Shaping our action space: a situated perspective on self-control

Self-control is more important than ever: living in contemporary society requires us to resist temptations continuously and to allocate our time and money wisely. Our thinking about self-control has long been dominated by the idea that self-control requires willpower. Unfortunately, the most important thing psychology has revealed about willpower is that we don't have much of it. A popular and promising response is to suggest that our surroundings should be structured so that we are nudged towards prudent behaviour. However, this response faces two key objections. First, classic nudges are one-size-fits-all interventions that aren't tailored to our individual goals and preferences. And secondly, nudging seems to involve a troubling form of manipulation, even if we do it to ourselves.

The proposed research programme will address these objections and demonstrate that our crucial reliance on environmental supports need not reduce us to passive bystanders. The important innovation here involves analyzing self-control as a distinctive type of relation between agents and their environment: we will argue that agents are capable of exercising genuine self-control by shaping their own action space, where our action space is understood as the set of possibilities agents consider relevant for action and shaping involves actively changing (enlarging, restricting, recalibrating) that set. This analysis will result in a situated account of self-control.

The research programme will develop an account of the novel concept of shaping an action space (project 1), demonstrate how shaping can yield genuine self-control (project 2), and explore the role of shaping in the development of self-control (project 3). In contrast to willpower, the notion of self-control we will develop emphasizes the importance of environmental structuring. But contrary to existing accounts of nudging, our account will show how agents can truly guide their actions on the basis of their own goals.

Keywords (Max. five words)
self-control, nudging, action space, situated cognition
Vernieuwingsimpuls / Innovational Research
Grant application form 2018

Vidi scheme

1e. Current institution of employment
Utrecht University

1f. Prospective host institution
Utrecht University

1g. NWO domain (Choose one)

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Explanation of the cross-domain character of the proposal (Only if you have chosen to submit your application as cross-domain; fifty to one hundred words)

1h. Main field of research
Indicate the main field of research and (if applicable) other fields of research, in order of relevance, using the names and codes from the NWO research field list: www.nwo.nl/researchfields. For ZonMw applications, use the fields of research listed on the website (www.zonmw.nl). Please consider carefully which main research field matches your application best. Note that we may use the indicated (main) research fields during the assessment of your proposal, for instance to find suitable reviewers.

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Please note that it is compulsory to fill out the same, identical information in the ISAAC or the ProjectNet system on the tab “General Information” (Algemeen) section ”Research fields” (Disciplines) before submitting the proposal.
1i. Public summary of your research proposal
Please supply both an English and a Dutch version (max. 50 words each), including an English and a Dutch popular title. Please check the Notes for the requested format.

**NL**

### Zelfcontrole of alleen zelf-manipulatie?

De meeste mensen hebben teleurstellend weinig wilskracht. Zijn nudging en zelfmanipulatie met slimme trucs het enige dat ons rest? Dit project ontwikkelt een gesitueerde theorie van zelfcontrole, en laat zien hoe we echte zelfcontrole kunnen uitoefenen door zelf onze handelingsruimte vorm te geven.

**ENG**

### Self-control or just self-manipulation?

Most people unfortunately have little willpower. Are nudging and self-manipulation by means of smart tricks, the only strategies left? This project will develop a situated account of self-control, and will show how we can exercise genuine self-control by shaping our own action space.

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**Research proposal**

2a. Description of the proposed research

**Shaping our action space: a situated perspective on self-control**

**The problem of self-control**

Whereas perfect beings would automatically do what they think best, as flawed rational creatures human beings often need to invoke self-control in order to realize their goals (Frankfurt, 1988; Kalis, 2017). Being good at self-control is often viewed as the straight road to success. The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, 2017) recently published an advisory report emphasizing the importance of abilities like self-control for citizens to function well in contemporary society. Society demands from us that we budget our time and money, resist the temptations that are everywhere around us, and fulfil our civic responsibilities.

