Hanne Randle

Staying alive!

The restructuring process in two Swedish steel and metal companies
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1 Introduction and context of the research

This thesis was written within the framework of an EU financed research project that was started in late autumn 2001 and completed in spring 2005. The research project had been initiated by trade union organisations in the steel and metal industry through their interest in the current structural transformation in Europe, where many of their members and employees within this sector had been losing their jobs over a number of decades. The research project was given the name “Learning – in Partnership” which was then shortened to “Learnpartner”.

Aim of the thesis and summary

The aim of this thesis is to describe how processes of transformation carried out at the organisational level as a response to restructuring within a certain sector can result in different outcomes at the levels of organisation and individuals. In the context of two companies, I wish to show that different measures carried out during the transformation process can lead to organisations managing a crisis, but at the same time these measures may lead to negative consequences for the employees such as a deterioration of their work situation. The thesis also aims to show how relations between employers and trade unions may influence the planning and execution of restructuring processes through discussions of conditions related to cooperation between these parties.

The summary builds further on earlier results of research projects and aims at deepening the understanding of how different factors in the restructuring process influence the outcome at the level of organisations and individuals. By first unravelling which specific factors may be significant in different stages of a restructuring process, I can show how they contribute to forming the conditions for restructuring work in organisations and for employees.

This summary contains five sections and starts with an introduction of the background, aim and research design of the project in addition to describing which parts of the research projects are related to my thesis. Section two refers to methodology and describes how I have carried out my studies. In the third section of the summary I provide a brief review of each text included in my compilation thesis, which is concluded with a section in which I formulate new research questions. In section four I answer the new research questions and make use of a schematic model for restructuring processes in order to create a structure for my presentation. In the concluding section I summarise my research results.
Background to the research project and research design

Researchers from Leeds University Business School (LUBS) in Britain developed the research project in cooperation with other researchers from Europe and trade union representatives from the steel and metal industry. They then applied for funding from the EU fifth framework programme and were given the remit of leading work in the project. National Institute of Working Life (NIWL) in Stockholm was the Swedish contract partner. In addition to the researchers from Britain and Sweden, people from the following organisations took part in the project: the trade union organisation Steel Partnership Training (SP) from Britain; a private consultancy, Talentis, from the Netherlands; another private consultancy from Finland, Tietopalvelu Käyttötieto Oy; Sozialforschungsstelle Dortmund (SfS), an action research institute in Germany; Fundacion Primero de Mayo (FPdM), a trade union organisation in Spain; and Fafo, a partnership organ for sociological research in Norway. I was recruited to APeL in Lindesberg on 1 January 2002 to work as a research assistant on the project. APeL was run as a project by NIWL to develop new knowledge and experience about learning at workplaces. APeL FoU is now a research and development company owned by Lindesberg municipality and run as a municipal limited company.

The research project was aimed at developing a new understanding of the conditions for structural changes on the basis of three questions:

1. What are the relationships between new strategies for learning and socioeconomic restructuring?
2. How can lifelong learning, competence development and increased employability help individuals and organisations to handle change processes?
3. How can partnerships lead to the creation of conditions aimed at reinforcing an individual’s capacity to handle processes of change? (Stuart 2005:7)

On the basis of the above issues, six overall goals were formulated for the project. In addition, we would develop the understanding of successful restructuring processes.

The overall goals of the research project were:

1. To map the contours of structural changes in the steel and metal industry in Europe, and to investigate how trends in restructuring and changes in technology are linked to the development of new practices in HRM in relation to new demands on learning.
2. To investigate how learning is included as part of the changing environment for steel and metal workers.
3. To identify what barriers exist to partnerships related to learning, based on the idea of developing ”best practices”.
4. On the basis of mapping each participating country's system for learning, to discuss the idea of how a European framework may be developed to promote learning.

5. To develop policy recommendations aimed at improving the dialogue between the parties on the labour market in Europe and promoting partnerships related to learning and change work.

6. To draw up a series of comparative, theoretical and practical frameworks related to partnerships and union strategies on lifelong learning. (Stuart 2005:8)

The research project was divided into five partial studies called “work packages” (WP) and the commission was to deliver research results based on the research issue and research design of each work package. Each partner was given instructions on the issue, research design and methods of each work package leader – refer to table 1. Due to lack of resources, not all participating partners were able to take part in all work packages. NIWL participated in all work packages.

Each partner summarised the results of its work package in the form of a report. Each work package was later summarised by one partner in charge as a conclusion or comparative report. The Swedish partner (NIWL) was responsible for leading the work in the fourth work package and for drafting a comparative final report. This task involved sending out instructions to the research groups on methods of gathering data and deciding on a date for submitting the reports, among other things. The ambition in work package four was that all researchers would use an interactive approach to gathering data, data processing and analysis. The project leader wrote a summarised research report for the entire research project in July 2005.

The first three work packages of the research project were descriptive and were to map and summarise written material such as reports from the National Agency for Education, statistical data from Statistics Sweden, statute texts, various policy documents from trade unions, employer associations, partnership organs, union reports and other material. The studies were supplemented by data from interviews with employers, trade union representatives, employment office officials, statistics etc., in accordance with instructions from the work package leadership. In the first work package, each partner would describe the country's educational system in relation to ideas on lifelong learning, "Contextualising the learning agenda: historical legacies, contemporary policies" (Randle & Svensson 2002a). The second work package was to map and describe trade union strategies for learning related to ideas on lifelong learning, and to give examples of partnership in learning issues, "Trade unions, partnership and the learning agenda" (Randle & Svensson 2002b). Work package three described the extent of structural change in the steel and metal industry in each country, "Mapping the contours of restructuring across the European steel and metal sector". By describing how the number of employees
had changed, we were able to give examples of structural change at the company level and by giving examples of technological development and how this has influenced volumes manufactured. The fourth work package had a qualitative approach and was built on case studies, "Towards the learning organisation: case studies on workplace partnerships and the management of organisational change" (Randle 2004). We carried out interviews with employees, trade union representatives, managers and HR administrators. The aim of the interviews was to investigate partnerships in the process of change and to describe the consequences of change work at the level of organisations and workplaces, reflected by a number of people working in different positions.

The fifth work package had an individual perspective and was based on in-depth interviews with unemployed people, "Learning to learn: Displaced worker biographical analysis" (Randle & Heinemann 2004). We carried out interviews with people who had lost their jobs in the steel and metal sector. We used a "Grounded Theory" inspired method for categorising interview data and for analysing results. The aim of the work package was to investigate and describe how individuals coped with their unemployment and to examine what role trade union organisations had in this process. See table 1 for a summary of the different work packages in the research project.
### Table 1. Allocation of work packages and partner in charge of methods and instructions for gathering data in the research project Learnpartner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of work package</th>
<th>Aim and method</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WP 1: Contextualising the learning agenda: historical legacies, contemporary policies. Party in charge: LUBS</td>
<td>Mapping of the educational system and lifelong learning, desktop investigation</td>
<td>Participating countries have national systems for education that support ideas for lifelong learning, but in practice the systems vary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP 2: Trade unions, partnership and the learning agenda. Party in charge: LUBS</td>
<td>Mapping of a national strategies, partnerships, lifelong learning, desktop investigation and interviews</td>
<td>Participating countries have different systems for partnerships, which can be categorised as institutional, reactive and proactive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP 3: Mapping the contours of restructuring across the European steel and metal sector. Party in charge: FPdM</td>
<td>Mapping of restructuring at the company level with aid of statistics gathered and interviews</td>
<td>The process of restructuring is ongoing and has influenced employment in participating countries in the steel and metal sector in different ways. In certain countries manufacturing has almost completely disappeared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP 4: Towards the learning organisation: case studies on workplace partnerships and the management of organisational change. Party in charge: NIWL</td>
<td>Investigate and describe partnerships in the process of change, and describe consequences of change work at the level of organisations and workplaces with the aid of case studies at company level</td>
<td>Partnerships have led to different strategies being developed with the aim of coping with structural changes, such as employees being offered different opportunities for competence development and learning with the aim of handling change processes and to improve their employability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP 5: Learning to learn: Displaced worker biographical analysis. Party in charge: SfS</td>
<td>Investigate in what way individuals cope with their unemployment and describe what role trade union organisations have had in this process with the aid of in-depth interviews, life stories</td>
<td>Labour market parties can develop strategies aimed at improving the situation of unemployed, such as preparing employees before giving them notice, providing the opportunity of social networks during unemployment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The subject of the research project has its background in EU strategies for economic growth and lifelong learning. Strategies for lifelong learning are supposed to make it possible to adapt the knowledge and skills levels of the
labour force to ongoing changes in society. Countries' collective ability to handle processes of change is also expected to improve when their citizens can develop or maintain their employability through competence enhancement programmes. EU guidelines to realise lifelong learning (KOM 2001:678) emphasise the individual's responsibility for his own learning and for maintaining his own employability – but allocates an equally large responsibility to employers (companies) and society. The European commission prescribes partnerships for developing strategies for lifelong learning.

The research group was commissioned to investigate the consequences of restructuring in the steel and metal sector in Europe. The commission meant that we would use "best practice examples" to develop a new understanding of successful processes of change – to enable the spreading (exporting) of this knowledge to other sectors also undergoing structural changes. We gradually gave up the idea of "best practice" and chose instead to focus on learning examples in order to minimise the risk of the research results implying that there are simple solutions to complex problems.

Since one of the fundamental issues in the research project was to investigate how parties in the labour market jointly develop strategies for processes of change, trade union organisations were the first portal to the area of investigation. From Sweden, the Swedish metal workers' union (Metall) participated in the project. From Britain, the trade union organisation Steel Partnership Training took part, their principals being Amicus and the Trade Union Confederation (TUC). From Norway, researchers took part from FAFO, the foundation for occupational research, in which the owners are represented by labour market parties. From Germany, IG Metall participated. From Denmark and Finland people representing trade union organisations participated at project meetings and dissemination activities during the project. The Fundacion Primero de Mayo (FPdM) took part from Spain in the project run by Centro de Estudios e Investigaciones Sociales de la Industria (CEISI). This organisation is an amalgamation in which social researchers and union officials from the steel and metal sector jointly develop research issues related to topical subjects in working life. The Netherlands did not have a union representative in the research project, but contributed with research support from a department with IR traditions at Utrecht University.
Articles

In addition to the summary, there are three texts in my thesis. In the first of these I make a brief presentation of the licentiate dissertation "A partnership approach – strategies for organisational change" which relates to partnership in planning and execution of change processes (Randle 2005). The dissertation is a reworked version of work package four and describes how learning and work organisation has been influenced by change work. The essay also discusses different paths for change work in the form of short-term or long-term strategies.

The second text is an article that I wrote together with Ian Greenwood from Leeds University Business School entitled, "Team-working, Restructuring and Skills in UK and Sweden" which was published in the European Journal of Industrial Relations (Greenwood & Randle 2007). The article mainly describes how work in teams has been influenced by processes of change in two Swedish and four British case study companies. The study is based on the perspectives of learning and autonomy, and describes how relations between company management and trade unions have influenced the conditions under which work teams handle processes of change. This article is also based on results from work package four.

The last text is an article that I wrote with Lennart Svensson from Linköping University entitled, "Teamwork and restructuring – self-exploitation or empowerment" which was published in the Swedish journal, Arbetsmarknad och Arbetsliv (Labour Market and Working Life, Randle & Svensson 2007). The article is based on case study results from the same company as the licentiate dissertation describes. This article focuses on describing how the process of change leads to different consequences for employees at the two companies. To discuss whether self-exploitation or empowerment characterises the situation of the employees, our starting point is how the union and employees view learning and self-determination in relation to work teams and teamworking. The article was written in English as a conference paper for a workshop on Teamwork (IWOT8) in Trier in 2004.
2 Method

The thesis work is mainly based on the results from work package four, which was carried out as case studies at the two Swedish companies. One of the articles in the compilation thesis compares the results from case studies in two Swedish companies with the results from case studies in four British companies (Greenwood & Randle 2007). The results from the summary report that contains all participating countries’ case studies in work package four is not included in the thesis work. My colleague at APeL had the responsibility of summarising the research results and writing the final report in work package four. Instead of being a comparative analysis, the final report became a summary of all participants’ work packages. When we started summarising each work package report we found it difficult to put together criteria that were suited to comparisons.

In work package four, the task was to investigate in what way union organisations had participated in development strategies for restructuring processes and to describe what role learning played in change work. The starting point of the study would be good examples of partnership at the organisational level. Work package four was carried out as a qualitative study. We used case studies as a method of gathering data since our ambition was to study concrete cases and real conditions (Wallén 1996:115). There was also an explicit ambition that the research group would use an interactive approach to the research process. This meant that we involved different participants from both companies and trade union organisations in the formulation of the research project’s issues, and in the interpretation and explanation of results (Svensson et al. 2007b:258). In purely practical terms this meant that the research group was able to report preliminary results to participants from companies and trade unions, and then invite the participants to a discussion of the results. New problem areas could be identified at these meetings. The intention of this was that we as researchers would not run the research project on the basis of our own areas of interest; i.e. we did not wish to act as action researchers. Our goal instead was to keep research and theory formation at the centre while at the same time offering participants the opportunity of participating in the development of understanding. This meant that we partly conducted research with the participants with the aim of developing new knowledge together (Svensson et al. 2007b:273). This was a method of gaining access to an environment which was difficult to research, as well as being a recognition of the participants’ significance in the formulation of issues and explanations of our results.
An interactive approach in the project

We designed certain parts of the research project so that we would be able to achieve a joint knowledge creation process through cooperation between researchers and participants. This aim was visible above all in work package four. By using an interactive approach in the research process, our ambition was to carry out research together with the participants, and not on the participants (see Aagaard Nielsen & Svensson 2006:4, Eikeland 2006:196, Svensson 2002:11). This is also an aim in some areas of traditional research, such as ethnographic studies. Participants in research projects aim at achieving joint knowledge production, based on the knowledge and experience of each participant being used in the research process (Svensson et al. 2007:236). New knowledge developed in a joint knowledge production process may have different areas of use. In practical applications, new knowledge can be converted into action plans, handbooks and competence for development. Within the knowledge society, new knowledge can lead to the development of theories and academic products such as conference papers, articles and books.
Interactive research emphasises a deep cooperation throughout the entire research process, from the formulation of issues to analysis. When participants have the opportunity of taking part in the formulation of issues, research issues gain practical relevance. The important aspect here is to clarify who the participants are in the knowledge production. It is not possible to cooperate with all groups involved. In our case the trade union organisations were the central cooperating party.

The participants took part in different ways during the research project. The representatives from Metall participated in issue formulation during the introductory phase of the project. In work package four, union representatives and personnel managers took part in the process of deciding on the form of interviews. This gave advantages but also limitations. In addition to union representatives, employees and HR personnel took place in joint activities such as project meetings, workshops, analysis and dissemination seminars. In the section on gathering data I describe how we carried out the research project with the participants.

The interactive approach was incorporated into the project plan for the fourth work package in order to emphasise that the research process should be characterised by cooperation between researchers and participants. The research group discussed the significance of interactive research at project meetings and the Swedish project group was responsible for sending out methodological instructions to the other partners. The interactive approach was initially questioned by one researcher, but within a short time all researchers agreed on the approach.
The interactive approach influenced how we went about gathering data and the areas of feedback, analysis and dissemination. Interactive research assumes that it is possible to construct and maintain equal relationships between participants in a research project, since it is dependent on the participants’ desire to take part in a joint knowledge production process. These equal relationships, built on trust and mutual respect, then constitute the basis for developing a reflective group in which participants’ experience and knowledge have equal value (cf. Wigblad & Jonsson 2007). Since interactive research puts the focus on developing shared learning processes it is necessary to be able to arrange meeting places and times for learning within the framework of the research project. As a researcher, one should also strive to achieve a high level of participation in the research process by all participants through initiating or supporting various activities. This may include supporting shared writing processes, arranging meeting places, discussion meetings etc. To be successful in creating shared learning processes, relationships between researchers and participants should be equal (cf Larsson 2006:252). The equal relationship does not mean that the researcher ceases to be critical and keep a distance in his research role or that there is no clarity in roles or in the division of work (Ellström 2007:4), but rather that a learning process is created in which participants feel secure in critically examining their own activities together with researchers and other parties. The ambition of the research project was to develop a foundation for learning which was built on the participants’ various experiences and knowledge (Ellström 2007), since it enriches the development of knowledge during the entire research process.

The research process is labour-intensive for all parties involved (Svensson et al. 2007a:4), which in concrete terms means that participants need to set aside time for taking part in a research project. Planning made it possible to ensure that participants could take part in different kinds of activities and was complemented by thorough preparation, during which participants received an invitation well in advance before activities took place. This also included planning for feedback sessions after interviews. Interactive research is time consuming for both researchers and participants when interviews need to be prepared and carried out, interview responses are verified through personal meetings, letters, telephone conversations and e-mail; time is required for joint reflections with the aim of analysing and documenting preliminary research results, and time for joint writing processes to achieve joint knowledge creation.

As I have previously described, the interactive approach puts demands on the researcher to develop and maintain his relationship with the participants in the research project. As we organised different types of activities during the entire duration of the research project it became a routine task to keep in touch with participants. As a beginner in a research group, it can be difficult to learn to use an interactive approach to research. This also applied to me as the role of research assistant was new to me. As interactive research requires collaboration with participants it can be difficult to learn where to draw the line between
closeness and distance (Svensson et al. 2007b:275). To handle this situation I received support and guidance from my colleagues and research leader. To be able to develop in the role of interactive researcher, various forms of support structures are required (Larsson 2006:256) which in concrete terms means guidance to develop as a research assistant and support in different activities such as feedback to participants, arranging seminars and the process of writing. It is important that the researcher avoids becoming "one of the gang" (Svensson et al. 2007:246) in order to be able to maintain the role of the critical, reflective researcher during the entire project. The disadvantage of becoming one of the gang is that the researcher is considered to lose his capacity to remain critical to research results, which in turn is considered to reduce their validity (Eikeland 2006:203). I received the support of other researchers in the research project and through continuous critical reflection and discussion of the project's execution and results, which helped me to maintain a critical distance the research project itself as well as towards the participants. Belonging to a vigorous research environment is another important condition for being able to act independently and critically, and I received useful guidance from the research leader at APeL and from my colleagues in the research project. The good relationships with the participants in the project contributed to the ease of gathering data and its analysis, since they generously volunteered and shared their knowledge and experience in interviews as well as taking part in various seminars.

