A partnership approach

The research described in this report aimed to describe “best practice” for partnership based work in the labor market in the steel and metal industry as a response to the process of restructuring in the European steel and metal sector. It is based on case studies at two companies manufacturing goods to a global market and presents how the blue-collar workers union has dealt with the management of organizational change in the steel and metal industry in Sweden. The results in this report show that both companies have been successful when it comes to responding to the restructuring in the steel and metal sector; however there are some differences. The author discusses the differences in the report and search for answers in the trade unions involvement in the change process. Trade unions that have a higher level of participation and a stronger influence on the management of organisational change are more successful in creating sustainable conditions for change – that means creating conditions that are good for their members.

Hanne Randle is working as a research assistant at the R&D centre APel in Lindesberg in Sweden and she is currently involved in two different research projects. The first project is to evaluate investments in the public sector to lower employee sick rates and the second is to take part in a transnational project with the ambition to develop a European standard for employee vocational training and education for the explosives sector.
Hanne Randle

A partnership approach

– strategies for organisational change
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A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Strategies for organisational change

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FOREWORD

The steel industry has always been a part of my life. I grew up in a small region in Sweden where the steel factory was the biggest and almost the only employer. Both my parents and my brothers have work in the steel industry until the rolling mill was closed down. I can still remember the excitement as a child when my parents took me to the huge steel factory. The memory of the workers in blue overalls, the rattle and the smell of factory will always stay with me. My own relationship to the world of steel has helped me a lot during the work with this report – it gave me some kind of credibility to be nosy.

This report is based on a research project named Learning-in-partnership, abbreviated to “Learnpartner” conducted under the fifth program in the European Commission. The work was organized as a joint research project between the countries, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Holland, United Kingdom, Spain and Germany, and managed from the Business school at Leeds University in England. Our job in the project was to describe “best practice” for partnership based work in the labor market in the steel and metal industry in Europe and to evaluate the role new lifelong learning strategies could play as a response to the process of restructuring in the European steel and metal sector.

This research report builds on many interviews, meetings, workshops and other methods with people representing trade unions, companies, universities, trade union officials, employees, management, human resources, researchers, and community agencies. Many people have taken part in interpreting and analysing research findings as a method to validate and discuss research results, and to learn from experience. This research process has engaged many people’s attention and commitment and it has required their wish to share their problems, thoughts and ideas with the researchers.

I want to thank them all for their contribution – it would have been quite impossible to manage the work without their wish to take part in this journey.

I want to thank all the fantastic people who represent the trade union Metall (Svenska Metall industriarbetsareföreningen) and the trade union SiF (Svenska Industrijästesternaförbundet) and all the employees who contributed in talks, meetings and interviews. You have been very generous to share your knowledge, experience and wisdom with me. Thanks, also to company managers, human resource people, and people in middle management; it would have been very difficult to conduct this research without your help and contribution. You have all tried your hardest to be helpful, by organising my visits and interviews. You helped me to get in touch with people, and made sure that I got all the facts right. I specially want to send my thanks to the presidents for the trade union Metall at both company A and company B, and the trade union people at the head office for Metall in Stockholm.

I want to thank Mark Stuart at Leeds University Business School and Lennart Svensson at NIWL in Stockholm; you have both been fantastic mentors for me during these three years of research. Thank you all my colleagues in the research project “Learning-In-Partnership” from Germany, Spain, Holland, UK, Norway, and Finland for your contribution to fantastic meetings and interesting discussions. You are all so special to me and it has been my fortune to get the chance to work with you and to learn from you all. I especially want to thank you for your feedback on my writing.
I also want to thank Jan Karlsson and Birgitta Eriksson who gave me this chance to finalise three years of research into this academic report. I wish to thank all the other people at the department for work science at Karlstad University; you always make me feel welcome to your group. They say that the sun is always shining in Karlstad - for me it is true. On cloudy days, you find the sunshine in the eyes of the people you meet.

Torbjörn Petterson, Maria Modin in Sollefteå and Inga-Lill Eriksson in Sundsvall/Östersund – you have become my partners – you are genuinely interested in finding new ways to develop individuals, organisations and the local communities. You have given a face to real commitment. You make things happen, what most people only dare to dream about – by sticking your head straight into the lion’s den. You are the best! Thank for all you help.

And finally I want to thank my colleagues at APeL R&D for their comments on my research which has helped me to reflect on many things, such as approach and methods in conducting case studies, reporting and the planning of seminars and workshops, and most of all they keep reminding me that there is more to life than work.
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SUMMARY

This report is based on a research project conducted under the fifth program in the European Commission. The work was organised as a joint research project between the countries, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Holland, United Kingdom, Spain and Germany, and managed from the Business school at Leeds University in England. The project aimed to describe best practice for partnership based work in the labor market in the steel and metal industry in Europe and to evaluate the role new lifelong learning strategies could play as a response to the process of restructuring in the European steel and metal sector.

The report presents and discusses how the blue-collar workers union has dealt with the management of organisational change as a response to the consequences of restructuring in the steel and metal industry in Sweden and based on case studies at two companies manufacturing goods to a global market. The report describes empirical findings of the consequences of the change process in both companies.

The research design was to use qualitative methods such as interviews, work shadowing and surveys in case studies and to complement with interactive methods in discussions, workshops and seminars which meant involving practitioners from the companies and the trade unions to participate in the interpretations of the results.

The theoretical framework relates to work organisations, industrial relations, and different perspectives of learning and some ideas of how to create sustainable conditions for change. In order to describe the research findings in this report a model was developed which highlights the interrelationship between industrial relations, work organisation and learning.

The results in this report show that both companies have been successful when it comes to responding to the restructuring in the steel and metal sector; however there are some differences in the level of success. We discuss the differences in the report and search for answers in the trade unions involvement in the change process.

The trade union that have a higher participation and a stronger influence on the management of organisational change are more successful in creating sustainable conditions for change – that means creating conditions that are good for their members. Trade union opportunity to influence work organisation and learning is dependent on the skills, the degree of teamwork and on the autonomy among their members.

It is easier to participate and influence if the union is part of an established and legitimate partnership solution. To accomplish sustainable conditions for change the partnership will benefit from participation in strategic networks. The level of change competence in the partnership is also important. The success factor of the union participation is depending on the strength of the union and the democracy in the union organisation.
1. INTRODUCTION

This report is part of a transnational research project named Learning-in-partnership, abbreviated to “Learnpartner”, which was managed from the Business school at Leeds University. The research project started 1st of October 2001 and ended in September 2004. The overall aims of the project were to evaluate the role new lifelong learning strategies could play as a response to the process of restructuring in the European steel and metal sector, and to assess the potential of partnership-based approaches for furthering the learning agenda. Further aims were to develop the European skills charters for the steel and metal industries by describing best practice for partnership based work in the labor market and to reduce the displacement of employees from the steel and metal industry in Europe. The project was conducted as a joint research project between the countries, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Holland, United Kingdom, Spain and Germany, under the fifth program in the European Commission.

1.1 Objective and background

As the theme in the research project is structural changes in the industry, there is an expectation that we shall be able to find some consequences of restructuring at plant level. This report will focus on changes found at the organisational level. To be able to analyse organisational changes I shall illustrate the case studies by using some voices from employees, trade union people, and management.

The main issue in the research is to describe and analyse how the trade unions participate and influence the management of organisational change as a response to the consequences of restructuring in two companies in the steel and metal industry.

The role of the trade unions have been discussed when it comes to partnership based developmental work. When it comes to dealing with change processes in Sweden, the trade unions often make a natural partner together with the employers and community agencies. The trade unions in Sweden have dealt with major change processes caused by structural changes in the economy recently and in the past decades. In order to adjust to the pressures from the global economy, companies in the private and public sector respond by downsizing or reorganising their activities. Some of the consequences of change processes become visible in displacement of workers, redundancies, and an increasing need to invest and participate in supplementary training and education. This basis for the research is to find out whether there are any successful ways to deal with the situation of restructuring and to find out to which extent a partnership-based solution is an effective strategy.

1.2 Contents of the report

The structure of the report is to present the research design in chapter two. This comes after discussing the main objectives in the research, which is how trade unions has participated in the management of organisational change as a response to the consequences of restructuring in the steel and metal industry in Sweden.

In chapter two, I present the challenge and the meaning of interactive approach and methods in qualitative research. This chapter also presents the practice of conducting case studies at
two companies in the steel and metal sector. Both companies manufacture goods and compete on a global market.

In chapter three, I present a conceptual model for the theoretical framework which I later use to base the analysis of empirical results. I present theories about work organisations, different perspectives of learning in an organisational context, how to create sustainable conditions for change, how industrial relations can be described in different typologies, influence and participation in strategic decision making and finally some thoughts about conditions for trade union work and influence.

In chapter four, I present empirical data from both companies describing some of the consequences of the change process. I use quotes from interviews to describe the situation at plant level. In this chapter people representing the companies gives voice to their sincere thoughts and ideas. Some express hope, visions and possibilities others express anger, problems and anxiety.

In chapter five, I discuss and analyse research results. To help the reader I also present a table that describes similarities and differences between the two companies when making the analysis based on the theoretical framework. I also discuss the analysis together with the practitioners as I invited some of them to participate in the interpretations of the results.

In the final chapter six, I make an attempt to sum up the conclusions by returning to the conceptual model. I discuss how the research findings can be interpreted and used based on the idea of presenting ideas of a good or best practice.
2. Research design

This particular report was part of a transnational research project including several separate work packages that included five separate national reports. One of the ambitions in the research project was to join the practitioner and researcher’s interest in the study, however it was initially difficult to establish. A project management group set up the objectives for the Learnpartner project representing trade union people and researchers from Europe, and the practitioners were not invited in beginning. It has then been the responsibility of the researcher to find ways to work with the ambition to combine the overall research objectives with an interactive research ambition and to find ways to involve the practitioners and to join their interest. When we presented the research project to the practitioners together with an invitation to participate in an open inquiry, many doors opened. In this particular study the practitioners have been involved in the process of interpreting the results during the writing process.

The report presents empirical results from case studies at plant level in the steel and metal industry. A trade union perspective is presented from people acting on the behalf of the trade union in positions as trade union activists and local authority politicians. The research report also explores how learning, skill enhancement and competence issues are dealt with at plant level in comparison to the chosen theoretical framework.

The research results are based on empirical findings from case studies at plant level which are analyzed and discussed together with the practitioners and towards a theoretical framework. The research design combines both inductive and a deductive methods. The report aims to emphasize understanding (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994:42, Starrin & Svensson 1994:26). The ambition in the research project was also to invite the practitioners to a joint knowledge production where the research results are discussed, analyzed and disseminated together with the practitioners on a continuous basis. Instead of making research on people we make research with people (Svensson, 2002, Heron & Reason, 2001).

I selected the plants where to conduct case studies after recommendation from trade union officials at the national level. The trade union people and the human resource personnel gave us the approval to conduct case studies at the two plants. In order to find people to interview I asked people representing the management, trade unions and other employees to recommend me whom to meet. I agreed to meet some of the people whom they recommended me to meet.

This report does not focus on gender issues in the steel and metal sector and therefore it may seem to present a gender blind study. The participation of female workers in the steel and metal sector is rare – and both the chosen plants are dominated by male workers. However to find out if the restructuring has had different impact and consequences for female employees we need to make additional data collection and this was not the purpose of the research.

The results represented in this study are derived from findings at the local level by interviewing trade union activists at plant level, as well as workers, managers, human resource personnel, local authority politicians, job center people and displaced workers. In order to understand the workflow at both plants participation on the shop floor was necessary. This was managed by three days of work shadowing. The basis in the interview has been to present each person’s view and experience of some common issues. All the people we talked to shares some experience and expressed opinions about issues related to the management of
change and the situation in the steel industry, as a consequence of having to adjust to new requirements.

2.1 Interactive research

The research ambition is that the benefits from research should be mutual between both practitioners and researchers. Interactive methods are promoted as support to an interactive, change-oriented, critical, and interdisciplinary research about learning and change-processes in working life. The research should be characterized by equal relationships and high participation at all levels. However, the issue of power is always present in the research relations - you do have different presuppositions when you enter a project and you could never be complete equal and have the same understandings (Reynolds, 2002). Nevertheless, the ambition when using an interactive approach in the research design is to create a mutual respect for each other where each party’s knowledge and understanding carries the same weight in the knowledge production.

The interactive knowledge production should have practical relevance but should also contribute to a long-term theoretical development. Empirical results that are possible to codify, tacit knowledge and practical knowledge are equally important and should be brought into the knowledge formation process. Joint knowledge formation entails both technical and social knowledge formation in direct contact with practitioners in a developmental process.

Researchers should collaborate closely with partners and not dissociate themselves from fieldwork. The success factors should be measured on results made in changed practices as a result of a deeper understanding of the practice and not solely on theoretical results. Research should deal with challenges and practical problems identified by practitioners in their enterprises and the basis should be how they experience their problems and not initially defined by the researchers as academic problems. Identified problems in everyday practice can trigger the research process. The initial stages can be followed by critical analysis that aims to detect underlying mechanisms and general patterns. New research methods can be used and combined in different ways, for example discussions, reflection, experimentation, or floor testing. By making the process of analysis more innovative a joint learning process can be stimulated.

A combination of pragmatism combined with a critical perspective is the ontological and epistemological basis for interactive research. Interactive methods make it possible to discard old dualistic thinking in academic traditions such as keeping theory and practice apart (Senge & Schamer 2001). By tradition, theory is both tried and applied on practice or theory is constructed from the knowledge derived from the empirical fields of practice. Argyris & Schön concept of single-loop learning builds on the old thesis that theory comes first as a mould to practice and in their mind, it will not lead to a genuine development of either thought or practice if practice is not part of a dialectical process in developing new theory (1996). By applying an interactive research approach we can provide a more holistic and process-oriented perspective where theory can be constructed and tried simultaneously. An interactive research approach can work as a prerequisite to enable the joining of interests. Action and practice are decisive conditions for knowledge formation in the tradition of pragmatism, promoted by John Dewey. He fathered the expression “learning by doing” as the guiding star of all good learning practices.
When practitioners become genuinely involved in the research process new and sometimes unexpected perspectives and interpretations can be discovered and put forward. This can contribute to the development of new concepts and theories (Svensson, Brulin, Ellström & Widegren: 2002). By inviting people who represents the practitioners to a joint knowledge production, the researchers can get access to their knowledge. (Aagaard Nielsen & Svensson, 2005) By interactive methods, it is possible to access tacit knowledge. By making everyday practice explicit it is possible to critically examine and change ‘theories in practice’, which can result in the development of theory building. When people with different or similar experiences meet to put words to their practice they also theorise about their practice. This kind of theory building differs from traditional academic theorising, as practical theory is very seldom systematized, written, or related to already existing theories, in the actual area (Svensson 2002). However, theorizing everyday practice can mean to validate existing theories.

When using an interactive approach in the research design the role of the researcher is different as the researcher is looking to become more involved in the everyday practice as a mean to develop a deeper understanding of underlying mechanisms. At the same time, the researcher must find methods to carry out the fieldwork where it is possible to be both close and distant. The success of the research can depend on the researcher’s ability to find a balance between keeping a distance and staying close to the practice (Davies, 1999). The researcher puts the self in a more vulnerable position as the research results depends more on practitioners wish and desire to take part in the research process. In order to develop functional and open relations with the practitioners the researcher need to be more open and flexible in fieldwork. The interactive research process also requires more time both from the researcher and from the practitioners when compared with traditional research.

2.2 Interactive research – the practice

In the beginning of the research project, our job was to create a learning environment where we could contrast empirical results. Our task was also to create a climate where both practitioners and researcher could discuss, accept, and understand research results. We also had to make sure that we could maintain a critical stance in the research and at the same time maintain a good relationship with the people representing the practitioners.

The trade union at national level was involved from the beginning in the research project and they even participated in the process of setting up the overall research project at transnational level. As such, the trade union had the chance to influence the topics in the research design and highlight areas, which they found important to investigate further. They have been involved in all parts of the research process and during the entire research project; we have had several feedback sessions about results and findings. The trade union people got an update about the progress in the research on a continuous basis and they have been involved in practical work such as planning and organising workshops, seminars and hosting transnational meetings.

As soon as I started the case studies at plant level, I kept in touch with the trade union people at national level and kept them informed about the progress in the casework. I also communicated with the trade union people and the management at the local level about work progress in the case studies. We discussed the planning of interviews and work shadowing sessions in a dialogue together at plant level. I kept in touch with the people at plant level by
phone and e-mail between my visits. By involving the practitioners at plant level in the research project, I became very close to the people and our relation developed into a mutual partnership at both plants.

During the entire research project, timing has been vital when it comes to planning and conducting fieldwork and as such, it has been essential in the research project to be able to judge when the time is right to approach people in different organisations. I waited for the right moment to ask for interviews and meetings instead of convincing people to participate. I gave people plenty of time to prepare for meetings and observations and sent the interview guides well in advance of the meeting. By inviting the practitioners to participate in workshops, seminars and other dissemination activities, the research project developed a quite elaborated network with people representing different areas in life and work. People have found new ways to meet other people and they have discovered new platforms for learning. My own and personal experience is that if researchers approach people when conducting fieldwork, with the curiosity to learn more about their practice and with respect as equal partners, they will treat you with the same respect back.

During the research project, I used several methods for conducting case studies at plant level. The basic idea was to use traditional qualitative methods such as in interviews and observations, work shadowing and other participative methods. I used questionnaires in specific cases. When I used questionnaires, I also made interviews in order to widen the sources of data collection however; I did not use any questionnaires for this particular report. When I made interviews, I sent out an interview guide to allow the interviewees some time to prepare for the questions. I prepared interview guides in themes, with the ambition to avoid yes or no answers. I started the interviews with open-ended questions and the talks finished more or less as an open conversation. I planned the work shadowing session together with the chair of the trade union and the management confirmed my participation in work. I turned up at the beginning of the shift, changed into working clothes, and took part in the workteams. They showed me around the entire plant (at company A) and as such, I got the opportunity to see the workflow in each workstation. At the same time, I had the opportunity to meet the workers and to ask questions. However, I did not experience any trouble in getting any information from the workers or managers, as it seemed they were quite happy to share their experiences with me. At company B, I spent the shift in one workteam. They gave me the opportunity to see other parts of the mechanical workshop and to meet other employees. At this plant, the employees sought me up to share their experiences with me. They had heard from the trade union that I was visiting the plant.

The skill to listen is essential for making correct interpretations from interviews and observations. When people share their stories, they say things without speaking the words. Instead, they can use different kind of artefacts in order to communicate. Suddenly silent people start to talk and things start to happen. People create a new kind of social community between them selves where they all share similar experiences. As a result of interactive research methods we can provide a venue for a common knowledge production. In addition to the interviews, talks and shop floor meetings we also had several official meetings where the practitioners were invited to participate.

I met employees on the shop floor and trade union people both in their union offices and on the shop floor. I held a special meeting with the trade union clubs at both plats to discuss and analyse research findings together with them. I met people with office jobs, such as managers, and supervisors in their offices for interviews. These meetings were more like traditional
interviews where I was sitting at one end of the desk and the person who I met was sitting in the opposite side from me. Again, every single person whom I met seemed to be happy to share his or her experiences with me. I also met managers and human resource personnel at both companies and our meetings were more to like a traditional interview situation than a social visit with free conversation. However, at company A, I participated in several meeting with the human resource manager and her assistant in different kind of settings. I introduced students from universities who were there to assist the management in developmental work related to organisational development. I also participated as a researcher to evaluate a course developed for a group of employees who were on a long-term sick leave. I met the group on several occasions and I invited the management to participate in the meetings in order to analyse and discuss the findings from the evaluation as a joint learning experience.

All meetings and interviews resulted in some kind of documentation, which I fed back to the interviewees. I asked them to read the text and to make comments to the contents. In some cases, I had made some errors when I was describing facts, due to my lack of knowledge of the correct technical terms. In other cases, they asked me not to refer to certain phrases as the contents were sensitive and in some cases, it came clear in the text that I had not been able to understand the basic reasoning. We communicated changes until we could agree on the contents and we were sure that I had completely understood the description from the case studies. This was not an easy process to give an accurate description of human behaviour or describing people’s conception of matters. We could have chosen to refrain from discussing the contents in the text in depth and detail; however, that would have compromised my understanding of the practice. I could have described a first glance picture that everybody could agree on but it still would have been an inaccurate picture, as I could not understand or interpret the meaning in the description. My ambition was too search for the hidden and untold. There is always a risk to fall for the urge to jump to conclusions, especially if many people share similar experiences and are open to share them with you – without a careful analysis. You might become tempted to think that you understand more about the practice when you notice that you use same words and concepts as practiced in the field – before you learn that there is a difference in meaning.

2.2.1 A joint knowledge creation – and a critical stance

In order to be able to conduct research and gather people to participate in the search for a joint learning experience or knowledge production it is vital for the researcher to be able to communicate to people at different levels in organisations and to communicate in different arenas and create a feeling of mutual trust. The key in the research process was to create an atmosphere where I could develop a good relationship with the practitioners and with my co researchers. The research project was a learning experience not only for me as a person it was a learning experience even for the involved practitioners and the researchers. Many researchers from other countries have very little or no experience in using interactive research approach in methods. They could not always understand the benefits of involving the practitioners into the process of analysis and dissemination.

In order to obtain a critical stance in the research process elements of critical analysis and joint learning have been vital. One key method has been to organise learning processes when and if opportunities have emerged. In order to be able to organise learning processes some kind of learning environment must be established where people could take part as equal partners in the discussions and dialogue. I have organised meeting places and venues where
people representing employees, trade unions, researchers and others have had the opportunity to meet.

When people experience mutual trust and that, their words are just as accepted and important as any other people’s words they feel more committed to the task to participate in a joint learning process. In the absence of traditional power play in organisations, we managed to create an atmosphere where people felt free to speak their minds and talk about their experiences. Many people in working life have no experience of having a voice and their opinion of them selves is that they have no experience or knowledge that is worth spreading to others or sharing. By organising learning environments in networks, people can discover their own knowledge and they experience that other people share a wish to listen to them. When people have the chance to meet other people with similar conditions, they soon learn that other people share similar experiences. A method to lift local perspective to the next level in the knowledge production is making a critical analysis of research results. One venue is a network strategy. In networks, people from different areas of life can come together to discuss certain issues and to learn from each other. The researcher can use the network to analyse research results and to disseminate results. (Svensson, Jacobsson & Åberg, 2001)

2.3 The data collecting

In this section I shall present how I went about to collect data for the research report and also describe what an interactive research approach means to the practice of data collecting.