Unfortunately, for most people becoming good at self-control is more like a utopian ideal than a realistic expectation. For several decades, research on self-control focused almost exclusively on the notion of willpower (Mischel e.a., 2010; Shoda, Mischel, & Peake, 1990; Gailliot e.a., 2007). The bleak take-home message from this domain of research is that most people have notoriously little willpower (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). Moreover, the concept of willpower itself has recently invoked serious criticism (Hagger e.a., 2016; Lurquin & Miyake, 2017). It is therefore not surprising that attention is shifting away from willpower, and towards the question how we can organize our environment and institutions such that people are nudged towards prudent decisions (Sunstein, 2016; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Wansink & Chandon, 2014).
Nudging can be defined as manipulating people’s choices by changing the way choices are presented to them (Bovens, 2009). A classic example is the promotion of healthy food choices by positioning healthy items in prominent locations at the supermarket. The crucial insight from this approach is that successful self-control requires environmental support. However, nudge is not the final solution to our struggle with self-control that it is sometimes taken to be. Classic nudges are one-size-fits-all, top-down interventions that help us behave in ways that society considers desirable. It has incited a fierce debate on so-called ‘libertarian paternalism’, and the fine line between autonomy and manipulation (Crawford, 2015; Nys & Engelen, 2017; Wilkinson, 2013). Furthermore, Luc Bovens (2009) has argued that even if individuals impose nudges on themselves, they are still not exercising self-control: manipulation does not become autonomous agency just because we are doing it to ourselves.

Outline of the proposal

This conclusion seems to rely on the idea that the agency required for genuine self-control should be spelled out in terms of independence of external influences. However, it is also often argued that agency is not so much about being independent, but about relating to such influences in a way that allows us to realize our goals (Hornsby, 2004; Arpaly, 2009; Kalis, 2011, Keestra 2014). The idea that action should be understood as a certain type of relation between agents and their environment, has its home in the tradition of situated cognition (Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Hutto & Myin, 2012; Menary, 2010; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 2017). However, the question that so far has not been answered, is how much as relation could provide us with genuine self-control.

The important novel step we will thus take in this research programme is to develop a situated account of self-control, specifying the kind of relation that expresses the required kind of agency. In contrast to willpower approaches, a situated account of self-control would emphasize the crucial role of social, cultural and environmental structuring for agency. But contrary to nudging approaches, the account will show how agents can guide their own actions on the basis of individual goals.

Over the last thirty years, situated approaches have become increasingly influential in claiming that human cognition constitutes a web of continuous interaction between consciousness, the body, and the social and physical environment. The tradition has important philosophical roots in the tradition of phenomenology (Dreyfus, 2002; Kiverstein & Wheeler, 2012; Merleau-Ponty, 1996) and in the philosophy of psychology developed by Wittgenstein and Ryle (Bäckström & Gustafsson, 2017; Gallagher, 2009; Ryle, 1949; Schroeder, 2001). In the domain of self-control, insights on the situatedness of cognition have been used to propose that the will is extended (Heath & Anderson 2010, Vierkant 2014): we can arrange our environment in such a way that it supports us in sticking to our plans (for some related suggestions, see Balcetis & Cole, 2009; Clark, 2007; Hung & Labroo, 2010). Although these are promising ideas, so far they have remained isolated suggestions. More importantly, they do not answer Bovens' urgent challenge: how could such forms of 'self-manipulation' constitute genuine control?

The situated account of self-control we will develop addresses this challenge by proposing that we can exercise genuine self-control by shaping our own action space. We will develop the notion of action space as the set of possibilities we consider relevant for action. The list of things we could possibly do at any moment is endless (raise one finger, raise two fingers...), but most of these possibilities are not genuine options for us: they do not belong to our action space (Kalis, Kaiser, & Mojzisch, 2013; Kalis, Mojzisch, Schweizer, & Kaiser, 2008; Keestra, 2014). The notion of an action space bears similarities to the notion of affordances (Chemero, 2003; Gibson, 1977; Jones, 2003). However, the notion of affordance is closely coupled to the direct physical
environment, whereas the notion of action space crucially allows for action possibilities that are highly abstract or far in the future, such as the possibility to become a lawyer (Kaiser e.a., 2013; Kalis e.a., 2013).