For the participants in the research project, the interactive approach meant that they have developed new knowledge of their own activities. Through striving to develop a critical and reflective community of researchers and developers (Svensson et al. 2007b:260) it is possible to illustrate and highlight mechanisms that characterise everyday activities. One result of the interactive approach used in this project was that the researchers also carried out an evaluation of the project for long-term sick employees at one of the companies. To increase the understanding of what the company can do to improve the situation of the long-term sick and to promote their return to work, the management of the company took part in analysis seminars with the participants. The new knowledge could then be used practically at the company since the management learned more about how they could behave towards employees that were off sick. The research project enabled participants to be in various national and international networks for the exchange of experience, and students at colleges and universities have contributed with their support in the development processes at the companies involved by sharing their knowledge and experience and by making reports as part of their exam work. This type of activity does not directly add to theory development, but should rather be seen as an element that creates interest and participation among participants. One possibility for fulfilling the requirement of development support from participants is that researchers and developers work in a team with clear allocation of duties (refer to Larsson 2006). However, there were no resources for such an arrangement in this project.
One important aspect of interactive research is the dissemination and beneficial aspects of the research results. There is also a striving in interactive research projects to create “the common third” (Husted & Tofteng 2006), in which joint action and dialogue is central. The third share is about developing something in common in both language and action between researchers and participants, which represents something over and above the activities of the researcher and the activities of the participant. In the Learnpartner project, researcher and participant developed texts together that have been published as chapters in anthologies and conference papers. The texts have been developed through dialogue and close cooperation, and are based on each participant’s knowledge and experience. In addition, many of the participants worked together with the researchers in various dissemination activities, including international conferences and workshops, in order to share their knowledge and experience. (For more information about this, refer to Appendix)

Selection of companies

The representatives from the Metall union office and representatives of the employers’ association Metallgruppen participated in the selection of companies for work packages two and four. Since we were searching for good examples of partnerships in learning and restructuring work, we in the research group felt that the trade union Metall and the employers’ organisation Metallgruppen had the best knowledge of which companies had "succeeded" in restructuring. The trade union representatives and the employer representatives provided us with the names of contacts at various companies. After reading through the list of proposals, we chose to contact three companies for case studies in work package four. One of the companies later chose to withdraw its offer to participate in the study since it was going through a rather extensive restructuring process that required the full participation of the trade union. I only carried out a few interviews at this company.

Presentation of the companies

The two companies described in the study are given the names Sweproc, or company A, and Sweeng, or company B. These companies are more different than similar and it can be the difficult to compare them with each other, even though they are both producers in the steel and metal sector. The differences lie in their businesses, products and regional locations which affect their overall conditions for managing the restructuring process. Despite these differences there are many areas worth investigating in the project area. The research issues
in work package four treated, among other things, partnerships and the significance of learning for the process of change on the basis of good examples. The companies were selected because they fulfilled these conditions. Trade union representatives at the union office as well as representatives of the employers’ organisation felt that these companies could be seen as good examples of successful processes of change.

The one company (Company A, or Sweproc) has been established for more than 150 years and was previously Swedish owned, located in an area of low population. The company is a steelworks with its own hot-rolling mill, which also produced reinforcing bars in the past. At the time of the study the company was part of a large Finnish group and manufactured special steel of high quality to order instead of manufacturing to stock. The company has a low cost strategy and its primary market is Europe. The company is considered to be a natural choice for employment by those living in the area, and has long been the largest employer in the region alongside the municipality. At the time of the study there were about 450 employees at the company, of which about 370 were blue collar workers. The employees remember the company as a responsible organisation that used to offer occupational training, career possibilities and good company healthcare, and perhaps foremost, job security. During the last 20 years the number of employees has decreased from about 1,800 to 450, at the same time as production has increased by 300 percent. Almost all the employees in production are members of the Metall trade union.

The other company (Company B, or Sweeng) is a mechanical workshop that started as a Swedish family company 150 years ago, but was owned by a Norwegian group at the time of the study. The company has moved away from manufacturing standard products and instead manufactures special goods to order. They supply expensive customer-specific solutions to the pulp industry around the whole world. It may take as long as 18 months to make a product from order to delivery. As well as manufacturing, the company supplies additional services such as installation of products for the end customer and dismantling old products. The company is located in an area where there are alternative employers if employees wish to change jobs. Unfortunately it is not as easy for the company to find employees with specialised competence since there are many companies competing for the same labour force. As one part of re-organising production, the company laid off about 40 employees who did not have the "right" professional qualifications in order to recruit employees with peak competence. All of those laid off found new jobs rather quickly. When we carried out the case studies at the company, there were about 220 employees of which 180 were blue collar workers. In this company, too, almost all production employees are members of the Metall trade union.
Gathering data for work package four

Based on the formulation of aim and issues, a qualitative approach was chosen for the gathering of data (Bryman & Nilsson 2002:252). The aim of work package four was to investigate partnerships in restructuring processes and to describe their consequences at the organisational and workplace levels. In addition we were to investigate what role strategies for lifelong learning played in the restructuring processes and examine how it affected the employability of the employees. The main issue was to investigate whether organisations can enhance their ability to respond to new demands from their surrounding environment by increasing organisational flexibility and by strengthening their employees' skills levels. With the aid of qualitative interviews of a number of people in different positions we were able to investigate participant's attitudes on the basis of our questions (Starrin & Renck 1996:53). Data was gathered from interviews, study visits and participating observations. In addition, I collected company information in the form of company descriptions, annual reports, personnel magazines, personnel policy materials, competence plans, educational material and other market communication materials. To learn more about the companies I was given guided tours. At Sweproc I was guided by a retired production worker and at Sweeng by a union representative. In order to see how work was carried out at each company I conducted observation studies of production. I was given policy material and other union material by the trade union, including books on the development and history of the union.

The thesis work is based on 128 interviews at the two companies which I conducted in work package four; see table 2. The number of interviews to be carried out in each work package was planned by the project management group at an early stage of project planning. To achieve our goals in the research commission we wished to interview people who had special knowledge and experience that could be related to restructuring, and in particular to local change work. We carried out interviews according to plan at Sweproc and fewer interviews at Sweeng since we reached saturation at an earlier point there (Starrin 1996:113). We had selected some categories of people for interviews such as managers, middle managers, HR administrators, union representatives and employees. To find these people we used a selection of convenience (Bryman & Nilsson 2002:313). I contacted the company management and personnel manager and chairman of the union association to find suitable interviewees. In certain cases we used a snowball selection (Bryman & Nilsson 2002:290), in which interviewees gave me tips about other people I could contact. We had no difficulties in getting people to participate in interviews. People at the local union branch at Sweproc gave me tips about production workers that I could interview, and they arranged for me to meet these people. At the same company I was also given a tip by the personnel manager about other people suitable for interviews, including a group of people off sick, whom I met on several occasions. I also interviewed the shop steward for the SIF
union\textsuperscript{10} at Sweproc, who had previously been the shop steward for the Metall union. I met men and women at both companies. I carried out follow-up interviews with a number of interviewees, at the companies and at other places. The table below describes the number of interviews carried out at each company in work package four\textsuperscript{11}.

### Table 2. Detailed table of interviews in work package four

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Total no. of respondents</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Managers</th>
<th>Union representatives</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Seminars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>Swe-proc (A)</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swe-eng (B)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( M = \) men, \( W = \) women

The interviews in work package four coincided with interviews in work package five, which meant that I also met people who had been laid off from Sweproc. I was given tips by the union representatives about some people with whom they had already been in contact. I later contacted some of these people. During the whole research project I met union representatives at the local union office and at the regional level for discussions and interviews. These meetings took place with some regularity during the whole research process, often at the head office of Metall in Stockholm\textsuperscript{12} and had different aims, including my presentation of the contents of work packages and feedback on the results.

I ensured that the respondents and I were well prepared before the interviews. I sent an interview guide to respondents before all interviews in work package four, either as an e-mail or letter. From an ethical viewpoint it was important for me that the participants knew why I wanted to interview them (Henriksson & Månsson 1996:35). I gave all participants information about the aim and structure of the research project at the beginning of every interview. When the interview was completed I gave the participants a brief written description of the project and information on where they could reach me. I used semi-structured interview guides that were constructed on different themes (Bryman & Nilsson 2002:301), partly for me to follow a line but also to create space for respondents’ own thoughts. This sometimes meant that discussions went off on different tracks, which is the strength of qualitative interviews, since they are based on the assumption that the interviewer does not know what is important or significant before the interview is carried out (Starrin 1996:56). I could have controlled the interviews through a structured guide in order to enable comparisons with others, or more systematically used questionnaires to
supplement the interviews. But the study was not aimed at comparing different people’s experience of restructuring processes with each other. We were instead looking for diversity in people’s accounts based on their situation, job, position and duties. By the use of open questions during the interviews the respondents were free to talk about what they considered relevant to take up, and this also reinforced the quality of the study. I asked the participants to describe how they viewed the process of change from their role and everyday work situation. Every respondent was given rather a long time to recount how they viewed their own situation, work, the contents of their work, work organisation, learning, development, and threats and opportunities. Examples of unplanned questions were, for example, about sickness absence and competition exchange. These discussions led to new meetings with people off sick, retired employees and contacts with employment centres and temporary workers.

I used a tape recorder as often as possible and whenever respondents gave me permission, but to be on the safe side I also took notes during the entire interview. On a few interviews I had a colleague with me who could assist in taking notes. Sometimes it was not very practical to use a tape recorder for interviews, such as when I walked around the company and conducted interviews at different workstations where the noise levels could be very high. On a few occasions respondents asked me not to use a tape recorder. I had a habit of always summarising the content of the discussion after an interview to ensure that I had understood it correctly. After each interview the respondent was asked to comment on a preliminary script from the interview, often within one week of the interview being conducted. All interview information was commented on and approved after some corrections by respondents, and this applies to all work packages in the research project. In most cases I had contact by telephone with respondents after the interviews to discuss their comments, but sometimes e-mail correspondence was sufficient. In some cases it was necessary to carry out follow-up interviews to supplement the gathering of data in order to saturate theoretical categories (Bryman & Nilsson 2002:314; Starrin 1996:113).

There was a specific aim in quickly sending scripts of the interview information to respondents. My viewpoint was that respondents would have a greater chance of remembering the contents of the interview if they could read scripts of the discussion as soon as possible. When one writes out notes neatly, there is always a risk that some parts of the interview are “forgotten”, since one does not have time to note everything that is said. It is my impression that all respondents read through the interview information very thoroughly. It was rather clear that they had examined the texts critically when I received their comments. Sometimes respondents asked me to clarify certain parts of the text where I had omitted important factual details. Sometimes they asked me to correct errors which had arisen when I had misunderstood information, or had heard wrongly. On some occasions they made their own corrections to the text, including supplementary text that described in detail what they considered was
important or what they wished to emphasise. For example, this could be
detailed descriptions of processes, detailed competence plans, detailed
information such as job descriptions etc. My opinion is that the respondents
attempted to give a correct picture of company activities and not to embellish
any details.

My experience is that all meetings with participants during the research process
were based on mutual respect. I was clear in my information to the participants
that I had a little knowledge of the steel and metal sector since both my
brothers and parents worked at a rolling mill in Bångbro until it was shut down
at the end of February 1987. Among other things I clearly recognised smells
and sounds from the many occasions that I had gone to the rolling mill with my
parents.

Data processing and analysis

With the background of the interactive approach in work package four, an
important part of the research process was to involve the participants before
and during the analysis of results. This step was important to validate the results
of the research project. The results from work package four were discussed at
both companies at different analysis seminars with union representatives. This
may sound like a simple procedure, but in reality it was problematic for several
reasons. The largest obstacle in creating reflective characteristics is that many
people do not believe they have knowledge that is valuable to share with others.
There is a blind faith among many "common” people in researchers knowing
everything. Sometimes it is even the case that researchers are considered to be a
little strange when they ask for others’ viewpoints. Creating an atmosphere in
which all participants really feel that their contribution has the same value as
that of the researcher takes time, and above all it requires that the relationship is
built on mutual respect and trust. In order to dare to relate and sometimes
criticise your own company’s activities, an individual must feel secure in the
situation. In other cases some of the participants have taken part in
international meetings, workshops and conferences where they have described
their own experiences of activities to researchers. This has required different
forms of support from researchers including help with translation, producing
overhead slides, coaching and other means of creating a secure situation.

Since several work packages were carried out in parallel during the entire
research project, the gathering of data, its interpretation, feedback and analysis
were conducted in several stages. This means that in each work package, the
gathering of data and its analysis took place in parallel and in interaction with
each other (Bryman & Nilsson 2002:375). The research results were tested
through systematic reflection at several levels (Alvesson 1994:12). We strived to
obtain an open and transparent research process in work package four
(Eikeland 2006:232) by setting up feedback and reflection sessions where the participants and researchers could critically examine the research results together. Results from all of the work packages in the research project were discussed in the research group at regular project meetings.

After the interview text was approved by respondents, I conducted an initial processing and analysis with the aid of open coding in which I categorised different concepts (Starrin 1996:109). The data gathered and its analysis was then supplemented by other source data such as policy texts, company information and statistics. Concepts and preliminary research results within the framework of work packages four and five were discussed at a transnational meeting and seminar in Stockholm in November 2003 with participants from the companies and all participants in the research project. One important lesson from this seminar and occasion for dissemination of information was that participants from other European countries noticed that the Swedish trade unions appear to have greater opportunities of influencing strategic decision-making at the organisational level. Another issue which became clear is that Swedish unions take responsibility for preparing their members who are about to become unemployed and that there is a clear link between union activities and political activities. After the seminar we continued to gather data, for which the concepts acted as a signpost in further gathering and sorting of data (Starrin 1996:110). After supplementary interviews, the results were analysed in the light of scientific theories and other knowledge, and the synthesis was presented as scientific reports. The written report was examined by the research group and was then sent to the participants of the project.

The process of gathering data and analysis for personnel off sick took a different course of events. The personnel department gave me access to relevant information about training programme they had developed for a group of employees on long-term sick leave. The course aimed to strengthen the self-esteem of the participants through learning how to communicate. The first time I met personnel off sick I carried out a group interview and asked all participants to fill in a questionnaire, which was aimed at evaluating the course which they had just participated in. In addition to the participants I also met the course leaders for interviews. I was able to look through the course material. At the second meeting I verified the preliminary results from interviews and the questionnaire responses. At this meeting I learned about the frustrations and future dreams of the participants. It was obvious that many of the participants had become stuck in their professional roles, which became an obstacle to their recovery. It became clear that the participants had ideas about how the company could help them back to working life. I summarised the results from the discussion with the preliminary results that I had presented to the group for a detailed analysis in which I also reflected on the results in relation to other relevant research. At the third meeting I verified the detailed analysis for the representatives of the company's personnel department and those off sick at a joint meeting. At this meeting a new understanding evolved of how the
company could develop new procedures and approaches to personnel off sick with the aim of promoting their return to work. It was clear that the employees’ expectations of measures by the company would not be particularly difficult to fulfil. By improving company procedures for how to organise activities and the dissemination of information, they would be able to offer long-term sick employees a social community. This feedback occasion was also documented and created the basis for a synthesis which is presented in the final report.

In addition to the feedback of interview results, we invited participants in the framework of the research project to analysis seminars where the preliminary results were discussed and analysed with other participants and researchers. The conference was held at the Arbetslivsinstitutet in Stockholm on 8 November 2003, with 43 participants. The research group, including union representatives from all participating countries, met to present and discuss results from the research project together with active union members from the Swedish case companies and one British case company. We also arranged one seminar day at Masugnen in Lindesberg on 2 April 2004 with about 80 participants. Participants from both companies were there together with representatives from Metall and Kommunal unions to share their experiences of learning in working life. The theme of the day was "The union as a force for development”.

Reflection on the study’s value, validity and self-critique

Before I developed work package four into a licentiate dissertation, I met union representatives from both companies to discuss and reflect on the results of the research. During the reflection seminars I learned that there were other factors that had influenced the restructuring process that I had missed in my analysis. I also met the representatives from the Metall union to discuss the research results with respect to the Metall union policy document about good work. This meeting led to me wanting to research how the trade union organisations can influence working conditions for their members. Working together with the other participants produced the impetus for new ideas and issues. In summary, after various dissemination activities such as analysis seminars, presentations and article reviews, I understood that by developing my theoretical framework of reference I could achieve a more profound understanding of the research results.

From my basic academic education in pedagogy I had gained a fundamental understanding of development and learning in working life that was based on theories about adult learning in a social context. This knowledge stood me in good stead in work package four, where many of the interview questions were related to describing and understanding how respondents viewed opportunities of development in work, competence and learning. Issues connected with
learning and development gave a natural start to discussions and created an interview situation where it was easier for the respondents to talk about changes that had taken place at the workplace during the restructuring process. But it is also possible that my limited theoretical frame of reference in the area of industrial relations contributed to the fact that my analysis, primarily in my licentiate dissertation, had limited theoretical depth resulting in conclusions that were at least partially commonsensical interpretations (Alvesson 1994:72) which may have resulted in that research results gave an oversimplified picture of reality, almost to the point where there were no conflicts between employers and employees. The particular relationships between the parties in developing companies should have been contextualised more clearly and related to conditions in society.