2.3.1 Method used at national and transnational level

In addition to the interviews, talks and shop floor meetings there have been several official meetings where the practitioners have been invited to participate. We arranged for several seminars and workshops during the research process where we invited trade union people, employees, managers, human resource personnel, learning centre managers, adult education instructor, and researchers to participate. In December 2002 a seminar was held at company A. We held a European seminar in Oslo in September 2002, and we hosted a transnational workshop at the Institute of Working Life in Stockholm in November 2003. Five trade union people – representing Metall and SiF from plant A, and B, – participated in the transnational workshop. There was also an open seminar in April 2004 in Lindesberg in Sweden, organized as a dissemination activity where trade union people from the national level and local level from both plants participated in a workshop together with the research group and 60 invited people representing trade unions, management, employer’s organisations, adult education providers etc. People representing the trade unions at different levels and employees from both companies, where we conducted case studies, had several opportunities to meet each other to discuss different kind of issues, together with the research group.

Our ambition when we arranged for these meeting places was to create a learning environment and promote an emerging learning process – which we succeeded with in many cases. We also invited trade union people and grass root people to participate as speakers in the seminars and workshops in order to allow people to speak for them self. This way we could avoid a distortion in communication. Instead of a researcher telling other people about what had happened at company level, people could speak for them self and the rest of the audience could hear the story direct from the source. We did not experience language as a barrier for participation in the workshops, seminars, or paper conferences. In the cases when
they had to talk in another language than Swedish, I helped the practitioners to translate overhead slides or I acted as a live interpreter.

We also invited practitioners to participate in transnational meetings in the research project abroad, and to take part in paper conferences. We wanted to create an opportunity for them to describe the cases presented in the research or in the papers and they had the opportunity to disseminate their work to other researchers or practitioners besides from answering questions. This way to work had many spin-off effects for the participating practitioners. During the research project, several networks emerged as the result of people connecting with other people in different social contexts and surroundings in order to discuss similar ideas and problems. People invited other people to cooperate in different kind of projects and networks.

The trade union people at national level also took part in interviews at their local offices however; they also took part in transnational meetings in the project. This also led to a joint learning process emerging between the trade union officials at national level and the local trade unions as they got a greater understanding of the gap between national policies and what activities takes place at local level. The different trade unions in the participating countries also had the opportunity to discuss similarities and differences in their assignments. Many people have come together from different kind of businesses and practices because of the research in the Learnpartner project, which has resulted in the creation of new learning environments and the opening of new research fields.

2.3.2 The interview situation

I have met all the interviewees at least once, some of them I have met on several occasions. The interview situation with the trade union people can be described as open conversation. Partly structured questions were used in some of the interviews to direct the conversation towards the area of learning and competence enhancement. During the work shadowing sessions I used semi-structures interview techniques. The workflow and work situation and the number of employees on the shop floor guided what questions were discussed during interviews. In some areas the situation was very noisy and sometimes too dangerous to stay and chat (risk of falling or exposure to heat). For these reasons, it was sometimes difficult to make a conversation at the specific moment, and therefore it was necessary to return to the discussion at a later point. The interviewees were very eager to share their stories with me and often they started talking without having any questions to answer. This situation happened when the employees understood the reason for my visit.

A few days after all meetings and interviews each person was asked to make changes in the transcripts of the interviews and talks if they found any errors or misunderstandings in the text. Each person asked me to make some kind of changes in the documents; some of them only requested very small changes. They have all approved of the final wordings of the interviews.

2.3.3 Meetings and interviews at company A

My first visit to the plant was in spring 2002 when I met the person who used to be the chairperson of the trade union for blue-collar workers, Metall. At that time he has been elected chairperson for the white-collar trade union, SiF, at the same company. I also met the person who used to be chairperson for SiF he is now retired. I met the new chairperson for
Metall on several occasions and four of his colleagues; they all have different assignments for the trade union, as Safety and Health inspector, study organizer and members of the board.

I met cost center managers, department managers and shop floor people. I met most of these people during my two days of work shadowing. I met and talked with around twenty people. All the people I met seemed quite happy to share their experiences with me, and I got the impression that they needed to talk to somebody about their situation at work. I also met two different teams working in the process at the steel works. When I came to the workteams of four or five people it seemed that they had one natural spokesperson that did most of the talking. The rest of the people in the workteam either nodded when they agreed or they filled me in on some details, which they thought, needed to be told in their story.

I also met a group of eight people now on long-term sick leave who all have worked at the company at the minimum of thirty years. One of them had worked at the same workplace for more than forty years. I met the group on five different occasions. I also met the managing director of the company on one occasion and had about eight meetings with people from the human resource department. I was asked by the HR department to describe the research project in the company newspaper, and the article was issued in the spring 2003.

It was slightly more difficult to organize a reading through the notes by the people from the workteams after the work shadowing, compared to a traditional interview. I asked the trade union people to help me out in this process, so therefore the trade union person who guided me through the two days were asked to make sure that the people were given the notes, which he did. I made personal phone calls to each of the people I had met and asked them to read through the notes, and after they had agreed to do that I sent the notes either by email or by post. The number of stories I asked people to read through were eight in the steel works and six at the hot roll mill and department of dispatch. I was asked to make some changes in the wording, but they commented that I had managed to describe the situation at the company – in their view – in a correct way. The people I meet were very honest and upfront about things, and when I was taking notes I was not being selective of what to put down in writing. I was asked to cut and not to recite certain parts in the text regarding the notes after the work shadowing.

As part of dissemination and interpretations of the findings a seminar was held in May at the trade union club. Eight people representing the trade union company board participated during the seminar. The research findings were discussed and the trade union recognized the described picture and commented on the results.

2.3.4 Meetings and interviews at company B

I met two people representing the trade union (Metall) at company B on three different occasions. They have both alternated in the position as local trade union chairperson. I also met with the human resource manager once. To know more about the workflow I participated in the work process during one shift and I met several people from the shop floor. During the day of work shadowing, I met two people working in the workteam handling a horizontal drill, a person in another workteam handling a vertical drill. I met three of the five women working at the plant, two of them working as CNC-operators and one operating a forklift. I met welders and tinsmiths and people from the section in the workflow who do the assembly work. In addition, I met a person who is currently working together with the trade union in order to find ways to supply training and education to the smaller steel and metal enterprises.
in the region. My impression was again that the people I met were very happy to share their story with me.

I sent the notes from the work shadowing to one of the trade union activist whom I had met. I asked him to make comments about any misunderstandings or things he thought we needed to clear out. He approved of the description of the situation on the shop floor and the workflow. I sent notes to the people I had met by email describing the meetings with trade union people and the human resource manager. They made several changes and finally approved of the final wordings of the descriptions. The trade union people also checked the information from the person working with the ideas of supplying training and education for Small and Medium Enterprises.

As part if dissemination and interpretations of the findings a seminar was held in the end of April at the trade union club in the city centre. Six people representing the trade union company board participated during the seminar. The research findings were discussed and the trade union recognized the described picture and also commented on the results.

2.4 The validity and reliability of the results from case studies

When it comes to validity and reliability questions of the results of the reports it is fair to say that each person conducting interviews with other people can influence the interviewees. To reflect on my own role as a female researcher in a male dominated environment - it is possible that it has had some effect on the interviewees in how they chose to present their practice to me. Knowing that I had some previous knowledge and experience about the steel industry could perhaps also influence what they choose to say and how it is said.

If the researcher is too close to the participants and too involved in the practice there is a risk of going native (Davies, 1999), meaning that the researcher lacks the ability to keep a distance between the role of a researcher and the role of a practitioner. The researcher must be able to distant her or himself to be able to reflect and to see the mechanisms and patterns that are often invisible to the practitioners in a contextual setting. A forum to discuss and analyse research results with other researchers on a continuous basis is important as a method to keep a critical stance in the research process.

This report does not aim to produce results that are to be counted as a truth far beyond any doubt, in an objective sense. The qualitative research ambition in this report aim to reach a higher understanding around the issues connected to trade union assignments and their role in the management of organisational change (Molander 1997:100).

A way to handle the question of validity is to invite each interviewee to participate in the writing of the interview text and to accept the final wordings, which has been done in this report. The fact that the practitioners have all understood their participation in the research project as the context of the research project has been explained to them, makes up some kind of guarantee that their description is both understood and presented by the researcher, in their view, as far as it can be an accurate way in this report. To feed back data from the field is an important factor when it comes to drawing conclusions from empirical findings. If people do not have knowledge of how the researcher has understood their world of life how can they be sure that research findings are accurate. During my research, I fed back all interviews, descriptions from my casework on a continuous basis, and my ambition was to be quick. In
most cases, I send the interviews back within a week and I asked them for a response. In most cases, people asked me to make some minor or major changes in the writing. This included all descriptions of the cases. On occasions when I produced text, which contained common information about the plants, I asked the trade union people to involve other colleagues to go through my descriptions and bring back comments to me.

The question of reliability of the report deals with how the interviews and case studies have been analyzed in comparison to chosen theoretical framework by the researcher. Each researcher taking on a different stance in their theoretical framework is bound to arrive at different results. This issue will also be discussed further in the last section in the report. The theoretical background of the researcher is based on both management-oriented literature and on pedagogy. This means that theories about managing change processes and related to learning are described both from the perspective of organisational learning as well as on theories about workplace learning based on adult learning.

When presenting this report the chosen theoretical framework makes the basis for the interpretation of the results and conclusions and will therefore guide the researcher to present and stress certain aspects (Asplund 1970:28).
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter describes the theoretical framework. I shall present relevant research and theories, connected to the research questions and concepts here.

I shall use following theoretical issues to describe and connect empirical findings when analysing research results:

1. *Organisational change and change competence*. How can the trade union be part of and involved in the process of managing organisational change?

2. *Sustainable work systems*, to what extent are the changes in work systems sustainable. Can creating sustainable conditions for change depend on how the trade union is involved in the process of management of change?

3. *Partnership*. Is there any significance in the culture of partnership (between the union and employer) and does it influence how the work is organised? To what extent does the trade union take part in social dialogue? Are they taking part in strategic networks together with other agencies in the community?

4. *Influence* and *participation*. What factors decide the level of influence and participation among the employees in change processes? Does the management regard the trade union as a powerful resource in the organisation of change processes?

5. *Trade union organisation*. Is there any significance in how the trade union is organised at plant level for their participation in the change processes?

In the next section, I shall present the theoretical framework as an interrelationship between work organisation, learning, and industrial relations when describing the management of organisational change.

3.1 Presentation of the conceptual model

I shall begin this section by presenting a conceptual model, Figure 1. The model can help us to understand how the above aspects relate to the research question, which is:

How do the trade unions *participate* and *influence* the *management* of organisational change as a *response* to the *consequences* of restructuring?

The model in Figure 1 describes the interrelationship between *work organisation, learning,* and *industrial relations* as related to different aspects of organisational life and particularly to the management of organisational change. I regard the three components as intertwined and interdependent and make up the prerequisites for determining the outcome in the process of change management.

Previous work in the Learnpartner project gives evidence of structural changes in the steel and metal industry in Europe. We learned that some of the consequences of the change process have been the introduction of new technology, downsizing and major job losses, but it has also influenced how work is being organised. Other consequences previously described is the
shift of manufacturing of low-skilled and manual jobs to low cost countries, which in short means that many of the remaining jobs in the industry requires higher skills from the employees. The above factors in some workplaces have had an enormous impact on the situation of the employees in the sense of having to adapt to changes. In this report, I shall focus on describing a theoretical framework, dealing with work organisation and how organisational change can influence workteams and work autonomy.

I described different national strategies for learning as a response to the needs of enhancing the educational level in the labour force as well as a mean to deal with new skills requirements. The reports gave support to the idea that the national strategies were related to the Green paper issued from the European commission about making the European agenda for lifelong learning a reality as well as related to increasing the employability in the labour force. In this report, I shall highlight theories of learning related to working life and the capacity to carry out jobs as well as a mean to develop the workplace. (Randle & Svensson 2002:a)

I described how it is possible to manage the restructuring process in a partnership-based solution between the employers’ organisation, the trade unions and different agencies in the community. The report gave evidence of that the incentives for and the strength of the partnership-based solutions varied essentially due to different strategies of partnership-based work, which could be related to different contextual factors. In this report, I shall focus the theories of partnership-based work essentially to industrial relations and to the trade union organisation and their work. (Randle & Svensson 2002:b)

![Diagram of interrelationship between Work organisation, Learning, Industrial Relations, and Conditions for Sustainability](image)

**Figure 1 Interrelationship between Work organisation, Learning and Industrial relations.**
3.2 Organisational change – work organisation

Because of downsizing, many changes have been affecting the organisation of work. By describing the work organisation before and after change processes, the changes become more visible. The question is how the employees and the trade unions can be part of and involved in the process of managing organisational change, especially when it comes to the task of organising work? Is it possible to learn to live in a changing world, and can a change in work organisation make it easier to adapt to changes in the outside world? In this section, I shall describe different aspects of work organisation as well as workers and team autonomy.

Literature often describes how to organise work as the principles for work organisations. Taylor (1911) introduced the principles for scientific management with a high degree of specialisation in short cycles in the beginning of the last century and his ideas has built the structure to many leading principles for organising work ever since. One example of the development of Taylor’s principles is what we nowadays call Fordism, which describes the conveyer belt system developed in Ford’s automobile factories. The guiding idea behind these principles were to solve the problem and the need to manage and organise people into working in a highly specialised workflow based on pace and quantity (Brulin & Nilsson 1995).

Management philosophies have played an important role when it comes to developing businesses. Management philosophies describe different trends and provide remedies and new ideas to improve company performance, efficiency, productivity, management systems, company democracy, company competitiveness etc. Among the remedies to test are formal organisational structures, organisation cultures, new routines, new procedures, and process knowledge and they are all more or less in fashion (Røvik 1998).

Today the fashion is to talk about the philosophy and the ideal model of the integrated production system that strives towards a dynamic and a learning organisation (Brulin & Nilsson 1995). The principle for management is to organise work around the customer, and customer needs are in the centre of activities. The basic idea with the integrated production system is that it requires the worker to have the ability to rotate between functions and take on several work tasks, which requires more skills from each employee. It presupposes that the workplace is handling more information from the outside world, from both customers and subcontractors. The integrated production system expects employees to accept flexibility in terms of working hours, accept shorter terms of employment in order to adjust to fluctuations in staff levels. In the ideal model, employees should be able to swap between different shop floors and workteams. Flexibility can mean employees participating in changing how work is organised, which requires two things; first – the opportunity to learn from experiences and second - the mandate to develop both work tasks and work flow.

Brulin & Nilsson describe the contents in their five principles for work organisation as in main features of integrated production systems in contemporary organisations (1995: se Table 1). To emphasise a change in the principles for work organisation and to highlight the learning and dynamic organisation they compare the integrated production system with other models of production systems, such as the Bureaucratic production system and the Taylorist production system.
The first principle comes from the change in the motives for manufacturing, the customer makes decisions about manufacturing what and how to manufacture and in short, manufacturing is customer-led.

The second principle describes the change in work tasks − work tasks as integrated instead of divided by function.

The third principle describes the employees as members in an open system, where they participate in different networks. Attention is on customer needs instead of acting by formal rules. Workteams maintain relations with customers, suppliers, and trans-national contacts in European Workers Councils.

The fourth principle describes the relation between work tasks and flexible workers and the flexibility in workflow, as opposed to highly specialised and monotonous tasks. An open working climate is necessary to make up the prerequisites for becoming multi skilled workers, to maintain flexible workteams and to create flexible production units with the capacity to attend and adapt to customer needs.

Reflection is the fifth organising principle in ideal model of the integrated production system. Bureaucratic production systems and systems building on Taylor’s ideas did not base their system of organisation on reflecting individuals instead, the ability to follow orders was essential.

Table 1 Five principles for work organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integrated production system</th>
<th>Bureaucratic production system</th>
<th>Taylorist production system</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer-led production</td>
<td>Norm and rule management</td>
<td>Detailed management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Division by function</td>
<td>Division by function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in network</td>
<td>Formal paths</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Specialisation</td>
<td>Specialisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Brulin & Nilsson 1995:41

One of the contemporary management principles is highlighting the idea to combine high quality products with cost efficient manufacturing by using flexible and multi skilled workteams in a manufacturing process, which starts from the end − the customer order. Docherty & Huzzard names lean production as one management principle that fits with these ideas (2003). Lean production means that the manufacturing process is workflow centred and focused on resource − controlled by customer orders without any surplus resources or buffers. The term lean production also includes the process of manufacturing, customer relations, and sub contractors. Lean production as a concept that relates to rationalisation and efficacious methods to increase market competitiveness and return on investment and is often connected with downsizing as a measure to cut costs. Brulin & Nilsson (1995) describes the change in manufacturing towards customer orders − instead of manufacturing products to a shelf - as a transfer from push to pull.

One corner stone in lean production is the flexible worker who has acquired several skills and who can manage several tasks and operations. They know how to handle work tasks varying from manual work to managerial tasks. A change in trade union membership in Sweden reflects the change from blue-collar work to white-collar work (Kjellberg 2003). The employee’s carry out a mix of traditional blue-collar work with white-collar tasks and this combination create a new workers identity, the so-called grey-collar worker (Docherty & Brulin 2003). No matter what we choose to call the workers − in order to carry out all the required work tasks they need to have more skills. Besides, from work related skills the
employees need social skills, as they have to communicate with customers from time to time. Docherty & Brulin stresses that there is a greater risk for the displacement of employees due to them lacking social skills, which is regarded a necessary skill in integrated work systems (Docherty & Brulin 2003). Employees who cannot learn social skills are difficult to place, as it is important for company competitiveness to maintain good customer relations.

What does it mean to be a flexible worker? Flexibility relates to several dimensions in work organisations, (Docherty & Huzzard 2003; Brulin and Nilsson 1995);

- **Numerical flexibility** means that the number of employees are adjusted to production
- **Functional flexibility** means increased ability to take on different job tasks, practised as work rotation, work enlargement and work expanding and individual skills to cross new bounders as an employee and skills to learn to be employable to sustain high market value
- **Wage flexibility** means differentiated pay related to output
- **Flexibility in the placement of work** means that employees might have to accept conditions to work where the employer places them as well have the option to work from home

The flexibility issues also entail that the employees must have others skills than the knowledge to do the job; they also have to learn to live in uncertainty, as they might have to move about in order to maintain a job. Becoming a multi skilled worker has greater dimensions for the individual and as such, they need more learning opportunities. The work force in the steel and metal industry is experiencing an increase in demands for them to become multi skilled as the employers demand from the workers to become more flexible. Karlsson and Eriksson (2000) have debated the issue of flexible work organisations in the Swedish industry. They conducted research among companies to find evidence of the transition towards more flexible work organisations, however they found that there is little connection between the rhetoric’s and the reality in organisations. However, the rhetoric about the high expectations of a flexible workforce and flexible industry is a major issue for the European Commission and the European market as it has a great influence on labour market politics and policies in each country in Europe. There is a high expectation on work force in Europe to become more flexible and highly skilled (Brown, et al 2001).

The trade unions have to deal with issues, which might conflict with the solidarity principle regarding pay conditions and terms for employment. The trade union for Metalworkers issued their ideas about the good work where they describe how the trade union promotes the development of jobs where the employees can develop their skills and develop the work contents (Metall 2001). However, how are issues connected with learning related to developing the work in it self? In the next section, I shall describe learning as a mean to develop both skills and work.

### 3.2.1 Learning as part of becoming the skilled worker

In this section, I shall present some thought of how learning at work can develop working life and how learning can relate to work. I shall start this section with the assumption that learning is actually taking place at workplace level to some degree and often describes as informal learning. To describe work related and informal learning differs from describing learning in traditional institutional forms that often deals with formal education and training. Theories for adult education are often the base in theories relating to learning in working life. I shall
describe learning as a combination of formal and informal learning and as a mean for
development and a way to enhance job related skills. To ensure that learning will appeal to
people in working life the basis for organising and introducing learning should be to create a
deeper understanding of the meaning of learning in the organisation and to promote the “sense
making” process in taking part in learning activities. A mean to increase employees
understanding of how skills enhancement relates to both employability and work development it is vital that learning activities reflects both individual motives and desires.

One of the consequences described of restructuring in the steel and metal sector is a need to
enhance employee skills to become more flexible and for coping with future challenges. This
means that there is a demand to increase learning opportunities in order to enhance employee
skills to become a more flexible worker. I shall attempt to illustrate how changes in
organisational life could correspond with learning requirements in organisations.

The level of market competition and purpose of the organisation could contribute to the
defining learning requirements in the organisation. The purpose of the organisation defines
and decides the boundaries for work organisation, workflow and manufacturing processes.
The manufacturing process defines different tasks and job descriptions, which require
different kind of knowledge and experience and therefore make the foundation for contents in
learning activities. The manufacturing process and the workflow create the working
environment (1). The work organisation defines the job contents (2). The organisation of
work could correspond with the organisation for learning, which could define the boundaries
and climate for learning opportunities (3). Job contents should define the contents for learning
(4), which in turn could correspond with the system for learning.

1. The purpose of the company gives the system for work, which defines why and how we
work in this company.
2. What we do at this particular place defines the work contents.
3. Why and how we learn in this organisation defines the system for learning.
4. What we learn – the learning contents are defined of what you need to learn in order to
be able to carry out duties here.

It is possible to understand if one imagines that above factors were to change in organisations
(1-4), how strategies for learning can influence organisational development and organisational
change. Ellström (2002) views learning and work as two linking processes and his argument
is that this is the prevailing view in the learning theories of today.

According to this perspective, we can understand learning as an integral aspect
of human actions. Learning is the process where you create knowledge and
competences in and through the collaboration between people within the
framework of every day work and communities of practice […] or through the
activity, system […] people are part of. Learning will then be more about
individual’s active participation in an activity system than about transferral of

Ellström (2002) makes a distinction between learning for adaptation and development. The
motives for making this distinction is that the traditional way to view learning in activity
systems is to emphasise how people learn new knowledge’s, how they solve problems and
how they learn to act according to specific situational needs. Ellström argues that this
traditional perspective of learning promotes learning in order for people to adapt to certain
circumstances or to master specific skills. The need for people to learn skills – to critically analyse, to question or to change prevailing conditions – are not included in their perspective of learning. Ellström argues that both skills are necessary in work life today and both perspectives complement each other.