Objectives

The proposed programme aims to show that although we are crucially dependent on environmental support, this does not force us to conclude that we are mere passive bystanders of our own actions. In the research programme, we will:

(A) Analyze the notion of *shaping one’s action space* as a set of skills
(B) Determine how such shaping could be genuine self-control

Method

Addressing these two objectives firstly requires a *conceptual analysis* of the notion of *shaping one’s action space*. What do we mean by shaping, and how does it relate to concepts such as affordances and nudging? How can the concept of shaping be spelled out in terms of concrete skills? And how do these skills relate to psychological knowledge on underlying processes and mechanisms? Secondly, we need to show how shaping our action space could be a form of autonomous agency. This requires an account that can *integrate the subjective perspective of agency with the objective perspective* from which we analyze external and internal influences on behaviour. The question how integrating these perspectives is possible is one of the core themes in philosophy (see for some exemplary discussions Sellars 1963, Nagel 1979, Moran 2001). However, even if shaping our action space would be genuine self-control, this only provides real autonomy in so far as we can, at least to some extent, *learn* to do this. This raises the question what role shaping plays in the *development of self-control*, and to what extent learning to shape our action space is different from learning other agential skills such as reasoning.

This shows that the programme requires methods which are essentially philosophical in nature. Nevertheless, the success of the endeavour will substantially depend on psychological expertise regarding the analysis of skills, underlying mechanisms, and skill learning. This expertise will be secured by the collaboration of Prof. Denise De Ridder (UU Self-Regulation Lab) and Prof. Erik Rietveld (UvA, expert on the psychology of situated cognition).

Programme structure

The two objectives will be addressed in three interconnected projects, executed by a team consisting of the PI, a PhD student and a postdoc. The programme structure is schematically depicted in Figure 1. In the next sections we will describe the three projects in further detail.
Aim: In this project we will analyze how agents can shape their action space, by developing a systematic inventory of (1) relevant skills and (2) the psychological mechanisms underlying those skills.

Theoretical framework: If our action space is the set of possibilities we consider relevant for action, shaping this space could involve various things. As a preliminary framework, we will build on earlier work in which we investigated how people come up with options for action (Kalis & Kaiser, 2018; Kalis, Kaiser, & Mojzisch, 2013). There we argued that in order to make adequate decisions, people should generate enough options but not too many - moreover, the options they see should be relevant and feasible. This suggests that firstly, agents might shape their action space by restricting their set of considered possibilities: they could bring it about that certain possibilities are literally ‘not an option’ for them. This is what alcoholics do when they choose routes on which they will not encounter bars. Secondly, agents might enlarge their option space: they could get new ideas for action by for example talking to others, reading books, watching movies or taking part in courses. And thirdly, agents might shape their action space by actively changing the saliency of their options, so that certain options become more vivid while others recede in the background. For example, the children in Mischel’s famous marshmallow studies made the temptation to eat the marshmallow less vivid by actively shifting their attention and imagining the marshmallow to be a cloud (Druckerman, 2014; Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989).

Method: The method we will adopt for this project consists of two steps: First, we will employ conceptual analysis and literature research to identify and analyze the skills involved in different ways of shaping our action space. For restricting one's action space, we will for example take a closer look at the skills involved in self-binding (Elster, 1990). For expanding, promising concepts to start with are option generation (Kaiser e.a., 2013; Kalis e.a., 2013), creativity and practical imagination (Hutchins, 2010; Smith, 2010). For changing saliency, we will for example look at attention (Crawford, 2015), aspect-seeing or seeing something-as-something (Baz, 2000; Kalis, 2017) and narrative imagination (Carlson & White, 2013). Secondly, in collaboration with Prof. Denise de Ridder and Prof. Erik Rietveld we will make an inventory of relevant psychological
processes and mechanisms involved in these skills. For example, option generation turns out to rely on verbal fluency and working memory (Kaiser et al., 2013, Leder et al. 2018), and recent work on the processes underlying goal-directed behaviour emphasizes how activating one's goals affects the saliency of the related options for action (Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007; Moors, Boddez, & De Houwer, 2017).