The different work packages in the research project have no gender perspective. When I started my duty as research assistant I lacked the knowledge of how to use the gender perspective in research. In later research projects (Svensson et al. 2007a) I learned that in working life there are great differences between the genders, particularly with respect to work-related sickness absence. The relatively high absence of women compared to men can be partially explained by women's relatively high total workload when work at home is added to paid work as an employee, but also to other issues such as division of work, participation, variation and scope of action, and how they vary between male and female workers. Applying a gender perspective, the starting point of my studies could have been to examine whether women handle changes at work differently from men, or whether changes cause different consequences for women compared to men. All interviews were carried out in a male dominated environment, which may have influenced interview data. In the steel and metal sector the proportion of women workers in production is estimated at about ten percent. Those women that work in production tend to work as stockroom attendants, with quality control or as welders. Women also have white collar jobs and work in laboratories or in office jobs such as HR administrators, personnel assistants and financial assistants. The case studies indicate that women's work in production was different from men's tasks and this was particularly clear at one of the companies, Sweproc. The men worked in positions which required high qualifications, such as smelters in the steel works and workers in the rolling mill, while women worked in support functions such as laboratories and in quality control. Many female production workers held positions in the shipping department which was regarded by workers to have the lowest status in the whole factory. Work at the shipping department was physically strenuous; workers joined steel bars to bundles by wrapping heavy steel chains around the bars and moved them by overhead cranes in preparation for transport.

Parts of the theoretical framework in work package four were already determined during project planning since there was a clear link between the issues of the work package, method and theoretical framework (Ellström
I chose other theoretical starting points in the summary, partly to supplement the theoretical starting points presented earlier in the texts included in the thesis, and partly to be able to answer new questions.

An interactive approach assumes that the research process is carried out in cooperation with participants representing praxis in order to be able to access their knowledge and experience. According to Ellström it is recognised that close cooperation influences the results of a research project (Ellström 2007:4), but it may also be relevant to question if the close cooperation with participants has affected the validity of our research results? We have strived to validate the research results in different ways, partly with the participants’ knowledge and experience (Svensson 1996:220) through respondent validation (Bryman & Nilsson 2002:258) and partly with the research fraternity. We have carried this out at different analysis seminars where the participants’ viewpoints have been weighed into the analysis. The interactive approach in work package four has in our opinion increased the validity of the research results since the research process has been open and transparent for all participants and thus assessed from other perspectives (Eikeland 2006:232). By critically reflecting on the preliminary research results with the participants, we created an open research process. Among other things we analysed accepted practice for perceiving concealed mechanisms that control actions. As an example, we analysed the unions’ real opportunities to influence strategic decisions in relation to union strategies, which emphasise good work and competence development. We believe in doing this that we increased the validity of the results since more participants apart from researchers were able to influence the analysis (Svensson et al. 2007:239).

Results from the research project have been presented and discussed in various scientific contexts since June 2002, and at these presentations I have been met by a high degree of recognition. This has also been the case when I have presented results to participants of the research project. These feedback sessions has created additional opportunities to validate research results (Svensson 1996:220) as the results and interpretations have been subjected to yet more scrutiny. The reasoning related to connections and interpretations becomes even more transparent and this openness can contribute to critical reflection.

One aim of the research project was that the results would lead to the development of new knowledge of general value, since the commission included a description of the significance of partnership for how one can (or should) handle restructuring processes within a particular sector in Europe. The project leader has summarised the research results from all parts of the project in a final report (Stuart 2005). The project resulted in large numbers of publications and dissemination events, including scientific articles published in national and international journals, anthologies, books and project summaries (refer to the list in Stuart 2005). Researchers at the Swedish partners in the
The results that we discussed at dissemination events were, among others, union strategies for lifelong learning (Randle & Svensson 2002b), learning in networks (Kevätsalo et al. 2003), team work in restructuring processes (Greenwood et al. 2005), (Randle & Svensson 2004) and union participation and taking on social responsibility (Randle & Hauneh 2008). Several of these contributions have reflected the tradition of "Industrial relations". Other experiences have been published as chapters in anthologies based on the pedagogical perspective "Workplace Learning" (Svensson & Randle 2006). I have taken part on an expert panel organised by the EU (Cedefop, Thessaloniki 2006) to spread experience about how to utilise older labour. These research results are reported in the Swedish interim report from work package five (Randle & Heinemann 2004), and are also published in anthologies (Randle 2006, Cedefop 2008). I have been invited to participate on various international expert panels for disseminating research results, including Leeds 2008, Paris 2008 and Quebec 2008. All expert panels have had the theme of learning in working life, specialising in partnerships, older people in working life and professional training.

This means that knowledge developed during the research project has come to use at the individual level, organisational level and with the research fraternity. Among other things, research results from Sweden have contributed to researchers in Scotland starting their own research project to promote better conditions in the working life for low educated, long-term unemployed and older workers14. Different forms of research cooperation and trainee cooperation have been developed as a result of the Learnpartner project15. Participating companies have used the information to change various procedures in their business activities, and at the individual level, several participants have reinforced their self-confidence after taking part in activities in which their knowledge and experience was valued.

It is important to be self-critical in a thesis. My own reflection concerns how to act to create a common understanding regarding interactive research in transnational projects. We had to abandon the idea of the interactive approach for all participating countries’ studies in the fourth work package, but despite this we solved the overall task of producing information about partnerships and restructuring processes. In spite of the fact that sociological research based on interactivity and cooperation with participants is subject to much criticism and skepticism (Ellström 2007) I remain convinced of its benefits when conditions
exist for such cooperation. In later research projects I have seen confirmation of the intrinsic value of creating meeting places for different issues, between people in different roles, jobs and positions in network-type learning environments (Svensson et al. 2007a). The capacity to think critically about your own activities increases when you have the opportunity of comparing your everyday activities to others; moreover, it is possible to learn to dare to talk about your own activities in self-critical terms. This critical capacity can be converted into individual and organisational development competence.

Even though the results of the research project have been analysed and discussed on several occasions together with the participants from industry, the synthesis and presentation in this thesis text was my own task, which means I alone am responsible for the final analysis and conclusions reported in this thesis. The knowledge, however, has been developed in cooperation with other participants.
3 Article presentation

In this section there is a brief summary of the different texts included in the dissertation. The summary describes the main issues in the texts and gives a short report on the results.

I am the sole writer of the licentiate dissertation and I wrote the article in EJIR together with Ian Greenwood at Leeds University Business School, where we both contributed equally to the text produced. I was the main author of the article in Arbetsmarknad och arbetsliv, which I wrote together with Lennart Svensson, research director at APel. FoU and professor of sociology at Helix, Linköping University.

A partnership approach – strategies for organisational change

This text (Randle 2005) describes the results of restructuring processes at two Swedish companies, A and B. The main issue in this report concerns the ways in which union organisations contributed to developing strategies for the restructuring process and a description of the role of learning in the process of change. Both companies had succeeded in their restructuring work in that they had handled the threat from the global market by strengthening the companies’ competitiveness, and at the same time had kept many jobs even though a large number of employees were made redundant.

The licentiate dissertation is based on case studies at two companies and is built on the experiences of managers, union representatives and employees with respect to restructuring work from mainly three aspects: organisation of the work, work teams, and learning. Large parts of the text give space for the participants’ accounts in the form of citations, and describe how the union representatives and employees view the restructuring work.

The two case companies operate under different conditions in the form of context in society and production environment, and thus have different conditions for handling competition on the global market. They manufacture different products for different markets and customers, and they do not compete with each other. The greatest difference between the companies is that the one company ”A” manufactures steel which is rolled into bars and subsequently loaded onto different vehicles for transportation to customers. Customers are price-sensitive and buy when they are able to purchase the best quality at the lowest price. Manufacturing takes place in steps with the aid of process technology, in which the manufacturing process to a large extent
controls both the pace of work and its flow. Exceptions are reject classification, interim stocks and loading. In the second company “B” large vessels are manufactured for use in pulp manufacturing. Customers are not price-sensitive, but place high demands on auxiliary services and delivery security. The vessels are manufactured in a mechanical workshop, which is adapted to the size and number of the vessels.

However, both companies have certain common denominators, including the fact that work teams played an important role during the execution of restructuring work. Through the versatility of the employees, working teams have created importance prerequisites for the restructuring process, including flexibility in production. The companies are highly flexible through the versatility of their employees, i.e. the companies have high flexibility because their employees are flexible. The employees are able to cover for each other (numeric flexibility), they know each other's duties and jobs (functional flexibility), they have a great deal of knowledge and they have the will and capacity to learn, and can therefore develop the companies' capacity. Despite the many similarities, it is clear that there are many differences between the companies, above all in their view of how the restructuring process can be carried out.

Company A has chosen a low-cost and high-quality strategy, in which the approach was changed to manufacture steel of high quality at competitive prices. This was achieved by reducing manning levels in the work teams and moving parts of production to other areas. Instead of manufacturing steel and waiting for it to be sold, which ties up capital, the company has changed to manufacturing-to-order and has introduced a database system for stock control in the rolling mill to match manufacturing and dispatch to order.

In the second company B, manufacturing has also been changed to order instead of, as previously, manufacturing standard products to stock. By raising the competence of its employees, the company was able to change production to only manufacturing and selling special products for the pulp industry on the world market.

The unions at the two companies were involved in the restructuring process to different extents. In company A the local branch of the Metall union was given information about decisions made by the company management as well as the task of handling the consequences of these decisions for employees – including the process of negotiating layoffs. In company B the local branch of the Metall union played an active role in decisions as well as execution. Among other things they developed a system for developing the competence of employees.

The licentiate dissertation describes the consequences of the restructuring processes for the employees. Opportunities for employees’ learning and development at work were influenced at both companies, but in different ways.
In company A time and opportunities for learning were decreased, partly as a result of manning cutbacks but also as a result of management strategy for execution. Through partnership, the union and employer both drove a conscious strategy to include time for learning as part of work at company B. This was to reinforce the company's competence and ability to handle future restructuring processes. In company A the restructuring process also had other consequences including the intensification of work, a decrease in the autonomy of work teams and increasing sickness absence.

The licentiate dissertation also discusses how different strategies for restructuring processes can lead to the development of sustainable organisations, or organisations that have intensive work systems based on the concepts of high road and low road. My analysis concludes that at company A work was intensified partly because fewer employees manufacture more steel (without corresponding improvements in technology), and because there is less time for learning and socialising with workmates. At company B development did not take place at the expense of the employees’ work environment. At this company both the union and the employer created conditions for the employees to develop at work and members of the work teams take a large part of the responsibility for developing employees’ competences.

In the conclusions I discuss how the unions had such different roles in the restructuring processes. I argue that it depends on the change competence of the union organisation, their knowledge of the world at large, participation in networks, and the union's composition in the form of participation, all in relation to the attitude of the company management to partnership. The answer to the research question in work package four and the conclusions in the licentiate dissertation are therefore that company A lacks favourable conditions for handling the restructuring processes through partnership between union and employer. In addition there is a risk that the company will suffer from competence losses since there is no time for learning and no system for competence development. At company B the union and employer have together created better conditions for handling future restructuring processes through their partnership, since their strategies include time for learning and setting up systems for competence development.

Teamworking, Restructuring and Skills in UK and Sweden

This article (Greenwood & Randle 2007) is based on the results of case studies in work package four, in which companies from Scotland, Norway and England were included. The first draft of the article was presented at the second CTEE conference (Conference on Training, Employment and Employability) held in Prato in September 2005. The aim of the article was primarily to describe and compare how restructuring processes had influenced teamworking, working
teams, learning and industrial relations. In the first version of the article results were included from Norwegian case studies. Unfortunately we were not able to use the results from the Norwegian case studies because the criteria we set up for comparisons were lacking in the Norwegian studies. We had to accept describing and comparing results from case studies in Sweden and Britain based on case studies at six companies in the steel and metal sector: the two Swedish companies Sweproc and Sweeng (the same companies as described in the licentiate dissertation) and the four British companies, UKA, UKB, UKC and UKD. In 2006 and the beginning of 2007 the text was re-edited before publication in a special issue of the European Journal of Industrial Relations (EJIR). This special issue contained articles describing research results from the Learnpartner project.

The article mainly describes how teamworking has been influenced by restructuring processes in the six case companies from the perspectives of learning and autonomy, and how relations between management and unions (industrial relations) have influenced work teams’ potential for dealing with restructuring processes.

The starting point of the article is to examine whether it is possible to see any differences in how work teams are influenced by restructuring processes as a result of expectations regarding national stereotypes of teamworking and industrial relations. We were also to examine in what way these stereotypes create differences in conditions for employees in work teams. Stereotypes were assumed to have their roots in historical background factors such as national systems for industrial relations, but also in how work teams have been used in industry. Swedish companies are expected to form work teams with high degrees of autonomy due to a socio-technical attitude to work teams. This was not expected to apply to British companies.

The expected stereotypes that will be tested are: Swedish companies use work teams partly to describe autonomous workgroups as a form of organisation but also to describe teamwork as a way of working. Work teams at British companies are used to describe a form of organisation for versatile workers where the total competence of the work team will increase its functional flexibility. The work team is not expected to have a high degree of autonomy but is steered and controlled by company management, which means that the way of working is not characterised by autonomous workgroups. With respect to industrial relations we start with the following stereotypes: in Sweden, relations between union and employer are characterised by harmony whereas in Britain relations are characterised by conflict. We use these stereotypes as analytical categories in the article.

Data is analysed with the aid of the selected analytical concepts. We compare how theoretical concepts of autonomy, learning, teamwork and industrial relations can be described in relation to their empirical counterparts.
The analysis shows that the context at the company or workplace in relation to management strategy will determine the conditions for how work teams are used and influenced by the restructuring process, and this will also influence how the work team can control the organisation of teamworking. National contexts do not have any great significance for how work teams are used, even though the Scandinavian model is expected to give greater space to autonomy in Swedish work teams. Product markets, price pressing and the company’s competition situation will largely determine what conditions are created for work teams. However, the results support the hypothesis that there is more space for autonomy in Swedish work teams compared with those at British companies, but also that autonomy in Swedish work teams is not a matter of course. Results showed that when Swedish companies change owners, relations between union and employer may change towards confrontation (conflict). In this case relations between union and employer will more similar to the British tradition, if we look at national stereotypes. This change in Swedish industrial relations influences how union organisations are given conditions for influencing restructuring processes in the long term. The Swedish case studies show, in comparison to the British studies, that autonomy in work teams may be decreased, to be replaced instead by increased control from company management.

The article shows that restructuring processes have variously influenced work teams through either decreased or increased time for learning, decreased or increased autonomy, improved or deteriorated relations between union and management, both in Sweden and in Britain. The English case studies describe examples of employees’ resistance to company management strategies. As a result of the introduction of work teams, employees share their resistance by refusing to work when problems arise in production.

The analysis shows that work teams have been important factors in the success of restructuring processes. The analysis also shows that restructuring processes have influenced teamworking in different ways, through increased or decreased autonomy amongst other things.

**Team work and restructuring – self-exploitation or empowerment?**

This article (Randle & Svensson 2007) is also based on the results from Sweproc and Sweeng (the same companies as described in the licentiate dissertation), in which teamworking is an important part of work organisation. The article describes the unions and the employees' view of the consequences of restructuring work in the form of decreased self-determination and autonomy, as well as increased absence levels in one of the case study
companies. The research results show that restructuring processes have influenced work teams and the employees’ situation in different ways in the two companies. In this article the two authors attempt to answer the question of whether the use of work teams in restructuring processes leads to exploitation or empowerment of employees.

At Sweproc, the new owners have decreased the influence of work teams by introducing a new control system. This has led to less autonomy and fewer opportunities for learning at work. Work teams only control that the right (key) persons are available for the right function in the workflow. Work teams take a large responsibility for delivering the right product quality, but lack influence when recruiting personnel for work teams. Restructuring work has focused on quickly reducing costs by cutting down on personnel, but also by decreasing stock costs and wastage. This means that employees experience an increased workload since work teams were drained of skilled workers when one quarter of the employees were laid off. As a result of the layoffs and the intensification of work, employees feel that they are dispensable and considered as a cost by the management despite management rhetoric that their versatile employees are the company’s most important resource. The lean organisation decreases the capacity of work teams to learn new skills since there is no time for learning and the social network has been weakened.

Company management does not invite the union to discussions or negotiations about goals or resources for restructuring work. Instead the management uses the union to spread information to its members. The union has few options to influence these traditional management tasks and as a result employees and the union have lost confidence in the management. Since there are fewer people in each work team employees have little influence on their working conditions. The employees see worse to come in the future since they are worried that fewer people must do more work, more employees are off sick and there is no development of competence. Employees are worried that the versatility in work teams will be threatened since there is no time for learning and job rotation. This worry is compounded by the threats to social cohesion among the work teams. The analysis shows that the positive financial development took place at the expense of the employees’ working conditions and work situation.

At Sweeng the situation looks a little different and teamwork there is characterised by cooperation in the work teams, which plan the workflow together. This joint planning is particularly important when the manufacture of new products is being planned since the workflow is estimated for each element of the manufacturing process. Work teams organise and introduce changes to the workflow, develop procedures for the work and plan the manning for the different work teams. They also take responsibility for mapping the competence requirements of employees and planning learning time in working hours. The autonomy of work teams gives them the opportunity of challenging the current
ways of working and creating the will to replace these with completely new work methods.

The union has a large influence in how the restructuring work will be carried out, which reinforces members’ confidence in the union. The fact that the union is active in restructuring work enables the employees to understand arguments for this work more easily. The employees have become accustomed to handling changes continuously since the company needs to adapt manufacturing to customers’ new demands. Manufacturing new products thus puts demands on the employees to maintain and develop their competencies. The union drives a proactive approach to development work and actively contributes to improving the company's competitiveness, partly through creative solutions to product development and partly through process innovations. Company management at the group level recognizes the employees’ competence and management at the local level utilises the employees’ creativity. This takes place by continuously creating opportunities for competence development and learning at work and outside work. Work teams are used as a means of achieving wider influence in change work for all employees. The analysis shows that the employees have the opportunity of influencing their everyday situation at work not only through increased autonomy but also through more empowerment.

In the final discussion the authors reason that when the work teams are used as a means of streamlining the organisation and cutting costs, it may lead to members of the work teams being exploited. This happens when the perspective of restructuring is focused on short-term rationalisation and cost hunting. When management strategies mean fewer opportunities for autonomy in work teams and decreased authority despite responsibility for production, we consider that the work teams are being exploited. When work teams are used to develop company organisation with a broader and more long-term aim, this can lead to increased empowerment for the members of work teams. This presupposes that the work teams have resources and the authority to influence overall conditions at the company.