Learning for adaptation puts the focus on a reproduction or production of knowledge. How questions are central in this perspective as the main issue is to learn how to do a job according to the requirements from the manufacturing process. In the process of learning individuals, solve given tasks (requirements from the production process) with given means (boundaries in the process and workteams) in order to reach given results (output in the process), and sometimes, new results (implementation of new workflow). This means that all learners-workers learn how to do a job.

Learning for development puts focus on production or creation of new knowledge. Why and what questions are central in this perspective as in what is the purpose of this company and how can we organise our workflow and are there any ways to change the way we do things – could we do things better and more efficient? Individuals solve new or given tasks (purpose for existence – trying out new markets – products etc.) with means not given (trying out new methods and workflow) in order to reach new results (the outcomes of new markets and products – learning experiences) during the learning process. Employees develop skills to answer “why” questions by approaching work in a problem-based manner. They try out new solutions in the job situation and in the organisation by being inquisitive and by daring to use new methods. They learn to find out the answers to “what” questions by relating the process of manufacturing to organisational needs. (Ellström 2002) Ellström further argues that,

An important conclusion of above reasoning is the duality of learning. One side of learning means adaptation and mastering of something given or in advance defined (problems, tasks, knowledge, regulations). […]. The other side of learning also means the creation of something new, i.e. we discover, develop and test new thoughts and actions that are not well established and therefore means a greater risk of errors and failure. (Ellström 2002:339−340, my translation)

Ellström also describes the above perspectives of learning (Ellström 2002; 2002:2) in an organisational context where learning connects to different levels in organisational development. He describes learning in two basic logics. The first logic is based on the production process in organisations, where learning is organised to adapt peoples’ skills to demands and threats from the outside world², he calls this the logic of production. Ellström also means that the logic of production will only allow individual learning to focus on learning for adaptation. Ellström illustrates this logic with following sentence,

It is important to make things right and quickly (Ellström 2002:341, my translation)

Ellström describes the logic of development as the meaning of learning in organisations where problem solving and organisational development come into focus. The logic of development provides more space for reflection. Individual learning means that people can come up with creative solutions to problems and they are encouraged to take their own initiative.

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Through reflection, individuals can act in a development-oriented way where problems are related to the situation and to future demands. Ellström (2002) illustrates this logic with the following statement,

We can interpret the logic of development as collective learning, which demands risk taking and the acceptance of failure, the ability to make critical analyses and prerequisites and resources to experiment and practically test different choices of actions. (Ellström 2002:342, my translation)

However, in most organisations, learning for adaptation is the dominating view of learning, as company demands gives the basis for skill formation and makes the contexts of learning. Adaptive learning seldom leads to organisational learning. Learning is usually in demand to work as solution to companies’ short-term needs and not a mean for creating sustainable conditions for change. Ellström stresses that if learning is to lead to organisational changes, learning for development must be part of learning activities in organisations. Company leaders must put high priority to issues related to developmental changes. Organisational learning requires a positive atmosphere that supports developmental learning where change processes can begin. In the next section, I shall discuss how learning can be part of workteam development.

3.2.2 Workteam development

Work in industries and in the service sector of today is often organised in workteams. However, how workteams influence the actual work content can vary a lot.

The first assembly plant in the world to break with the Fordist concept of manufacturing was Volvo at Kalmarverken in Sweden in the in year of 1974. By organising work in a new work organisation and using a new production layout, the workteams had the means and power to control their work situation with a high degree of group and individual autonomy. During a period in the 1970’s, the management at Volvo wanted to test if it was possible to organise work in autonomous workteams by replacing the conveyer belt manufacturing to assembly stations and by providing a shop floor where the workflow was highly flexible and each workteam had the power to control and plan their workflow. The incentives were related to work environmental issues. The work force experienced an increased fulfilment at work and a sense of meaning in their work. The results showed that the workteams were more committed than before and they were successful in manufacturing high quality cars. Sandberg (1995) has called this the reflective production system, as he means that holistic learning will be the basis for all learning in the workteams and he claims it is a result of workers commitment;

[...] if the entire working activity is meaningful, then the capacity to learn during work is very high. (Sandberg 1995:5)

Although the good example from Volvo is more than 30 years old, the base in the workflow in the Swedish steel and metal industries builds on a high degree of group autonomy in workteams (Brulin & Nilsson 1995). Bruzelius & Skäravad (1989) describe criteria’s for autonomous workteams such as, teams having the power to decide within their area of control; an easy to follow clear definition of the area of control, the responsibilities are comprehensive and exclusive; and finally pay conditions relates to efforts.
Thorsrud & Emery conducted socio-technical experiments in four industries in Norway in the
sixties where they learnt more about autonomous workteams. They defined four components
as the trademark for autonomous workgroups. They described choice between work methods,
the formation of the group, leadership, and finally – who does what tasks, as the four defining
factors for autonomous workgroups. (Thorsrud & Emery 1969: 186ff). The contents of the
four criteria’s for autonomous work groups have changed in Bruzelius & Skärvad description
as it includes pay and the role of leadership is implicit.

The trade union understanding of the concept autonomous workgroups is the same as
Bruzelius & Skärvad as pay has become an important factor for trade union policy work. A
way to enrich work itself is by organising work in autonomous workteams, where work-
enlargement and work rotation is part of managing the workflow. The trade union for Steel
and Metalworkers describes good work in visionary terms in their policy document (Metall
2001) and their ideas are similar to the ideas described in the Volvo example.

Teamwork introduced to workteams in slimmed organisations can mean to work in teams
with a minimum number of workers that have little power to control the work situation and
the workflow. The latter is often the case for companies managed under the principle of lean
production and some critics mean that lean production can lead to “mean” production as work
is organised with strong discipline and workers have to work under hard conditions with long
working hours (Brulin & Nilsson 1995).

There are no exact figures of the number of workteams in the steel and metal sector in
Sweden; however, a study in East Sweden showed that about 70 percent of the enterprises in
the steel and metal industry had introduced workteams (Brulin & Nilsson 1995). They
function as autonomous workteams where the members have the opportunity to organise work
tasks between them selves. Quality control, planning of workflow, customer relations,
administration etc. can be part of the work. The blue-collar workteams handle more
managerial tasks and therefore it will affect the group of white-collar workers, as they no
longer need to act as supervisors of workflow. They now handle production planning as their
main work tasks and they learn to become technical generalists. Because of this development
and transfer of skills and tasks, the number of white-collar workers has decreased in the
Swedish industry.

Working life of today means to live and work in a society in constant change. Employees
have to be multi skilled to manage the new demands from working life. They need social
skills to work in teams and to meet customer demands, technical skills to carry out new tasks,
learning skills to learn new tasks, and finally they need to have an open frame of mind in
order to develop change competence. How can change competence become a skill? In the
next section, I shall present some ideas about individual and collective change competence.

3.2.3 Change competence

I have described that the management of change is dependent on people who have change
competence – which is a competence to develop new ideas and to take part in developmental
work. What does it actually mean to have change competence at individual and collective
level?

The best way to illustrate change competence is to describe the opposite, resistance to change.
Schon describes this as dynamic conservatism in a social system (Bruzelius & Skärvad 1989),
which means that the social system tries to maintain the status quo. The fight to retain the status quo can be described in four phases; pretending that there is no need for change, resisting the change, resisting the consequences of change, and in the end accepting only minor changes. I can describe change competence at individual level as the ability to cope with change processes.

In order to manage change processes and long-term developments, two issues seem to play an important role; employee participation in the change process and individual and collective change competence. Aronsson (et al, 1995) describes individual change competence as a person with the abilities;

- To see new opportunities;
- To have a curious mind;
- Try new ideas;
- Solve problems;
- Take own initiatives;
- Pursue change processes;
- Be courageous.

Individual change competence means two things, the level of motivation, and the capacity to act in accordance to the situation. A way to describe change competence is as different sides of the personality in combination with a person’s driving forces. The chart in Table 2, suggests that a person in order to have change competence needs to have both knowledge and personal aspirations combined with a positive outlook for the future.

Table 2 Individual capacities for change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Driving forces</th>
<th>Contradictory powers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>To see new opportunities</td>
<td>Home blindness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Self esteem</td>
<td>Insecurity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief/Hope</td>
<td>Hope for the future</td>
<td>Lost hope – given up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests/Wants</td>
<td>Requires change</td>
<td>Adjusting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values/Attitudes</td>
<td>Value system</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Aronsson et al. 1995:45

Change competence on a collective level is also important; Aronsson (et al, 1995) describes collective change competence as groups with the ability to;

- Relate their work to an overall context;
- Solve problems together;
- Influence work;
- Influence the prerequisites for their work;
- Find a balance between individual needs and collective requirements;
- Have informal leaders;
- View individual differences as a strength in teams;
- Have and maintain equal relations.

The atmosphere in a group can describe a well functioning group in a changing society. The climate in the workplace and the quality of the relations between the members together with the level of group and individual autonomy are other criteria’s for high level of change
competence. How well the group is functioning is depending on where the members of the group put their focus on in their work and if there is time to maintain the relationship between the members in the teams. These prerequisites I shall describe in Table 3.

### Table 3 Group competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomena</th>
<th>Prerequisites in the organisation</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teams</td>
<td>Common responsibilities</td>
<td>Organisation development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task oriented</td>
<td>Individual responsibilities</td>
<td>Competence development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance between the individual</td>
<td>Equal relations</td>
<td>Planning and project activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint problem solving</td>
<td>Multi skilled</td>
<td>Exchange of experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-operation,</td>
<td>Influence, time for group meetings</td>
<td>Temporary workteams, mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open atmosphere</td>
<td>Social support structures</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Aronsson et al, 1995:58

Is it possible to learn to have individual and collective change competence? Indeed it is! To provide employees with the opportunities to try out new methods in their work, in a climate where trial and error is the norm then people can be encouraged to develop new ideas without having to fear of becoming the common laughing stock or just another failure. This is particularly important if one expects the employees to rotate between work tasks. If management or senior workers encourage employees, it will build up their self-esteem. People learn that it is not the end of the world to fail once or twice when learning new tasks, which means they learn to take risks in their work. It is possible to learn collective change competence from other groups either in networks or by swapping workplaces. It is also possible to use work shadowing as a mean to mirror the workplace as a base for individual and collective reflection. It is also essential to allow the workteams to be involved in the planning of change processes as this will allow for the teams to set up goals and targets and they will experience and learn from defining key success factors. If working with change processes is bringing back a positive experience to the workteams then the workteams learns to have an overall change competence, which can result in organisational learning (Bruzelius & Skäravad 1995:293).

A successful change process is depending on the level of change competence in the management, the employees, and the trade union people. Incentives for organisational change can be new management philosophies caused by a change in management or ownership. The introduction of new management philosophies can be to serve as a mean to problems that need quick solutions like renewed targets on profits etc. Quick fix solutions very seldom give enough time to anchor change processes with all groups of employees. Long-term perspectives are very rarely the basis for quick fix solutions, which will make it difficult to accomplish a change process that will lead to sustainable conditions. Is it possible to manage organisational change, solve problems, and at the same time give weight to long-term effects? In the next section, I shall present different perspectives of creating sustainable conditions for change.
3.3 Creating sustainable conditions for change

What does it mean to create sustainable conditions for change or to create a sustainable work system? Quick solutions and short-sighted incentives for organisational change will not automatically lead to sustainable conditions for change. What happens to other factors related to the organisation of work – like the quality of work and work environment issues? In this section, I shall describe change management as related to a level of ambition in developmental work.

Several researchers have discussed different perspectives of creating sustainable work systems in a recent collection of work published by the National Institute of Working Life in Sweden (Docherty, et al 2002). They describe working conditions and work environments as key issues in the research. Organisation which allows people to grow, where the regeneration of human resources is key can create competitive organisations and sustainable work systems. On the other hand, intensive work systems refer to the consumption of human resources, physical, cognitive, social, and emotional, which makes it impossible to combine the pressures from work with a healthy life.

In fact, many have begun to argue, based on research findings, that during the last ten years we have witnessed increasing stress, burnout, turnover, absenteeism, injuries and heart diseases. The balance between work and life also emerged as a major concern for many. (Docherty et al 2002:3)

The characters of sustainable work systems, in contrast to intensive work systems, are systems, which allow the involved workers to maintain health and to regenerate their human and social resources while utilizing them. This means that work processes allow development of personal skills and competence as well as collective expertise in 'communities of practice', to recover from tiring workload, to develop sound relations to colleagues as a 'culture of dialogue', and to stay open for other experiences of life outside work. (Brödner & Forslin, 2002)

To be able to create healthy work systems some basic issues have to be part of working life such as the concept coherence described by Antonovsky (1987). Antonovsky was interested to find out why some people could stay healthy at work and he discovered three important actors that together build up his concept of coherence (Docherty & Huzzard 2003):

- Understanding the flow of information in a rationale sense, information is not distorted
- Coping: a capability connected to the ability to manage work tasks as well as having access to required resources
- Meaning, to be emotionally involved in the work as work in it self is valued as worthwhile and gives a meaning to activities.

The above factors can make up the ground rules for creating an explicit system for common values in organisations, which aims to appeal to the workers motivation and commitment for the workplace.

Organisations are part of a social and cultural context and therefore organisations cannot exist in a vacuum with closed boundaries to the outside world. Different levels with different perspectives can describe the sustainability of work systems, such as
- From a worker’s perspective, a work system is sustainable when it maintains or develops (or allows one to develop) marketable qualifications and skills, social relations and personal health. (Brödner & Forslin 2002:23)

- […] on the organizational level, […] when it maintains or extends the human, social and institutional resources (e.g. flexibility) of the organization. (Brödner & Forslin 2002:23)

- From a societal perspective, organizational strategies can only be held as sustainable if they to not stress the socially produced resources and the social system as a whole, but contribute to the generation of resources, e.g. by qualifying their workforce, or contributing to their old age pension. (Brödner & Forslin 2002:23)

The different perspectives might entail that it is necessary to make compromises between the different levels to create sustainable work systems. Trade unions can prove to be important as influencing factors when developing sustainable condition for the work system.

Several factors in lean and downsized organisations can hinder the creation of sustainable work systems. The employees lack resources to develop their skills and competences, maintain a good health, and there is no time to socialise with workmates, which means that they cannot develop their work tasks as was intended. The whole idea with lean production is to integrate work tasks with people’s different skills into functional workteams. To maintain functional workteams people must learn to develop their skills and competences on a continuous base. To introduce teamwork in organisations is a way to create opportunities that allow people to carry out more than one task in a manufacturing process. Teamwork could mean sharing the workload and reduction of stress, but it can also create a source for harassment and conflict. The issue of skills could lead to conflicts in teams, employees who are reluctant to learn more skills or employees who cannot use their skills in their jobs.

Learning and continuous improvement are new demands which are put on top of productive work. Management expect the employees to participate in education and training outside working hours, as there is no time during working hours to participate in learning. Organisations are living under unstable conditions and uncertainty. Brödner & Forslin (2002) describe the sort of confusion employees can experience in lean organisations today;

In addition, employees experience discontinuity and unpredictability induced by frequent changes in policy and management philosophy. (Brödner & Forslin 2002:21)

During the last five decades, many organisations have tested different management philosophies; however, their effect describing workers situation in relation to sustainable work systems is rare. There is awareness that the different management philosophies have some impact on how work is being organised and how people carry out work. Docherty & Huzzard describe lean production as imposing on the employees’ leisure time as they must cover for their colleagues when they are absent from work (2003).
I shall return to the rhetoric of management philosophies. Docherty and Huzzard describe three alternatives; high road, low road and no road (Docherty & Huzzard 2003) as three different rhetoric alternatives to how companies can develop conditions for change.

Using the image of a high-road alternative, it means to focus on developing strategies for increased competitiveness, through the creation of organisational prerequisites in time and space for employee development, and by their creative contribution to the dynamic balance between product and process innovations. The companies have to recognise and utilise the employee’s skills, learning abilities and creativity. The generation of new knowledge is an important success factor and viewed as vital for the company. Innovations can lead to the achievement of market competitiveness. To illustrate Ellström’s ideal type of organisational development - the logic for development, I can use the high-road solution where developmental learning is part of developing both the organisation and the employees.

Using the image of low-road solutions means to focus on developing strategies for increased competitiveness, by lowering costs, introducing flexibility and new quality measures and by increasing the pace in manufacturing. Existing skills are utilised in the manufacturing process rather than developing new knowledge. Lean production is a good example of the low-road solution and the low-road solution can illustrate the ideal type Ellström describes when he talks about the logic of production. In these kinds of organisations, learning is vital in the sense that employees must learn how to do their jobs in order to get a functional manufacturing process. The employees are not focusing on developing the workplace or the work contents they focus instead on being productive workers.

Finally, using the image of a no-road solution means to continue treading the path of the old and safe. This is not a good example of how to sustain competitiveness on the market. However, this could be a strategy to maintain a non-growth organisation.

I can use the above three perspectives to describe conditions for change and interpret them as different ways to approach sustainable or intensive work systems. The image of a high-road alternative visualises how to create prerequisites for the employees to develop contents of the work, develop within their work, and how to develop sustainable work systems, as employees are equipped with tools to manage the situation at work. The image of the low-road alternative describes another example of intensive work systems where employees are part of the production unit. The image of the low-road solution describes strategies for low-cost manufacturing and survival on the market; however, it does not provide any strategies for employee development, or develop sustainable conditions for change.

Backström, Eijnatten & Kira (2002) describe sustainable work system as a dynamic process and not a stable state.

It concerns changeable value — mutual growth and discontinuous development, simultaneous considerations of all stakeholders – rather than a set of rules and structures. (Backström, Eijnatten & Kira 2002:74)

Creating sustainable work systems means to develop a way of thinking about how to make resources emerge when they needed, instead of focusing too much, on existing resources.

It is indeed quite a challenge for managers relying on contemporary management philosophies to keep a visionary mind and view work systems with a pro-active approach instead of
looking at the face value of things. The trade unions could define creating sustainable work systems and collaboration with the employer’s organisation important tasks for the trade unions and therefore they could define the ideas in the major trade union policy documents. Recent research shows that trade union activity and influence regarding above issues is on the decrease in Sweden. Although there are currently several research projects dealing with work environment and work organisation development in Sweden, and many of them at the National Institute for Working Life, it seem to be difficult to influence company managers with contemporary ideas. Prevailing management philosophies and the constant search for return on investment seem to take precedence over long-term investments in the development of sustainable work organisations and healthy work environments (Brulin & Ekstedt 2003).

We have found out that creating sustainable conditions for change relates to how the management of change connects to long and short-term planning and to the degree of employee involvement. How can trade unions and employer’s organisations together develop a working climate that will lead to developing sustainable conditions for change? Is it possible to connect the skill to work in partnership between thee trade union and employers organisation with developing sustainable conditions for change? Are there any other factors that can either inhibit or strengthen the success factors of partnership work? In Table 4, I describe the different aspects of conditions for change, learning climate, work system, work organisation, and relate them to creating sustainable conditions for change. The ideal types described above share some common factors when related to describing sustainable work systems. High-road solution organises work in integrated production systems, which allows employees to develop in the sustainable work system, and the purposes of developmental learning is to develop employees and the organisation. On the other hand, in the low-road solution work is organised in intensive work system where lean production and/or downsizing can be the guiding principle for the organisation of work and purposes of learning is to make sure that employee’s skills match a level where they can adapt their expertise to the requirements from the manufacturing process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions for change</th>
<th>Learning (Ellström)</th>
<th>Work system (Docherty et.al)</th>
<th>Work organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-road (Docherty et.al)</td>
<td>Developmental</td>
<td>Sustainable</td>
<td>Integrated (Bruin &amp; Nilsson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-road (Docherty et.al)</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Intensive</td>
<td>Downsizing, Lean production (Dochert et.al)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next section, I shall describe different aspects of partnership-based work.

3.4 Partnership – networking

Is sustainability related to or dependent on how the trade union actually is involved in the process of management of change? What does it mean to work in partnership between the trade union and the employers’ organisation? Are there any particular factors that can prove to be beneficial when it comes to working in partnership and to understand the potential and meaning of partnership? Does tradition and culture influence how the partnership work is organised? To what extent do the trade unions take part in a social dialogue in strategic
networks with other agencies in the community? I shall examine different characters of partnership in this section.

There is a long tradition for working in partnership around issues related to working conditions in industrial relations in Sweden. “The Swedish model” describes a method for collaboration between the workers association, trade unions, and the employer’s organisation together with parties at national level (Huzzard 2000, Randle & Svensson 2002). The trade unions in Sweden have a long tradition of holding a strong position in industrial relations (ever since late 19th century).

The trade unions in Sweden have managed, as opposed to other countries in Europe, to maintain their members’ interest to participate in trade union activities even though many of them have lost their jobs. The changing society has required from the trade unions to adapt the trade union role to the new conditions in the labour force, which means they have to adapt to new requirements from their members. The labour unions in Sweden have collaborated in different kinds of developmental projects in order to deal with trade unions in the modern society (Lindberg & Ullberg 2001). They have introduced new roles and tasks into trade union work, among them are issues related to learning (Huzzard 2000). The Swedish steel and metal trade union congress in 1999, decided to embark on a new journey where competence enhancement and lifelong learning were to be part of trade union activity as well as traditional trade union issues. They presented these new ideas in a program declaration and they issued a policy document “Knowledge for development” (Metall 1999). The trade union made a change in their route and aimed ahead from their traditional trade union role where focus lays in negotiation to take on the role to participate in the development of the new and changing society.

The trade union movement in Sweden compared to international standards seem to have very good prerequisites to play a part in developing sustainable conditions for work systems. There are some uncontested facts that makes the basis for this assumption: a high trade union density; a well-developed trade union organisation at workplace level; low degree of trade union rivalry; and, the long tradition of working in partnership with the parties on the labour market (Kjellberg 2003). However, several trade unions are experiencing some trouble since 1990 to live up to the expectations of being forceful agents for development. Although the trade union density is lower today than it was in 1980, it is still as high as 80 percent of the salaried workers. Trade union density is even higher in the steel and metal sector. About 90 to 95 percent of the salaried workers are covered by collective agreements and bargaining.

Why is it that the Swedish trade unions seem to be able to hold on to their members? The explanation lies in the fact that the Swedish trade unions are handling the unemployment benefit funds and therefore attract members. Another factor is that the partnership based relation is technically speaking both centralised and decentralised, which means that when the trade unions negotiate for their members they can relate their local requirements to agreements made at national level. Local level negotiations require trade union activity in local unions. Basis in local negotiations is the variation of needs found at the local workplace, such as work environment and work organisation. In this sense, the trade union members in Sweden feel the presence of trade union activity at local level.