Outcome: A PhD thesis, answering the question what shaping one's action space can involve, both conceptually and psychologically. Two chapters will be published as journal articles: paper (1) introduces the notion of shaping, and paper (2) reviews central underlying psychological mechanisms.

Project 2 Shaping as an expression of agency (PI, 5 years)

Aim: An inventory of skills and psychological mechanisms is well and good — but how should an individual determine, in everyday life, if any shaping of one's action space is required and if so, whether it needs restriction, expansion or a change in saliency? This project will prepare the ground for concrete applications by analyzing shaping one's action space from the perspective of the agent, in order to determine if and how shaping one's action space can be understood as genuine self-control.

Theoretical framework: Shaping one's action space involves a subject relating to oneself as an object, and the question is how such 'self-manipulation' could be an expression of agency and thus genuine self-control. The framework of situated cognition offers unique potential for addressing precisely this question. Whereas the idea that cognition is situated originated in the tradition of phenomenology (Gallagher, 2009), more recent situated approaches tend to focus more and more on third-person accounts of cognition and action, for example by investigating how situated cognition relates to mechanistic explanation (Bechtel, 2009; Herschbach, 2012). In this project we will focus on two core concepts from the tradition of situated cognition that seem particularly promising for answering the question how to integrate a first- and a third-person perspective on shaping one's action space: the concept of affordances and the concept of aspect-seeing.

Method: An affordance is a possibility for action provided to an animal by the "substances, surfaces, objects, and other living creatures that surround the animal" (Rietveld & Kiverstein 2014). Although the concept of affordances is too closely couplled to the direct physical environment to serve our purposes, we will study recent work on affordances in order to determine how it conceives of the relation between the first- and a third-person perspective. More specifically, we will examine whether affordances can involve a form of agency (can agents change their affordances?). We will use these insights to determine how agency could be conceptualized in our notion of shaping one's action space.

Secondly, we will investigate the idea, well-known in the situated cognition literature, that perception and action are intertwined (Merleau-Ponty, 1996; Noë, 2004). According to this idea, perception is not a purely passive process, as it is infused with our goals, values and norms (Hutto & Myin, 2012). This suggests that we might exercise agency by changing the way we see the world, which would be crucial for understanding shaping our action space as a form of genuine control. In developing this line of thinking, we will build on recent Wittgensteinian philosophy of psychology (Child, 2017; Schroeder, 2001; Wittgenstein, 1953). For Wittgenstein,
the connection between perception and action is inherently social, and mediated by language. We can actively bring ourselves to see something in a certain way (now I will see this not as a marshmallow but as a cloud...) only because we are social and linguistic animals; we can 'bring a concept to the world' (Baz, 2000; Budd, 1987). We will examine to what extent aspect-seeing exemplifies the kind of relation between the agent and his/her environment which constitutes the kind of agency required for genuine self-control.

Outcome: This project will result in three papers that together demonstrate how shaping one's action space can be genuine self-control. One paper will use insights on affordances to develop a situated perspective on self-control (paper 3), paper (4) will analyze the phenomenon of aspect-seeing and paper (5) will answer the question how shaping one's action space can be seen as genuine agency.

Project 3 Shaping and the development of self-control (Postdoc, 3 years)

Aim: This project takes on the question what role shaping one's action space plays in the development of self-control, and to what extent learning to shape our action space is different from learning other agential skills such as reasoning. Also, we will address the question to what extent we can legitimately expect agents to develop shaping skills.

Theoretical framework: Even if shaping your action space can be shown to provide genuine self-control, this only provides real autonomy in so far as we can, at least to some extent, learn it. However, one of the conclusions of the report by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR, 2017) was that non-cognitive capacities such as self-control cannot easily be taught, and that therefore the government should be realistic about what citizens can do. On the other hand, they also mention that learning potential seems larger for concrete skills, though there is hardly any empirical research on this topic yet. Since it is implausible to expect that our lives will become more simple in the near future, it is important to determine to what extent people can learn shaping skills relevant for self-control. For this project we will start from recent work on situated moral development (McGeer, 2008, 2015; Pettit, 2016) which outlines how 'situated beings' acquire skills that contribute to agency. We will use these general suggestions to construct a developmental perspective on shaping, which would provide a conceptual basis for future empirical research on developmental and educational possibilities.