The answer to the question whether teamwork leads to exploitation or empowerment is therefore neither categorically yes or no; instead we find that it depends on the context, which in turn is determined by leadership, traditions, values, organisational structure, partnerships and relations to the outside world. Teamwork can lead to both empowerment and exploitation.

**From results to more reflections and new questions**

The short summaries of each text show the results from work package four in the research project that treats a number of issues. Even though I have received
many answers to the questions which have been taken up in the various texts, I can see that there are more questions which have not been answered yet. I shall briefly describe which areas I believe need to be looked at further.

The research results show that the two companies have "succeeded" in their restructuring process at the organisational level, but the results show that the restructuring process resulted in different consequences for employees at the two companies. Despite the fact that the restructuring process has contributed to many of the employees at one of the companies having a tougher work situation, the representatives of the Metall union consider that both companies could be seen as good examples of successful restructuring processes. The union representatives gave three main common arguments for viewing the companies as good examples:

1. the union had played an important role in the restructuring process
2. many jobs remained at both companies despite a number of layoffs
3. both companies had reinforced their market position
And for Sweproc there was a fourth argument:
4. the union organisations, together with the company management, had made a successful effort to alleviate the effects of layoffs some years earlier.17

These are of course important arguments, but was the case that simple? Both companies had survived the restructuring process and had responded to market demands by reducing the costs of manufacturing or by developing their range of products. The survival of the companies was secured and they could continue to sell their products on the European and international market. Despite the arguments of the union representatives, the results showed that the union organisations at the two companies had different conditions for participating in the restructuring process, and the employees’ situation and working conditions were different at the two companies. However, the results do not show in a satisfactory way why these differences had arisen. The union representatives gave me some clues to how these differences may have arisen when I carried out reflection seminars on both case study companies during spring 2005. The members of the local union considered that my description was “unfairly” drawn. I asked the union representatives to help me to understand in what way the material was unfair, and they took up differences in production processes, placement and competence development which constituted both obstacles and prerequisites for restructuring work. After the reflection seminars I understood that there were more factors that created obstacles and prerequisites for the restructuring process which I had “missed” in my analysis. It is now necessary to deepen my analysis in the summary and broaden the issues examined, partly to understand the research results and partly to be able to explain how these differences arose at the organisational and individual levels.
New issues in the summary

Bearing in mind the remaining reflections that I formulated about the results from the licentiate dissertation and the articles, I now pose three new research questions:

1. What factors at the organisational level have influenced the management of the restructuring process in the Swedish example companies?
2. In what ways have these factors constituted obstacles or created favourable conditions for the restructuring process in the companies?
3. How have the company management and the trade union representatives acted in relation to these factors and in what way have their actions contributed towards creating different outcomes at the organisational and individual levels?

The results in this summary may improve the understanding of how both companies, despite the fact that they are considered to have been successful in their restructuring processes from an organisational perspective, have such different results with respect to consequences for their employees.
4 Results

In this section I shall attempt to answer the new research questions. I will introduce the section by describing a simple model for restructuring processes. This model will be used throughout the results section and constitutes a structure for a systematic presentation of different factors that can influence the restructuring process in its different phases; refer to figure 1.

What factors affect restructuring processes?

Structural changes force companies to adapt for reasons beyond their control. There are many different factors that can create conditions or hinder organisations and their leaders from coping with restructuring processes. External factors in the world around the company, such as changes in environmental legislation, may influence the conditions under which the company is cost effective by influencing the company's costs for transportation, for example. Other external factors that may force companies to adapt may include unexpected cost increases caused by energy crises or changes in the supply of raw materials. Currently topical factors that influence companies’ ability to compete on the world market are access to capital and credit conditions, and the effects of the global recession on real economics. These factors may contribute to a company having difficulties in selling its products on the market. Such difficulties are multiplied when price-sensitive customers choose to purchase products from competitors in low-cost countries. An internal factor which can determine a company’s ability to handle new demands is the competence and readiness to change among both management and employees.

Steps in the restructuring process

I will use Lewin’s model for change processes to illustrate and describe restructuring processes as if they take place in three steps (Lewin & Cartwright 1951). In reality, restructuring processes are a more complex procedure in which the different steps cannot clearly be delimited from each other, but it can be valuable for analytical reasons to simplify descriptions as if the activities in different phases can be separated from each other. The three steps constitute different phases in the restructuring process where one phase merges into another. The Lewin model for change processes is based on a planning phase, followed by an execution phase and completed with a stabilisation phase.
In order to plan a restructuring process, it is necessary to assume the possibility of knowing in advance what activities will be included in the different steps of the restructuring work. In reality this demand creates problems for the business, above all if the business intends to develop something new which has not previously been tried within the business. In Lewin’s model (Ibid) the three phases are called, “unfreeze”, “change/transition” and ”refreeze”; refer to figure 1.

According to Lewin’s model, the phases have different significance during the change process, above all in creating readiness for change at the individual and collective level. In order to succeed in change processes, people affected by the change need to:

- have an opportunity to prepare for change work, in the planning phase,
- be active joint creators in change work, both in thoughts and in actions, during the execution phase,
- have the opportunity of adapting to the changes in the stabilisation phase.

In order to execute change processes, individuals in an organisation need to change their attitudes and approaches to everyday practice and question prevailing work methods and routines. In the unfreeze phase ingrained methods of working and routines must be made evident to the organisation’s members and then questioned. Through critically examining activities it is possible to create increased understanding among organisation members of the need for change. In this phase the needs for change must be documented and alternative work methods and routines proposed. In the change/transition phase, planned changes are executed - which may mean that individuals break with ingrained work methods and routines. The rate at which this takes place depends on how long the organisation's members need to adapt to the changes which are to be introduced. If the organisation's members cannot see all of the opportunities or advantages to be gained by introducing the new work methods and routines, they will not leave the old ones. In the refreeze phase, new work methods and routines should be part of everyday business activities and no longer questioned by the organisation's members. The last phase does not mean that the new patterns of action become permanent, but emphasises that every new phase of change needs to be completed and frozen before the next phase of unfreeze can be started. When Lewin developed his model he based the model on psychological perspectives of how individuals handle change.
processes, which builds on the assumption that when individuals go through changes they also need to change their attitudes to reality.

Lewin's model is often used to describe episodic change processes (Weick & Quinn 1999:372). Between periods of change there is stability. But there are other ways of describing change processes. Weick describes a model for constant changes that contains three phases "Freeze", "Rebalance" and "Unfreeze" (Ibid:379). The model assumes that businesses constantly go through changes and therefore the phases have different meaning for the change process compared to Lewin's model for change processes. The first phase is freezing the process in order to identify the process of change, the second phase relates to identifying possibilities in order to focus the change process and the third phase allows the process to continue with reinforced power of development (Ibid:379). Lewin's model for episodic changes is more suitable to use for my analysis since each company describes the restructuring process as a result of strategic decision-making. Restructuring work was an interruption of the ordinary running of the business and stability. In the next section I will show how different factors affect the restructuring process in the planning phase.

**Factors in the planning phase**

According to Lewin's model, the restructuring process is introduced by the unfreeze phase, meaning that activities must be analysed and critically examined, among other reasons to question ingrained attitudes and notions of practice. Included in this phase are preliminary studies and planning of the restructuring process, and descriptions of what measures the organisation needs to take to comply with new demands. With the support of results I will show how different factors in the planning phase influence the restructuring process, and these are summarised in figure 2.

![Diagram of planning phases](image)

**Figure 2. Summary of important factors in the planning phase**
I start this section by describing management strategies as an important factor and a prerequisite for the restructuring process.

Management strategies
Management can develop strategies for future restructuring processes that contain descriptions of aims and goals of the restructuring work (why it must be done), a description of the measures included in the restructuring work (what must be done), a description of how the restructuring work will be executed (how it must be done) and finally a description of how the work will be followed up (are we on the right path?). In this text I have chosen to use two concepts for describing strategic choice by the management: "high road” and "low road”. I have chosen these concepts as they can be used in relation to the concept of sustainable development. The research project shows that the restructuring process can lead to different outcomes at the organisation level and individual level, and that the work situation for the employees is affected in different ways. By using the concepts of high road and low road I can show how company management considers the work situation of employees when they draw up their strategies, which means that I wish to show if management strategies include both organisational perspectives and individual perspectives. In order to show how the concept of sustainable development can be useful in this thesis I need to define it.

As the thesis deals with restructuring processes and their consequences, the definition of sustainable development will comprise a resource perspective; semantically, sustainable development means meeting daily needs without the risk of compromising future resources. In working life sustainable development means that business and their processes will create and regenerate human resources rather than consume them. Sustainable development also means that demands in the long run can be balanced with accessible resources or that new resources can be created to balance new demands (Hvid 2006:31, Svensson et al. 2007:13).

Based on this definition of sustainable development I assume that ”high road” strategies focus on other goals in the business than “low road” strategies. My interpretation of high road strategies is that company management makes strategic plans for the business that include both economic and humane aspects, meaning that people as individuals are not consumed as resources in the emerging work systems – instead, new resources are generated. Docherty and Huzzard understand high road strategies as those leading to developing work and work systems which provide space for individuals’ need to develop and provide opportunities for employees to control their work (Docherty & Huzzard 2003:152). High road strategies may also mean that business activities develop new products or introduce new service functions (Shapiro 2001:10) as new resources are created to match new demands.
Based on my definition of sustainable development I assume that low road strategies instead focus on reaching instrumental targets in the organisation. Docherty and Huzzard describe low road strategies with the assumption that company management makes short-term plans on the basis of profitability demands (Docherty & Huzzard 2003:153) which may mean that follow-up of profits in monthly and quarterly accounts become important control signals to the management about the status of the organisation. Based on low road strategies, the development of work is such that people operate as one of many resources (cogs) in a machine-like work system, and people are regarded as being part of the organisation. Human values have therefore no place in management strategies. With low road strategies, rationalisation in these work systems may lead to the intensification of work and that people as a resource may be consumed (Docherty et al. 2002:5), since human values are not given priority in relation to financial results.

Cutting costs is part of low road strategies which may lead to tasks at work being broadened but it does not lead to the enrichment of work (Shapiro 2001:9); this happens when employees carry out more tasks at work without it leading to any professional development or career development. In certain cases restructuring is synonymous with strategies to decrease the labour force and to introduce a leaner organisation (Wilkinson 2005:1081, Farrell & Mavondo 2004). Farrell & Mavondo claim that management can choose between two strategies to achieve cost advantages with the help of a leaner organisation: a re-orientation strategy or a convergence strategy (Farrell & Mavondo 2004:385). A re-orientation strategy means that the management changes the company’s basic functions and processes in order to comply better with external demands, which may mean entering new markets and the development of products and services. Convergence strategy means that management decreases costs in the business through cuts in the workforce. High road strategies may lead to the development of both organisations and individuals, whereas low road strategies focus on achieving instrumental goals in the organisation in which individuals are considered as a means to an end.

The results show that the management at Sweproc and Sweeng made different strategic choices, but also that they had different conditions under which to make these choices. The new manager at Sweproc had to plan the restructuring process as soon as he started work. The management chose a low road strategy for the restructuring work and carried out rapid cost cuts with the help of a slimline organisation in accordance with the principles of Lean Production. By rationalizing the manufacturing process through downsizing and more profitable orders, the company was able to refine production and reduce costs for steel manufacturing. The management strategies also meant that manufacturing was to order, which is a prerequisite for Lean Production. This part of the restructuring process would not give cost benefits as quickly as reduced personnel since the company needed to introduce new systems for control of production and move parts of production to a factory in another
area. At Sweproc the management give priority to instrumental values in work when they draw up their low road strategies for the restructuring process (Hvid & Lund 2002:11), in which the concept of sustainable development has an instrumental and technocratic meaning.

At Sweeng the restructuring process was caused by the company being divided, and it needed to create its own niche and position on the market. With high road strategies for the restructuring process, the company's management could respond to market demands and reorganise production by involving work teams in the development work. High road strategies increase a company's capacity to develop new forms of work when moving in uncharted territory (Edwards et al. 2002:88). With the aid of the management's high road strategy, they chose a path which created conditions for long-term development by re-orienting activities, from their perspective, towards a sustainable alternative. The employees and the union were involved in discussions from an early stage, which implies that the management showed an interest in the employees’ viewpoints on restructuring work. A prerequisite for sustainable development is that the management has reflective leadership, and one expression of reflective leadership is when the management enables other perspectives based on different rationalities are also valued in the business operations and development as a complement to the management perspective (Hvid & Lund 2002:13). This may mean that employees’ ideas lead to developing work in the direction of sustainability (Ibid:11) to a greater extent than when management makes all the decisions. This means that in order to illustrate similarities and differences between management goals and interests and employees’ interests in organisational changes, there must be space for discussions.

**Process planning**

To be able to control restructuring processes, they must be planned and documented. As well as goals for restructuring work, plans may contain a description of elements included in the process which constitute a basis for control. How the restructuring process is planned and controlled may be described from two perspectives of management and control: either a planning strategy or an activation strategy (Svensson & von Otter 2001:13). When management uses a planning strategy, planning starts at the top of the organisation and is executed through various activities in a downward process in the organisation. Grossly simplified, this means that the members of the organisation are not able to influence the goal of the change process and they merely carry out activities according to plan. A planning strategy which emanates from the top of the organisation excludes the bottom-up perspective during the planning work. The planning strategy is appropriate to use in cases where there are clear elements in the development process and when it is easy to navigate towards the goal.
If company management wishes to create space for a bottom-up perspective on restructuring processes, they may use an activation strategy (Svenssson & von Otter 2001:48). In this case employees’ creativity, experience and knowledge can be utilised in the change work. When change processes are based on participants in business activities proposing ideas and executing changes together, it is more difficult to plan the process since development work is dependent on participants having sufficient time and resources to leave their current work and take time for development work. Many organisations implement several change projects at the same time, which can make inroads on participants’ interest and involvement and in the worst case taking part in different development projects may be experienced as forced (Svensson et al. 2007a:35). By combining a planning strategy with an activation strategy, the change process can be planned as an organisational, total solution at the same time as it creates space to activate members’ interests.

The planning process around the restructuring process at Sweproc can be described as based on a planning strategy. Management formulated proposals for change and made all decisions. The management decided how the restructuring work would be carried out and the decisions were executed in a downwards process in the organisation. Neither employees nor the union were given any opportunity to influence the situation or put forward proposals.

At Sweeng the restructuring process was envisaged as a combination of planning and activation strategies. The management cooperated with the union and employees to create space for their interests and experience. In addition, union representatives at Sweeng played an important role during the whole restructuring process, partly in maintaining other employees’ participation and partly through spreading information to employees about restructuring work.

**Evaluation and follow-up**

A restructuring process may be executed quickly or continue over a long period of time. The longer the process continues, the more difficult it is to evaluate its effects on the organisation and employees with any certainty since many other factors influence events in the organisation’s life (Vedung 1998:137). To find out how the restructuring process is progressing, management may follow-up restructuring work on the basis of targets set, which is a summative form of evaluation (Svensson et al. 2007a:80). If the management or union is interested in obtaining information about the long-term effects of the restructuring process, follow-up must be planned as one part of the entire restructuring work (Ibid:94). Learning evaluation (formative) differs from summative evaluation in several aspects, one of which being that the focus is on following processes and that it has a clear learning perspective based on continuous feedback from business activities (Ibid:78). An important part of follow-up work is the way in which company management uses knowledge and experience gained. Employee questionnaires are one instrument which may be an aid to management in
systematically following up changes in employees’ attitudes or viewpoints on workplace-related issues. This information can be used to identify areas of improvement at the workplace, such as employees’ perception of participation, control of work, work demands, stress, development potential or how they view support from the management etc. If follow-up work is organised as a learning process, the management can handle deviations in cooperation with union and employees by re-allocating resources, changing plans or even changing goals if necessary. With the aid of evaluations the management can gain information about completed change processes which can then be used for future activities such as correcting mistakes or reinforcing success (Vedung 1998:19) or judging whether measures taken had the desired effect (Ibid:9).

Since restructuring work at Sweproc was about decreasing the company’s manufacturing costs by around 20 percent\(^{18}\) and focusing manufacture on profitable orders, the management monitored cost developments at the company, capacity in production and profitability of orders. In order to support manufacturing, the management introduced various IT-based systems for quality improvements.

The focus on restructuring work at Sweeng concerned developing the company’s capacity to reorganise production through an adapted range of technology to be able to manufacture new products and the employees’ competence in being able to carry out new elements of work and auxiliary service. Their follow-up work focused on different quality criteria such as the introduction of new products as part of production, improvement measures, time taken from idea to finished product, expanded customer service and logistics.

**Communication strategies**

To create more participation in restructuring work, management can cooperate with employees or unions at the company. Participation consists of several components: partly it relates to those affected in the organisation being informed about current events at the workplace and employees being encouraged to participate through being given resources that can be used for influence. Earlier results show that the union plays an important role in restructuring processes from the influence perspective, in addition to having an important function in communicating at the company level. By developing strategies for communication the union can also increase employees’ knowledge of the restructuring process with the aim of decreasing their uncertainty and developing the organisation’s ability to manage restructuring work. Uncertainty can be defined as an individual’s inability to predict the consequences of choices or decisions, caused by lack of information (Paulsen et al. 2005:465).

The union can develop communication strategies in cooperation with the management or on their own. Management communication strategies may have
two different purposes: to inform employees about the restructuring process so that they can handle changes better or to create participation in order to increase employees’ control (Bordia et al. 2004a:513). By informing employees about the reasons for the restructuring process and how it influences the employees’ real work situation, the management can contribute to decreasing employees’ uncertainty and reducing their stress (Bordia et al. 2004b:347). But the management may have an interest in not spreading information about impending organisational changes to save employees from worrying about what may never happen (Tourish et al. 2004:490). When management communication strategies are aimed at increasing participation this means that employees will be given the opportunity of having increased control over change work, partly through increased knowledge of the reasons for the changes and partly to involve employees in change work (Bordia et al. 2004b:361). If management lacks communication strategies, rumours may be spread in the organisation (Bordia et al. 2004a:525) which can increase employees’ uncertainty and lead to their trust in the management decreasing (Mishra & Spreitzer 1998:584). Lack of control in work in combination with increased uncertainty about their own work situation may lead to an increased feeling of hopelessness and discontent (Paulsen et al. 2005:465) and may cause more work-related stress.