Another explanation for high union density is that the trade unions are highly specialised, where blue-collar, white-collar and professional workers have their own trade unions. Different sectors have their own trade unions etc. The parties on the labour market have also
reached agreements in several areas concerning working life where other countries have instead made national legislations. This in fact strengthens the reason for the trade unions to exist as the play an important role when they negotiate at local level.

The high union density prevents the employers to hire non-union workers in order to lower the wage cost as a mean to lower company costs. The collective agreements in Sweden include non-union members as well (Kjellberg 2003). The employers are also organised in different employers associations in order to make up a strong negotiating party on the labour market.

There have been some changes in the trade union movement; the blue-collar workers trade unions have lost many members to the white-collar workers trade unions. The blue-collar trade union has lost their number one position due to the high number of job losses in the industry. The movement of manufacturing to low-price countries and machines replacing manual jobs leads to job losses. The conversion from blue-collar jobs to white-collar jobs leads to members changing their membership to white-collar trade unions. The trade union for white-collar workers (SIF) has increased their members from 60 000 in 1950 to have 308 000 members in 2002. The blue-collar trade union (Metall) have increased their members from 212 000 members in 1950 to 295 000 members in 2002 (Kjellberg 2003).

Since 1990, there have been many redundancies in the steel and metal industry as a response to the consequence of restructuring. Trade union work related to the work environment and work organisation had to step into the background to deal with job losses. The workers also experience less power to control their work situation and specifically the pace of work. Most alarming is the figures presented in 2002 where three quarters of the metal union clubs reported that the intensity in their work has increased (Kjellberg 2003). Six out of ten clubs reckons that there is an increased risk of displacement. The casual factors behind these figures are for example that management decides to hold down the number of employees at workplace level to a minimum. The low staffing – lean production- has consequences as in less time for competence development and learning.

The downsized workteams also have consequences in trade union work. Many clubs describe they have less time to leave the workteams for trade union assignments. Only half of the union clubs are systematically working with issues related to work organisation, competence development or pay. There is strong relation between workplace development and the level of trade union activity (Kjellberg 2003:364). Although the Swedish metal trade union Metall, has accepted the ideas bout lean production, they are pursuing work enlargement and work enrichment issues related to working at the production lines (Brulin & Ekstedt 2003).

The trade union for metalworkers has learnt from the past, they are now trying even harder to pursue issues related to competence development and work environment. They have also recognised in their national policies that the low staffing at the workplace level is a contributing factor for the lack of competence development and health related problems. The trade unions have identified that trade union work at workplace level focused more on defence in the nineties than on developing workplaces. An important factor deciding trade union involvement in developing the workplace relates to the level of activity in the local union club. There is also a strong relation between activity level and the possibilities to maintain a good industrial relation with company managers (Huzzard 2000).
Is it possible to describe trade union activity related to partnership-based work and learning as a response to major change processes at societal level? Wallis has compared trade union activity in seven countries related to the issue of dealing with major change processes caused by the restructuring of the steel and metal industry where learning agendas has been made an important factor in the process (Wallis 2003). Wallis describes a model to classify trade union involvement at societal level into three different categories, institutional, responsive and a reactive type of partnerships. Wallis calls the categories as types of learning partnerships. Below I shall describe the typology.

3.4.1 A typology of learning partnerships within the European steel and metal sector.

**Institutional partnerships** are extensions of existing social partnership arrangements that reflect the legal and institutional framework governing both industrial relations, and education and training. Institutional partnerships can be evident in the form of negotiations between trade union and employer federations and individual employers at national, sector and/or corporate level that consider issues relating to training and learning and they can represent trade union involvement within national education systems, through representation on government committees and advisory bodies. Institutional type partnerships result in the formulation of new legislation, and collective agreements in relation to learning and training. Focus of such partnerships in terms of learning outcomes is primarily in the development of sector or firm specific skills, and on the provision of training for those in work. Issues relating to employability are of less significance. Institutional type partnerships result in the formulation of new legislation and in collective agreements in relation to learning.

**Responsive type partnerships** share many of the characteristics of institutional type partnerships, but they emerge independently of existing social partnership arrangements. Such partnerships are located at corporate or plant level, and are formal bi-partite or multi-agency arrangements. Responsive partnerships develop within companies and plants where downsizing is not an immediate threat, and the objective of the measures developed by such arrangements is often to facilitate workforce up-skilling in order to smooth the introduction of new forms of work organisation, or working practices. The primary focus of such arrangements is the development of sector and firm specific skills and puts a strong focus on improving business performance. The responsive type partnerships are flexible and the learning opportunities they facilitate are possible to tailor to meet the specific needs of particular companies and plants in relation to skills formation.

**Reactive type partnerships** are located at plant or community level, and are multi-agency arrangements that involve a wide range of organisations in addition to the social partners, including local authorities, educational institutions, local employment services, government departments and private training providers amongst others. Reactive partnerships are ad hoc arrangement and establish in closure situations, or when announcing large-scale redundancies. They develop independently of existing social partnership arrangements. They have the objective of providing new opportunities for displaced workers, or those under immediate threat of redundancy to gain transferable skills in order to increase their employability in the labour market beyond the steel and metal sector. Reactive type partnerships therefore address trade union concerns in relation to the learning agenda more directly than do institutional and responsive type partnerships and focus learning opportunities on those in danger of marginalisation within the labour market, rather than on those whose position is relatively secure. Reactive type partnerships are reactive rather than pro-active, and therefore develop primarily when there is a crisis.
The typology suggests two things, the kind of issues the partnership is dealing with and the timeframe they can work within will work as a guide to how the partnership is organised. This means that in certain cases when the timeframe is short and when dealing with high numbers of redundancies the partnership approach has to be both reactive and proactive at the same time, in order to create conditions for sustainability. In this chapter, I have described that partnership work is most successful when they relate to strategies for creating sustainable conditions for change.

We have also found out about the benefits of networking in general, but how important is the participation in strategic networks for successful learning and creating sustainable conditions for change? How do the partners at the workplace level involve each other in strategic networks?

3.4.2 Strategic Networking

To become a successful partner in partnership work means that the participation in strategic networks can aid in the process. What are the motives and benefits in getting involved in strategic networks? By cooperating in developmental projects, several smaller enterprises and agencies can create a common external developmental organisation as opposed to having all the resources themselves (Svensson, Jacobsson & Åberg, 2001).

The basis for participating in a strategic network is to learn from new experiences where the arena for learning can be a joint developmental project and organised in informal settings. Each member in the network is a member of the learning network, which aims to create new conditions for developmental work in their home organisations. The learning network provides an arena for learning where new ideas are tested. The purpose of testing is to break old habits and to invent new methods for problem solving. Different kind of experience and knowledge between the members in the network and participating experts makes it possible to try out new ideas.

The platform for creating a good working relationship between the members of the network need to be based on four pillars, trust, equal relations, time and resources and finally external support (Svensson, Jacobsson & Åberg 2001). A relationship based on trust between the members in the network means they can trust each other with information. It is important for the members in the network to be able to trust that other people do not use information for negative purposes. When sharing experiences with the other members it means you have to keep an open mind for new suggestions and dare to exhibit the routines in your own organisation. If network members receive, criticism from others concerning their methods in their organisations especially if it deals with developmental issues the trusting relationship is important as a mean to understand that criticism can be a method for reflection. The process of give and take can entail hard work and can put pressure on the relationship between people if there is no trust.

Equal relations is important in a network otherwise the work will risk to come to a stand still if one person is taking up too much room or is taking on a dominating position. The basis for equal relations is that all members have experiences worth sharing, as they are there to learn from and with each other. If the members represent different organisations, the position in their home organisation is not important for their contribution to the developmental work. If the members in the network are people representing similar enterprises and organisations then
the developmental work will benefit from members sharing similar positions in their organisations, otherwise their respective positions might inhibit the communication. If for example, a network was set up between hospitals in order to deal with a common problem and the members were to be doctors and cleaners, the members would probably have a problem in regarding all members as equal partners. The tradition in hospitals is that the doctors have more saying, especially related to developmental work than cleaners do. Time and resources need to be a priority from all the members’ organisations in order to create a learning network. The members have to make sure they have resources to take part in the scheduled meetings and activities as the whole network is set up as a joint responsibility. To anchor developmental work well with the management is a way to make sure that members have means to focus on the tasks in their assignment. Otherwise, the people who participate in networks are only learning for themselves, and they have no power to bring about any changes in their organisations. The European Social fund has made it possible for many small and medium enterprises in Sweden to set up developmental work in networks. External support can prove to be vital for the level of success in the networks. External support can mean support from researchers, other organisations etc. It can also mean that the network can access help from people who are dedicated for certain tasks — for example speaking partners — who can fill in applications for funding, schedule meetings, write minutes, and coordinate activities. To create favourable conditions for network members so they can focus on developing projects in their own organisation and to implement or test new ideas it is important to plan for resources for external support in the developmental work. To learn how to collaborate around strategic issues in and between organisations, the knowledge to work in networks could develop at the shop floor level. By learning to influence change processes at an organisational level the overall understanding of living in a changing society can influence the management of change processes at the workplace level. However, how is the agenda for the change process influenced by the ideas of collaboration? What kind of questions is on the agenda and how do they deal with the issues? In the next section, I shall describe different aspects of influence and participation. 3.5 Influence – Participation How can the trade union organisation and the employees become involved and have the power to influence the management of change together with the management? The power to influence important matters in organisational life is a necessary element when creating favourable conditions for change. Is trade union participation in the planning process reliant on formal contracts or based on informal contacts? Is it significant for the outcome of the change process when in time or when in the stage of the process the trade union steps in? What issues could involve the trade unions? Can they be part of developing new ideas concerning working hours, learning, workflow, level of work autonomy etc? What level of discussion can the trade union become involved in and at which level – at an individual, group, or collective level? In this section, I shall describe different aspects of trade union involvement in the decision-making process and describe issues related to which questions trade unions could be involved in. To have the power to influence the decision-making and planning of change processes can mean different things depending on organisational context. We can describe the level of
influence as direct or indirect (Bruzelius & Skäravad 1989). The difference between the two aspects lies in the fact whether the employees can influence their particular work situation or not. Direct influence means that the employees can make all the decisions necessary related to their own work situation. Indirect or representative influence means that the employees can influence their work situation through the involvement in the decision making process by the trade unions.

What does it mean to have influence at the workplace level? Influence can be illustrated as climbing up a ladder where stepping on the bottom step is that you are informed from the “top” after decision have been made. Each step further up the ladder the more democratic the process of influence gets and you get to have more power to influence and have a say as either an individual or a member of an organisation (Bruzelius & Skäravad 1989). To reach the top step of the ladder means you have lever and the power to make all the decisions necessary related to your own situation. To illustrate the power to influence stepping somewhere in the middle of the ladder, you can have access to information before decision-making, the right to negotiate and to use veto etc. In Sweden, we have the co-determination law, which gives the unions a legislated right to get information about changes and to negotiate the terms for change.

Cressey (2004) describes employee participation as related to formal or informal settings and as part of representative or non-representative organs (see below in figure 2). His thoughts describe the placement and situations where employees can participate in discussions described as different scenarios in a four-fielded scheme described below.

1. Formal and indirect communication
   Formal and indirect communication is the basis for participation when employees represent their group in formal settings. The format for discussions is formal agreements, like co-determination and works-councils where employee voice is necessary to the discussion as part of a formal procedure. Issues like downsizing, learning agreements and the implementation of new rotas for working hours, usually take place in formal settings. The trade union is participating as a representative for the employees in the organisation. The issues for talks probably need to pass a procedure of negotiation and the results will not always have immediate effect. A delay in the implementation phase can happen for different kind of reasons. This procedure relates to a “top-down” perspective of communication.

2. Informal and indirect communication
   Informal and indirect communication is the basis for participation when employees represent their group in informal settings. Dialogue is the basis for communication in project groups and joint consultation meetings. The employees are participating in meetings as representatives for their group, but not as part of a formal procedure. They are participating to ensure that employee voice comes to consideration in the discussion. New workflow inventions and issues like work related training are issues discussed in informal settings. Informal settings can prove to be fruitful, as it will provide the opportunities to try out new ideas without formality inhibiting the developmental process.

3. Formal and direct communication
   When employees are participating in a non-representative forum but in formal settings, the basis for communication is dialogue. Employee voice is valued and represented in discussion groups and in teamwork. The basis of the dialogue is the direct connection to the issues of discussion in a formal procedure where the employees have a saying in a forum as employees
and not as representatives of a group. This is a mean to ensure that employee voice is part of the discussion, as employee voice is important especially when trying out new ideas. Employee voice is legislated in certain issues and cases. Issues relating to work organisation such as work rotation, teamwork, trying out new work rotas, trying out new machinery and implementation in workflow changes are subjects for discussions in this forum. The discussions gets noticed at the shop floor level as they concern every day work however the discussion is connected to some kind of formal procedure, like negotiation or decision making process.

4. Informal and direct communication
When direct communication is the basis for talks, employees can participate in informal settings and represent individual employees and not the group. Informal talks can create good conditions for maintaining a dialogue. The format of dialogue in discussions relates to direct situations and problem solving. Employees take part in dialogue meetings where their knowledge, experience and desires in matters are valued as vital. Issues that relate to teamwork, group organisation, work environment, communication, and preventive work are focus for attention in a dialogue between employees and the employer. Communication based on dialogue needs dedicated and committed speaking partners, and therefore the issues discussed must be close to heart, and make a difference to the participants. This is what we usually call the “bottom-up” perspective of communication.

![Diagram of employee participation](Figure 2 Employee participation)
Source: Cressey P, 2004:4

I have discussed the level of participation in above section, but I have not discussed the perspective of how the trade union can take part in developmental work as having an active role. Developmental work is often organised as developmental projects in organisations where trade unions plays an important role in the work process. It is possible to organise developmental projects in many different ways, described in ideal models such as top-down
project, bottom-up projects or networking projects. How people decide to organise projects depends on the strategy and the objectives in the project.

Change projects require thorough planning and organisation as they often have the ambition to manage and implement organisational changes simultaneously. Despite the thorough planning and organisation, many major change projects result in failure to some extent (Svensson & von Otter 2002). Why is it so difficult to plan and foresee the difficulties and pitfalls when planning for change projects?

Part of the explanation is that people who are affected by the change process has not been involved in the planning of the change process which means that the change project is not anchored in the organisation. Other explanations could be that important stakeholders are absent in the planning process or they receive an invitation when it is too late to influence matters. This means they have no genuine influence in the planning process.

Developmental projects are often organised in a “top-down” process, where planning and scheduling is important. Everything comes in sequences – planning first, then actions, and finally the results. The decision making process is formalised. Important stakeholders should be part in the initial stages of the planning process and their information and perspectives should feed into the planning process. This type of planning process is handy to use when results are easy to define in advance, the overall costs are known or easy to calculate and, finally, when keeping a time schedule is vital for the outcome of results. Professional project workers make out all the planning and they organise events. This kind of planning process has its strengths when planning is key and it is possible to define results in advance. However, there is a backside to this kind of planning strategy for developmental projects. Things can turn sour when conditions change, as there is little or no room for flexibility – as the model requires detailed planning. The planning strategy has other backsides it does not deal very well with new ideas. When and if new ideas come up from the bottom in the project organisation (not from the project management) there is no room for new thoughts or ideas. Sticking to plans is often important and key for success. This means that new ideas have no part in the solution. All new experiences that develop during the change process have no place in the change process (Svensson & von Otter 2002). A planning strategy will not provide an arena for organisational learning as learning from previous experience and events are important for developmental learning.

It can be more fruitful to use an activation strategy as a planning strategy for organisational change, as a method to fit in new ideas and new solutions growing from the bottom. This strategy is a “bottom up” strategy for change. Employee voice can feed into the planning and execution parts of developmental work. However, when using activation strategy for developmental work it is not possible to decide project results in advance instead they can be defined as visions. There are other differences if compared to the planning strategy, there is no exact time or cost frame to keep within and they mainly focus on local issues. The basis for using activation strategy for developmental work is to allow for experiences and knowledge to feed into the developmental process. Instead of putting focus on planning the overall project, several smaller project groups can be responsible for developing new ideas. Ideas can later merge into activities and organisational change. The negative side with an activation strategy when planning and organising developmental work is that it depends on people’s commitment to take part, as the developmental project is not part of the formal organisation. If peoples commitment fades out the developmental project will suffer or cease to exist. Other backsides to using the activation strategy are that it can be difficult to know or
decide when the developmental work has reached any goals or targets. This can mean that developmental projects can sustain a life of their own and there is a risk that the new ideas are difficult to implement in the organisational structure. (Svensson & von Otter 2002). To plan major change project that aims for creating sustainable conditions for change is a process that need high degree of involvement from many levels in the organisation, genuine commitment from all involved, mutual respect for different perspectives, and a long-term planning of resources.

Is there a best way for the trade unions to become involved in developmental work? If the planning strategy requires from the trade union to work in formal structures, where they participate as representatives for the employees, they must be involved in the very early stages of the planning process. If not, they are only participating as representatives with no say, as it is too late to have any influence in the process. If they are participating in developmental work based on activation strategy, they can influence the process as representatives for the employees as well as individuals with experience and knowledge from the local arena. The lack of working through a formal organisation can hinder trade union involvement in developmental work. It is possible to misinterpret trade union participation as representing individuals in the organisation and not the trade union as a formal organisation.

There is a third alternative to use as a planning strategy for developmental work, which is to choose a networking strategy. This can combine the “bottom-up” perspectives with the formal organisation of developmental work. Instead of focusing the planning process on either "top-down" or "bottom-up", it is instead organised horizontally or the participation is based on equal relations and the freedom of choice to take part in developmental work. The basis for participation is the wish and the opportunity to develop and influence developmental work. Network strategy means that the organisation of work is open and flexible. Experienced problems or defined as developmental areas builds up themes in network meetings. People can participate during certain parts where they can find a value in joining in. Learning from equals in similar situations is a basic ingredient in the developmental process. The network strategy is not focusing on presenting results; it is more about focusing on learning and the developmental process. (Svensson, Jacobsson & Åberg, 2001)

What does the network strategy mean for trade union participation? It will provide an arena for learning and a genuine form of participation in developmental projects. Instead of taking part in developmental projects at the local arena, the trade union members can participate in a much wider context where they can learn and bring back the experiences to their home arena. The trade union does not have to wait for an invitation from the employer to participate in developmental projects; they can initiate learning in strategic networks themselves. By involving employees and members in strategic networking, they can use their own examples and develop them in joint developmental projects. They can learn to become more proactive in how they regard developmental issues at their own workplace, and the employer will have to regard the trade union as the strategic partner as they have more knowledge and skills about managing change processes than the management might have.

How is the level of trade union participation in decision making and planning process related to the trade union organisation or tradition? In the final section of the theoretical framework, I shall present different perspectives of how the trade union organisation can make a difference in the approach to working with question related to change management.
3.6 Trade union organisation

How the trade union chooses to organise their work can vary depending on the industrial relations system and on trade union tradition. The activity level of members depends on the trade union density. Are trade union activity and their internal organisation significant to the level of participation in the management of change? An important question is if the Swedish tradition of high density in trade union membership will affect how the management of change is organised at local sites. In this final section, I shall describe different aspects of trade union activity and organisation.

Sweden is often characterised as a country with a peaceful labour market. However, this situation has changed drastically during the 20th century. For some decades in the beginning of the last century, Sweden was at the top of the strike-list. A few decades later, Sweden was at the bottom of the list. How can we explain this kind of change?

In late 1930’s, the establishment of the famous Swedish model was a fact. The Swedish model stated that the parties on the labour market were responsible for their own affairs and the state was not to interfere. However, the state was responsible for creating good conditions for growth, employment, and welfare. To accept structural changes was a way to create competitive conditions for a modern working life with high wages and skilled jobs. The trade unions were co-drivers in this race for high profits and in building the welfare system.

Local unions have often been active in promoting competence development and pushing for changes in work organisation as part of the restructuring process. Union members have seldom criticized this proactive union strategy because it was part of a consensus model in the Swedish society. The labour party (the Social Democrats) was dominating in the political life for more than fifty years. New laws were introduced during the 70’s and 80’s, which strengthen the trade union role – in terms of co-determination, work-environment, the position of the union-officials, right for studies, rules for laying employees of, etc.

Official authorities, including many researchers (see Korpi 1978) often present this positive perspective of the Swedish model. However, there is also a more critical evaluation of the Swedish model (Nyström 2000; Svensson 1986). The critiques focus on how lack of influence and (the lack of) trade union work has contributed towards the negative outcome of intensive working systems – like stress, fatigue, work-injuries, high absenteeism etc. The Swedish trade unions accepted and pushed for the Tayloristic work systems, and because of that, working life in Sweden was more Tayloristic than it was anywhere else in the world (Björkman 2003). However, since the 60’s some unions have been pushing for autonomous groups, self-determination, and union co-determination. These changes have always been part of a strategy for rationalisation, efficiency and custom-orientation, which have open the minds of some employers for a new work organisation.

There is always a dilemma for trade unions when taking part in management decisions. They will be part of and co-responsible for some of the decisions that will strike their members hard. If unions are to take a proactive role in the restructuring process and still keep its own identity and the support from their members some important things has to be fulfilled (Svensson 1986):

- Strong internal democracy – when it comes to work forms, transparency, union activity, closeness between the leaders and members, a high unionisation rate, etc.
• High change competence among the union leadership

• Trustful relationship with management, who puts focus on creating sustainable conditions for change and invests in the development of the company – its organisation and individuals

• United labour union that cooperates with the white-collar union and the professional unions.

The trade union organisation in Sweden focuses by tradition their power to negotiate with the opposing party – the employer. Many of the problems the trade union was dealing with in the beginning of the last century related to basic rights, the right for unionisation, negotiation, and freedom of speech. Today, we expect that kind of issues to work as basic rights. There is also a tradition to combine trade union activist work with political work. Several of the labour trade unions still have close connection with the social democratic party. Collective bargaining of hourly rates, learning funds, and learning agreements are issues the trade unions negotiate about today. The trade union movement has slowly shifted from being the negotiating partner to become a strategic partner in developmental work (Lindberg & Ullberg 2001).

