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EVIDENCE BRIEF
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EVIDENCE BRIEF · INNOVATION AND NETWORKS

Orchestrators Change Roles by Stage

Who orchestrates healthcare ecosystems?

Incubators, test labs, co-working hubs and health ministries all claim to orchestrate innovation ecosystems, often through events. Studies of a Finnish hospital, a Perth innovation hub, intermediaries in five regions and South Africa's maternal health platforms show who orchestrates, how roles change by stage and why the type of orchestrator matters.

By Eventamin · How we work 12 November 2026

Finland, Australia, Germany, South Africa, Europe

5 studies

innovation ecosystems | ecosystem orchestration | innovation intermediaries | healthcare innovation | hackathons | start-up support | incubators | hospital test labs | digital health platforms | MomConnect

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KEY FINDING

No single actor orchestrates an ecosystem: test labs, research bodies, incubators and clinicians share the role, and intermediaries change roles as ventures grow, from architects running free events and hackathons at the idea stage to conductors, facilitators and leaders. The type of orchestrator sets the pace, and a government-led platform scaled faster than a nonprofit-led one.

Five studies, 2017–2024

Key findings

- **Events open the ecosystem.** At the idea stage, intermediaries attracted founders through free events, hackathons, start-up weekends and an annual business plan award; contacts stayed loose, with more than four months between first touch and follow-up[1].
- **Roles change as ventures grow.** Among 20 intermediaries in five regions, 17 acted as conductors once ventures took shape, and eight of nine led as leaders at the scale-up stage[1].
- **A hackathon can start a supply relationship.** In Perth, a start-up that won a hackathon run by the innovation hub CORE gained free membership, refined its idea with members' knowledge and became a vendor to the industry[2].
- **Orchestration is shared in hospitals.** In a Finnish hospital ecosystem, a test lab, research organizations, an incubator and leading clinicians orchestrated in parallel, and the academic orchestrator lacked authority to keep everyone involved[3].
- **The orchestrator sets the pace.** In South Africa, the health ministry's MomConnect platform grew faster than its nonprofit-led predecessor MAMA, building on its lessons[4].

FOR THE MARKET

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Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Organisers & associations	Free events, hackathons and open days are the entry point to an ecosystem, but they need a follow-up path into matching, membership and contracts; the same intermediary must switch from host to broker to investor-facing leader as ventures mature.
Venues & destinations	Physical places, such as a hospital test lab or a co-working hub that hosts events, keep members active and let firms test solutions in a real setting; they anchor the orchestration that events start.
Investors & advisers	Ecosystems led by an actor with authority and resources, such as a health ministry, reach scale faster than those led by coalitions without it; intermediaries that support funding rounds directly shorten the path to investment.

Who runs an innovation ecosystem

Innovation ecosystems in healthcare bring together hospitals, firms, researchers, patients and public agencies, each with its own interests and hierarchies. Someone has to convene them, and events are often the first tool: open days, technology showcases, hackathons and start-up weekends [1,2].

Studies of ecosystems in Finland, Australia, Germany and South Africa show who takes on that role and how it changes over time.