Method: Firstly, we will review recent literature in the field of situated cognition on the learning of skills relevant for agency ((McGeer, 2008, 2015; Pettit, 2016). More specifically, we will examine the complementary roles of reflection and habit (Bäckström & Gustafsson, 2017; Brownstein, 2014; Christensen, Sutton, & McIlwain, 2016, Ometto & Kalis, 2018). We will apply these ideas to several of the specific skills identified in project 1. Also, we will build on the ideas developed in project 2 and explore the potential role of affordances and aspect-seeing in the development of self-control (for promising suggestions see Baz, 2000; Kuplen, forthcoming; Rietveld, 2016).

Secondly, in collaboration with the WRR we will analyze recent policy debates on self-control (WRR, 2017) to address the question what level of self-control we can legitimately expect from citizens. Should the development of self-control be part of the curriculum in schools? Or should it be up to individuals how much they want to invest in their self-control skills, and should society just scale down its expectations? On the basis of insights from these debates, we will develop concrete suggestions for policy making and education.
Outcome: This project will result in two papers on the development of shaping skills (papers 6 & 7), and in a policy paper (paper 8) outlining the relation between institutional and individual responsibilities with regard to self-control development. Project 3 will also play an important role in the knowledge utilization activities (see below).

Innovative potential

The main innovation of the programme is that it will answer the urgent question expressed by Bovens (2009): how can structuring one's environment, which is a kind of self-manipulation, be genuine self-control? Whereas it is generally agreed in the literature on self-control that this is an important challenge, so far none of the experts on self-control have addressed it directly. We believe we can provide an answer by building upon certain recent insights from the field of situated cognition. Addressing this challenge will provide a novel and comprehensive account of situated self-control, something which has not yet been developed. And thirdly, the programme is original in the way it presents philosophical methodology as essential for analyzing self-control. We employ philosophy as a mediator between the subjective perspective of agency and the objective perspective from which we analyze external and internal influences on behaviour. What this programme wants to exemplify, is that philosophy offers methods that allow us to shift between different perspectives (conceptual analysis, phenomenology, reviewing empirical insights), and that precisely such shifts are crucial for making sense of a complex phenomenon such as self-control.

2a2. Research plan

A timeline for the programme is provided in Table 1 below. Even though each of the three researchers primarily works on one project, we will establish a close team by using a collaboration strategy employed by the German Volkswagen Stiftung in their European platform for young researchers of which I was a member for eight years. We will hold weekly one-hour meetings with the team, which external experts will join when needed. These meetings will be dedicated to:

1) The development of an inventory of the areas of expertise that are present in the group, and identification of missing forms of expertise and knowledge. This will lead to a concrete work plan for providing the different researchers with the expertise they need.

2) Open exploration of themes, questions and research interests between the researchers involved.

3) Building a shared body of knowledge: identify the most important gaps in knowledge, and develop a concrete work plan for addressing these gaps that will involve shared core readings.

Throughout the programme, these sessions will gradually transform in opportunities for discussing progress in the different projects, and exchanging feedback on drafts. Furthermore, each researcher will take the lead in organizing a shared activity: a workshop in year 2 (on shaping one's action space) and in year 3 (on situated self-control), and an overarching conference on the general theme of the programme in year 4.
### Table 1. Timeline (output is marked in italics, activities are underlined)

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<td>Paper 4: Aspect-seeing as agency</td>
<td>Main conference: Shaping as self-control tool</td>
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<td>Workshop 2: Situated self-control</td>
<td>Paper 7: Developing shaping skills</td>
<td>(Policy) paper 8: Who’s responsible?</td>
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| Work-shop 1: Shaping one’s action space | Paper 1: Shaping one’s action space | Paper 2: Skills & mechanisms | Finalization thesis |
| Paper 5: Shaping as agency |

### Collaborations

**Local (Utrecht University):** Within the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, particularly valuable for this programme will be Dr. Joel Anderson (working on autonomy and situated cognition) and Prof. Frans Brom. Brom is also director of the WRR, which is a collaborating partner in the proposed research (specifically involved will be Dr. Will Tiemeijer and Drs. Anne-Greet Keizer). Crucial expertise regarding psychological mechanisms will be provided by Prof. Denise de Ridder (UU Self-Regulation Lab) and Dr. Ruud Custers (Social Psychology, UU). Moreover, for the valorization activities I will involve the Utrecht Young Academy, a group of talented young scholars from various disciplines, which offers a highly fruitful context for exchange of ideas and collaboration.