The reason why people take on an activist role in the trade union is both to be able to influence matters as well as they share a genuine interest in the well-being of others, but the majority of them take on the role because their colleagues coach them into trade union work (Karlsson & Svensson 1995:136). Injustice at the workplace triggers trade union people to work and to take part in developmental issues; they also take great interest in societal issues. Many believe that trade union work will lead to personal development.

How does the trade union organise their work? Trade union organisations are more professional in their work and they divide trade union work between people that have required special knowledge and skills to take charge of specific issues. This means that instead of engaging more members to work with a variety of assignments and tasks a few trade union activists’ to do more work. These professional trade union activists are part of the organisational structure and part of the management and control system. This development of trade union work can create a distance between the formal trade union organisation and their members (Karlsson & Svensson 1995).

The activity level in the local trade union is depending on their members. When democratic values influence trade union work, it can spread out and influences the way the trade union organises its work, then trade union members can make up a strong position in organisational life. Such a trade union will be a strong, united and credible partner if their members are involved and share the trade union understanding of partnership-based work in the management of change.
3.7 Summary of the theoretical section

I have discussed following themes in the theoretical section;

- **Organisational change and change competence.** I presented and discussed five principles for organising work where I focused on the integrated production system as the work system where flexible and multi-skilled employees are central to the organisation. I presented and discussed different perspectives of flexibility. Learning related to developing the organisations and as a mean to learn to be able to do a job was, also presented and discussed in this section. I then discussed and illustrated individual change competence as the ability to cope with change processes, motivation and the capacity to act. Finally, I illustrated change competence in groups as the ability to handle change and work in a changing society.

- In the section for creating sustainable conditions for change, I have described the difference between intensive and sustainable work systems. I also discussed different perspective of how work systems can relate to strategies and organisational development. I then highlighted certain key issues and related them to sustainable work systems such as competence development, healthy workplaces, and work as part of a social community etc.

- The Partnership section described how tradition between the employers associations and trade unions in Sweden has contributed towards the establishment of partnership-based systems. I also discussed trade union participation in strategic networks as a way to learn how to live and work in a changing society. I finally presented a typology for partnership-based work when related to the task of managing structural changes.

- Influence and participation. In this section, I discussed how trade unions and employees could give voice to their opinions. I used a chart that described the level of influence as based on communication in the organisation. Either dialogue can vary between formal or informal communication or it can be set up in either representative or non-representative forums. The degree of employee and trade union influence varies depending on the level of participation in the process of communication.

- Trade union organisation. In the last section in the theoretical section, I discussed how the trade union organisation could be organised in order to take part in developmental work and manage organisational changes. I argued that if the trade union organisation has a wish to become successful in this task, it requires a strong internal democracy in the trade union organisation; they need to develop a trusting relationship with the employer, and have high change competence. Finally, I also described that trade union work is slowly moving from negotiation and towards a more change oriented approach where they take part in developing workplaces.

In the next section, I shall describe the empirical findings.
4. DESCRIPTION OF THE CHANGE PROCESS

In this chapter, I shall describe two companies at plant level and relate them to their different contexts and their organisational prerequisites. It is important to understand how the conditions, which these two companies exist under are different, and how the differences can be related to the manufacturing process and their products. Below voices from the plants are used to illustrate the description of the change process.

4.1 A structural description of Company A

The place for the company is a region in the middle of Sweden, where they have experienced severe structural changes in the steel industry. The population in the region has decreased to less than 12,000 people in the year 2000. Ten years earlier almost 13,500 people lived in the area. The local authority is the biggest employer in the region, which employs about 1,000 employees. Looking at historical numbers this steel plant used to employ about 1,000 people at the most; this was about twenty years ago. There has been a radical decrease in job opportunities in the region; just over 3,500 people could find work in the region in 2001 compared to more than 5,000 in 1990. Many people choose to leave the region, especially the younger generation, as they cannot find ways to make a living.

The Finnish state owns 40 percent of the mother company (steel group) and private investors own the rest. The company is part of the steel group and they manufacture special steel bars in the medium range to a highly specialised and price sensitive market. The steel group bought the plant in 1996, before that, a Norwegian company and the Finnish steel group co-owned the plant. When it first started as a company in 1858 Swedish private investors owned it. In 2002, it was the most profitable company in the steel group.

The company employs about 440 people\(^5\). About 285 of the employees are members of the trade union for blue-collar workers called Metall; the union density is more than 99 percent. The majority of the employees at the plant are over 50 years of age, about 62 percent. About ten percent of the employees are female and the majority of them work at the department for dispatch in the hot roll mill section of the plant.

By tradition, the entry level of vocational education and training has been low for the blue-collar workers. There used to be a training centre at the plant, which closed down in 1990. People who left elementary school could get basic vocational training and education, at this centre, in order to acquire basic skills to work at the plant. The entry level is higher today. There is an expectation that most new recruits have graduated from upper secondary school and preferable from an industrial programme.

The numbers of people on a long-term sick leave have increased since the changes in 1999. Today just over ten percent of the blue-collar workers are on long-term sick leave. For white-collar workers this figure is three and a half percent. However, the highest rate of people on sick leave is found in the steel works; about twelve percent of the workers are absent from work due to illness. Long-term sick leave means that a person has been absent due to illness during a period of four subsequent weeks or more.

The company employs workers to the process of making steel in the steel works, to the process of rolling the steel in the hot roll mill, quality control and to the process of delivery.
and finally to customer service. Different categories of skills are required to be able to work with these different kinds of tasks, for example, furnace workers, founders, rolling mill workers, maintenance workers, dispatch workers, quality controllers etc.

They have introduced technological changes in the manufacturing process and experienced several cuts in the numbers of employees during the last twenty years at this particular plant. Just recently in the last four years they have made people redundant on three occasions. This resulting in one person out of three had to leave their job. By investing in new technology, downsizing and the relocation of production units, the company has increased production by 600 percent in the last 20 years.

4.2 Interviews at company A

The overall picture described from employees at the plant is that they have made reductions in the number of employees due to organisational changes. Nevertheless, they manage to produce more steel and they create more profits than ever before. Focus in the production process is to manufacture high quality and high profit steel towards customer orders instead of manufacturing low-profit steel mainly to steady customers. The company manager describes the change process in the following way:

They have invested and made changes in the manufacturing process in order to enable adjustments to the process of mixing minerals to the steel, such as adding or reducing minerals and chemicals from the mix.

4.2.1 Work organisation

In practical terms, customer orders are to guide manufacturing, which could mean shorter cycles and smaller bulks. The company management view some customers as strategically important therefore; some customer orders still contribute with a low profit. Local management describe the situation at the company, as they are now on top of the situation of manufacturing high profit steel according to customer demands to the market. The company manager describes the market competition as following:

The company is active on small markets where higher quality and highly refined steel is on demand. To continue the process of refining the steel, better customer service and by increasing the numbers of high profit products, the company will sustain competitiveness on the global market.

This means that the production cycles are shorter and require several changes in the routines of the workflow. These changes have been noticeable in all units in the plant, from the furnace to the department for dispatch. As the company manager explains:

Work organisation has changed. There are not many line managers left in the organisation. Work is organized and managed by workteams. The company has introduced flexible working hours for all groups of workers. The driving force for changes in the work organisation has been to combat low profits. Today the company manufactures products towards customer orders.
They manufacture steel as bars at the steelworks; and each customer order with a set quality of the steel, guide the manufacturing process where they add components and minerals to make the required quality in the steel. They transport steel bars to the department for hot roll mill at the same plant or to the other plant. At the department for hot roll mill, they plan and adjust manufacturing to customer orders where the orders fit into a four-week manufacturing cycle. Then, the department for dispatch takes over the steel, at that point loaded into crates. Several customer orders can be loaded on the same crate and sometimes it is necessary to shift bulks of steel in order to be able to dispatch steel to the customer. Before shipping the steel, it passes a quality control to check for straightness. About ten percent of the steel bars need straightening before shipping.

The owners in Finland decided to downsize the company as a mean to cut costs at the plant. The plant manager describes the changes in work organisation as important to cut costs:

In the late nineties the majority of the redundancies were motivated by structural changes as parts of the (non-profitable) production moved to Norway (in order to be profitable). Again in 2001 some redundancies were motivated by demands of efficiency in production (cut down in numbers of employees).

Human resource department describes the transfer to a more flexible work organisation as a process, which entails development of work tasks, and investment in more organised learning described as such:

The result of a more flexible organisation and the skill enhancement of the employees will entail a higher quality in production. Today the company is likely to have a higher degree of scrap steel because of the employees lacking skills to carry out their tasks. We view competence development as a long process aiming to create a new identity around the steel worker, which means that steel workers can learn during their whole life and continually.

In the steelworks, the employees describe a situation where the numbers of workers doing the tasks are less, with fewer breaks and an increasing number of people working. Voices from the steelworks:

It happens quite often that a sole worker does a work task that normally requires two people. Today, the number of workers on sick leave at the steel works is quite high.

The employees in the steelworks describe the reduction in the numbers of workers:

They have cut down the numbers of employees by removing shift teams after shift teams.

They cut down on the number of employees by cutting the workteams down from six people to four people and then down to three, later two and finally one worker made up the team. Before the changes, the person who worked in this function worked for 30 minutes and then rested for 30 minutes. Previously they considered the position very demanding.
The workers in the steelworks express the overall experience of downsizing as demanding and very negative:

The workteams experience that the downsizing during these last years have not resulted in anything good for the employees on the contrary it has had quite the opposite effect.

From the shop floor, they described a picture where company management makes decisions, which entail that from a certain date the job is to be done with fewer workers. Trade union chairperson says:

The situation in the company today is very pressing after the downsizing, now the organisation is slimmed down to a minimum level, which is as near as you can get to reach the lowest limit.

They also describe a change in workflow; instead of producing steel seven days a week, they now produce steel five days a week. This means that there are fewer workteams, however some of the workteams now only consist of sole workers. The change process initially caused a decrease in production but it has gradually been increasing ever since.

The cutting of employees caused initially a decrease in production as the company shifted from manufacturing steel 24 hours a day to keep the factory open from Sunday night until Friday afternoon.

The picture is slightly different in the unit for hot roll mill; they can explain some of the cuts in the number of employees on the investment of new technology, which means that they need fewer workers in the workflow in order to carry out the same duties. One line manager describes the reinvestment process as:

We decided on a reinvestment plan between 1991−1993 and we finalised the investments in the year 2002. The whole plan means that we in practice have a completely new hot roll mill today.

In the department for dispatch, management decided to change the work routine and to cut down the number of workers needed in the process of straightening and loading steel bars. They experience that they are working under very hard conditions, as they now have to work twice as much as before. The job is also very heavy and straining and as they are getting fewer breaks and they get more tired. As a floor manager refers to the work situation:

Before the changes, the person who operates the crane worked for one hour and then had a rest for an hour. This has been the tradition to work at this department. The workteams are finding it hard to settle with the new deal to work eight hours without the hourly breaks. The downsizing at this particular department has no connections to any technological improvements or changes and therefore the workers have showed quite a resistance towards implementing the changes.

This particular unit employs a majority of the female workers at the company. Therefore, the working conditions have a greater impact on their health because the job tasks were initially
very heavy and now they have to work even harder. A department manager describes this situation with a heavy workload and high average age as:

The combination of hard work and high average age creates a work environment with a high level of sick absenteeism. As there are no supplementary workers to put in to cover for them on sick leave, the pressure on the remaining workers gets even heavier.

Even if the work situation is quite hard, the workers are very committed and they ask questions and take charge of problems as soon as they occur. A process leader at the department describes this picture:

In spite of the hard working conditions at the department for dispatch, the employees are very committed, they ask questions and they dig in to problems as they come up. A problem they often have to deal with is to repack and move bulks of steel in the storage area.

The unit has also recently employed a person to work with developing the workflow at the department for dispatch. The function is to analyse which improvements can be done, especially in the areas of heavy loading. They gave this position the title “process leader” and the person has already received high expectations from the workteams. He describes the workers expectations of his work as following:

The employees regard the position as a hope for the future and they hope that they can create a channel to the management through this position. They hope they can find ways to communicate with the management about the work situation on the site.

The department of scrap steel have made substantial changes in the number of workers and in the workflow. Before the changes, five people worked on the scrap yard and one person was running the crane. Today only one person works from the top of the crane and makes assessments on the steel in order to be able to classify the scrap steel. This means that they have put the responsibility to assess the quality of scrap steel and control to the supplier and now the crane operator only need to decide onto which pile to load the steel. This does not mean that new technology is part of the developmental process. It is simply a management decision to cut down the number of quality controls on incoming scrap steel. They describe the changes as:

We managed the downsizing by the introduction of new routines and by decreasing the number of controls of the scrap steel.

4.2.2 Multi-skilled workers and flexible workteams

There exists a tradition at the plant to be a multi-skilled worker. This is not a new idea. To be a highly skilled worker at the plant means to have high informal rank in the workteams. They promoted two multi-skilled workers in the steelworks and the hot roll mill to positions where they manage workflow today. Employees representing the department of hot rolling mill illustrate the importance of mastering skills as in:
It is important to know how to do the job at the hot roll mill. Knowledge and vocational skills are valued very high. The person with highest skills gets the highest ranking among the workers and the opposite exist as well. We regard managers who show they have little knowledge with a very low informal status. By tradition, we regard the person who operates the hot roll machine as the person with the highest status in the workteams.

The team describe the person who has taken on specific tasks to manage the newly introduced computer programme used in the workflow. His knowledge is valued and based on the fact that he also has a high overall knowledge of the tasks in the unit:

He maintains an informal high position among the workers although he is one of the younger workers. It depends on the fact that he can operate most of the machinery. His computer skills are extensive, and he has the best overall knowledge about things.

The workers in the slimmed workteams make sure that no errors occur in the process of manufacturing as they keep an eye on each other and the people running the production. The team responsibility is quite extensive; as they teach each other to be skilled workers; they also take on a great responsibility to do the job well and to make sure that people will not injure themselves on the job. The explanation for this comes from the workers in the steelworks:

The average age of the employees is very high today. The downsizing has been successful only because the average age is high among the remaining workers. This means that the gathered knowledge about melting steel is very high in the workteams and they are because of that less vulnerable for skill shortage due to illness or absenteeism in the workteams.

The different workstations at the steel works relies on multi-skilled workers in the workteams, as this provides opportunities for workteams to plan the operations for each day and to cover for each other. They all (on the shop floor) describe that the number of people being on sick leave has increased and therefore they experience that it as necessary to be able to cover for each other.

Absenteism due to illness is still increasing.

The trade union chairperson also describes that the workteams has to put a lot of effort into planning to cover for each other as the number of people are on sick leave is as high as one person out of six. This situation puts a lot of pressure on the workteams, as they have to handle the situation of carrying out all the tasks in the downsized workteams.

The consequences of downsizing are that the employees in the department for hot roll mill often have to work double shifts several times each month. Restructuring means that focus is on decreasing the number of employees and downsizing workteams. The company has not invested in new technology to the same extent. This means that fewer people are handling more tons of steel. One person of six is on sick leave. It is difficult to get the manager to understand about the relationship between workload and sick leave. (The chair of the Metal trade union)
Errors occur in the workflow at the hot roll mill, which need correcting further down the chain. However, errors do not occur due to the lack of knowledge of the overall workflow. Instead, it connects to the lack of time and resources to deal with problem solving. The responsibility to solve errors shifts from workteams to the next. This is explained by the workers at the hot roll mill as one of the results of people having to adapt to changes, to the heavy workload and finally to lacking enough resources to solve problems.

Several employees have a very stressful work situation and they are struggling to keep up with the pace. They feel stressed because they are so few to carry out the work tasks. This is more obvious in some of the workteams where they used to carry out their task with time for breaks. They do not have the energy to bother about the fact that somebody else has to deal with the errors further down the chain.

4.2.3 Learning and change management

As they have made some reinvestments and alterations in the technology used in the manufacturing process, at the hot roll mill, it has resulted in employees having to learn to operate the changed machinery. Although the workers pride themselves in the art of doing a job well, the pressures from work affect their motivation to learn. The manager from the maintenance department describes that learning and training relies heavily on people teaching each other how to do the job, however the lack of formal training in work related subjects affects the outcomes of training as the employees cannot argue why employees should do things this or the other way. People cannot commit to learning and training and to take on the responsibility of spreading new knowledge and information. Problems arise when people do not understand the importance of spreading the information down in the chain and how the information connects to the quality of work.

Tacit knowledge and experiences is not possible to verbalise, which means that when somebody is actually trying to teach somebody else the ropes, there will be some gaps in the knowledge, which will result in errors in the workflow. Another source to problems in the workflow is that you communicate through workteams about changes in how to operate machinery or when we introduce new technology. Communication is not working well between the teams. The transfer of information and knowledge from one workteam to the next often works from the first line to the next. However the further you go down the chain of information, it seems to distort the information. This is because the people in the workteams do not feel that they are responsible for the information or they do not feel that the information is important to spread.

There is also an element of health risk built into the downsized workteams, as the workers are eager to fill in for each other. They might have to operate machinery or carry out tasks, which they are not fully mastering. One worker describes the risk in the following way:

When a person is lacking necessary qualifications or skills to carry out a job, then they can hold workers responsible in the case of any accidents, if the employee was not carrying out orders from management. This means, that each person has to be responsible and announce in the workteams that they do not have sufficient experience or skills to carry out certain tasks.
This example illustrates that employees have more ties to certain workstations, and they are not free to choose which duties they are to carry out. Before the change process, the workteams decided between themselves who was best suited to carry out certain tasks, and employees who did not have sufficient training was under supervision when they carried out their duties. Employees having to work with tasks they have no proper training to do can illustrate the force from management to become more flexible. Although all the workers have others skills (as they have all passed some kind of training at the workplace) they might not be able to utilise them to the full, as they have to work at other workstations as well. This is how the workers describe the change:

Before the changes, before they cut down on the number of workers at the plant you could choose more freely, you could work with the work tasks, which interested you more.

The employees on the shop floor work in teams with a high degree of self- and group-autonomy. Therefore, they also participate in major change processes; at least they describe it in that way. At the same time, they describe that some of the changes are management decisions forced down to the workteams.

The shift team experience that the local management puts the responsibility on the individual worker to cope with the changes and to learn new techniques.

Sometimes management invite employees to participate in the planning of change processes when it involves investment in new techniques or how to improve quality of work. The employees have a unique knowledge about workflow and about improving technology. A floor manager describes his ideas about project work:

When we introduce new routines or new technology, we set up project groups to work with the assignment.

However, some employees on the shop floor describe that they do not always introduce organisational changes through project work or by involving the employees.

Sometimes management just tells us about coming changes or tells us to execute decisions.

Some of the workers now on a long-term sick leave describe the situation at the plant as the changes were imposed on them and that a lot of the workers were “left out in the cold” by management. They feel that they did not receive any respect as some of the workers with more than 30 years of work experience from the plant had to throw themselves into new situations and work tasks. They had to learn new jobs and take on responsibilities with a short notice, which they did not get any time to prepare for. The workers also describe a sense of loss and guilt when their workmates had to leave the company.

Many of the people were treated very badly in this process and they are now very disappointed with the company’s management.

The biggest change described by the workteams is how the downsizing is affecting their everyday situation. They feel that it is not as fun to go to work, as they do not have time to socialise with their workmates. Socialising is important part of work as the majority of the
workers have their friends at the plant, as a result of spending on average 20 years at the plant. The lack of time for socialising has some consequences, as they describe that most of the learning occurs during breaks, when there is time for reflection and time to talk about work and other issues. Now, these breaks and moments for talks are all gone and learning need to be organised in order to happen. Voices from the steelworks:

Work was more fun before the downsizing. There was more time for socialising, which is an important factor in work. That is when you can learn from others and when you glue the team together.

The employees describe that work, the situation at the plant is much harder, and they feel more tired when they leave after each shift of work and work in the process is taking all available time. Voices from the steelworks:

Today you work harder and you get more tired after each shift than before. You do not have time for socialising as before.

They also describe that when there is less time to socialise, they will not be able to sustain the knowledge of the workflow, as they more or less have to stick to their workstation during the entire duration of the day. This will have some consequences on how the workers understand the meaning of a functional workflow. Some of the workers think that instead of taking on the responsibility of the effectiveness of the entire steel works as part of a process, people will focus only on their specific tasks as the situation forces them to look after their own interests at first hand.

The workers in the workteams experience that the downsizing can lead to long-term consequences, it can result in the workteams becoming more isolated and that they will not have the time to maintain an overall understanding of the production in the steelworks.

The problem with the increasing number of people being on sick leave has resulted in the start of a few developmental projects by the human resource department. They are currently running a training programme aimed at some of the workers on long-term sick leave. The trade union chairperson describes this as:

The department for human resources have some thoughts of how to develop the ideas about competence development and promoting health issues. Several projects are started which focus on work environment and on workers rehabilitation.

The situation at the plant allows no surplus time for the workteams to train each other as the work organisation is too slimmed; all employees need to fill in with the workflow. This means that today no organised schedules exist for training multi-skilled workers; at least that is the workers’ opinion.

In the end of the 1990’s and as part of the restructuring process, the company invested in further training for the workers. The agreement, which granted resources for investing in training for the employees, was set up between the trade unions and the company. As part of the agreement, the company management had to commit on not making any redundancies for the next coming two-year period. The money to invest in further training came from different
trade union funds. This investment meant that many workers had the opportunity to take part in formal education and informal training at the workplace. The employees could take part in courses in metallurgy, steel production, hot roll mill skills, maths, English language, and business economics. Nevertheless, they still had to make severe cuts in the number of employees in the years to come at the company. However, the employees regard this investment as a good initiative as several employees had the opportunity to learn new skills and subjects they needed in their jobs.

There has been some organised training in workteam development at one of the departments. The company is not in the immediate process of recruiting workers as they still can rely on their old workforce as competent workers. Personnel at the human resource department are in the process of mapping the employees’ skill levels and match them to a work description chart in five levels. The process is supposed to lead to the organisation of skills enhancement and further training. Each person is to get an individual plan for further training based on his or her mapped skills shortage and adapted to individual choice and level of aspiration. This is how they describe the basic ideas for competence development:

The basis for having developmental talks with the employees are to make a career plan that maps each person’s competence needs reflecting both company needs and individual desires.

