates that are considered as “placement-ready” and “stable”, for instance despite having poor school degrees. This practical work that leads to placing young people into internships and to make the “valuable” in the eyes of an employer can be described as a work of “valuation” and “mediation”. As intermediaries of the labor Market (Eymard-Duvernay/Marechal 2006), frontline workers at the SeMo contribute to defining value through different activities and foster valuation frames that can improve the labor market opportunities of young persons. These activities of intermediation and valuation are subject of this chapter.

The description of the practices of valuation requires to distinguish between the conception of (labor)-markets in classical microeconomic theory and in the economy of conventions. Microeconomic theory conceives the coordination between “buyer” (the employer) and “seller” (“the apprenticeship candidate”) as operating through a transparent price-mechanism based on fixed and immutable qualities of the candidate. In turn, in the economy of conventions, the “value” of individual characteristics on the apprenticeship market is neither fixed nor an inherent characteristic of the person but is only apprehended based on specific technologies of evaluation, criteria, conventions, and instruments. In this perspective, the “the market is not given a priori, but is constructed by means of “third parties” who can be more or less stable and institutionalized, and who can structure various
modes of activity or introduce mediation between general conventions of quality and more local conventions’ (Bessy/Chauvin 2013: 95). Furthermore, the process of valuation of specific competencies is always inscribed into specific situations (Eymard-Duvernay 2008). From the perspective of the sociology of conventions, it is thus crucial to highlight the different actors and processes involved in producing, assessing and institutionalising the relative value of an apprentice.

The role of the frontline agents as institutionalisers of value, as co-constructors of those conventions that make possible market exchange becomes particularly visible in those explicit practices in which the valuation frames of the apprenticeship market are harnessed to “sell” a young person to an employer. As a matter of fact, many of the young persons at the SeMo do not dispose of an official, recognized final school diploma, making it particularly hard for them to apply for a job with even a low chance of success. The absence of a final school diploma constitutes a deal-breaker for most employers, as uncertainty about their ability to successfully complete an apprenticeship exists. The school diploma constitutes a conventional object that reduces uncertainty in recruitment decisions and that as such is crucial in maintaining the functioning of a so-called apprenticeship market. In the following quote, we see that frontline agents in the SeMo can harness alternative modes of valuation that partly substitute a final school degree. In order to do so, the SeMo recurs to alternative valuation devices: in the case below a psychometric test that can certify the equivalence of the cognitive abilities of a young person to a statistical reference group, the expertise of a psychological consultant, that allows an interpretation of these test results by laypersons and that certifies the aptitude of a specific applicant for a specific profession, and so on. These are activated in concrete practices of valuation, in which – through considerable institutional effort and investment, the value that is required for “selling” a young person is institutionalized. This is reflected in the following interview quote:

“even without a final school certificate but a good competency assessment we can tell them that they have a sufficient level, there are many reasons why a person that could have succeeded in a regular apprenticeship did drop out. Particularly for those that did drop out the year before graduation, we try to get this piece of paper (competency-assessment), so they have something to show to the recruiter and eventually explain to him what it means. The young persons who have this competence assessment might add it to their resumé and our psychologist adds a short note that certifies that their chosen profession is realizable or not, to what school type their competencies correspond and so on. That is a basis for us to sell that person to an employer, to act as a guarantor and to eventually show that they have enough cognitive competencies or that they caught up in specific school subjects through our extra tuition courses. We try to validate their efforts in front of
an employer. Eventually, we will send them to do a “Multi-Check” and then that’s a quasi-official certification, that is recognized by employers” (I.11: 1012-1023).