The management at Sweproc and Sweeng chose different communication strategies when they informed their employees about the restructuring process. At Sweproc the process went from deciding on the restructuring process to quickly informing the employees. The management informed employees and unions about the aim and contents of the restructuring work through established information channels. In this situation there was no opportunity for dialogue or negotiation, which meant that the employees did not receive information that gave them security or control. The union was then given the task of preparing employees for layoffs. The employees still had a fresh memory of the restructuring process that had been carried out two years previously and employees were worried about new layoffs and how it would affect their jobs and their work situation at the company. During the restructuring process various rumours circulated about redundancies. The union was given an important function in handling employees’ worries and decreasing their uncertainty.

Employees’ worries about the future were handled in a different way at Sweeng. The union followed up what was happening to people who had been given notice and informed those employees who would keep their jobs. The future looked bright even for those who were leaving the company, since there were plenty of jobs in the region. Everybody that was laid off found new work. Both the union and employer gave the same message to the employees and union members about the reasons for and the aim of the restructuring process. Both the union and the employer were clear in creating involvement in the
restructuring work, which contributed to reducing employees' uncertainty and boosted their control.

**Partnership**
The fact that unions play an important role in restructuring processes in Swedish companies is perhaps evident, since the Swedish model is built on partnership and cooperation between parties should be a natural part of workplace culture. Huzzard and Nilsson describe this tradition in the following way: "[…] partnership has been deeply embedded in the country’s unique institutions and high trust culture […]" (Huzzard & Nilsson 2004:104). This statement builds on the assumption that union influence makes a difference for development and that unions can influence decision making processes from a strategic position (Huzzard et al. 2004:25).

When management plans and carries out restructuring processes in cooperation with the union and employees, it is possible to prevent negative or unexpected consequences of restructuring work since partnership makes it possible for employees to influence developments (Karasek & Theorell 1990:236). At the same time, cooperation can lead to management, union and employees gaining important experience and knowledge about the results and effects of restructuring work. The employees can be an active force in restructuring work towards sustainability when they have real influence (Hvid 2006:233), but this presupposes that some form of exchange of experience takes place based on a dialogue between management and employees.

But as results have shown, it is not always evident that the union is able to participate in planning restructuring work. This can be explained in theoretical terms since the relationship between employees (union) and employer (owner) is such that in fundamental terms their interests are incompatible (industrial relations), which may be described as two different perspectives of this relationship - harmony or conflict (Noon & Blyton 2007:301-324). When unions and employers cooperate, irrespective of the starting point, and a relationship is established that is characterised by either harmony or conflict, we talk of a partnership. Restructuring processes that are based on high road strategies can increase the likelihood of cooperation between management and unions (Shapiro 2001:13).

I have linked the discussion to two metaphors to describe the relationship that exists between unions and management and which constitute the basis of partnerships: unions either dance with the management or they box with the management (Gregory & Nilsson 2004:5). When a union dances with the management, the partnership is based on the relationship being harmonious, which means that union and employer are able to reach agreements or find solutions through compromise. By describing one of the partners as leading the dance it is possible to illustrate that one party has a stronger position or more
power in relation to the other party. In certain cases the union may lead the
dance, when their knowledge and experience has a high value when decisions
are being made. When unions box with management, the partnership is based
on a relationship of conflict and the union and employer lack the capability of
sharing the same picture of reality. When a union boxes with management, the
role of the union is to take offensive action or negotiate hard with the
management with the aim of improving employees’ conditions. Boxing and
dancing alternate with each other and are not necessarily mutually exclusive

At Sweproc the relationship between the union and the employer had
deteriorated drastically after the restructuring process and was more based on
boxing than dancing. There was a clear conflict of interests between
management decisions and the interests of the employees, and the question is
how the relationship worked before the restructuring process. The unions said
that when the company changed ownership the relationship between the union
and the employer changed for the worse – in terms of the union’s ability to
influence the situation. The union had previously danced with the management
and they had the opportunity of participating in decision-making on strategic
company decisions. The new Finnish management did not have the same
interest at all in dancing with the union as had the previous owner. This attitude
towards cooperation with the union was made even clearer when the leadership
removed some of the managers that had traditionally cooperated with the
union. Instead of involving the unions at the planning stage of the restructuring
process, the management informed the union after decisions had been made
about the scope of the restructuring. In addition to draining work teams of
personnel, the restructuring process at Sweproc meant that fewer members of
the union were able to devote time to union work since they needed to
reinforce the manning in the work teams. When fewer union representatives are
able to take time for union work, the union’s position is weakened at the
company.

When Sweproc laid off more than one hundred employees in a restructuring
process two years earlier, the management had a different approach towards
cooperation with the unions, which meant they chose to dance with the union.
The company management listened to the ideas from the trade unions and
developed a resource centre in cooperation with union representatives and the
employment office, which was located at the work site. The aim was to create
better opportunities for those under notice to find other employment, partly by
providing opportunities to search for work during working hours and partly by
providing proximity to job centre service. Union representatives were present at
the resource centre to help their members apply for new jobs, training courses
or find other work19. The results were successful and almost half the people laid
off found other work within six months of being laid off.
At Sweeng there was an old tradition that the management danced with the union in questions concerning strategic decisions at the company, and they met regularly to discuss company strategy. Even after the restructuring process, relations were generally harmonious since union organisations had participated in planning and executing the restructuring process.

Political space
Union organisations have varying opportunities of influencing strategic decision-making even if relations between management and union are of the dancing type. Influence may be active or passive (Gardell & Svensson 1981:96) and determine how union influence takes place. When the union drives development issues on the basis of union strategies, they are active. When management seeks approval or legitimacy from the unions for actions already decided, union influence is passive in contrast to the situation when management creates opportunities for the union to influence decisions with a proactive aim. This type of influence is active, such as when the parties can agree on a common decision on paths taken in the restructuring process.

Union organisations have different conditions with respect to influencing management decisions. They can either influence management decisions from a position of power, or the union is subordinate to management decisions. When union members have knowledge and experience valued by management in decision-making, the union has a strong position at the company. The management is able to use the unions' potential to influence in a proactive fashion to arrange preventive measures and to improve readiness for the future. When this takes place, Huzzard says that the union is leading the dance (Huzzard 2004:231). When instead the company management leads the dance, they dominate decision-making and the union has a much weaker and more subordinate position. This type of dance is reactive and management dances with the union with the aim of gaining the union's approval of results, and they also have to adapt to management decisions. Reactive strategies may be based on an ad hoc approach with the aim of creating immediate readiness to handle current problems; refer to table 3.

Table 3. Boxing or dancing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unions’ power position</th>
<th>Dancing</th>
<th>Boxing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong union</td>
<td>Proactive strategies</td>
<td>Offensive boxing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak union</td>
<td>Reactive strategies</td>
<td>Defensive boxing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table drawn up after Huzzard (2004:231).
During the earlier cooperation on layoffs between the management and union at Sweproc, management was leading the union in the dance. Since the union has a weaker position in decision-making at Sweproc this means that management strategy for cooperation with the union is reactive. As management did not give unions the option of cooperating in issues related to the restructuring process, the union has a weak position in strategic decision making at Sweproc, refer to table 3. Nevertheless, from the members’ perspective the union is a strong representative of their members’ interests and at the time of the study the union at Sweproc still had strong support from its members. After the layoffs the union could only drive strategic issues at the company from a defensive position in the boxing ring, meaning that union influence became passive instead of active.

Management and union at Sweeng take turns to lead the dance. The union has taken part in developing proactive strategies for the company, including driving certain issues for its members that benefit both employees and the company - such as the development of an apprenticeship system at the workplace.

Functioning partnerships may be a strategically important resource in restructuring processes, but for the partnership to be successful relations between union and employer should be characterised by trust and respect. This means that discussions require both parties to show an interest in the other party’s arguments with the aim of achieving a dialogue (Hvid & Lund 2002:13). If relations are characterised by conflict and the parties are continuously in the boxing ring, these conditions are absent. At Sweproc the unions were not active in decision-making about the restructuring process in the role of strategic partners, but instead were forced to act as messengers of management decisions to the employees. Relations between employer and union did not have the required conditions for a dialogue. The union had to start negotiating with the management.

If relations are built on harmony in which the parties take turns to lead the dance, unions may have a strategic position in decision-making and create a situation where the union can act from a political space, which Huzzard calls “policy space” (Huzzard 2004:219). The union’s dance with the leadership at Sweeng has lead to the union having a strong position as strategic partner at the company and the union can act from a political space and thus influence decision-making at the company. Relations between management and union are built on trust, which creates good grounds for dialogue and active influence. The trust of unions and employees in the management constitutes the basis of a constructive dialogue in change management (Mishra & Spreitzer 1998:573). The union plays an important role in developing sustainable workplaces (Hvid & Lund 2002), where the participation of employees is concerned with developing the content of work from a holistic perspective rather than instrumental goals.
Summary of factors' influence in the planning phase

The analysis shows that the two companies had different conditions during the planning phase. But what conditions did the companies really have for readiness at the individual and collective levels?

Since their situation was acute, Sweproc had a worse starting point than Sweeng. The management had slim chances of planning for the restructuring process with the help of an activation strategy or through a partnership since the time required for discussions and dialogue did not exist. This meant that employees at Sweproc did not have an opportunity of preparing for the restructuring process. Nor was it possible for the employees to gain their own understanding of the acute situation at the company or the need for restructuring work. The employee's unawareness of the need for restructuring work was reinforced by the lack of information from the management. Reductions in cost were demanded to increase profitability. A low road strategy meant a downsized labour force and thus cost cuts and the introduction of lean production, allowing customer orientation of manufacturing and sales. Management strategies for the restructuring process were focused on increasing profits in order for the business to survive the crisis.

The management strategies at Sweeng were based on both profitability and humane perspectives and focused the restructuring work on changing the business. High road strategies made it possible to solve the problems of the business without compromising the employees' interest in development. Good cooperation between the management and union created the necessary conditions for dialogue. By participating in the restructuring work, employees were able to prepare and understand the need for such work.

At Sweproc the relationship between company management and union was characterised by conflict, which also influenced the management when they communicated their decisions. The management increased the conflict between the two parties' interests through their choice of not cooperating with the union. This meant that communication by the management was more based on informing employees of decisions than creating participation.

At Sweeng the relationship between the employer and union was characterised by harmony, which provided favourable conditions for dialogue about planning and execution of restructuring work. During the restructuring phase the union had a strategic position with the management since they had the opportunity of influencing management decisions in strategically important factors.

The analysis shows that the factors in the planning phase create different preconditions at individual level in the restructuring process. Employees at Sweproc had poorer conditions for understanding the need for a restructuring process than did employees at Sweeng. Relations between the union and management influenced the information given to employees about the
restructuring work and the way in which employees could prepare for this work. The lack of information and participation in planning at Sweproc caused anxiety about the process of change, made worse by the management's one-sided pursuit of cost cuts. At Sweeng the employees were activated in the planning phase, helping to assuage their worries and increase their understanding of the need to change business operations.

In the next section I will show what factors influenced the restructuring process in the execution phase.

Factors in the execution phase

To emphasise the significance of change, the execution phase is called "change/transition" in accordance with Lewin's model. When restructuring processes are carried out, work is aimed at introducing various types of changes to business operations. But to change routines or working methods that already function, one requirement is that the organisation's members understand the need for change or they can see that the new working methods have advantages compared with the old ones. In practice people need different amounts of time to readjust their ways of working. However, it can be difficult in practice to wait for employees to adjust, which means that restructuring processes are carried out without everybody involved being completely convinced of their advantages. By first changing methods of working, individuals are sometimes able to change their ways of thinking about how work is carried out. To be successful in restructuring work it is necessary that the majority of an organisation's members adopt new working methods and routines though, otherwise there is a risk that activities will return to their original status in the stabilisation phase (Lewin & Cartwright 1951). In other words, for restructuring work to achieve planned results, members of an organisation need to change their ways of working and routines as a result of understanding the need for change, which in the best case leads to them consciously abandoning ingrained methods of work and routines in favour of new methods. In this section I will show what factors influence the execution phase of the restructuring process with the support of results obtained, these being summarised in figure 3.
During the execution phase decisions from the planning phase are put into action and various activities carried out with the aim of achieving stated objectives. In this phase the employees’ role in restructuring work becomes operative and clear, and they may influence or be influenced by the process. I will introduce this section by describing how changes are carried out in organisations.

**Work organisation**
Restructuring processes mean organisational changes and in this context restructuring work brought changes to the work teams. One way to facilitate organisational changes within the framework of restructuring may be to improve the capacity of the organisation to respond to new demands. By creating a flexible organisation both people and the organisation can readjust as required. Work teams are expected to solve all manner of problems in organisations (Drew & Coulson-Thomas 1997:163), but are mostly used as a means of achieving organisational goals (Thompson & Wallace 1996:105). With flexible and versatile work teams, a company can increase its flexibility at the same time as employees’ participation is expected to rise (Bacon & Blyton 2000:1426). Work team is a concept used in industry to describe a form of organisation, but also a method of working. By moving away from technology-oriented working methods such as the production line, a company can develop more humane forms of work in work teams characterised by cooperation and variation of tasks (Mueller et al. 2000:1394) and simultaneously improve the physical work environment. The concept of work team is also used to describe a form of organisation, for example in well-defined department or unit, though working methods may largely consist of monotonous elements of work carried out by people working beside each other in a production line (Greenwood & Randle 2007). When the members of a work team work on the same line, in the same direction of flow and in many cases at the same pace, their interaction is through technology (Bergman 1995:70) and does not require that employees have more competence or that they have resources for influence (Delbridge et
al. 2000:1465). When work teams emphasise working methods, members of the team have different skills to be able to carry out different tasks and work is based on cooperation and joint responsibility. This type of work team is described as humane because it combines the execution of tasks with a good work environment (Mueller et al. 2000:1391, van Amelsvoort & Benders 1996:159).

At Sweeng work was organised around flexible and versatile work teams which cooperated throughout the whole factory. At Sweproc work teams were already in place which were downsized during restructuring work. Many employees had worked for a long time at the factory and thus had many skills which they could use even if they had to change tasks at work.

Functional flexibility is based on an ideal picture of work teams in which versatile employees work together and have the capacity to carry out all tasks which arise (Docherty et al. 2002:5). When one person is missing in a work team, another employee can be seconded from another work team to cover for them, without any of the teams suffering functionally (van Amelsvoort & Benders 1996:165). Flexible work teams are expected to give the company several strategic advantages, such as employees providing operational security at the same time as the company can reduce costs by minimised personnel levels (Bacon & Blyton 2005:250).

At Sweproc the whole flow of production is based on work teams and workstations without any production lines, even though manufacturing is process controlled. All production is built on functioning cooperation in work teams and in many cases between work teams, especially in the steelworks. Cooperation was strained during the restructuring process due to reduced personnel levels in work teams since employees could not switch easily between work teams to support their workmates.

Production is based on work teams at Sweeng, too. All production is dependent on functioning cooperation in work teams and between work teams to enable planning of new products and making changes in the flow of production.

Creating flexible organisations puts demands on individuals as well as work teams. To make a company more flexible, individuals or work teams need to be flexible (Karlsson 2006:144). Flexible work teams may constitute a strategic resource for a company if they can quickly adapt production to changing external requirements, or when the members of work teams, individually and collectively, can quickly switch between routines and improvisation (Bergman 1995:380).

When restructuring processes were carried out at Sweproc and Sweeng many employees were given new tasks and workmates. Even though both companies had a common goal to increase flexibility in the organisation through flexible
work teams, these teams had different conditions. Personnel cuts in the work teams at Sweproc meant that employees had to stay at their workstations and jobs for two reasons: there were not enough personnel for employees to switch between tasks and work teams, and those who moved to new work teams had to start with jobs in which they had no use of their previous skills. People who had not previously worked with tasks associated with their jobs had to start as a “fourth man”, the job given to a new employee, and learn the work gradually. It is not unusual that members of a work team are given new tasks at the same time as the workload increases (Bacon & Blyton 2005:241). When the company moved parts of production to another area many employees also lost the opportunity of using their qualifications. The ability of work teams to be flexible was influenced by new members of the work team not having the same level of qualifications as the other members.

There were redundant resources in the work teams at Sweeng so employees could learn new tasks as they arose. This means that work teams planned time in production to learn during work and appointed one person to supervise those training on the job as a part of work. Even when some employees were learning during work, there were sufficient numbers of personnel in the work teams to create flexibility and secure production.

**Participation and work control**

When restructuring processes are planned with employees and are based on their participation, management has created conditions for employees to influence how the restructuring process is carried out (Karasek & Theorell 1990:215). When management is open to employees’ ideas and opinions conditions are created for the use of employees’ experience and knowledge to develop the organisation (Gardell 1979:143). One way of creating participation in the restructuring process is to encourage employees to take part in various development groups or development projects (Karasek & Thorell 1990:206, Svensson et al. 2007a:27). Involvement may be defined as a process where decision-making is shared between leaders and their subordinates (Bordia et al. 2004a:514). According to certain researchers there has been a shift in creating space for employees’ participation in processes of change (Shapiro 2001:6). Employees were previously involved to improve their own work environment, but in recent years they have been involved in developing the company’s competitiveness through innovations and increased flexibility. This means that management moves some of its responsibility to the employees. When participation means that employees can influence organisational goals and strategic planning it has the meaning of workplace democracy (Foley & Polanyi 2006:174). An important task that management gives to work teams is to critically examine work processes with the aim of later developing them, and if necessary to abandon old methods and replace them with new ones (Schuring 1996:174). This is a central concept in Lean Production.
Employees at Sweproc are expected to participate in development projects aimed at improvement work. In practice this involvement in development work is to improve business operations in accordance with Lean Production. During the process of restructuring the different development groups were sometimes working with improving parts of production at the same time as the organisation as a whole carried out rationalisation and cutbacks. The ambition to develop activities was difficult to realise in practice since employees found it difficult enough to make “normal” activities function with reduced manpower, let alone learn new work methods aimed at improving production. It was more difficult to involve employees in development projects after the restructuring process.