The whole process aims at creating opportunities for the employees to develop according to their individual career plans. The overall aim is to supply the plant with highly skilled and more flexible workers. Human resources use following example to illustrate how to connect needs found in the company with individual development in order to achieve a flexible organisation through flexible employees:

When all the employees have taken part in skills enhancement activities, the company will be able to increase productivity figures. When all the employees have reached the right level of competences, the employees have better chances to cover for each other in the organisation. They can also learn from each other, which can lead to a smoother organisation. This organisation can create flexibility, if responsibilities are broken down to the individual level in order to prevent production limits.

The process of mapping each employee’s competence needs and finding out each individual employee’s skills levels is a response to the restructuring of the company. The management ambition is to achieve an organisation with multi-skilled employees in order to reach efficient workteams. There are fewer employees left in the workforce and they need to be up-skilled to be able to cover for each other. Other reason for mapping employee skills are that the trade unions have made a national agreement for competence enhancement, which states that the blue-collar workers are entitled to further training as part of their employment. The HR’s goals for investing in learning activities are for the employees to master more skills in order to become a more flexible worker. The ideas of a worker being more employable elsewhere are not the objectives for learning. The people working at the department for human resource describe the motivation to develop workers skills:

Our managing director has given the middle management an assignment to describe skill needs from different perspectives. They should strive for making the employees wider in their skills, this in order to be able to break down
responsibilities to the workteam and individual level in a greater extent than what happens today. This requires that the employees can master several skills. (Director for human resources)

However, the mapping of skills has not resulted in the organisation of any learning activities. The trade union explains this with the situation of the management focusing on chasing costs.

If you cannot prove to the company manager that the company will get a quick return on investment from investing in learning then they will not invest in any activities for learning. They have cancelled a computer course for the employees, as it was too expensive.

The trade union has no interest in pursuing the learning agenda, as it will lead to their members being even more “overworked”. Even if learning is to be organised during working hours it would mean that it would leave even fewer people to carry out the duties in the workteams. Instead, the trade union wants to promote that the company employs more workers in order to create a slack in the organisation and then they can organise for additional learning during working hours.

In issues regarding competence development it can be difficult to manage the time needed for being the mentor for others, there is simply no surplus time or staff for these tasks. Activities for learning and competence development are usually organised so the employees learn from each other, which means that somebody must take the time to teach others in learning. There is no time for these activities in the workteams today. (Trade union chairperson)

Learning is part of every day work at the plant, but learning at the workplace includes only how to manage job related skills. There is a long tradition of connecting the job description in the steel works to craftsmanship. A steelworker describes the process of becoming a skilled steelworker in the following way:

You start as a learner in the steelworks as a help-smith C, and then you learn more skills and positions by work shadowing a skilled worker. Then you get to work as a temporary at a position. It takes about a year to become a skilled worker. If you are uncertain of how to carry out a task, or if anything happens, you can always ask somebody else in the workteam. There is always somebody working somewhere in the steelworks who is experienced enough you can ask for help. The person who is actually training you, together with the line manager assesses your acquired skills and they make the judgement of when you have learnt the tasks to the full.

The art of making steel has changed quite a lot between the older workers, who were classed as craftsmen and who could manage one highly skilled task in the manual process of making steel, to the younger generation steel workers, who are multi-skilled and who can operate several steps — including machinery in the workflow of making steel. Some of the older generation steelworkers find it difficult to adjust to the change of having to learn several skills, and this demand becomes visible when they discuss the value of the gilded craft. The employees in one of the workteams at the steel works discussed the need to become a multi-skilled worker and the difficulties to adjust to learning:
Our experience in the workteams is that you will find employees who are actually afraid of learning new things.

Older workers, who have worked at the plant around 30 – 35 years, usually know how to carry out only one task. We believe that it has to do with the fact that they are not as curious to learn as the younger generation.

Some of the workers from the older generation think of the new technology of making steel as a simple task. This quote from a younger generation steel worker can illustrate the transition of skills required to melt and make steel:

There is an attitude among the older workers that the younger generation workers do not understand the meaning of making steel. The art of making steel has developed from the older generation of steel workers mastering a guild to a simple process that we can operate through a computer.

The workers describe a situation where they miss having time for socialising, as this provided time for reflection and learning between the workers and workteams. They regard socialisation among the workers as an important part of work; it provided them with opportunities to discuss work-related problems and chances to develop new ideas. During these moments, they could also assess workers capacities to do a job well. It was during these sessions of breaks as the workteams could learn from each other and learn more about other workstations. Learning was an integral and important part of work especially among the workers. One steel worker describes his experience of not having the time to meet his colleagues as much as he would like to:

The friendship in the team is an important component for the overall wellbeing at the workplace. You get to be part of a work community together with the other workers, especially when you change shifts. The community provides each employee with opportunities to talk and meet the rest of the workers in the steel works.

The employees do not regard all departments at the plant directly connected to craftsmanship or a highly skilled work process. For example, the employees regard and connect the workflow at the department of dispatch with a lower status.

Work here is “classed down”. In the dispatch department, we have to deal with problems caused elsewhere in the manufacturing chain. (Floor manager)

However, the workflow is slowly changing and now it requires higher skills from all the employees. The work was primarily about heavy lifts as in loading and shifting steel bars to trucks. Today, the workers also need to know how to handle computers as a tool for planning the production in order to get a better economy in the production. They also need to be able to find, fill in, or alter customer orders. The manager of the hot roll mill expects the changes to achieve following results:

The new system is supposed to lead to a more efficient storage handling, as the storage is to function automatically with the help of new technology. The system is to make all the calculations necessary in order to reach a better usage of all the steel bars and lead to less steel going to waste.
The benefits with introducing the computer-based software are two fold. Firstly, the planning of workflow as the people working at the unit for delivery can find where about each order is in the manufacturing process. Secondly, the software makes it possible to calculate each customer order to see whether it will produce any profits. This has previously been a problem, as some of the customer orders have not generated profits. One person describes the benefits with the computer-based technology as:

In order to manage the handling of customer orders we invested in a computer based software to be able to manage and trace the production. There is an overall aim with the new computer based system, to get a better and more efficient workflow throughout the entire organisation. (Person in charge of the computer software)

However, they are still experiencing some disturbances between the shop floor level and the marketing function regarding the management of customer orders. People at the marketing department do not understand how customer orders actually affect the workflow in the department of dispatch. They need to understand the overall workflow and better understand about how to improve it. This is particularly important when assessing quality standards. The people in the department of dispatch illustrate this:

If the marketing department could produce a product catalogue for the people working here then the workers could much easily make their own assessment of the quality of the steel, either to pass the steel or to scrap it. Knowledge about what the customer is going to use the steel for would be of help in this process. Today there is some sort of distance between the marketing function and the manufacturing units that causes irritation with the people working at the department for dispatch.

A floor manager describes the new requirement to enhance the employee’s computer skills:

We are going to introduce new computer-based routines in the department to provide the customers with quick and handy information. For example, we provide the customers with the service to search for their own orders and to find their own order in the chain of manufacturing.

The need to enhance computer skills among the workers at the department is a high priority, however the situation on the shop floor is the same as in the rest of the plant, there is simply no surplus time. Not everybody at the plant is aware of the change in work descriptions. The workers at the department for dispatch have, at times, to help the workers on the hot roll mill floor, when they are running into problems. The reverse situation seldom happens:

Work rotation between the departments does not function very well today. To be able to manage the pressure from the customers the work at the hot rolling mill has highest priority at all times. This means, that when they are short of people it is the workers from the department of dispatch, who has to help them out. (Process leader)

They provide few employees with opportunities to participate in further training on a regular basis at the plant. People working at the human resource department participate in higher
education, and the electricians from the department of service and maintenance have to learn how to programme computers. Senior managers take part in management courses and so on. The learning agreement between the trade union for blue-collar workers and the employer entails learning to be organised based on both company and individual needs. Learning is to be organised by combining formal education and informal training. Some of the training can result in the acquisition of certificates of training. The director of HR describes training with these words:

Some part of the training can result in the employees acquiring certificates in certain vocational skills, for example working with hot materials, operating cranes and forklifts.

However, as the tradition is that the workteams themselves make sure to teach each other the ropes, learning activities focus on informal learning and only entail work related skills. The other employees in the workteams measure the outcome of learning, as their picture of the competent worker is a multi-skilled worker. The benefits of participating in informal learning are twofold; first, the employee gets to carry out other duties and secondly they gain a higher informal position among the other workers in the workteams. The workers describe career development as:

When you learn a new task or skill, we update the information in the employees act or portfolio. However there exists no career plans for employee development at the present. Career development and skill enhancement is organised and based on the needs in the company and planned to fit in when the company has a surplus of resources to take from.

For the majority of the employees there is neither time to complete the analysis and assessment of individual needs, nor are there time or surplus workers in the workteams to participate in organised training or education. The trade union describes a “gap” between the intentions from management when introducing individual learning agreements and practice:

When planning for competence enhancement at the workplace we seem to focus more on strategic planning through analysis and mapping individual plans than on starting activities. There is a lot of talk but not much happens.

The work situation does not allow for any time away from the duties of work in order to take part in training. Even if they make plans for realising the learning agreements, management can make last minute changes in the plans and withdraw or choose not to grant any resources. This puts a stop in the procedure of organising learning activities.

It is very difficult to organise for competence enhancement activities, as there is no slack in the people. Today the workers has to find their own “stand in” if they want to take part in any events, which means that the employees in fact takes on the employers responsibility to take charge of the planning of resources. (Trade union representative)

4.2.4 Industrial relations

The relationship between the trade union and the management has changed since the Finnish steel group took over the ownership of the company. They have a different management
culture, which entails that they tell the trade union, instead of engaging them as partners in the change process. The Finnish owners concentrated the change process to focus on cutting overall costs and to focus on market demands. The situation for the company manager was to execute the decisions. The steel workers describe the decision-making process related to the change process as:

There was no co-determination in the groups as the management in practice made all the decisions.

The trade union describe how the difference in management culture has had practical implications for the industrial relations at plant level. Previously the trade unions played an active part in the decision making process in relation to the future of the plant. Now they play a more passive part in the change process. The trade union is finding themselves in the situation of having to renegotiate their role at the plant, especially when it comes to participating in change processes. At this point, the trade union has to negotiate the terms of their members working conditions. The idea of working in partnership is not working because they manage the company from overseas, and the local management only executes top management decisions.

When the company changed the ownership and changed the management, the trade union has fewer opportunities to influence the actions in the company. The trade union co-determination and influence is less, because the Finnish owners decide before they issue any information.

The co-determination law makes no difference in reality. If the local trade union decides to fight the management’s decisions according to the co-determination laws, they must move the fight to a national battlefield and the local issues are subjects for negotiation at national level. This is not a practical or a very proactive solution, and therefore the local trade union do not view national negotiations as an option. The trade union chairperson describes the process of downsizing:

In the first occasion in 1999 the redundancies were handled by allowing the older workers to leave on early retirement schemes. In the second and third occasion the co-determination law where seniority gives job guarantee guided the redundancies. If we cannot reach an agreement at the local level, then the issues will be lifted to national level, and then the local trade unions will become spectators of the negotiation process.

In practice, the trade union has to go back to basics and fight for the working conditions for their members. They will have to fight for the company to deal with the increasing number of people getting ill from work. The trade union chairperson describes the trade union role of today:

The biggest task for the trade union is to pursue the question to recruit more people back to the organisation in order to create better working conditions for the employees.

A majority of the workers has worked at the plant most part of their working life. Many of them can remember how things used to be between the management, the trade unions, and the workers. The employees remember that when Swedish investors used to own the company the management made investments in bad times in order to pick up work when the boom came.
They can also remember when the middle management had more leeway to make decisions, and when they had more guts to stick up for their workers. One steel worker describes the difference as such:

The way they manage the company today reflects the power of the steel group. The Finnish management culture has affected the old traditional culture of the company. The major difference between the two cultures is most visible for the employees in how it affects the relationship between the line managers and the employee because it no longer functions as they expect it to and as it used to do.

Several steelworkers have expressed a concern about the long-term consequences of the change process at the plant:

You have learnt that it is possible to execute decisions although a non-present management organisation makes the decisions. You have also learnt that you must live in uncertainty about the consequences and long-term effects that the decisions will eventually have on the workers. The downsizing has perhaps led to an increase in the number of employees on long-term sick leave.

The human resource department describes that during the years of downsizing the company have lost a lot of respect from both the community as well as from their workers. They need to invest in changing and restore their reputation among their workers.

After making all the cuts in the numbers of workers the remaining employees, the trade union and the local community have no longer any faith in us.

Local management has decided to invest in engaging workers and to change the basic values of the company.

The trade union is still keeping their members, 99 percent of all blue-collar workers are members of the trade union.

There are some good examples when the trade unions at the plant found new ways to work in partnership with management. In the process of making over one hundred workers redundant in the year 1999 the management and the trade unions made a joint effort to start a resource centre at the plant, where the people who were about to loose their jobs were provided with extra service. The investment led to very good results as a majority of the people going into unemployment found other careers. This investment did not cost a lot of money for the plant as the community and the job centre financed parts of the resource centre. The company manager describes the involvement from the trade unions with these words:

In the late nineties between 1997 and 1999, when the company moved parts of their manufacturing to Norway, about 200–300 people lost their jobs. During this period, we made more blue-collar workers redundant than white-collar workers. Some workers got early retirement offers. We invested a lot of effort and resources in to the resource centre, which we open at the company in order to enable the workers to find new jobs and alternatives to work. The trade unions for the blue- and white-collar workers participated in these processes and were personally involved in the resource centre.
The human resource department also tries out new methods to collaborate with the community agencies in order to find new ways to recruit people to come to work at the plant in the future. The trade unions are supportive of these ideas. One way to do this is to collaborate with the elementary and secondary schools in trying to influence them to customise education programmes to be more in line with the qualifications needed from the local industries. People from the human resource personnel department describe the collaboration as:

The company management has found new ways to collaborate with the secondary school and their industry programme. The strategy is to get the secondary school to tailor an education programme to suit the company skill requirements. If the secondary schools can provide education in subjects like metallurgy and hot rolling skills, then it would be possible to recruit people from the region to work at the plant. The goal is to get six new trainees each year by providing the learners with a fourth practical training year within their secondary school programme, two each to the departments of service and maintenance, steelworks and hot roll mill. Each trainee person is to have his or her own mentor at the workplace, and instructors from the secondary school train him or her.
4.3 A structural description of Company B

Company B, is part of a Norwegian company; it has grown from starting as a small family business 150 years ago in the mechanical industry, to be part of a multinational company. The plant is placed in a medium sized city with about 80 000 inhabitants in the middle of Sweden. This region has a tradition of paper, pulp, and forestry industry. Nowadays the region is also a centre for the finance sector. Historically the main part of the employees used to work as tinsmiths and welders, but now the company also employs assembly workers, special tinsmiths, CNC-operators, and quality-workers.

The company employs about 235 people and about 170 of them are members of the trade union for blue-collar workers the Metall union. The union density is 100 percent.

The company manufactures highly specialised steel and plate products to the paper process industry for the entire world. Company B; exist under conditions dictated from the pressure of competing on the global market. Their customers pay for high quality and customised products. The manufacturing process is constantly required to alter as the products manufactured at the company changes as rapidly as the conditions in the market.

By tradition, the entry level of vocational education and training has been high for the blue-collar workers. The majority of the workers have some kind of vocational education as they are employed as skilled labour. This plant also used to have a training centre at the plant, which closed down in 1990. The training centre is still in use for informal in-house practical training. Education providers who run different kinds of training programmes use the training centre for their vocational training. The company cooperates with different educational institutions.

During a period in the middle of the 1990’s – when the company changed ownership and made a split with the Finnish owned company – this firm had to make around 50 blue-collar workers redundant. Most of them went into early retirement. The average age of the workers went down because of the redundancies. Then again, in 1998, the company had to let 30 welders (blue-collar workers) leave the company as they were changing their production line and the company needed to change and strengthen the skill requirements among the employees. At this time, the majority of the workers who went into unemployment were young as the company made the most recent employees leave the company. The welders who left the company found other employment, as their skills were highly transferable all over Sweden. Because of the change process, the average age of the workers increased. Simultaneously when people where laid off at the company they also experienced a skill shortage. In order to sustain flexible production units, it was necessary to recruit more people who had the qualifications to work as special tinsmiths and assembly workers as well as CNC-operators in to the workteams.

There has been a significant change in manufacturing at the plant in the last ten years. Today, customer demands are the basis for all manufacturing in an itemised production line, where each item is unique and differs from the next piece. Manufacturing focuses on key products to the paper pulp industry. The change in the production line reflects the overall change process in the industry. The chain of suppliers and subcontractors to company B, also have to customise their manufacturing process, responding to new requirements from their customers.
The overall figures for staff turnover are very low for all the employees, for white-collar workers it is about one percent, and for the blue-collar workers it is about four percent. Most people who leave the company today retire. The average employment time is 23 years for blue-collar workers and 20 years for the white-collar workers. Most employees have reached high age; the average age for all employees is 46 years. The average age for white-collar workers is 51 and for the blue-collar workers the age is 44.

About 23 percent of all employees have reached the age of 59 or older, 36 percent of all employees are 56 years or older. The majority of the employees are male, 217 out of 234, which means that there are only 17 female employees. The company is in the situation that they will have to start to recruit younger people.

4.4 Interviews at company B

Although company B, does not show many signals of a company in need to downsize, they still had to make some redundancies during the last decade. This is how the trade union officials describe the process:

In the middle of the nineties, we had to make between 40–50 blue-collar workers redundant at the company. Several of them went on an early retirement scheme, which in turn resulted that the average age of the employees, decreased. Then again, in 1998, we had to make another 30 blue-collar workers redundant, but only five of them received an early retirement scheme.

4.4.1 Work organisation

The organisation of work has changed at this plant as well. The trade union people describe the changes as going from manufacturing standardised items to the manufacturing of unique equipment pieces based on customer demands.

The company manufactures wash and boiling equipment to the paper-pulp process industry and exclusively towards customer orders. Each product item has a long manufacturing process, from making an order until the finished product. Each order has its own drawing made at the head office. Then the drawing is adapted to the production line here at this plant.

Employees on the shop floor describe the changes like this:

The tasks here at the horizontal drill are slightly changed and adapted to each product. Today we are manufacturing very large products measured in size and weight. The customers decide what we manufacture here, which requires that we can adapt to changes as both an organisation as well as an employee. When you manufacture items that are both very wide and long, you must adjust the workshop to fit in with the production process. You just have to shift everything that is possible to move. Employees from our company will assemble all the items we manufacture at the present at customer’s sites sometime in six months time.
4.4.2 Multi-skilled workers and flexible workteams

The people working in the different production units have to develop and maintain their skills to be able to produce what the customer orders. Not only do the workers have to adapt to changes, the entire shop floor need to make changes of the workflow. The pieces manufactured are sometimes quite large and extremely heavy, which means that they must plan and organise the workflow within the production process into every detail. The workteams manage the task together. The human resource manager describes the changes at the plant as:

We manufacture complete products to the paper-pulp process industry and we have changed the manufacturing towards key-products. The company has survived the competition on the global market by managing to become a highly specialised company. We have also been successful in speeding up the workflow at the shop-floor level.

Each workteam makes their own estimate of how long the process will take in their specific part of the workflow. Then, the total amount of time is calculated and planned into a workflow, which means that the workers can plan how to use their resources best. Sometimes, the workteams make changes in the manufacturing process in order to get a better workflow and to speed up the process. Sometimes the company manufactures large items so they have to finish the manufacturing process at customer sites. The sheer size of the objects limits the chances for transportation, from the company to the customer. To finalise the manufacturing process at customer sites requires that the employees have many different skills. The trade union people describe the workflow as:

There have been some changes in the manufacturing at this plant. We have changed from manufacturing standard items to manufacture highly specialised products based on customer orders. Some parts of the products we construct at the customer sites outside Sweden. Manufacturing placed at customer site is due to sheer size. It is not possible to transport the finished products either on water or on the road.

We regard our employees at the company as highly skilled and as artisans, because all categories of employees require high skills and an in-depth knowledge of the products.

Many of the items have their own workflow, and therefore the workteams can customise it during manufacturing because they learn to know the product alongside with the process. The trade union spokesperson describes how they plan customer orders to fit in with the workflow:

We plan the customer order with the manufacturing process to match our customer’s time schedule. The customers need to replace their equipment as it affects their production. When the item is ready to be shipped to the customer several assembly workers, tinsmiths and welders from this plant goes along with the produced item to the customer site to install the equipment. This process from draught to instalment at the customer site can take about eighteen months in time.

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4.4.3 Learning and change management

The employees regard learning as a key success factor for managing change processes. In order to be able to adapt to changes each worker need to learn how to master their skills even better and to be part in developing their work tasks. They also view job rotation as vital in the process of learning more about workflow, but also about each other’s jobs in order to work out dependencies between the different workstations. People on the shop floor describe the need for maintaining high skills at work as:

It is difficult to recruit new employees on the labour market who have required appropriate skills to work, for example at the horizontal drill. All new employees at this plant have required some basic education and training to work in a mechanical workshop, but to be skilled enough to work here each person has to get further training at work.

The trade union people discuss the thought for future planning:

We need to make up a plan for developing the workplace to fit future requirements. We need to develop new methods for work rotation. Today, some of the assembly workers can cover and work as welders. Work rotation functions very well when they work at customer sites, but when the employees get back to their ordinary jobs the work organisation functions as a barrier for work rotation and workteam development.

The ability to master high skills is valued as important in the workteams and therefore workers who fail receive no leniency from the workteams. The peer pressure is high to learn the ropes of the tasks and if people show that, they are slow to learn or reluctant to learn the employees put even more pressure on them. If people with temporary employments or employees who participate in learning activities show they are slow learners, it can end their chances to get steady employment. The workteams provide opportunities for workers to learn how to carry out new work tasks. The human resource manager describes the learning culture in the company as such:

It can be difficult for the newcomers to understand the company culture at this particular workplace. This mean that some workers who do not get the hang of the ropes, will be left out in the cold. High skills and in-depth knowledge is valued very high in the workteams. Sometimes they find it difficult to see the potential in the new recruits, which can develop if they are given the time. The workteams values if a person is highly skilled from start and can contribute to the workplace and the workteam from the beginning.

People from the shop floor describe the old culture as:

The culture at this workplace puts focus on people’s ability to be “fixers” and they have inherited their attitude from the period when the company used to be a family firm.