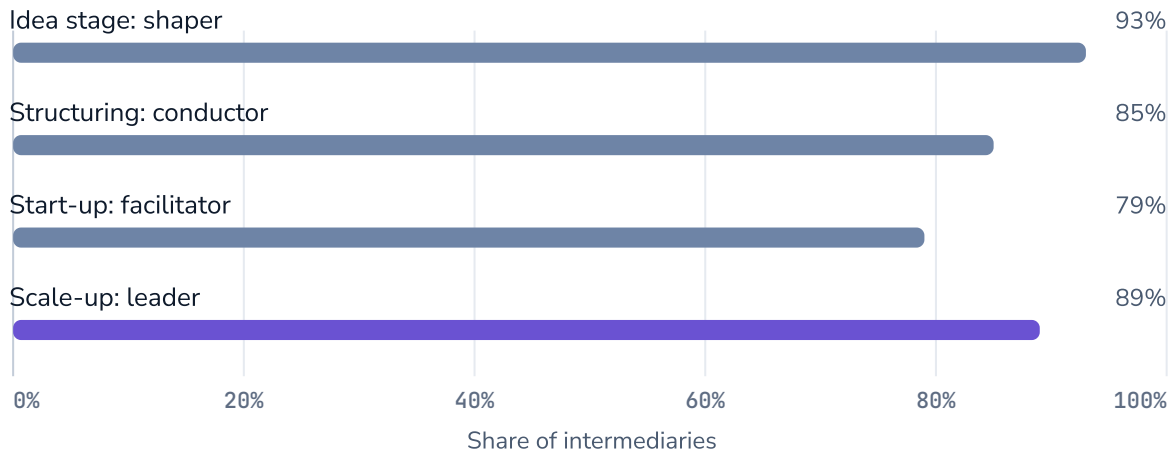
Roles change as ventures grow

Intermediaries adapt their role to the venture's stage. In a German innovation region followed over several years, an intermediary acted as an architect at the idea stage, attracting founders through free events, hackathons, start-up weekends, monthly workshops, roadshows and an annual business plan award[1]. Contacts were loose, with more than four months on average between first touch and follow-up[1].

As ventures took shape, the intermediary matched them with partners, then supported all nine start-ups in their first funding round, and finally worked under formal contracts with international investors[1]. Interviews with 20 intermediaries in five regions confirmed the pattern and added a sixth role, the shaper, which builds a culture of entrepreneurship without expecting direct returns[1].

Dominant orchestration role of innovation intermediaries, by start-up stage

Share of intermediaries active at each stage.



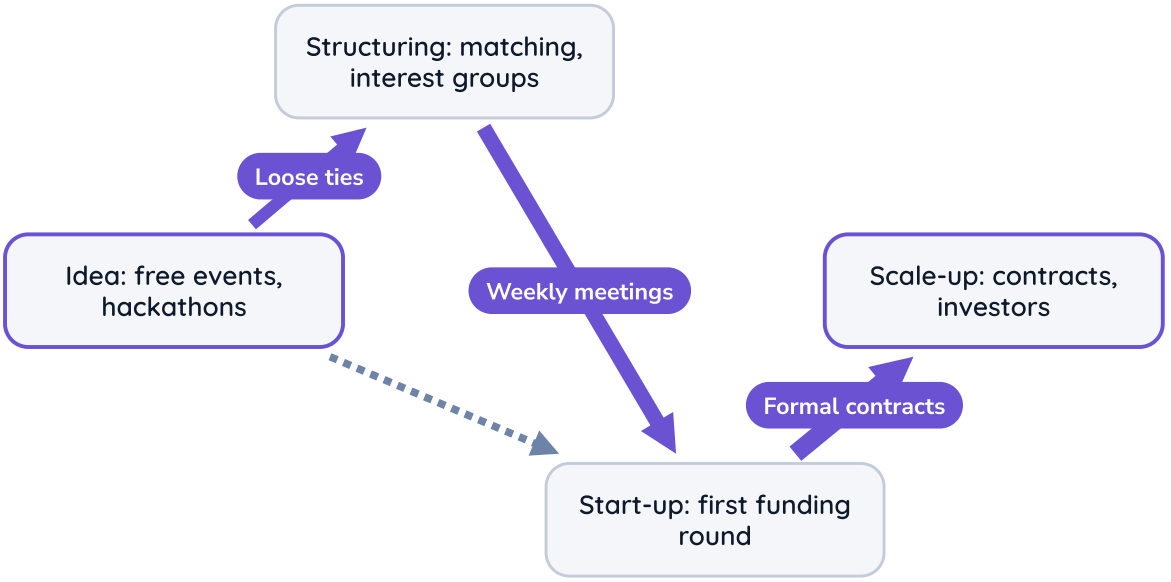
Source: Stahl (Universitat Ramon Llull) · Release date: 2024 · Region: Europe (five regions) · Number of intermediaries: 20

How innovation intermediaries orchestrate start-ups from idea to scale

Main sequence; line width shows the main route, not a measured value.