Employees at Sweeng are involved in developing the company’s and the employees’ ability to handle changes through suggesting and carrying out necessary changes in production technology.

Creating involvement for employees in the restructuring process can reduce their worries. When employees lack control over their immediate work situation, their stress levels rise (Bordia et al. 2004a:513) since uncertainty about their new work situation is high (Paulsen et al. 2005:465). Influencing work can improve the psychosocial work environment since sound work includes meaningful work and potential for development (Hvid 2006:132).

Employee influence is another aspect of participation and may be consultative or delegating (Edwards et al. 2002:93). Consultative participation means that management consults employees on their viewpoints and later decides whether or not to weigh in these viewpoints when making a decision. The management may be interested in listening to employees’ viewpoints because they have knowledge and experience that the management lacks. Delegating participation means that the management gives employees powers to make their own decisions and carry out actions. The management assumes that employees have the necessary experience and knowledge. Delegating participation is a way of creating the means for employees’ influence in operative change work. If the management is to delegate responsibility and authorities to work teams it must release control, since direct control and autonomy are considered to be antitheses (Ibid:78). When employees have the authority to control and influence the process of change this means that the management of the organisation has moved power to employees. In concrete terms this means that the management considers employees are better qualified to make decisions on issues that affect them.

Employees were involved in the execution phase at Sweproc when the management decided to change the composition of work teams, which meant that employees took responsibility for execution rather than being involved in proposing actions. Employees had no real influence in restructuring work when work team manpower was reduced; they merely had to adapt. Neither were they
consulted by the management on the issue of how best to reduce manpower – instead members of the work teams had to handle management decisions by reorganising work. Influence at Sweproc had an operative content for employees in the work teams and they had to quite simply solve situations as they arose through management decisions on reducing personnel and changing parts of production. The management did not share power or release its control.

Employees at Sweeng were involved in the execution phase in different ways. Among other things, they were responsible for changing the work teams in order to facilitate a market-oriented and flexible organisation and for improving and developing production.

When employees receive authority from management to independently influence and control the content and form of work, they become autonomous. Self determination provides the scope for actions, which gives authority to autonomous actions (Bergman 1995:118). Self determination may also be expressed in autonomous work teams. Members of this type of work teams have the power to decide about different elements of work including when tasks will be carried out; they can choose work techniques and influence the pace of work as well as product quantity and product quality, and they can move freely on the shop floor (Bergman 1995:119).

Autonomous workgroups can stimulate employees to developing a greater interest in work and for the organisation as a whole, (cf Gardell 1976, Gardell & Svensson 1981, Karasek & Theorell 1990). Important factors for success in restructuring processes include decreasing the uncertainty of employees (Bordia et al. 2004a:528), but also increasing their control of their own work situation (Bordia et al. 2004b:360) in order to reduce their stress levels and also to prepare them for restructuring work. Employees can contribute to increasing a company’s capacity to meet the demands from society at large by solving problems and thinking creatively, which places demands on getting employees involved (Edwards et al. 2002:77). To increase employees’ participation in the execution phase and to improve conditions for changes having their desired impact, restructuring work may be organised through autonomous workgroups. Gardell has shown in his action-oriented studies that increased self-determination leads to more employees wanting to be involved in decisions at the workplace (Gardell 1976:114); refer to figure 4. When employees feel that they have the opportunity to influence their work situation their engagement in work and their self-confidence rises, leading to an increased demand for influence.
Increased self-determination
Increased engagement in work
Increased self-confidence
Increased demand for influence in decision processes at the workplace

Figure 4. Self-determination increases employees' demands for influence
Drawn after Gardell’s figure (1976:114).

Does the statement tally with how employees view their opportunities to influence the situation? The restructuring process at Sweproc led to fewer personnel in the work teams at the same time as the manufacturing process was controlled through orders. During the restructuring process work teams were less autonomous than previously since members of the work teams did not have the powers to make decisions concerning production and manning levels. The employees say that the management gave work teams responsibility for the execution phase without giving them the corresponding resources or authority. Employees were influenced by management decisions but had few opportunities of influencing how the restructuring work would be carried out. They were forced to adapt to management conditions and make the best of the situation. This situation led to employees feeling despondent and also worried about the future (Bordia et al. 2004a:528, Paulsen et al. 2005:488) and they say that their engagement in work declined. When employees are deprived of the opportunity to influence their own work situation in change processes their feeling of powerlessness and helplessness may lead to their engagement in work decreasing (Mishra & Spreitzer 1998:572).

Work teams at Sweeng planned the manufacturing process together and planned which elements would be included in the flow of production. They had the authority to structure work teams as required. The autonomous work teams at Sweeng were an important factor in the execution phase of the restructuring process since the participation of the employees enabled the company to develop both its products and its services. Employees say that they had good opportunities of influencing the company’s capacity to compete on the world market at the same time as they were able to develop at work.

Competence development
If the management creates resources for competence development during restructuring work, employees in work teams may experience higher job satisfaction (Bacon & Blyton 2003:27) provided they can match the competence development to work requirements. When management strategies include resources for learning and development there may be opportunities for employees to try new methods and ways of working in a secure environment. However, this requires that employees feel secure, that they have autonomy (Mishra & Spreitzer 1998:578) and do not feel that learning is more of a workload and that they are forced to choose production before learning (Ellström 2006:43). When management strategies promote learning and
development they also create space for learning to be included in work and employees can participate in development projects. Autonomous work teams create conditions that enable employees to define competence requirements (Molina & Llorens-Montes 2006:268).

Competence development is an important prerequisite for developing flexible work teams. Autonomous work teams require that employees can cooperate and that all members of the work team have the right competence for their work. To be able to maintain the right competence level or for the organisation to be able to adapt or develop operations to external requirements, employees need to undergo constant competence development – or to express it more drastically, to maintain their employability (cf fundamental ideas behind lifelong learning). These requirements on work teams can develop into work-related stress at the individual level (Hummels & de Leede 2000:84) and create peer pressure between employees (Knights & McCabe 2000:1486). There is an exaggerated belief that competence development and learning always bring about positive effects for organisations or employees, which results in rhetoric about learning and competence development seldom being subjected to criticism (Contu et al. 2003:933). In contrast, restructuring processes may lead to employees no longer being able to utilise their skills at work. When management strategies for restructuring processes lead to reductions in the workforce at the company, the company loses competence at the same time as its capacity to learn is decreased (Fisher & White 2000:249).

In autonomous workgroups employees may take their own responsibility for planning competence development and learning as part of work, if they have the necessary authority. Competence development can take place through education outside the workplace, at the workplace or as on the job learning and through employees exchanging tasks and jobs with each other. For employees to be able to develop a deeper understanding of the contents and methods of work through learning from each other in the work team, they must have confidence in each other (Jones & George 1998:343). If employees are to maintain their competence levels or develop them, company management needs to develop strategies for learning and development. This means that the management needs to invest in personnel development in order to develop versatile employees (Farrell & Mavondo 2004:396). When management strategies for learning are based on an overall strategy of developing total operations (Contu et al. 2003:936) this means that the management prioritises resources for learning in order to stimulate innovation and diversity, according to the logic of development (Ellström 2006:37). When competence development concerns training employees for work (Contu et al. 2003:935) in order to standardise and rationalise production, management strategies are based on the logic of production, leading to learning based on reproduction and adaptation (Ellström 2006:36). Differences between these two types of logic and management strategy provide an indication of how management values...
learning and development, either as an investment or as a cost, and shows whether the company is in a development stage or a stable phase.

Individual competence can be described by the concept of qualifications, in which individual qualifications describe educational background and previous experience and process-related qualifications are either process-dependent or process-independent (Bergman 1995:123). A person's handicraft skills or capacity to master a job express process-dependent qualifications and describe company-specific or job-specific qualifications. A person's technical talents or capacity to be flexible and take responsibility describe generic knowledge and as process-independent qualifications, these qualifications are also interesting for other employers. Put together, these qualifications requirements should lead to employees developing relevant knowledge so that they are able to act immediately when necessary (Ibid:210). But employees in work teams need even more skills such as technical competence, decision competence and social competence in order to contribute to and create flexible work groups (Huusko 2006:10). These skills then form the individual's capacity to work in autonomous workgroups built on self-determination and a high degree of control, as well as the capacity to cooperate.

Some years before the restructuring process Sweproc had carried out a competence drive aimed at developing employees' generic knowledge in cooperation with the union. This drive was to reinforce the company's ability to handle future structural changes. At the beginning of the restructuring process the management had formulated strategies for employees' competence development to convey more responsibility to the work teams and to develop autonomous work teams. Despite these strategies for competence development at Sweproc there were no resources for learning during the restructuring process since the overall strategy at the company was to cut costs. There was however an agreement between the union and the employer regulating employees' rights to competence development. But the union feared that competence development during the restructuring work could lead to negative effects on the employees and increase their work strain. The Metall union did not push competence issues since they could drain the work groups of even more personnel. Competence development and job development had previously been important parts of work at Sweproc. Most employees had gone through courses at the company's industrial school. In conjunction with the restructuring process the company started to map employees' skills, and although this mapping process was completed it did not result in any measures. In some cases employees had been promised competence development measures but the management withdrew these options just before the activities were about to start, motivating the decision by a lack of resources. The management at Sweproc had an instrumental view of competence development during the restructuring work and all activities aimed at learning and competence development were restricted. In other words the management viewed all forms of education and competence development as a cost since the
focus during the restructuring process was to cut operational costs. During the restructuring work itself employees who had changed jobs had to learn the new job at the same time as they carried out their duties. Employees’ insufficient knowledge led to accidents at work in some cases. There had previously been an apprenticeship system at Sweproc which was routinely put into practice when employees participated in training at work to gradually learn new tasks from a workmate.

Management strategy for learning at Sweeng was characterised by development optimism. By investing in competence development and supplementary training, employees’ tasks would develop at the same time as the company improved its ability to deliver peripheral services for products. The union pursued competence issues based on national trade union strategies and regarded competence issues as an important trade union assignment to develop. This means that the management and the union shared the same view of competence issues and they were in agreement that the company’s development capacity was dependent on employees’ improved competence. The management invested in competence development and learning, as a strategy for improving the company’s competitiveness and to develop the company’s and the employees’ capacity to handle new changes. Work groups planned training activities together with the union and management and work groups were put together so that learning could take place within the framework of ongoing work and employees took turns to learn new tasks by working alongside a skilled workmate. All activities aimed at learning were integrated with work, even when the employee took part in formal education such as a language, and this was carried out in cooperation with various educational establishments in the region. Many employees at Sweeng had participated in the company’s industrial school when they were first employed and had subsequently taken part in competence development at work. Employees were also involved in development work to evolve better and more profitable products by developing methods and content of work. As new products were introduced the contents of work changed, which also placed demands on raised qualifications among employees. Employees were given the opportunity through competence-raising activities to develop their process-independent and process-dependent skills as well as decision-making skills.

Work demands and stress
During the execution phase of the restructuring process, the employees’ work situation changed in many different ways. In addition to being methods of work, work teams also provide social belonging and social support for employees. Social space is created in which employees can discuss and reflect on consequences of change work and deal with the uncertainty caused by the process of change. Reflection can lead to health-promoting effects and development of operations (Randle & Tilander 2007).
In cases where restructuring work leads to employees working in isolated work environments away from social support, they are subjected to a higher stress levels (Karasek & Theorell 1990:135, Wilkinson 2005:1083). For these people breaks and relief time can provide social interaction and the opportunity for discussions and reflection. Karasek and Theorell (1990:32) has developed a demand/control model that describes different work environment factors which are significant for employees' health. The model links different factors in the employees work situation, including options for control of work, demands from work, employees' competence and stress at work. These factors together make up criteria for whether work can be described as active or passive, high stress or low stress (Ibid:31). Control of work may be described as, "an individual's belief in being able to influence change in their environment in the desired direction at any point in time” (Bordia et al. 2004a:512).

Gardell has also shown in his studies that employees’ participation in work and change management can influence their health and engagement (Gardell 1976:88). Increased participation gives employees increased control. Gardell's and Karasek & Theorell's studies have several common denominators, such as when employees can balance the increased demands from work with increased control in work so that they can handle stress better. But restructuring work may cause employees to feel that their control at work is influenced at the same time as demands at work are changed. Different steps in restructuring work may mean that work demands increase during certain periods and then return to more normal levels. Employees' control of work is partly influenced when they lack information about their job situation, but also when work changes so that machines instead of people control the work. Other work environment factors that may influence employees' health are how their social environment at work is influenced and how employees are able to use their skills at work.

Employees' work situation at Sweproc changed in many ways during the execution phase of the restructuring process. Layoffs and the introduction of a slimline work organisation resulted in fewer people handling more steel per person, which led to increased stress and higher workloads per individual. Employees describe that the changes meant that the work changed from being decided by employees to being controlled by a process system. The changes also meant that employees had to work in more isolation than earlier for two reasons: there was no time for socialising in the smaller work teams, and that a number of workers had to work alone. These solitary jobs are still called work teams by the employees. The union says that the management chose not to listen to the employees’ viewpoints on how they felt about the restructuring work and that this contributed to both employees and the union feeling worried about the future. As a result of deteriorating working conditions the unions started negotiating with the management about the necessity of increasing personnel at the company. The lack of dialogue between management, union and employees increased employees' mistrust of the management at the same time as job satisfaction decreased. Employees also described that they felt worn
out. Relations between employer and employee's became more strained as the employees' trust in the management decreased. At Sweproc the union changed its strategy for how to drive competence issues. For the employees, participating in competence development during working hours would mean that the already slimmed work teams would be emaciated and it would worsen the employees' work environment.

If the content of work is changed so that employees can no longer use their skills at work in combination with increasing demands from work, it may influence their engagement in work (Mishra & Spreitzer 1998:580). At Sweproc the restructuring process meant that work teams no longer had the same flexibility due to decreased manning levels, which resulted in employees no longer being able to maintain their versatility or use their skills because they were restricted in their jobs. Decreased mobility in work teams also increased the company's vulnerability during the execution phase which in turn created worry among the employees and increased their stress.

Gardell describes situations when it is inevitable that employees deliver lower quality work because the production system does not allow them to make adaptations in their work, calling this a quantitative overload of work and a qualitative under-utilisation of employees (Gardell 1976:101). When changes in the content of work decrease employees' opportunities of learning, stress increases at work, which inhibits employees' capacity to learn (Karasek & Theorell 1990:89). Employees can accept working harder for periods of time if they can see a reason for it (Edwards et al. 2002:107).

One sign that a workplace has a good psychosocial work environment is its ability to quickly respond to customers' requirements (Karasek & Theorell 1990:254). Work teams at Sweeng cooperate with each other, employees have access to a social community and there is a functioning dialogue between employees, union and management. Employees at Sweeng say themselves that they have increased their readiness for handling changes. Since the work teams take joint responsibility for planning the flow of production and for the manufacturing process, they share responsibility between themselves. The work teams balance increased demands from the work with increased control, and they share the workload when the company requires extra resources to complete an order. Employees are able to utilise their skills at work, but they are also offered the option of developing their professional roles since the company is striving to develop its product range.

When employees have the opportunity to control their work and influence their own work situation despite increasing demands at work, there is a balance between demands and control. This balance is characteristic of active work (Karasek & Theorell 1990:193). Active work has many positive effects, and it may increase employees' capacity to handle stress and increase their
engagement in work. If instead employees feel that they have little control and high demands at work, they are said to have high strain jobs (Ibid:31).

**Summary of factors’ influence in the execution phase**

Analysis shows that the two companies had different conditions in the execution phase. But how did the companies succeed in carrying out the changes that the reconstruction work was aimed at?

The employees at Sweproc had to adapt manning levels in the work teams to management directives. Those employees who were able to stay at the company had to work in jobs that needed personnel. The union negotiated with the management about the layoffs according to laws and agreements. The company specialised its operations and produced steel of high quality which was rolled into different dimensions and loaded for transport. At Sweproc resources were lacking for competence development, despite the fact that the union and the employer had negotiated a local agreement with the support of a central agreement which governed the competence development of employees. The lack of competence development meant that employees felt they were not able to maintain the qualifications they had acquired at Sweproc. The union branch at Sweproc did not drive the issue of competence development out of consideration for the employees’ work environment, since it would not be in the employees’ interests. Employee participation at Sweproc was low regarding their opportunities of influencing which changes would be introduced in the organisation. On the other hand they were very much affected by management decisions since the restructuring work brought with it changes in routines and methods of working. For employees the restructuring work meant that they had to work harder since there were fewer opportunities for breaks and rest, partly due to fewer personnel and partly due to new routines. In some work teams manning was reduced to one person, which allowed less time for recovery and also isolated working conditions.

The restructuring work at Sweeng brought about two main factors for the employees: new products would be introduced in production, and learning would be a part of work. Union and management cooperated to make the restructuring work successful, including the creation of resources for developing employees’ skills. The union drove competence issues at the workplace and a local agreement on competence development was in the pipeline at Sweeng. Employees had good opportunities to influence what type of competence development was demanded for each individual on the basis of the work teams’ needs. Employees in the work teams proposed production solutions for new products and developed the company’s range of services, which opened up large opportunities for the company when it carried out the restructuring process. The flexible work teams made good conditions for the
restructuring work and the employees had greater opportunities to balance increasing demands from work with corresponding control.

The analysis show that the factors in the execution phase created different preconditions at individual level which gave the employees different conditions for carrying out restructuring work. Employees at Sweproc had small chances of choosing or proposing changes. Restructuring work was carried out by the employees after decisions were made by management, even though the employees could not see how it would lead to a stronger company after the crisis. The rapidly implemented measures also decreased employees’ opportunities of adapting to the changes since they made conditions worse at work. The fact that employees wanted to reintroduce old work methods and routines is not difficult to understand since they also represented security, solidarity, comradeship, rest, recovery, potential for development and increased control.