The workteams’ takes on a joint responsibility to train newcomers in the art of mastering the skills required for each specific workstation. It is also up to the workteam to assess when the newcomer can work without supervision. One employee describes the process of learning:
A large portion of the training and competence development for the employees we place at the workplace in order to learn from the knowledge and experiences found in the highly skilled workteams. We plan work in teams and workflow so that people can learn from each other when working together. Learning can be organised on a daily basis or in periods. How learning is organised depends much on the manufacturing process. When we plan to manufacture items that are more advanced, we plan the workteams so that employees can learn from each other. In these circumstances, learning is organised. The same goes for installation and manufacturing at the customer site. When the manufacturing process entails installation of larger items at customer sites we ask employees who have little experience of working at customer sites if they want to take the opportunity to participate in the work in order to learn.

The trade union is about to sign a competency agreement with the company. The agreement states that learning should be organised and planned based on both individual and company needs and prerequisites. The agreement also states that wages and the system for pay should reflect skills enhancement.

We want to map employee education- and skill levels in order to be able to plan for future activities that relate to competence development. The trade union is very optimistic about the future considering competence development. They would like the developmental plans to include a wider perspective, where competence means more than the knowledge and skills required at work. Developmental and career talks between the floor manager and each employee can be the starting point for initiating competence development plans and agreements. The talks should result in each person setting up his or her individual plan. One leading question should guide competence plans, how would each employee like to develop and grow? There is also an intention that competence agreements should deal with workteam development. All employees should have the same opportunity to develop and basis for developmental talks must be a mutual trust and respect for each other. The local trade union club plays a vital role in this process.

Before the agreement, learning was organised in the workteams by providing slack in the time schedule or by supplying more resources to a particular workteam. People from the shop floor describe the attitude towards learning:

The work pace at the present in production is too high to provide time for training. Otherwise, the culture at this workplace is very allowing when it comes to competence development, and particularly so when it comes to trade union skills and competence development.

As the workteams have a great freedom in how they choose to place the work tasks in the team, they plan their jobs and organise the work in teamwork. Therefore, they create opportunities where the oldies can teach the newcomers. There is always a person in charge, who makes sure that the employees do the job correct and in the right order.
Further training is also organised by providing the employees with opportunities to participate in training programmes supplied by education providers at the workplace or other vicinities. The trade union people describe the need to invest in learning:

To be able to maintain and develop the employees’ knowledge and competences at this firm, the company provides education and training, which is partly organised at the workplace. As the company's official language is English, we will provide each employee with opportunities to study English. The management of the company and the employees have agreed on that a priority list is to guide the planning and execution of the education activities.

The company supplies the majority of the training at the workplace in their own training centre. Sometimes the company provides for training programmes that entail many employees having to take part in the same session. These sessions affect the workflow and therefore they plan it to run at a lower pace. This is how the trade union people describe the process of organising learning:

The company management plans one day of competence development for each employee where the employees can learn more about the company and their products. We plan manufacturing at the plant to fit in with the training sessions. The company also provides training and education in subjects as logistics, welding and in control systems. The training programme is a combination of informal exchange of knowledge, where people can learn from each other, and formal training and education. During some parts in the education programmes, instructors and teachers come to hold lectures at the training centre at the plant. The employees can practice different skills for example welding etc. The company also invests in providing theoretical education and training programmes in subjects like drafting techniques for our employees. Educational institutions provide the teaching of certain subjects and the activities are organised in their training centres.

The management and the trade union have reached an agreement on making special investments in further training for the assembly workers as they often work at customer sites. They need to improve their skills in certain areas, which they regard as vital for maintaining a functional customer service. The trade union people described this as:

There is a specific training programme for all the assembly workers. The programme is organised at the workplace and includes three different parts. One third of the programme includes education in English, another third deals with different aspects of jurisdiction and regulations, and the last part is about basic contracting knowledge and skills as in writing agreement. The last part is an adjustment to customer needs. It happens quite often that the customers want the service to extend and include parts not previously regulated in any agreements.

Learning is regarded as vital for the survival of the plant, and both the company management (at local level and from the owners’ perspective) share the vision of making further training as part of work, but also as a mean of making the work place a more interesting and fulfilling place to be for their workers. The trade union shares the owners view. By providing interesting jobs where the workers can alternate, their work between different workstations
and tasks the employees will get more motivated and stimulated by their work. Through a highly committed workforce, the plant will have a greater chance to sustain their grip on the market. The human resource manager describes the need for maintaining high skills as:

By organising competence development for the employees in a systematic way in different areas - as team development, group dynamics and tool knowledge - and by using modern techniques, it is possible to maintain the market position on the global market. By introducing new technology and techniques, it also means that the employees need to get more competence development in areas as new welding techniques and knowledge about new materials, and composite materials. In order for the company to survive on the market, the company has to find new ways in the future to provide their new recruits a basic training, which can be adapted to the specific requirement found in this company.

4.4.4 Industrial relations

The metal trade union have a long tradition to work in partnership with the management at this particular plant and therefore they have a strong position at the plant. The trade union also thinks that the industrial relation will improve even further in the future, as the company has employed a new shop floor manager. He shares the company history and he understands how the trade union wishes to participate in developing the company, he is also in favour of workers development. The trade union people describe following expectations about the new shop floor manager:

The new manager of production is a leader with visions, and he regards developmental talks with his co-workers as an important component in his leadership. He is also very engaged in creating a work place were people feel comfortable. The trade union wants to promote him as the new production manager. At this point, he has not officially accepted the position. The reason the trade union would like to promote him as new production manager is his positive view about people and because he coaches people to grow and develop. He is also active when it comes to creating an atmosphere at work where the employees feel safe.

The trade union people have worked longer at the plant than the company managers. The trade union people have been part of the company since the company started and they have been part of every step the company has taken. The company has had several owners but the company spirit is still the same as when it started. The human resource director describes the culture as:

There used to be an old and inherited company culture from the time when the company used to be a family firm. Changes often meant technological development more than developing the employees. The majority of the employees have been at the company for a long time, and they can relate to the period when the company was a family firm. The old culture is most visible in the employee’s sense of having to fix things, and they are very technology centred.
The feeling of belonging to a company with a tradition of supplying goods to the mechanical industries is very strong among the employees. The trade union for the blue-collar workers has a strong position among their workers at the plant, as the majority of the employees are their members. In 1995 the two companies split and the 1 000 employees were divided between the two companies. The firms chose different market segments and specialised their production lines. One employee describes the company history as:

The company is a family firm, which they later sold to become this firm in 1986, and thereafter they divided the company and the employees into two separate companies in 1995. This firm chose to manufacture equipment to the paper pulp process and the other firm chose to manufacture equipment to the overall production in the paper industry. This firm moved into the old mechanical workshop for tinsmiths.

The new owners from Norway have a vision to lead the company by committed and well-motivated workers. The trade union support these ideas and they take part in the developmental process by participating in a change process in order to achieve certain targets set by the company owners. The trade union people describe a company strategy to learn more about the company:

It is part of a company strategy to provide all employees with a deeper knowledge about the company and to create an understanding of how their part in the manufacturing process is vital and fit into the chain of the manufacturing process of making paper.

The trade union had a disagreement with the local management during the last year, but they are in the process of sorting it out. The disagreement was about how to realise the competence agreement and how a new system for pay can reflect competence development. The old system of pay does not function as a motivator for people to participate in skills enhancement, as most employees have already reached the highest levels in the system. Therefore, the trade union now want to negotiate about introducing a new pay system where an increase in pay reflects individual competence and skill enhancement. The trade union wants to achieve a pay system where individual aspirations to become a multi skilled worker can match a system with increasing wages. The trade union people describe the pay system as:

Today the basis in the pay system is different levels in competence positions, which regulate employee pay. About 85 percent of all the employees have already received the highest levels in the wage ladder.

The head office has recently recruited a new director. With his leadership, he wants to promote the employees of the organisation. He states in a newly issued policy leaflet aimed for the employees in the organisation, that they are the company’s “greatest assets”. The policy document has had some impact on the employees as they feel that the head office recognises them as valuable and competent workers and that company B, is important for the head office. The policy document fits well in line with the ideas of recruiting a new shop floor manager who also wants to promote the employees of the company. When it comes to issues related to developing the employees and the workplace, they share the same view at head office and at the plant. One of the workers from the shop floor recites the new company leader’s view of the employees:
His guiding star is to view the employees as the company’s greatest asset.

The head office in Norway has decided that the companies in the group must take part in some developmental work, based on the particular needs found in each company. After conducting an employee survey where they asked each employee to fill in a questionnaire, they could define areas for developmental work. People from the head office, local management, and the trade unions identified the developmental areas together. They chose to develop the system for pay, customer relations and the system for information. They could identify a need to improve the company infrastructure for information at plant level with the help of information technology and IT-support as a mean to reach out to each employee with company information. The developmental work expects to result in changed practice. The people from the trade union view the developmental work as a step in the right direction:

At plant B, we are to focus on three areas of development. The trade union has given information about these areas. The developmental areas found at local level are guiding the prioritised areas and should lead to activities. The system of pay is one area of development, and information is another. One of the areas we are to highlight and develop is how we communicate at this company. The company is not very open with information now. The third developmental area is how we view customer relations.

The trade union people are also active in the local community in several committees - as local authority politicians - and they participate in the development of society. For example, they have participated in the development of several education programmes and initiatives together with other employers in the region, education institutions, and local authorities. The basis for the new ideas has been regional growth and development. The trade union people describe the collaboration with the community like this:

To be able to maintain high skills in the company and to be able to recruit people in the future, the company collaborates with the industrial programme at the local secondary school. There is also a developmental council as part of the local authority, who invites companies, education institutions and people from the local authority to collaborate around issues related to education and training. The basis for collaboration is to provide customised education and training for future employees by the education institutions. To be able to adapt education programmes to the needs found in the industry, early mapping of company needs is necessary. We are currently running a project in the region between three local authorities, which the department of growth finances. The objectives with the project are to find new models to assess competency needs and to supply skilled workers to the manufacturing companies in a short and long term. Another aim is to recruit younger people to study vocational education programmes. There is a need to ensure a highly skilled workforce for the region. The trade union Metall is one of the parties in this project.

The human resource manager promotes collaboration with the local authorities and the communities’ agencies in order to be able to provide the company with education and training based on company needs. The company is finding it difficult to find people to recruit at the present. It is especially difficult to find people who have acquired the skills required to work in the company. The human resource manager describes the difficulty in finding people on the labour market to fit the skills required from the company:
The old industry school, our training centre closed down at this particular workplace in 1990. There is no education or vocational training programme available in the region that can supply people with the adequate skills required at this company. We cannot find one school in the entire Sweden who can provide education and training to become a special tinsmith. It is particularly difficult to find people with necessary skills who are available on the labour market today. However, there is some light in the horizon. We have invested in a specific vocational labour market course together with an education institution with the aim to train people to become special tinsmiths and welders. We gave some people the opportunity to learn as trainees during 40 weeks. We placed all the practical vocational training here at the plant. We offered some the people who participated in the training permanent positions after their training.
5. AN ANALYSIS – A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO COMPANIES

In this chapter, I shall relate the empirical findings to the conceptual model and the theoretical framework. The basis for making the analysis is the practical question whether or not the trade unions participate and influence the management of organisational change as a response to the consequences of restructuring.

The two described companies live under quite different conditions and therefore it is vital for the analysis to describe their different contexts. Both plants have managed to survive after years of restructuring in the industry.

Company A has turned negative figures to positive and are now the most profitable enterprise in the group owned by the Finnish state and private investors. The place of the company is in a small region where the population is decreasing. The plant used to be the largest employer in the community; about four percent of the population is still working at the local plant. The plant has always been an important part of the community and the entire community has grown in the surroundings of the steel works. The entry level to work at the plant has historically been low, as the employer has provided vocational training based on both formal and informal learning. This means that the employees are highly skilled at the workplace but they are not employable outside the steel and metal industry without supplementary education and training.

Company B is keeping its position on the market as a leading manufacturer of products to the paper process industry in the world. The place of the plant is in a region where the population is increasing. The company is medium-sized and it employs less than half percent of the population. The overall business in the region centres on the financing and manufacturing sector and there is a University placed in the city. The entry level is high to work at company B as most employees work as skilled craft. The skilled workers are employable elsewhere if they would want to leave the company.

In order to analyse the extent of success of the change processes and their causes, we have to make an in-depth analysis of the empirical findings. In this first section, change-management is analysed and compared to theories related to organisational change and work organisations.

5.1 Organisational change and work organisation

The organisation of work is quite different between the two plants. Company A is currently experiencing the situation of having to adapt an entire shop floor based on process manufacturing to market conditions. The work process to manufacture steel is not easy to change and therefore necessary changes must fit in within the workflow and existing production units.

In company B, they manufacture pieces that move along from one section to the next in a workflow where people operate and control machinery. This means that there is a stop and start in the workflow and that it is possible to halt the process at any time. They can introduce technical changes as long as they fulfil basic requirements such as people can learn new skills and use new equipment and that each employee understands the products they manufacture. The company adapts their manufacturing process to fit with the customer’s requirements. Not
very many companies can supply the same knowledge, service, and products to the global market.

The biggest difference between the plants is the workflow. Company A manufactures steel in a continuous process, which stops late Friday afternoon and picks up again on Sunday evening. If or when the process comes to a halt, then something extraordinary has happened. Several tasks in the manufacturing process are automatic and therefore managed from small control booths. Some tasks are manual work and therefore labour intensive - for example, quality control, the cleansing of caskets, and loading to trucks. The work in itself relates to high skills, as there is an old tradition to connect the art of making steel to craftsmanship. There is also a tradition at the plant to organise work around autonomous workteams. It is imperative that workflow functions at its best at all times at the plant. This provides for good conditions to manufacture high quality steel in high quantities at low price. This means that the workers need to manage the manufacturing process without any stops and breaks. To lower the rate of “stand still” is therefore a high priority. The teams take charge of the workflow as in the sense they run all the operations. In certain developmental projects with the ambition to improve workflow, the workers discuss new ideas, which they later develop and implement, into the system of work.

At company B the manufacturing process is itemised, starts, and finishes at each workstation and the finalised product is an item that is ready for transport to the customer. The workflow is labour intensive as each step in the manufacturing process is pure craftsman-ship. Most parts in the manufacturing process include people operating machinery, some computer programmed, or using different kinds of tools. The workflow changes with each different piece they manufacture. At times, they have to rearrange the entire workshop to fit in the pieces. The workteams plan and execute the order of the workflow together as well as sets the time limit for each operation. There is also a tradition at the plant to organise work around autonomous workteams. Work is organised so that employees can learn from previous experiences and subsequently change their work routines.

Both companies have organised the work around flexible workers. This means that the organisation is depending on the employees to have skills to manage several tasks and operations and who can handle work tasks varying from manual work to managerial tasks. This also means that the work organisation depends on their employees to have the capacity to rotate between functions and take on several work tasks. Both companies also organises work according to the integrated production system (Brulin & Nilsson 1995) where the customer is the centre for activities and multi skilled and flexible employees work with different work tasks in the integrated system. The employees also handle plenty of information from the outside world.

However, at Company A, it seems like work is organised along the idea and principle of lean production as the leading principle for organising work is to lower manufacturing costs by efficient manufacturing in downsized, flexible and multi skilled workteams (Docherty & Huzzard 2003). At company A, they expect the employees to cover for each other from time to time and to go to work at other departments in the plant, if necessary for the production. Sometimes they can take in people to work as temporary workers to cover for employees on a longer sick leave.

The fact that both companies practise a high degree of group autonomy means that the employees know how to plan and organise their own work between them selves. Line
Managers or supervisors exist but their basic work task during daytime is to manage the staffing of workteams. Neither of the workplaces have supervisors during evenings or nightshifts anymore.

Both companies expect the employees to be highly flexible; they should be able to manage several skills related to work, have social skills and they should have the capacity to learn more skills as time goes by. At plant A, the employees are experiencing that they have to carry out many different tasks in the downsized teams and they manage to carry out the same kind of duties in the downsized team, which evidently required more workers before the change process.

At company B, the trade union is pursuing a change in pay as their members are getting more multi-skilled and flexible workers, and therefore they want to introduce a new systems for pay which can be related to skill enhancement and reflect that the employees at periods work on customer sites (Docherty & Huzzard 2003, Brulin and Nilsson 1995).

Has the organisational changes affected learning at all in the two companies? Do the employees have to learn anything new to be able to sustain their employability after the change process? In the next section, the empirical findings related to how learning can be part of work and introduced as a mean to develop the workplace are analysed and compared to theories about learning.

5.1.1 Learning to become a skilled worker

How do they view learning and how does it relate to work at the two companies? Do the employees view learning as important or not? Who is pursuing a learning agenda? How do they introduce learning at the two companies, as part of work or as activities, which take place outside and perhaps beside from work?

Learning at company A, is important part of work. To become a multi-skilled worker connects to gaining a high informal status in the workteams. However, the manufacturing process is guiding and perhaps limiting the workers in how they can learn to be innovative. People in certain positions in the company or temporary project groups have the responsibility to think new, to develop the workflow process, and to implement suggested changes. The employees learn to do their work tasks from the other skilled employees, and informal learning is the basis for learning. Ellström (2002) illustrates this kind of learning as based on the logics of production, where focus for learning is to provide employees with sufficient skills to master work tasks. Each employee learns to do several tasks at the plant in order to be able to cover for each other, as overall skills are highly regarded in the workteams and acts as a guarantee for a functional workflow. Ellström (1996) describes this type of learning as learning for adaptation as it focuses on utilising “old” knowledge and the reproduction of knowledge instead of developing new knowledge. Reproduction of knowledge is not likely to lead to organisational learning, as the basis for learning is informal and the workteams measure knowledge as knowing how to do the job well.

They practise learning as part of work at company B, as acquiring new knowledge and skills are essential parts of work. When they plan to manufacture a customised product or new item, the process starts afresh as they want to avoid old habits and routines in the manufacturing process. The employees are encouraged to come up with new solutions to manufacturing even during the manufacturing process. This means that they can make changes to the workflow
even after a line is set up. The ability to reflect on why things are done in certain ways is a skill the employees have learnt while working with new items in the manufacturing line and from bringing home experiences from working at customer sites. Ellström (2002) illustrates this kind of learning as based on the logics of development where experimental learning is part of developing new knowledge. They base learning activities on both informal and formal learning. The employees reach an understanding of the necessity to be able to solve problems based on particular circumstances when they can use previous experience combined with new knowledge in their actions. They provide the employees with a “mirror” to their own practice when working on customer sites. The employees learn how to solve problems and they learn to think aside from old patterns – which mean they can think afresh. They develop employees’ knowledge and skills by combining practical problem solving at work supported by theoretical knowledge. The employees can therefore take part in developmental work aimed for organisational changes (Ellström 2002, 1996). The objectives of learning at this company are to become a more skilled worker but also to learn how to develop work in itself and to solve problems based on new circumstances. Learning is developmentally oriented as the employees learn how to try out new methods in new situations, where they do not know tasks or results beforehand (Ellström 2002:2).

They have established a learning agreement between the trade union and the employer at company A. However, the agreement has this far only resulted in the mapping of employee’s vocational education and skill levels and they have an idea of the aspiration levels of learning. The learning agreement has not yet resulted in the making of plans for learning activities. The local trade union has not pursued the learning agreement, as they cannot see how it is going to be possible to realise it into any activities. They manage the learning agreement at company A, as a human resource project.

The local trade union at company B is about to activate the learning agreements set up between the employer and the trade union. The trade union has worked a lot with the learning agreement in order to ensure that the agreement will result in activities and pay increases.

To be able to provide workers with opportunities for reflection and for testing new ideas, resources and problem solving opportunities should be part of the work process (Ellström, 2002). Visiting other steel plants with similar processes and conditions, the employees can mirror their own reality with other people’s experiences (Svensson, Jacobsson & Åberg, 2001). Employees can use their own and others peoples experiences for reflection and for assessing whether or not the requested changes are realistic in the steel industry. Reflecting with people that share similar circumstances can create reflective communities, which can be very useful as tools for developmental work. The opportunities to create reflective communities vary between the plants. In company A, the trade union people take part in trade union meetings and seminars. In company B, the employees spend many working hours on customer sites in Sweden and in other countries. This gives them unique opportunities to learn from others ant to mirror their own experiences with others.

How does individual skills and participation in learning activities connect to workteam development or to the development of work tasks? How can learning be part of developing the workteams and is there any correlation between learning and level of group autonomy? In the next section, the empirical findings are analysed and compared to theories about workteam development.
5.1.2 Workteams

What does workteams stand for at the companies? Are they functioning as autonomous work groups and workteams to any extent?

There is a difference between the two plants considering the level of autonomy in the workteams and work groups. Before the downsizing, the work, teams at company A, had more power to control their work. Today they can control the workflow in the sense of who is to run which process. In reality, planning the workflow is at the level where they have to make sure they have enough people at work to manage the operations in order to sustain the set quality in production. The workteams have no real power to require more labour to the workteams when they are short of people, which mean they have more responsibilities than power to control. This means that the workteams are not autonomous in the sense as Thorsrud & Emery mean, where they should have the power to control resources in the workteams (1969). Brulin & Nilsson (1995) mean that this situation of people having to work extremely hard in short-staffed teams with long working hours is a typical consequence of lean production.

At company B, the work groups plan the workflow together, especially when they are introducing new products in the manufacturing line, as they have to make their own estimates of the timeframe of each operation. They also plan changes in the workflow, develop the routines of work, plan for manning of teams and they also plan for the employees learning needs and fit training in together with the workflow. At company B, the responsibilities are in the same level as their span of control (Bruzelius & Skärvad 1989).

Now we know that there is some degree of workteam autonomy at both companies although the teams at company B have a greater span of control where they can execute their decisions. However, how do organisational change, individual skills, and workteam autonomy connect to change competence? In the next section, the empirical findings are analysed and compared to theories about change competence.

5.1.3 Change competence

As mentioned earlier change competence is important and can prove to be vital for the company and the union’s capacity to manage change processes. However, is it possible to establish the level of change competence the people in the trade union has at the two different companies?

Aronsson (1995) proposes that a person’s attitude and skills make certain prerequisites to handle and cope with changes in a positive way. If they have the capacity to see new opportunities combined with initiative and a curious mind, they have the capability to test new ideas in order to solve problems; they will most likely be courageous enough to pursue change processes.

When comparing the trade union activists at the two companies it is apparent that the trade union people at company A, have lost faith and trust in how the change process has been managed. The trade union does not trust the company management to organise the work in a way where the employees have good and sustainable working conditions. Even the human resource manager claims that the employees have lost their trust and for the manager’s capacity to organise the change process. When people have lost their trust, it is difficult to
have a positive outlook on the future. However, at company B, the situation seems to be quite different. The trade union people are trying out new ideas all the time and they do it together with the management in a partnership-based solution. The basis for partnership is trust and a mutual respect for each other. They have a very positive outlook on the future, they are curious about the future and they have initiative to start change processes of their own.