**National:** On the national level, I have relevant contacts with several researchers working on situated approaches to cognition. Prof. Erik Rietveld (UvA) a internationally renowned expert on situated cognition and affordances, will be a collaborating partner in the programme. I can further rely on Dr. Leon de Bruin (VU/Nijmegen), Dr. Sanneke de Haan (Tilburg), and Prof.

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² For the postdoc position the PI knows four excellent and recently graduated candidates who are currently on the job market. Even though this might change throughout 2019, it is reasonable to expect that a good candidate will be found. The same applies to the PhD student, given the large number of MA students who are interested in the topics of self-control and situated cognition.
Marc Slors (Nijmegen). In the field of psychology, important contacts will be Prof. Trudy Dehue (Groningen), Prof. Denny Borsboom (UvA) and Dr. Angelique Cramer (Tilburg).

International: Due to my earlier work on *akrasia* or lack of self-control (where I worked with Prof. Alfred Mele, Florida State University) and my membership of the *European Platform for the Life Sciences, Mind Sciences and the Humanities*, I have an extensive international network of researchers who will be valuable for the proposed programme. For expert knowledge on underlying psychological mechanisms and processes, I have good contacts with psychologists Prof. Lisa Osbeck (West Georgia), Dr. Agnes Moors (Leuven) and Prof. Jan de Houwer (Gent). In 2017 I spent a term at the University of Oxford to study Wittgenstein’s philosophy of psychology, where I worked with Prof. William Child and Dr. Edward Harcourt.

2.a3. Motivation for choice of host institute

One reason for choosing Utrecht University as a host institution, is that they gave me a permanent position four years ago. Furthermore, I think the UU is perfectly suited for carrying out this programme, as it hosts various research programmes that are highly relevant for this proposal. As a postdoc I was part of the NWO Horizon programme (PI Prof. Düwell) on practical self-understanding, in which a large group of researchers worked on the question how to integrate different perspectives on the human being - which is still a guiding question for research at the Ethics Institute. One of its core members is Dr. Joel Anderson, an expert on situated cognition. Beyond our department, the faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences hosts the Self-Regulation Lab directed by Prof. Denise de Ridder. She belongs to a team that recently submitted a NWO Zwaartekracht application entitled *Prompted Rationality: Roadmaps to a New Public Policy for Promoting Autonomous Choice and Societal Benefits*. For project 3, I will benefit greatly from the UU Strategic Theme *Dynamics of Youth*, in which I am an active participant.
2b. Knowledge utilisation
(Max. 1,000 words on max. two pages)
☑ Yes, this proposal has the potential of knowledge utilization
☐ No, this proposal has no direct knowledge utilization

Self-control (or more importantly, our struggle with it) is widely experienced as an important topic, both from the perspective of individuals trying to organize their everyday lives and from the perspective of policy-making. In developing a situated account of self-control, this programme firstly has the potential to change the way people think about themselves as agents relating to their own, sometimes recalcitrant, nature. As such it could provide an important counterbalance to the dominant narrative that we are basically “creatures at the mercy of external stimuli” (Berlin, 1959). At the same time, the programme will develop an important contribution to the debate on what society should and should not demand from its citizens in terms of self-control. Should citizens develop more self-control skills, or should society rethink its expectations? Also, if we conclude that development of self-control skills is an important aim for contemporary society, this has important implications for our thinking about education.