This quote displays well the mediation work “between general conventions of quality and more local conventions” (Bessy/Chauvin 2013: 96) the work consists in qualifying and emphasising characteristics of persons, that are “there”, that have been acquired through tuition courses, internships and through the school, but that lack an adequate certification in those formats that are recognised and recognisable by employers. According to the interviewee, it is merely a re-description of existing competencies through certified classifications and nomenclatures (“the school type to what the profile corresponds”). The process of valuation starts from locally acquired competencies to larger, publicly recognized dispositives of valuation. The psychometric test only constitutes an intermediate step before arriving at those publicly recognized valuation frames that carry the highest degree of generalizability. The process of valuation must be conceived as a process that starts from less stable and institutionalized valuation frames. The psychologist of the Motivational Semester highlights that the used psychometric test “is an indicative test, it is not a binary test with the result of having passed/failed but it can be useful for knowing if a person can do a multi-check or not” (I.10:730-734). Starting from valuation practices that are limited in range and rather “local”, the frontline agents do attempt to approximate the most legitimate and recognized forms of value that exist in the labor-market. In doing so, they also account for the potential “traumatizing” effects of being confronted with a situation in which “low” value is attributed: “As the young persons… you know, if we do the test internally, it is less traumatizing then doing a multi-check and failing. I can give a first estimation and say, “yes, a multi-check will pass” or say “not, rather not, because there we are heading for a battered self-esteem” (I.10.:874-881). The specific valuation practices, as for instance those happening in a specific assessment practices thus have potentially far-reaching implications for the identity of the participants. Through the valuation practices do they not only acquire publicly recognized certificates of value, much more, they learn about and incorporate the value that is attributed to them. Through being assessed against specific recognition orders (Reh/Rabenstein 2012), they learn about what career options a profession they can rationally expect. We are, once again confronted with the gate-keeping function of the SeMo and its ability to produce those self-descriptions that are required by the scheme to function. These processes of institutional valuation have a potential impact on the careers of the youngsters, whose likely futures partly result from the categorization work done by strategically placed others. For the frontline agents,

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7 The so called “multi-check” is a fee-based competence test offered by a private organisation that screens over 40,000 pupils a year and that is - at least in some professional domains – to be enclosed in job applications.
the information gathered during the motivation semester constitutes a central asset for “selling” young persons to employers. At the same time, the young persons are well aware of the role that frontline agents play when it comes to sharing potential information with representants of the labor-market.

“So, the information we gather on the young person plays a crucial role in that process. As you know, at the beginning and the end of the SeMo, the young persons are evaluated, their personal, professional and social qualities, that includes not only the internship-report but also everything that happens in the workshops. The young person knows that this information is not going to be seen directly by the internship firm, but they also know... let’s say, the small things count – an employer that calls us and asks “please tell me about that person” and if we tell them “everything’s fine but he has a horrible character”, we can’t sell that to an employer. The young persons are aware that at some point, we will have to give information about him to an employer, or at least, we cannot lie to them. Because sometimes, they (the young persons, S.D.) want us to talk rubbish, to give a purely positive appraisal of them. We are not obliged to tell everything, but that we cannot lie, but afterward, if the young person does not change some problematic behavior we cannot help them. We will arrive at a stage where the employer knows everything, and it is his turn to make a decision” (I.9.: 857-869).

As the quote shows, the valuation practices of frontline agents at the SeMo does not stop at the more general evaluation frames of the apprenticeship market. They also refer to the relationships they maintain with concrete employers on an individual basis. During their stay at the SeMo, participants are required to perform a one-week internship per month. These internships are often a welcome occasion to contact employers personally. Every internship is evaluated by a two-page evaluation document to be filled in by the employer. This document allows transporting valuations performed in the firm to the Motivational Semester where they are “worked on” and integrated into the weekly meetings between the young person and his personal counselor. In terms of actor-network theory, the document constitutes an artifact that is able to “act at a distance” (Latour 1986) and influence the behavior of other human actors, it bridges two local sites, the site of the apprenticeship firm and the site of the SeMo. As the following quote shows, the personal counselors conceive their employer-related work as a “warrantor” for both the smooth course of the apprenticeship and the young person.

“We got these internship reports, that we send to the employers. So at least we know if things went well or not and how it worked out. Often, we work on specific things that employers evaluated negatively. Even if the employer tells us simply if there is a possibility for an apprenticeship or not, that can be a key for pushing things forward. Then, if there were some quirks and irregularities, that enables us
to call the firm and to know what happened: on the one side this gives us clues for working with the young person, but also serves to apologize in the name of the young person... in fact we are some kind of support for them as well, we re-assure them if there is a problem, we are kind of a guarantor of the young person, so if something happens, we will have to stand up for it” (I.5.: 1201-1210).