Main route Other links

Arrow width marks the main route, not a measured value · dashed: weak or no link



Source: Stahl (Universitat Ramon Llull) · Release date: 2024 · Region: Europe · Start-ups followed: 9 · Classification: Eventamin

From hackathon to supplier: CORE in Perth

CORE, an innovation hub founded in Perth in 2016 for the mining, oil and gas industry, orchestrated open innovation at three levels at once[2]. At industry level, open days, technology showcases, networking events and hackathons drew in start-ups, students and corporate members; within its member network, corporate innovation challenges, experts in residence and communities of practice shared knowledge; at project level, it brokered partnerships[2].

Events fed commercial outcomes. A start-up that won a CORE-sponsored hackathon gained free membership, refined its idea with members' knowledge and became a vendor[2]. A mining company's continued presence at public events gave the hub legitimacy with other firms[2].

LEVEL	ACTIVITIES	VALUE FOR MEMBERS
Industry	Open days, technology showcases, networking events, hackathons[2]	Awareness of open innovation opportunities and new contacts[2]
Member network	Innovation challenges, experts in residence, communities of practice[2]	Access to industry knowledge and operational data[2]
Project	Brokering partnerships and trials[2]	Commercial relationships with corporate members[2]

Shared orchestration in a hospital

In hospitals, no single actor can orchestrate alone. In a Finnish hospital ecosystem developing technology for children's surgery between 2015 and 2017, the hospital's test lab let firms test solutions in a real setting, while research organizations, a business incubator and leading doctors and nurses took on parallel orchestration roles[3].

Strong professional hierarchies limited the outside orchestrators. Regular coordination meetings worked poorly because partners prioritized their own work, and the academic orchestrator lacked the authority to keep every organization involved[3]. Firms, patients and clinicians nonetheless reported positive experiences, as the difficulties stayed at the orchestrator level[3].

The type of orchestrator matters

Who leads changes how fast an ecosystem grows. South Africa's mobile maternal health platforms reached more than two million pregnant women and new

mothers[4]. The nonprofit coalition behind MAMA saw slow growth and its advertising model failed, while MomConnect, run by the National Department of Health, achieved stronger network effects, built on MAMA's lessons and spawned further services for nurses and children[4].

Across three platforms, 39 leverage points spanning technology, structure, social ties, knowledge and politics shaped the ecosystems' development[4]. Platforms can themselves act as intermediaries in health ecosystems, depending on how open their architecture is[5].

Notes on the data

The figures are based on five studies published between 2017 and 2024: an 18-month case study of one Finnish hospital ecosystem, 29 interviews and observation at one Perth innovation hub, a doctoral study following nine start-ups and interviewing 20 intermediaries in five regions, a doctoral study of three South African health platforms and a conceptual conference paper[1–5]. Shares of intermediaries use different bases at each stage, as not all intermediaries work at every stage. The stage sequence is Eventamin's coding of the study's findings.

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

1 Stahl, M. M. (2024). Innovation intermediaries and their role(s) in orchestrating networked innovation [Doctoral dissertation]. *Doctoral dissertation, Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona*. Retrieved November 7, 2026, from hdl.handle.net — First-hand

2 Schepis, D., Purchase, S., & Butler, B. (2021). Facilitating open innovation processes through network orchestration mechanisms [Journal article]. *Industrial Marketing Management, 93, 270–280*. — First-hand

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Management Review (TIM Review), 7(9), 30–43.
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4 Ngongoni, C. N. (2021). The Role of Innovation Intermediaries in Developing Healthcare Innovation Ecosystems: Value Co-Creation through Platforms [Doctoral dissertation]. *Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University*. First-hand

5 Ngongoni, C. N., Grobbelaar, S. S., & Schutte, C. S. L. (2024). Platforms in Healthcare Innovation Ecosystems: The Lens of an Innovation Intermediary [Conference paper]. *Conference paper, IEEE*. First-hand

The evidence

●●●●● 5 studies

SAMPLE

Five studies: an 18-month case of a Finnish hospital ecosystem, 29 interviews on a Perth innovation hub, a doctoral study of 9 start-ups and 20 intermediaries in five regions, a doctoral study of three South African health platforms and a conceptual paper on health platforms

YEARS

2017–2024

METHOD

Longitudinal case studies, interviews and comparative analysis

About Eventamin

Eventamin reads the peer-reviewed research on events, exhibitions and hospitality, sets it against industry data and states what it means for the market. Every brief is published by Eventamin as an organisation: its sources, method and corrections are open.

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