Employees at Sweeng were involved in the restructuring work and had an opportunity to influence its implementation. Through practical work at customers’ premises they have had the chance of understanding the need for variation in the range of products and services, and also understood the need for constant competence development. Their increased understanding of the need to adapt the company’s products and services to market demands was a condition during the execution phase and has contributed to their abandoning old routines and work methods.

In the next section I will show what factors influence the restructuring process in the stabilisation phase.

**Factors in the stabilisation phase**

The last phase in Lewin’s model is the stabilisation phase called refreeze. This means that the measures in the restructuring work have been carried out and in the best case new work methods and routines have become part of everyday operations. When members of the organisation have adapted to new work methods and routines this means that they no longer wish to go back to the old ones. When new work methods and routines are accepted as natural and almost considered as always having been applied in the organisation, they have become part of everyday operations. I will show which factors influence the restructuring process in the stabilisation phase with the aid of results; these are summarised in figure 5.
I will introduce this section by describing how restructuring work is followed up and leads to the development of learning processes.

**Explanations and feedback**

When restructuring work moves into the stabilisation phase, management and employees can gather their experience to analyse results and consequences. It may be difficult to trace back expected or unexpected results to measures during the restructuring work itself without the aid of an evaluation (Vedung 1998:137). Evaluations carried out soon after the completion of restructuring processes lack a description of the long-term effects of such work due to the time aspects (cf Svensson et al. 2007a:93-105). Certain results may be relatively simple to follow up and evaluate such as whether costs, productivity and personnel turnover have increased or decreased as a result of restructuring work. The evaluation is then used as a basis for stating whether measures were adequate or whether the management needs to take further measures to achieve the results targeted by the restructuring work (Vedung 1998:39).

In addition to delivering expected results and short-term effects, restructuring processes may also lead to unexpected or undesirable results such as increased absence, more work-related injuries, intensification of work, loss of competence and, in the worst case, reduced productivity (Wilkinson 2005:1082). An important part of evaluating measures carried out within the framework of restructuring work is the analysis of unexpected results since they may contribute to creating new problems in the organisation. The results may indicate that something in the restructuring process has not worked. Using the results as a starting point, management is able to judge whether it needs to act to prevent further negative effects.

It is not evident that restructuring processes aimed at reducing companies’ costs will succeed in the longer term in improving the company’s competitiveness or service levels (Kinnie et al. 1998:303). Cuts in costs may instead lead to the
company losing muscles instead of fat, (Ibid:304) i.e. losing competence instead of reducing unused resources. For example, increased sickness absence and work intensification may be a sign that there is an imbalance between production demands and manning levels. Loss of competence and work-related injuries may provide a signal that the company has laid off employees with key competence or too large a proportion of the personnel, and decreased productivity may signal that restructuring work has caused losses in efficiency. If management strategies focus only on chasing costs, relations between management and employees may deteriorate (Wilkinson 2005:180).

With respect to Sweproc, the restructuring process was aimed at surviving the crisis by reducing manufacturing costs and steering manufacturing towards more profitable orders at the same time as improving the company's competitiveness. Sweproc also became the most profitable company in the entire group. This was made possible by the company decreasing its costs for personnel through layoffs, reducing stock costs and increasing production per employee. The management at Sweproc used different criteria for following up the restructuring work and to ensure that costs were reduced according to plan. Included in these criteria were the numbers of employees in production per time unit, rejection rate, manpower in production, profitability per order etc. This follow-up led to the management only counting how many employees were at the company and not their working hours, which resulted in sick employees not being replaced by temporary workers since that would raise the level of basic manpower. The restructuring work was concentrated on measures that gave quick results and were possible to follow-up in the short term. When the goals for the restructuring process had been achieved the restructuring work was concluded.

The restructuring process at Sweeng was aimed at positioning the company on the world market by manufacturing specialised products for customers in the pulp industry. By increasing the company's capacity to adapt manufacturing and service to customer requirements Sweeng could develop and position itself as a competitive player on the global market. By constantly improving and renewing the company’s products Sweeng was able to find new customers and retain old customers. The criteria that were used by the management at Sweeng for following up the restructuring work included the lead time from new product idea to ready product, and the company's capacity to deliver specific orders on the basis of technological solution and size. This follow-up showed among other things the proportion of the company's product range that had been replaced during a certain time period. After the restructuring process a questionnaire was given to employees at Sweeng on the initiative of the group management. Results from the questionnaire led to management, in consultation with the union, picking out high-priority development areas.
Work conditions and work environment

Developing employees' work conditions may be the main reason for organisations carrying out restructuring work. But conditions may also change as a result of restructuring processes such as when companies introduce "lean production" and process controlled work teams, after which employees may have a work situation characterised by isolation without the opportunity of socialising with other employees (Edwards 1979:122). The lack of social support from workmates in work teams may also reduce employees’ capacity to handle stress (Hwang 2003:568). Employees at Sweproc said that their workmates had been given isolated jobs and less time and opportunity for socialising. They explained that their work was more stressful when they were forced to work harder at a faster pace and without the opportunity of recovery time. The employees’ description of work intensification corresponds to low road strategies.

Changes in employees’ work situation may vary between work intensification and empowerment (Edwards et al. 2002:72), which means that employees either become exploited as a resource or that they have increased autonomy. Restructuring processes may lead to sustainable development when working conditions are developed to support individual and group development and the working climate favours creativity and the generation of new ideas.

When employees experience they can develop and grow in their work and control their work they are stimulated to learn more for their own sake, but also as a result of their understanding they need to develop their skills to handle new demands from work (Karasek & Theorell 1990:308). When employees feel that they can use their competence as a resource in restructuring work and at the same time feel that there is a reason for such work in combination with control, the conditions bring about increased empowerment (Mishra & Spreitzer 1998:578). With increased empowerment there is a decreased risk that employees feel they are merely cogs in a larger machine (Ibid). Employees at Sweproc repeated time after time that the management did not see employees as valuable to the company; instead they felt replaceable. This statement provides another example of how the low road strategies of the management did not include employees as valuable resources in the restructuring process.

The concept of empowerment may emerge from management strategies that employees are granted authority to introduce new management systems with the aim of motivating employees, which in practice means that the management give individuals more responsibility without the corresponding authorities (Börnfelt 2006:67). Empowerment is always expected to give positive effects for employees and the organisation, as in the concept of a win-win solution (Collins 1999:209). However, Cooney (2004:689) disputes this since empowerment is really concerned with authorised work teams taking responsibility on the management’s initiative at the same time as employees are expected to identify with management goals for business.
But empowerment may also mean that employees actually have more resources to influence their own work situation – and increased opportunities to control their work (van Amelsvoort & Benders 1996:164). Employees at Sweeng said they felt they were appreciated by the management and they were seen by management as valuable employees. Both union and employer shared the same view of the company and the need for restructuring work to create readiness for change at the group and organisational level with the aim of improving the company’s competitiveness.

The development of working conditions during a restructuring process influences how employees experience stress (Karasek & Theorell 1990:215). When employees feel that work is intensified at the same time as their stress levels increase in combination with less control over their work, there is a risk that the work is heading towards a high strain category. This development towards high strain jobs may reduce the employees’ capacity to learn (Ibid:98), and they may be exploited (Edwards et al. 2002:104). Restructuring processes may be experienced as traumatic by members of the organisation affected. Employees that survive the restructuring process may have a negative attitude to the company long after the restructuring work is over, expressed in terms of low motivation, low morale and low loyalty in combination with high stress levels (Wilkinson 2005:1082). How employees manage to deal with the restructuring process determines whether they become victims or survivors during the restructuring work. Victims have a poorer capacity to handle changes in stress compared with survivors (Paulsen et al. 2005:470). The development of victim syndrome among employees may depend on the management forgetting about employees that remain in the organisation, which may subsequently lead to the development of other long-term problems for the organisation (Kinnie et al. 1998:305).

When restructuring processes result in a company laying off employees as part of cutbacks, this brings about a crisis for those people laid off. To make matters worse, research results show that employees who are able to keep their jobs also go through a crisis when their colleagues are laid off (Mishra & Spreitzer 1998:567). This type of crisis is called "survival syndrome" (Wilkinson 2005:1082). Employees who keep their jobs may experience a strong sense of threat during the restructuring process, reinforced by the worry they feel about the future in combination with a decline in their control (Mishra & Spreitzer 1998:567). Employees may feel powerless when the management does not wish to listen to their opinions and experiences of the restructuring work since they lack the means of influencing their own work situation. This powerlessness in combination with worries about the future or worries about their own work situation may lead to increased stress and a deterioration in the psychosocial work environment, which may lead to employees developing symptoms of burnout (Ibid). When employees feel that they cannot handle their work situation in combination with increased uncertainty and insecurity, this may result in illness (Karasek & Theorell 1990:307) which can lead to increased
sickness absence at the workplace. Employees who have the opportunity of taking part in processes of change show better health and employees' participation may also lead to increased creativity and a long-term increase in the company's competitiveness (Foley & Polanyi 2006:174-178). A work environment characterised by monotony may lead to employees becoming passive (Gardell 1976:109), which can lead to them not having the energy to be involved in work related issues any longer. A psychosocial work environment characterised by stress may contribute to learning difficulties among employees, at the same time as it may reduce employees’ initiative (Karasek & Theorell 1990:100). Employees may express their worry and powerlessness in the form of resistance to change by becoming cynical critics of change work (Mishra & Spreitzer 1998:571).

A good work environment can increase employees' motivation and engagement for participating in development work (Börnfelt 2006:196). Restructuring processes may lead to employees needing to change their tasks if they can no longer use their qualifications in their work. When employees feel that they have no opportunities of developing through work or that they cannot use their skills, they may feel that change work is a threat to them (Mishra & Spreitzer 1998:578) which may lead to low job satisfaction and frustration (Edwards et al. 2002:110). Low job satisfaction may cause the individual to develop work-related illnesses (Gardell 1976:88). Restructuring processes may cause employees to feel that the introduction of new tasks in conjunction with increased work demands produce tiredness and that they feel more worn-out than stimulated, as Edwards et al exemplified, "I don't feel enriched, I just feel knackered” (Edwards et al. 2002:79).

The results show that working conditions and the psychosocial environment at Sweproc was made worse by the restructuring process. Employees say that the joy of working has disappeared and that they feel more worn-out after a day's work than they did previously. The employees compare their work situation with the time before the restructuring process and say that they used to have more choice of tasks and that after the restructuring work they no longer have control of their work in the same way as previously. The employees say that the undermanned work teams are an obstacle to development as well as being a threat to their future development. The capacity of employees to learn may have been negatively affected since their day-to-day work situation is stressed (Karasek & Theorell 1990:89). All personnel present are needed in ongoing work. There is no time in the work teams for recovery, indicating that work has intensified and more employees are working in isolated jobs. The work teams have less control of work as a result of the management introducing computer-based planning and control systems for manufacturing to order. Employees lack the resources for balancing work demands with corresponding control (Docherty et al. 2002:5). Opportunities for learning and competence development have decreased since the work teams are too lean to be able to second people to supervise learning, and they cannot do without workmates.
from the work teams since they are all needed to carry out their duties. The management does not invest any new resources in maintaining employees' competence or developing new competence.

Sick absenteeism increased at Sweproc during the restructuring work. These changes in the levels of sick absenteeism could be interpreted, with the support from Karasek & Theorell (1990) and Gardell (1976), as an indicator of changes in working conditions during the restructuring process having a negative impact on employees’ psychosocial work environment. Unfortunately I do not have sufficient support from my data to verify this statement. The management did not create any new resources for the work teams, despite the efforts made by the Metall union to persuade them to increase the manning in the work teams. The employees’ lack of control during the restructuring process probably increased their feeling of uncertainty (Bordia et al. 2004b:350). Employees at Sweproc express their powerlessness by resisting changes, and they are not as positive to change after the restructuring work.

There has also been a de-qualification of work at Sweproc after parts of production were moved to other factories. Employees’ qualifications have also deteriorated, particularly those employees who no longer carry out the tasks they had before the restructuring process was executed. Employees also had to learn new tasks after they were moved to new work teams or to other jobs. Despite the fact that employees had to change their duties, they say that the shortfall of competence development and the lack of opportunities to switch between different duties both contribute to undermining their qualifications in the long-term. Employees also say that work no longer gives them the same satisfaction as it used to.

At Sweeng the restructuring process has resulted in employees’ work situation developing in a positive direction. The employees were involved in all of the restructuring work and high participation was a prerequisite for the success of the restructuring process. Work teams take joint responsibility for planning and executing tasks at work, which indicates that employees have much control over their work and also that there is a strong peer pressure in the work teams. Employees at Sweeng can balance work demands with corresponding control even though they need to work more intensively during certain periods, which may be called active work (Karasek & Theorell 1990:70). Employees show high engagement in their work when they take responsibility for teaching each other and strive to develop the flow of production. The work creates development opportunities for the employees and they have the opportunity of continuously developing their competence. The high road strategies of the management created favourable conditions for the business to develop sustainable work systems, where new resources could be generated to match new demands. Work teams are a social community for the employees. The levels of sick absenteeism stayed at a constant low level even after the restructuring work, which could be interpreted as an indication that the employees’ psychosocial
environment had not deteriorated, at least. Again, I lack support from my data to verify this statement.

**Summary of factors’ influence during the stabilisation phase**

The analysis shows that the factors in the stabilisation phase created different preconditions at individual level in the two companies, which meant for the employees that their everyday work changed in different ways at the same time as both companies had succeeded in achieving their restructuring goals.

Restructuring work was started in different ways at the two companies and this influenced the entire restructuring process. Sweproc moved rapidly from decision to action, as they responded to the crisis by introducing cost saving activities for the business, partly by decreasing production-related costs in the form of reduced personnel, and partly by fewer rejects and better orientation towards profitable orders. The downsized organisation constituted obstacles for developing “good” work during the restructuring. Management low road strategies led to work intensification for employees, which increased their work load and work-related stress. Changes in employee working conditions led to reduced work control when employees no longer controlled resources to work teams, as they had before the restructuring process. All these aspects put together contributed towards developing high-stress jobs, where employees found it hard to balance increasing demands from work with corresponding work control. In addition the employees felt they had been let down by management at the same time as they worried about their situation at work. Despite fewer personnel the manufacturing process still worked. Management was able to decrease the company’s manufacturing costs and increase production per employee and thus achieve the targets of the restructuring process. As a consequence of the downsizing and less mobility in work teams employees became restricted in their jobs. The restructuring work exacerbated the conflict between parties at Sweproc. Employees felt that their working conditions had worsened at the same time as the company was able to increase its profits.

At Sweeng the restructuring process was planned together by the employer, union and employees. Cooperation between company management and the union created good conditions for them to cooperate on drawing up high road strategies for the restructuring process. The cooperation also strengthened the company’s capacity to respond to external demands at the individual level as well as the company level. The reorientation of the business to new products and markets contributed towards developing creative tasks for the employees and creating favourable conditions for sustainable development. The curiosity and openness of the employees towards change created good conditions for ongoing change work and for developing good work according to trade union strategies. Employees at Sweeng had great opportunities for controlling the
restructuring work which related to their own work situation and they became active change agents by proposing changes in work methods and by developing new products and services. The company could achieve the targets of the restructuring process. For the employees, the restructuring work meant opportunities for development which increased their well-being at work and boosted their confidence in management and the union. Employees' working conditions meant that they could balance increasing demands from work with corresponding control and this supported the development of active work.

In the next section I will endeavour to draw some conclusions from this thesis work and formulate some important areas for continued research.
5 Concluding discussion

The research project behind this thesis was aimed at describing good examples of structural change in the steel and metal industries in seven countries in Europe. We also examined what significance partnership played in successful restructuring processes and described how competence development was involved in these processes within the framework of lifelong learning. The research project was conducted in close collaboration with representatives of the trade union, Metall, who together with representatives of the employers’ association, Metallgruppen, suggested various companies in the Swedish steel and metal industry as potential participants in the research project. These companies were considered to be good examples of successful restructuring processes based on the criteria of improvements in profitability, partnership and company investments in employees’ competence. The thesis is mostly based on work package four and focuses on the restructuring process in two Swedish companies referred to as Sweproc and Sweeng. Both companies had as a result of the restructuring process survived the crisis, by improving their profitability and position on the market. Moreover, many employees were able to keep their jobs after layoffs. But the restructuring process contributed towards developing different conditions for the employees in the two companies.

My ambition in this thesis is to advance knowledge about why restructuring processes caused by structural changes may give different results at the organisational and individual levels. By using examples from Sweproc and Sweeng I have been able to show that different factors in the companies’ restructuring processes can act to create both conditions and obstacles to restructuring work. With the help of these factors I can explain the various consequences at the organisational and individual levels.

Our task in the research project was to use case studies to examine the results of restructuring processes at the organisation level. Although Sweproc and Sweeng are both active in the steel and metal sector in Sweden, their operations are quite different at the organisational level. These differences between the companies, combined with the systematic comparison between the companies in relation to various factors’ impact on the restructuring process, resulted in Sweproc being depicted in more negative terms than Sweeng.

I have shown the complexity of restructuring processes in this thesis by breaking them down into different phases and factors. The different factors describe planning and management at the organisational level and different activities conducted by management, union and employees. My analysis shows that the different factors in the planning phase, execution phase and
stabilisation phase constitute barriers as well as prerequisites for the restructuring process.

The foundation for the entire restructuring work is laid in the planning phase by the factors; management strategies, process planning, follow-up and trade union influence. In the execution phase the terms for the restructuring work is shaped by the factors; work teams, employee participation, control and competence development and work demands. In the stabilisation phase the terms for continuing the development process is guided by the factors; feedback, work conditions and work environment. These factors together influence the outcomes of the restructuring work. These outcomes may be described as results at the organisational level and consequences at the individual level.

After having reported how the management at the two companies handled their restructuring processes I can show with the help of the factors how their strategies and methods lead to the success of restructuring at the organisational level. Both companies succeeded in turning around the tendency from unprofitable to survival and becoming viable. When I showed how the various factors in the planning, execution and stabilization phases contributed towards achieving the financial, rational goals I could also show how the factors contributed to creating different results at the individual level. The structural factors may provide one explanation for why differences at the individual level could arise in these companies. For employees at Sweproc the management’s low road strategies caused their work situation and work environment to deteriorate because the management strategies lacked a resource perspective which included individuals. For employees at Sweeng the management’s high road strategies meant that the organisation could develop at the same time as opportunities for employees to develop were created.