We will incite these discussions via three lines of activities:

(1) At the start of project 3 (Shaping and the development of self-control), the research team will organize at least two meetings with Prof. Frans Brom, Drs. Anne-Greet Keizer and Dr. Will Tiemeijer at the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) in order to establish concrete routes of collaboration. As the programme would only start at the end of 2019 and the WRR often works with relatively short-term projects, this collaboration cannot be completely planned in advance. However, we will at least organize two shared activities: in year 2, we will hold a round table discussion with both researchers and policy makers about the relation between individual and institutional responsibilities with regard to supporting self-control skills in citizens. This activity will build upon existing discussions between the WRR and governmental institutions such as those that were recently initiated by the report on practical abilities (WRR, 2017). Secondly, we will organize a public event in year 3 with the preliminary title Zelfcontrole: wiens verantwoordelijkheid? (Self-control: whose responsibility?). The event will be modeled on the successful Tegenlicht meet ups3, meetings where a diverse audience engages in discussion with a small group of guest speakers concerning a complex, contested and societally urgent topic. Given that the topic of nudging has incited heated discourse in various layers of society, we believe that the wider topic of responsibility for self-control would attract a substantial audience. The meetings will be recorded, and the recording of the public event will be made available online.

(2) The questions and ideas brought forward at these meetings will be used as raw material for the development of a series of four 20-minute podcasts on the topic of self-control (year 3). Within the Utrecht Young Academy, we are already experimenting with using podcasts as a tool in knowledge utilisation4. Dr. Sanli Faez (UU), who coordinates the Utrecht Young Academy podcasts, will provide advice and technical support for this project. We will take inspiration from the American radio show Radiolab5, which has as its main aim to make scientific ideas and

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3 https://www.vpro.nl/programmas/tegenlicht/meetups.html
5 https://www.wnycstudios.org/shows/radiolab
developments, old and new, accessible and 'alive' for a wide audience. By employing personal, individual stories about science and scientific phenomena, they manage to convey complex and nuanced ideas with lightness and humour.

In order to actively engage knowledge users, we will involve relevant organizations in the development of the podcast series by asking them what they see as the most urgent challenges with respect to self-control as a feature of successful citizenship. For example, we will consult the Jellinek, (an influential health care institution focusing on all forms of addiction) and the team responsible for the recent HUMAN documentary series Schuldig⁶, which investigated how people deal with debts, the impact of debts on their everyday lives, and diverging perceptions of responsibility for preventing and reducing debts.

(3) In the final phase of the programme, we will develop and test a pilot version of a **education module**, focusing on one or two certain specific skills that turn out to be important for shaping one's action space. The module will be developed in year 4 together with UU Onderwijsadvies & Training⁷, a team of educational experts within Utrecht University who are specialized in transforming scientific ideas and insights into educational material for various audiences. In year 5, the PI will test this module in two different educational contexts: first, at the **Money School Amsterdam**, an after-school educational programme focusing on finance & sustainable lifestyle tools for children⁸. The PI works at the Money School as a volunteer teacher; volunteers within this organization take an active part in the development of the curriculum. Secondly, we will also test a different version of the module as a form of skills training for BA students at the **Descartes College**, the BA Honours Programme of Utrecht University, where the PI is one of the programme coordinators. Recently, the Descartes College has formed the plan to integrate training of study-related skills like time-management and stress prevention into its programme: a brief module on self-control related skills would fit this plan very well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Involved team members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Exploratory meetings with WRR</td>
<td>PI, postdoc, PhD student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organize round table discussion</td>
<td>PI, postdoc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Organize public event: Zelfcontrole: wiens verantwoordelijkheid?</td>
<td>PI, PhD student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop podcast series</td>
<td>PI, postdoc, PhD student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Develop education module</td>
<td>PI, postdoc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Test education module</td>
<td>PI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. Workplan knowledge utilization*

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⁶ [https://www.human.nl/schuldig/over-schuldig.html](https://www.human.nl/schuldig/over-schuldig.html)
⁷ [https://www.uu.nl/onderwijs/onderwijsadvies-training](https://www.uu.nl/onderwijs/onderwijsadvies-training)
⁸ [https://www.themoneyschool.nl/](https://www.themoneyschool.nl/)
2c. Number of words used

Section 2a: 3986 (max. 4,000 words)
Section 2b: 910 (max. 1,000 words)

2d. Literature references