This quote shows that the “intermediating” activity of frontline agents involves “mov(ing) back and forth between different social worlds” (Bessy/Chauvin 2013: 98). Bessy and Chauvin use the word “translation” (Callon 1986) to describe these practices of “knowledge brokering” that do not consist in a simple transfer of knowledge, but in multiple activities of moving between places, of “intérêsement”, defined as “the group of actions through which one entity [...] strives to create and stabilize the identity of the other actors that it defines through the way it defines the problem” (Callon 1986: 185, own translation). As such, frontline agents are able to situate and re-define “quirks and irregularities” within specific life-situation, to describe the qualities one has seen in a young person that led to send him to the internship or to discuss if a candidate dispose of the right and sufficient set of qualities to be potentially considered as an apprenticeship candidate. As described in the first part of this chapter, this work is ambiguous and risky – on the one side, one does not want to “burn” an employer and endanger the reputation of the Motivational Semester, on the other side, the task promoting the qualities of a young person (“selling” the young person) while not disclosing too much of his potentially problematic characteristics. This is exemplified in the following quote, in which the frontline agent displays a specific care for the image that his telephone call might shed on the young person, displaying certain prudence for the potentially stigmatizing effects of a “social” institution calling to inquire if that person has been regularly attending his internship. At the same time, the frontline agent gains important information on the behavior of the young person that is potentially fed back into the weekly evaluation encounters and that allows confronting the young person on what “issues” he will have to work on henceforth.

“If there are young people where we are not that sure how it will work out, we often call the firm, often even during their internship in order to control if the young person did not miss out. Sometimes it is better to hide our intention to control the attendance of the young person in front of the employer. So, we call them, ask randomly about the attendance and then talk about other things. We do not want them to think that the young person is a social case that is closely followed up, or that he is a real problem case. That might also stigmatize a young person. But in case they have a vacancy, then we take the phone, we try to have an exchange and try to sell – in question marks – the young persons. The word “to sell” might be too strong, but we are obliged to back the young persons” (I.5.: 1201-1210).
This intermediation work is thus very ambivalent: on the one side, frontline agents surely “back” the young persons, promote them and highlight their qualities, qualities of the young person that might not have been seen by the employer if that person was brought to him through the classical market-based recruitment channels. Frontline agents can activate alternative orders of worth (Dahmen 2019) and make them count in the recruitment decisions of employers. Young persons that do not have the best school degrees and such would never have passed the “gates” of the apprenticeship-market might have alternative qualities that an employer might find attractive. In the words of the economy of conventions, frontline agents both create and modify frames of valuation – the young person might not have a good school degree, but he is “stable”, “motivated” a “team player” and “physically resilient” as his year-long commitment of playing football in a mid-league football club testifies. On the other side, frontline agents’ contact with employers is an opportunity for gathering information on a young person that is potentially valuable for the people-changing activities in the Motivational Semester. As the evaluation documents are filed in the personal portfolio of every participant, every official in the Motivational Semester disposes of detailed knowledge of how the young person fared at a certain internship and has access to an in-depth assessment of how employers evaluated the internship candidate. Through this privileged access to information, frontline agents dispose of a panoptical view of the young person and potentially totalizing control of their work-related behavior. As we will see in the next chapter, this knowledge is regularly put to work.

6.4. Constructing the Client that Can Create Himself: Technologies of Agency and the Production of a Will

The last two major sections showed how frontline agents operate within a complex institutional world, and how they balance different contradictory injunctions in order to “get along” in institutional everyday life. Both the chapter on sanctioning and the chapter on intermediation activities have pointed towards a central figure that I want to take up in the following section. To use Hasenfeld’s famous distinction between “people changing” and “people processing” organizations, the last two sections displayed the SeMo mainly as the latter: participants are processed according to administrative sanctioning criteria and value is assigned to them based on the valuation frameworks of the labor market or that come from the fact that the SeMo’s are a public policy. Nevertheless, both sections showed that beyond pure “people processing” the described practices have potentially deep implications for the subjectivity of the participants. As we have seen above, the abrogation of the administrative sanction criteria and the practice of non-sanctioning served to opens a “pedagogical space” in which introspection and reflexive self-evaluation