By using a model for change processes in three phases, I have been able to simplify my description of real conditions during restructuring processes. By analysing different factors in each phase I have been able to show how the factors influenced the restructuring work and created different outcomes at the organisational and individual levels in each company. But it is possible that my description of real circumstances in the restructuring process was oversimplified as I only considered organisational factors in my analysis. For this reason it may be appropriate to discuss the extent to which my analysis is valid, or to question whether there are any other factors or conditions that could have influenced these two companies when they started to organise their restructuring work.

In my licentiate dissertation and in other articles I have already reported that the work teams and the trade union played important roles in the restructuring process in both the Swedish companies. The work teams were used as an instrument for change during the restructuring work but they were also structural determinants at the organisational level in both companies. The
unions also represented structural determinants in both companies during restructuring with regard to how the relationship between unions and employers worked. In addition to the work teams and the unions, there are other possible determinants that may have contributed towards limiting or creating possibilities for both companies during the restructuring process. These can be described as structural conditions, which are manifested in the companies or in the external world. Although I have not previously referred to these structural conditions in my analysis, they should be briefly mentioned to acknowledge the fact that they may have affected the companies’ choices in handling the restructuring process.

Some of these structural conditions, which may act to limit or create possibilities in each company, can be linked to their business operations but they may also relate to how restructuring work started. The situation at Sweproc was acute and group management put pressure on the company management to achieve profitability, which resulted in a crisis package demanding that the company decrease its costs by 20 percent in one year. At Sweeng the situation was not so acute and so management had more time to plan the restructuring process.

The two companies’ production, products and services differ considerably. At Sweproc simple products are manufactured with high quality, and the option of variation in the product range is limited. Sweeng manufactures customer-adapted complex products with a great variation of special products, and supplies auxiliary services such as service and maintenance of products, installation and dismantling. These differences meant that the companies had different types of production equipment and work processes. Both companies used work teams as an instrument of change in the organisation of work during the restructuring process. At Sweproc work teams were mainly used to cut costs and at Sweeng work teams were used to create flexibility in production and service. The work teams also created conditions for both companies. At Sweproc workflow could function even though manning was decreased partly because employees were multi-skilled and were able to take on several jobs and partly because some of the jobs ceased to exist. At Sweeng the work teams were already highly autonomous and their open-minded attitude towards change supported the reshaping of operations to a more flexible organisation. However, the work teams had different prerequisites to adapt their business to meet new demands. At Sweproc one of the conditions which acted as a barrier for the work teams was the company’s manufacturing process. As the company’s production equipment was constructed for manufacturing steel there were few options of using it for any other purpose, combined with the fact that the company lacked resources for investing in new equipment. Sweeng on the other hand had good conditions in both production equipment and additional resources, which enabled the company to adapt operations to new demands.
Management cooperation with the union was both an instrument of change as well as a structural condition for the restructuring process. I have previously showed how this cooperation was used as an instrument in restructuring work based on how the unions could influence the situation, but relations between management and union at each company were also a structural determinant of the restructuring process. Existing relations between union and employer were different in character. At Sweproc there is an IR tradition and a negotiation culture which reflects the ideological struggle between work and capital, whereas at Sweeng there is an HR tradition which emphasises a development-oriented culture of cooperation instead. This creates different conditions for management at the two companies in how they cooperate with the union on the issue of restructuring work.

The differences between the unions’ opportunities of influencing the restructuring process at each company were emphasised by the companies’ participation in strategic networks, which gave additional structural conditions to the restructuring process and were used as an instrument during restructuring work. There were various strategic networks aimed at improving the local and regional business climate and to develop specific industrial competence in which both Sweproc and Sweeng were represented. But even these networks varied in their capacity to strengthen the companies in their restructuring work. Local strategic networks around Sweproc lacked sufficient public funds for cooperation between the municipality, employment agency, social insurance office and trade and industry to the extent required. Sweeng participated in strategic networks with employment agencies, a university and upper secondary schools together with many private companies to create growth opportunities and to develop new vocational training programmes, which strengthened Sweeng during the restructuring work. Union representatives at Sweeng were active in a national network for union representatives aimed at developing their role as competence representatives and working with competence issues at a local level, and this strengthened the union’s competence and legitimacy in its work with competence issues.

To return to my question regarding how these structural conditions could have influenced the restructuring process at each company I must return to how the employees’ situation was affected by the restructuring work. Both companies had starting conditions that may have affected the planning of the restructuring process. In other words it is relevant to ask whether the management at Sweproc would have considered cooperating with the union and employees in the planning phase if they had had more time to make plans for the restructuring process. But it was not only the aspect of time which acted as a barrier for cooperation with the union, the relation between the management and the unions also influenced the basis for cooperation. At Sweeng there were favourable starting conditions and management could draw advantage from the fact that there was time to plan the restructuring work with the union and employees and the relation between management and the union supported
cooperation. I have on different occasions described how competence development was used as an instrument in the restructuring process in both companies, but competence development was also part of the starting point for restructuring work. For example, the unions had a different approach towards competence development and they chose to pursue competence issues differently. At Sweproc there were local agreements between the parties regulating competence development, which the union did not pursue out of consideration for the employees since it would increase their workload. Again, it is relevant to ask whether the union at Sweproc would have pursued competence issues more proactively if it had been able to influence the management’s position on competence and manning during restructuring work. Even this aspect of restructuring work is based on how the relation between the management and the union worked.

A local agreement regulating competence development was in progress at Sweeng and the union was driving competence development issues on the basis of national trade union strategies on an ongoing basis since they created good conditions for the company’s survival. Besides the unions pursuing competence issues differently at a company level, the companies had different standards for entry level qualifications in recruitment. At Sweproc the entry level requirements were industrial school or technical college qualifications with supplementary competence development at work within the framework of an informal apprenticeship system. Employee competence levels were an additional structural condition in the restructuring process in both companies, but they also acted as a barrier in restructuring work at Sweproc. Employees at Sweproc lost their skills when tasks ceased to exist and the workers lacked sufficient skills for taking on new tasks.

Sweeng had slightly higher entry level requirements for employment: industrial school or technical college qualifications with supplementary education as well as professional experience in the different areas of competence demanded by the company. Their employees were expected to participate in competence development activities on an ongoing basis and also to develop their skills in English. Both management and the union at Sweeng recognised that employees’ problem solving and innovative skills and their knowledge of negotiating and setting up agreements created good conditions for the company to develop its services during the restructuring process. Employees’ competence levels and the systematic approach to competence development created an instrument for change and was part of the basis of restructuring work.

Whether the employees regarded the restructuring process as a threat or as an opportunity varied between the two companies. This difference was based on the structural factor of their employability as workers. Employees at Sweproc were worried about the threat of being laid off since it would be difficult for them to find new jobs in the area. The local labour market was small and
limited and the employees’ skills were difficult to utilise in other trades. If employees are anxious about losing their jobs it can affect how they regard their work. It is possible that workers chose to stay on at the company even though they felt that work conditions were deteriorating. Employees at Sweeng found it considerably easier to land other jobs when they chose to leave the company, since the company was in a medium to large region and there were other companies providing a demand for skilled steel and metal workers. Sweeng therefore needs to develop conditions at work that encourages employees to stay with the company.

So, has the absence of structural conditions in my report affected my analysis and my conclusions? To clarify my conclusions I will start by asking the question, did Sweproc have any other options when they planned and executed their restructuring process? According to my analysis, management at Sweproc chose a low road strategy for the restructuring process – but was it their only option? By studying the structural conditions which existed in both companies and in their surroundings, it is possible to understand on the basis of the differences in conditions why management at Sweproc chose a low road strategy for the restructuring process.

In a crisis situation management must deliver solutions that can produce quick results in order to ensure the survival of the company. Using a low road strategy, management could gain some control of the situation. But it is much more difficult to plan how to develop conditions for a sustainable working life in acute situations, as the time aspect does not allow for thorough planning or time for employee participation. Employee participation opens up the possibility for management strategies to include individual aspects as well as organisational aspects. When companies are in an acute situation and management must act quickly to reduce costs the speed of the process becomes a barrier to restructuring work. The demands from group management restricted the scope of action for the management at Sweproc. The urgency of the process was a barrier to employee participation in the planning and execution phases. To broaden the production line would have required investments in new production equipment. To invest in competence development would have required more resources, which the company was lacking. The austere economic conditions contributed to shaping the working conditions and work environment for the employees. Follow-up focused on pursuing cost reductions. Relations between the employer and the union became more polarised and the union had to put more efforts into looking out for the employees’ interests. So, my answer to the above question of whether Sweproc had any other choice is that in order for the management to come up with quick solutions and produce prompt results, a high road strategy was probably not an option since it would have required more time and additional resources.
Based on my definition of sustainable development it is plausible to assume that management strategies at Sweproc would not lead to sustainable development as the restructuring process was all about reducing operating costs and increasing business capacity with the aim of surviving the crisis. While developing these strategies, employees' needs were no longer present as a perspective.

Based on my definition of sustainable development in the sense of meeting the needs of today without compromising future resources and that businesses and processes will generate and regenerate human resources rather than consume them, the consequences of management strategies were poorer working conditions for the employees and employees at Sweproc being consumed as a resource. In addition, sustainable development means that demands in the long term can be balanced with accessible resources or that resources can be created to balance increasing demands. Sweproc could not live up to this condition either as the employees had no opportunities for developing their skills for new demands at work and they could not access additional resources for the work teams to be able to take part in competence development or to gain time to recuperate.

On the other hand, it is rewarding to discuss whether management at Sweeng could have chosen any other path than a high road strategy for the restructuring process. The company had good conditions for dialogue with the union and employees, and favourable conditions for developing a flexible organisation. With its multi-skilled and inventive employees, company management had good conditions for developing the business with a better capacity to adjust to new demands from the market. Theoretically, a low road strategy was an option for Sweeng, but it would probably have led to poorer conditions for the company during the restructuring process. Based on the above definition of sustainable development, my opinion is that Sweeng developed in this direction.

With this digression on structural conditions I have shown that it is possible that other structural or hidden factors or conditions existed, which the companies could not influence, that acted to influence the restructuring process in the two companies. I do not mean to play down the significance of the factors which I have described and analysed in relation to the different phases of the restructuring process, or claim that they are subordinate to structural conditions. Instead I would state that different factors have different significance in different change processes. When companies are forced to rush their restructuring processes in order to adapt to new demands from the external world they must start with existing conditions. My analysis shows that Sweproc and Sweeng had different starting points from which to handle the restructuring process based on several factors, which were emphasised by their respective structural conditions and these put together contributed to limiting Sweproc's options and contributed to strengthening Sweeng's chances. The analysis also show that the different outcomes at individual level in the
restructuring process were shaped in the planning phase, emphasised in the execution phase and could be followed up in the stabilisation phase.

The question now remains in the context of this thesis, are there any general conclusions that can be drawn about restructuring processes? This thesis has shown that, as a result of structural conditions, some companies are forced to choose a low road strategy. Handling a restructuring process is considerably more difficult when a company has to start from poor conditions, especially if it threatens the employees’ situation. The thesis also shows that work environment factors are important to consider in restructuring processes to prevent that organisational development does not happen on the expense of employee development. Whenever it is possible for management to cooperate with unions and employees about restructuring processes, there are better chances of utilising high road strategies as they require employee participation and perspectives. Without their participation, the management has no feedback as to whether employees are consumed as a resource or undergo development. In using high road strategies, management can develop conditions for sustainable development in which the organisation develops work systems that generate new resources as required and where working conditions favour employees’ work environment and development.

In using low road strategies, an organisation may develop work systems that consume employees as a resource, as organisational development happens on the expense of employee development. Organisational and instrumental factors have greater importance in the restructuring work and the perspective of individuals is lacking in these strategies. Even if the business is viable, it is not sustainable from a humane perspective. Even though the company may survive and become profitable, the employees’ work environment may deteriorate when the restructuring process only focuses on organisational conditions. When the individual’s perspective is not included in management strategies, organisational change may lead to work intensification, increased tiredness, stress and poorer opportunities for development among employees.

What happened later?
The company of Sweproc still exists but under a new name, and after further cutbacks the number of employees has been reduced to a total of 435, of whom 336 are blue collar workers. In 2007 demand for the company’s products increased, leading to the company making new investments in production equipment to broaden the range of the products and taking on another 40 employees. Sickness absence among employees has dropped to around four percent since the company introduced new procedures for preventive health care and signed an agreement with company healthcare. The company is now part of a new group and the market is still mainly Europe. There is a new site manager and personnel manager. The chairman of the Metall union has now retired and a new chair has been elected.
The company of Sweeng has changed ownership and is now owned by a Finnish group. Group management has phased out the company's manufacturing operations due to overcapacity in the group. Only 70 employees remain at the company: 50 of these are blue collar workers and 20 are salaried employees. Instead of manufacturing the company only delivers service to customers. All of those who were employed in production found work at other companies. The company has the same site manager. The chairman of Metall has a new job in the union.

In the light of this conclusion it is reasonable to ask just how sustainable the idea of sustainable workplaces really is. Sweproc, which was successful in its application of low road strategies in the restructuring process, created a viable company despite the employees’ work environment deteriorating at the time of the study. Sweeng was developed in accordance with high road strategies towards a more sustainable company, but was still not financially viable and was forced to lay off many employees and shut down production. This shows that even though companies may become profitable and create sustainable workplaces from a human perspective, they are not always viable from a financial perspective.

More research needed
More research – that include a gender perspective – is needed to study how companies starting from poor conditions in restructuring processes can still develop good conditions for their employees when they adapt business operations from crisis to survival and later to sustainable development. Structural conditions and their significance in the restructuring process also need to be studied in order to research companies’ real chances of adapting their businesses to new demand from the market. Structural change is a recurrent phenomenon both in industry and the service sector, in the public sector and the private sector, and therefore needs to be studied to develop a new understanding of how structural factors create conditions for organisations’ survival. Developing new knowledge of how to turn around the negative consequences of low road strategies to counteract the intensification of work, loss of competence and deterioration of work conditions should have both scientific and practical value. This development of knowledge can also be carried out in future together with those affected by restructuring processes such as owners, managers, employees, union representatives and part owners of other private and public organisations close to the company.
References


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APPENDIX

Additional research results, not presented in this thesis, have been disseminated in other articles, reports and conference proceedings.

Book chapters


Conference papers


Randle, H; Eriksson, I; Haunch, P; Bennett, T. (2004). Learning to become employable by learning to work in the health & social sector. A new career path in life. The International conference on Workplace Learning, the learners'


Footnotes

1 Contract no: HPSE-CT2001-00049
2 Arbetslivsinstitutet (Institute of Working Life) was a government research centre for research into working life which was closed down on 1 July 2007 after a decision by the conservative coalition government.
3 www.apel-foug.se
4 For a detailed description of the aims, goals and summary of research results refer to Stuart 2005
5 Deliverable no 34, Final Report. Learning in Partnership: Responding to the Restructuring of the European steel and metal sector
6 In this work package all participating partners reported information in a template sent out by the leader of the study. For this reason, no national reports were written in this work package.
7 It is often difficult to create these conditions for cooperation, which means that interactive research cannot be seen as a general approach but should be used as a complement to other research methods.
8 In the licentiate dissertation (Randle 2005) the company is called A whereas in the text (Randle & Svensson 2007) and (Greenwood & Randle 2007) it is called Swepro.
9 In the licentiate dissertation (Randle 2005) the company is called B and in the text (Randle & Svensson 2007) and (Greenwood & Randle 2007) it is called Sweeng.
10 Now included in the union called Unionen
11 For a more detailed list of all participating countries’ collected data read the complete final report, Stuart 2005.
12 Now included in the union called IF Metall
13 In work package five respondents could read the entire interview script since the whole interview was transcribed.
14 A research project was carried out to map and create better opportunities for older personnel in one health care district, NHS Fife Board in Scotland.
15 Research cooperation with researchers from a national health service university, NHSU, and the union called Unison in Manchester, England, and interns from the Lindesberg hospital and Sollefteå municipality.
16 The first version of this article was entitled, "Organisational change, teamwork and learning agenda: Cases from Sweden and the UK" written by Greenwood, I; Randle, H; Teige, B; Svensson, L and presented at the second CTEE conference in Prato, Italy on September 2004.
17 This is described in work package 2 (Randle & Svensson 2002b).
18 The figure is estimated by the union chair person.
19 For more information refer to Randle & Svensson 2002b
Hanne Randle is a researcher and PhD-student at Karlstad University – department of Working Life Science. Besides industrial relations and partnership, Hanne has researched; conditions for developing sustainable public sector jobs, developing a European standard for vocational education and training for explosive sector workers, older workers and lifelong learning, and workplace learning. As a mean to develop a joint learning process between researchers and practitioner her method in research is to involve participants into the whole process of the research.

The thesis is based on a research project called Learning-in-partnership, abbreviated to “Learnpartner”. The work was organized as a joint research project between Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Germany, and managed by Leeds University Business School in the UK. Our project task was to describe best practice for partnership-based work on the labour market within the European steel and metal industry when responding to the process of restructuring. The research was based on case studies in two Swedish companies, where we conducted interviews with trade union people, employees, managers, and human resource personnel. The qualitative design was supplemented with interactive methods during discussions, workshops, and seminars, which meant involving practitioners from both the companies and the trade unions in interpreting the results. The theoretical framework relates to work organisations, industrial relations, competence development as well as conditions for sustainable development. In order to describe the research findings in this thesis, a model was used to highlight different factors that can influence change processes.

The report describes empirical findings regarding the consequences of change processes taking place at organisational and at individual level. The results show that both the companies have been successful when it comes to responding to the restructuring process; however, there are some differences at individual level. The thesis highlights certain factors such as; management strategies, trade union involvement, workteams, employee participation and follow-up and discusses how they influence the entire process and the outcomes of restructuring work.