Are there any specific ideas that decide change competence at the collective level? According to Aronsson, (1995) it is possible to identify collective change competence from the following features; the group can relate their work to an overall context and solve problems together, they have the capacity to influence work and the prerequisites for their work. They can further find a balance between individual needs and collective requirements and maintain equal relations. So, what is the collective change competence at company A and B?

At company A, the trade union is dealing with the consequences of restructuring, but they have no real power to act in the trade union organisation, as they need to act in collaboration with the managers to reach a common understanding about the situation at the plant. The owners are acting as barriers for partnership work as they show little interest in involving the trade union in the change process and developmental work. The trade union is finding it difficult to meet the needs from their members and combining them to the requirements from company management. The number one priority for the trade union is to increase the number of employees in the workteams; however, they are finding it difficult to influence these matters.

At company B, the trade union seems to be able to connect the new requirements from company management to the overall change in society. The union also collaborates with other institutions and agencies outside the company, and therefore have the capacity to foresee events as well as plan for them, in order to fit the solutions into trade union work. They collaborate with other actors in the society to influence how things develop and to be able to solve problems.

Can it be possible to draw any conclusions about the change competence at the collective level and to the sustainability of work systems? What does it mean to people’s work life to work in a company where they manage changes to provide sustainable conditions? In the next section, the empirical findings are analysed and compared to theories about creating sustainable conditions for change.

5.2 Creating sustainable conditions for change

To have a job means to be part of a working life and it means to be part of a systems and a member of a community, which evidently can change. If people are involved in managing the change process they can take, the gratitude when things turn out well, but they also have to take the responsibility when things go bad. The two companies in the case studies show different ways to manage change processes. Is it possible to come to any conclusion about the long-term consequences that relate to the differences in the management of the change processes?

At company A, focus in the restructuring process is to cutting costs. The employees experience the consequences of downsizing affecting their own particular work. Even if the employees are the company’s greatest assets, based on their high skills, still the workers
experience that they are expendable and viewed as a cost. The employees do not understand 
the reason for downsizing, as the consequence of technological improvements or investments, 
and the change process does not make sense to them. More employees are getting ill from 
work and the trade union has recognised it as a problem related to the employees work 
situation. Docherty (et al 2002) would describe the above situation as an intensive work 
system, where work refers to the consumption of human resources, (physical, cognitive, social 
and emotional) and where it seems to be impossible to combine the pressures from work with 
a healthy life. The situation is quite different in company B, as the employees experience they 
can take part in developing the company and them selves.

There is a high degree of work group autonomy at company A, but the employees making up 
the teams experience that they cannot utilise their autonomy to the same extent as before the 
downsizing (Kjellberg 2003). Their autonomy stretches only as far as dealing with how to 
manage workflow in the sense of running a smooth process. The whole process of change has 
been quite dis-empowering for the workers as they find them self in a situation where they 
have less power to control their work situation and there is no room for nurturing the general 
knowledge about the company and the comradeship between the workers. The trade union has 
little power to influence the situation, as they have no part in managing the change process.

Using Antonovsky (1987) concept of coherence makes it possible to understand the meaning 
of a good work life, which means trying to understand and making sense of the situation. How 
does the sense of coherence relate to the trade union activist’s situation at the two companies?

At company A, there is no shared understanding between the management and the trade union 
about the extent of measures taken in order to become a profitable company. The whole 
process does not make sense to the trade union as the new situation is requiring other 
measures in order to deal with the under staffing. In order to deal with the situation of today 
the remedy is to recruit people back to the workteams and that means having to reverse back 
to what used to be, which means the situation of today makes no sense to the workers. The 
trade union people do not possess over any means to change the conditions for their members, 
and they experience they are left “out in the dark” by the management. Brödner & Forslin 
(2002) describe the confusion employees can experience in lean organisations when they 
experience discontinuity and unpredictability caused by frequent changes in management 
philosophy.

Is the situation the same at company B? No, the trade union experience they can cope with 
the situation very well, as they are part in the process, which they understand very well and which 
makes sense to them. They also have access to company information and they pursue 
developmental work themselves in order to deal with change management.

Docherty & Huzzard (2003) describe that creating a common value system in organisations 
can aim to appeal to the workers motivation and commitment for the workplace. Both 
companies have initiated such attempts. At company A, they have piloted a programme where 
they tried to establish a common value system at the department dispatch, which the trade 
union did not know about. At company B, they are about to begin this process as a way to 
deal with the results from the employee survey. The head office defined three areas for 
development where the trade union is involved in the developmental work together with the 
management.
At company B, the customer has always been in focus and the workers acknowledge customer service as the key factor for survival. If customers do not demand the products, then the company will die. To be able to manufacture products demanded from the customers, it requires competent workers and a flexible workshop. The company has to invest in acquiring new knowledge through informal and formal learning. The introduction of new techniques and new equipment is valued as essential if the company wants to sustain the capacity to provide the products, which are in demand from the market. The workers are in that sense used to work in a society in constant change and they understand the need to take charge in developing their own skills, knowledge, and tasks. The employees have experienced people having to leave the company because of skills shortage and they understand the relation between maintaining high skills in order to be able to manufacture customer demanded products. The trade union is actively taking part in developing the workplace and the employees work situation as they are now trying to start developmental work regarding work rotation.

Docherty & Huzzard (2003) description of the three road alternatives can be useful to describe the situation of today at the two companies. The low-road alternative could be a description of company A, which illustrates an intensive work system with exploited employees. Low-road solutions put focus on developing strategies for increased competitiveness by lowering costs, introducing flexibility, quality measures and by increasing the pace in manufacturing. They exploit existing skills and utilise them in the manufacturing process rather than used them for developing new knowledge.

In addition, company B, could illustrate the high-road alternative where the employees can develop themselves, as they are equipped with tools to manage their work situation. They can focus on developing strategies to increase company competitiveness by finding a balance between product and process innovations. The company is recognising and utilising the employees’ skills, learning abilities and creativity. They view regeneration of new knowledge as vital for the company.

When working with change management are there any specific issues that need special attention that can facilitate the creation of sustainable conditions for change. What part can the trade unions play in the role of managing change, especially if the approach is a close cooperation with company management? In the next section, the empirical findings are analysed and compared to theories about partnership.

5.3 Partnership

How can trade union work be part of creating sustainable conditions for change? Are there any major differences between the two companies in how they relate trade union work to developing sustainable conditions for change? Is the trade union taking an active part in developing the organisation and work? Do the companies have any tradition to work in partnership between the trade union and the employer’s organisation? Do they regard the trade unions as a strong and valued partner to work with and finally do the trade unions have any members?

Both companies share the same situation of having a high density of members in the trade unions. At company A, 99 percent of the blue-collar workers are members in the metal trade union and at company B, 100 percent of the blue-collar workers are members in the same
trade union. There are no employees left to recruit, who are not members of the unions. A few members from the metal trade union have transferred their membership to the white-collar trade union although they have transferred more white-collar work to blue-collar workers at both companies, (compare with Kjellberg 2003)

There is a long tradition to work in partnership in both plants. But the trade union at company A, are experiencing a situation where they are not made strategic partners when it comes to issues related to developmental work, in the same sense as the trade unions are in company B. They can explain this partly due to new owners. Management is too far from the local plant to make communication with the trade union a possibility. Another explanation can be the lack of tradition from the new owners’ side to view the trade union as a strategic partner.

Why is the trade union at company B involved in developmental work? Their owner is also from another country, from Norway. Could there be any other reasons? Could the different situation relate to the size of the company, the age of the company or to the trade union tradition of the company? We suppose it is a combination of these and other factors.

Both the trade union and the company at company A, have existed over hundred years. The trade union people have worked at the plant more than twenty years. Some of them have worked there even longer. As the trade union has a long tradition at the plant, it also has a long tradition to pursue traditional trade union issues, which focuses on negotiations. They have experienced several periods of organisational changes the last two decades, which means that the trade union, have been negotiating a lot and it is in line with Kjellberg’s (2003) argument that the trade unions have had to put issues related to work organisation and work environment in the background to deal with job losses. This can be a reason for why they do not regard the trade union as a partner for development as they have emphasised their tradition to negotiate in the last two decades combined with the fact that there are fewer active trade union activists, as they have to focus on their jobs.

At company B, the company and the trade union has developed together and reached the same age. However, the people in the trade union have worked at the plant longer than most of the managers, which mean they have an overall knowledge and understanding that exceeds the information many of the managers, have had the opportunity to get. The trade union people have also experienced several organisational changes during the last two decades, but instead of focusing only on negotiating about employee rights they have taken an active role in developing the workplace, which is in line with the trade union policy at the national level.

We have learned that the trade unions have a long history at both plants but the situation for the trade union at company A has focused more on dealing with redundancies and negotiations. Is it possible to categorize the way the trade union work in partnership with the management to solve problems at plant level? In the next section, the empirical findings are analysed and compared to different perspectives of partnership.

5.3.1 A typology of partnerships

How the company managers have involved the trade unions and the employees in the management of change is a basic difference between the two companies. At company A, the trade unions have been engaged in the process in the sense they have being told about the solutions after they have been decided and then asked to deal with the consequences such as redundancies. The approach is more like the reactive type of partnership as it focuses more on
ad-hoc solutions to upcoming problems (Wallis 2003). Focus in the approach has been to inform the employees through the trade union.

Company A, have to execute management decisions made at the head office in Finland. They decided to carry out changes in company A as a strategy to minimise costs and to focus manufacturing to high profit products. The local management must execute orders. The trade union has not really been involved in the planning and organisation of the management of the change process. Instead, they had to stick to their traditional role and deal with the consequences affecting the work situation for their members and the redundancies. The trade union at company A, work in reactive situations, where the strategy is to take part in handling the consequences of change and dealing with the effects of increased sick absenteeism.

At company B, the trade union have been involved to a certain extent through their own initiative to participate in the management of organisational change as a strategic partner, where the employees have been part in inventing new solutions to the problems. The partnership-based approach has been more of the responsive type of character as it focuses on improving the overall business performance (Wallis 2003).

The change process at company B, has been managed in a partnership approach where the trade union has been part in promoting many changes. In order to be able to survive on the global market downsizing has not been the only answer. Instead, the trade union have been successful in introducing flexible workteams by investing in learning and in recruiting people to the organisation who can be part in developing the workteams. When the company changed from manufacturing standardised products to produce items according to customer requirements they had to dismiss some people in order to be able to recruit workers with demanded skills. They managed this process together in a partnership approach. The key success factor to managing the change process is how the company and the trade union have viewed the need for further learning and training in order to be able to adjust the workteams to customer demands. The trade union at Company B can work in responsive conditions as they take initiatives for change.

Both companies are in the midst of developing activities to fit within the framework of the national learning agreements, which is a result of an institutional type of partnership between the trade unions and employers’ organisation (Wallis 2003).

Whether the partnership approach is either reactive or responsive, it needs to build on a stable ground to create sustainable conditions for partnership-based work. How do you build these conditions into partnership-based work? One prerequisite is to act in strategic networks where the partnership-based approach includes other actors in the community. In the next section, the empirical findings are analysed and compared to theories about strategic networking.

5.3.2 Strategic networking

What does it mean to participate in strategic networks and where can you find them? To what extent are people from the plants participating in strategic networks? Can work in strategic networks boost the partnership-based approach to the management of change?

At company A, people from the human resource department take active parts in strategic networks as they are collaborating with the education institutions and communities agencies in order to develop the vocational training programmes to fit company needs and as a mean to
find new ways to recruit young people to work at the plant. A few of the active trade union people at company A are members of political boards in the community.

At company B, people from both the human resource department and the trade union take part in strategic networks. The human resource department people participate in networks together with other mechanical industries, the community’s agencies, the University and education institutions to influence how qualified vocational training can be customised to fit the company requirements of training needs. They also try to find new ways to recruit people to the company by introducing trainee programmes for unemployed people.

The trade union people at company B, participate in regional strategic networks together with the community’s agencies, the University, regional trade union, education institutions and other enterprises, to create good prerequisites for economic growth in the region, especially in the smaller communities outside the big city. They also participate in strategic networks in the trade union organisation to develop the trade union role to focus on learning issues, and to develop the task of activate local learning agreements. They are also members of political boards to influence education and training programmes.

So, what could it mean for the trade union position at the local level to participate as a strategic partner in change processes, if they are also participating in strategic networks? It seems like the management do not regard the trade union at company A, as a strategic partner in the same sense as the trade union is at company B. It may relate to the fact that the trade union people at company B, have knowledge of many things that can become useful even at plant level. As the trade union is involved in creating favourable conditions for economic growth in their community, they know how to engage in issues aiming to develop the company. The trade union is as an equal partner when it comes to issues related to change management and developing the workplace.

Svensson (Svensson, Jacobsson & Åberg, 2001) means that when participating in learning networks people can learn from their experiences and bring new knowledge to solve and identify problems back home, where it can make a difference. It also seem like the trade union people experience that they have the knowledge to pursue changes as they initiate discussions about organisational changes themselves. Both the trade union people at company B, and the human resource people have probably learned from participating in learning networks that developmental work is based on equal relations, trust, external support and that it requires both time and resources. They have learned how to create favourable conditions for the company that can lead sustainable solutions.

This report suggests that if certain prerequisites are filled for partnership-based work then the trade union and the company management can learn to regard each partner as vital when it comes to developing sustainable conditions for change. How do the trade unions actually make a difference in the decision making process? How are they influencing the management of change? In the next section, the empirical findings are analysed and compared to theories about influence and participation.

5.4 Influence – participation

To be able to influence matters can mean different things for different people and as such, it often relates to contextual situations. In this report, I describe how employees and the trade
unions can be part of managing change processes. The meaning of participation in the management of change is to take part in decision-making, planning, and finally executing ideas for change.

How can the employees at company A and B, have a saying in how the management chooses to run the companies? The situation for the employees is quite different between the two companies in how they have the opportunity to become strategic partners and influence strategic decision making.

In company A, the management regard and use the trade union as a centre for information and to spread information to their members and therefore their influence is indirect (Bruzelius & Skärvad 1989). Trade union influence and participation is focusing on negotiations through formal meetings and channels. In reality, the trade union also deals with the outcomes of management decisions. Some of their work is to handle the situation of the increase in numbers of workers on sick leave and to changing working conditions. Although there is a tradition of workgroup autonomy at this plant, the workgroups cannot take on the role to develop the workplace. The workgroups make sure to place the right person to run the process in order to best utilise their skilled employees. The trade union tradition to negotiate for their members is strong at company A, it has recently become more important as the trade union again have to start to negotiate about employees working conditions.

The trade union work focuses on dealing with issues coming from the top management in a traditional top-down, planning strategy (Svensson & von Otter 2002). The trade union takes part in executing decisions or they can negotiate about conditions and terms. Cressey (2004) describes this kind of employee participation as formalised as influence is part of a formal procedure where the trade union is the other part, they represent employee interests, and communication is indirect. In certain developmental areas such as investing in new technology, people who represent certain workteams participate in developmental groups, where the bottom-up perspective is important in order to benefit from employee skills and knowledge about particular issues. Representation outside the framework of a formal procedure is the basis for employee voice in this case.

At company B, they use and regard the trade union as a powerful tool to enforce the change process together with the management. The trade union is involved in decision-making at plant level, which means that the trade unions acts on behalf of the employees and they have a direct influence on matters at the workplace level (Bruzelius & Skärvad 1989). The trade union people take an active role in developing the community outside the plant and therefore they have knowledge to understand the importance of participating in change processes. There is a tradition of workgroup autonomy at plant level and therefore it is easy to maintain an understanding among the employees of the importance of taking part in the development of work tasks combined with learning. The trade union movement at company B has gone further from the tradition of negotiation and they play an active role in developing both the organisation and the nearby community.

In company B, the trade union works with developing the workplace as well as workteams in a bottom up strategy, which means that employee voice is vital for developing prerequisites to spread ideas and to anchor new ideas (Svensson & von Otter 2002). Very often, the activation strategy connects to a network strategy, where the developmental areas have some connections to the world outside the workplace. Cressey (2004) describes that employee influence can be voiced and vary from one extreme as a combination of either setting up
formal procedures for their participation in different forums as representatives to the other extreme by organising employee voice in a direct communication in informal settings and groupings. The employee voice and their possibilities to influence matters at company B, varies depending on the subject of discussion and developmental areas however they know that they are important for the company both as speaking partners and as agents for change.

To have the power to influence the decision-making process in developmental work and in change processes as a representative for the employees in the trade union role or as individual employees varies between the two companies. The report shows that the trade union at company B have the power to influence matters regarding developmental work when it comes to decisions making, planning and in the process of management of the changes. Does trade union influence relate to trade union organisation and the level of trade union activity at plant level? In the next section, the empirical findings are analysed and compared to theories about trade union organisation.

5.5 Trade union organisation

Are there any particular characteristics that can describe an active trade union? Does the internal organisation in the trade union play a role to decide the level of and the strength of trade union activity? In this section, I shall describe the differences between the two companies in how they have chosen to organise their work.

At first glance, both trade unions seem to have quite good opportunities to play an active part in developmental work at plant level. However, there is a difference in how they can influence the management of change. How can we explain these differences and relate them to the organisation of the trade union? Svensson (1986) describes certain prerequisites that are necessary if trade unions have the ambition to become partners in developmental work to create favourable conditions in a proactive way.

Firstly, internal democracy should guide trade union work. Are there any differences between the plants considering internal democracy? It seem like the trade union at company B, are able to involve more people in trade union activity both at plant level and in the community even if the trade union in company A, have more members than company B. Trade union activity has suffered some consequences, as the downsizing of the organisation requires the employees to stick to production. There are fewer active people in the trade union but they have special tasks to work with – in a sense, they have more professional trade union activists at the local level. The trade union people in company A, do not take part in strategic networks to the same extent as the trade union people in company B.

The second prerequisite is a high level of change competence in the trade union and the level of activity in change processes. Here we can find a difference between the trade unions. The trade union people at company B take part in developmental work both inside the company as well as outside the company, which gives them the skills and knowledge to cope with change. Although the trade union at company A, has lived through several periods of changes, their skills and knowledge of handling change processes are not used in developmental work by the management in company A. This means that there has been a change in how the trade union can influence matters at company level. The trade union can involve the trade union at national level in order to demand negotiations.
The third prerequisite is a relationship based on trust between the trade union and the management. Again, we can find a difference between the two companies and their trade unions. In company A, mutual trust is lacking in the relationship. The trade union at company A, cannot understand or make sense of the change process at the company. On the other hand, at company B, the management regard the trade union as a competent partner for managing change. The basis in the relationship is that they share a mutual respect for each other.

The fourth prerequisite describes how different trade unions at the same workplace manage to stay united in certain issues and manages to collaborate in developmental work. In both plants, the trade unions seem to cooperate with other trade unions present at the same plant around different issues. One particular issue is the learning agreements; as they should apply to all employees at each plant.

This analysis suggests that the trade union at company B, fulfils Svensson’s (1986) prerequisites about participating in developmental work in a proactive way. It also suggests that the lack of opportunities to participate in decision making as a strategic partner and the lack of mutual trust between the company managers and the trade union at company A, can explain the reason why they do not work with the trade union and regard them as equal partners.

So how can we relate all these issues to the conceptual model presented in the beginning of the report? Are there any specific issues we can highlight as the main factors for success when it comes to describing issues that relate to partnership-based work in the management of organisational change? In the next section, I shall analyse and compare empirical findings with the conceptual model.
5.6 The interrelationship between work organisation, learning and industrial relations

When looking at the interrelationship between work organisation, learning and industrial relations and relate them to the level of participation in the management of organisational change it is possible to visualise some differences between the two plants.

The state of the industrial relations at company A between the owners and the local management affect trade union work in several aspects. The employees and the trade union are not involved early enough to take part in the planning of organisational changes as part of an activation strategy (Svensson & von Otter 2002) or as partners to create good conditions for proactive work (Wallis 2003). As the trade union does not have the role of a strategic partner for change, it will restrict workteam involvement in the process. As the owners sit outside Sweden, the trade union has no real power to change the conditions for communication, which means there is no open dialogue that is necessary for the co-management of change processes. This is a change if compared to the history of the trade union activity at the plant.

In the other case, at company B, the basis for industrial relation and communication is to create a dialogue between the employer and the trade union. The basis in communication in the partnership is direct and indirect and they share a mutual understanding about the importance of managing organisational changes to be able to adapt to new changes. As the trade union people also are active in different committees in the community dealing with regional growth and building an infrastructure for learning, they have a basic understanding of the meaning of getting involved in change processes. The proactive approach towards learning from the trade union spreads down to the workteams where the ideas can be realised (Svensson & von Otter 2002). In this company, the trade union works according to the tradition at the plant.

The work tasks at company A require highly skilled workers in order to assure the manufacturing of high quality steel, and the workteams take on the responsibility to maintain the skills which means they are unable to influence their own work situation. Workteam autonomy has changed, as the group no longer manages resources. The employees make sure to manufacture steel of high quality and they avoid errors or malfunction by keeping an eye on each other. The workers put their pride in their work. The workteams are by tradition responsible for teaching each other how to carry out duties, but learning is dealing with the reproduction of skills and knowledge in order to sustain a steady workflow. Learning activities focuses on how to do the job right, which is a key skill in the manufacturing process (Ellström 2002). However, the learning agreements, which could entail organised learning based on individual and company needs, have yet not led to any activities. The trade union has chosen not to pursue the learning agenda, as there is no time or resources available for the workteams to use. The work organisation could on the other hand function as an arena for developing new ideas, as it used to before the downsizing, but the downsized workteams do not allow any time to take part in informal or organised team meetings or for socialising activities which used to provide an arena for reflection and learning. This is a change in how employees relate to learning issues at the plant. The workers predict that skills will dilute among the employees at the plant, and this could lead to a company disadvantage.

The working culture at company B is about mechanical engineering and learning is about knowing how to operate machinery. The employees work in autonomous workteams where they plan and organise their own work, and tune it in to fit with company output and overall
company performance. This is the reason to why members in workteams accept learning in different forms as important part of work. They recognise it necessary to require new skills in order to introduce new technology. They can see how learning links to the capacity to operate machinery and how it gives them increased capacity to develop work tasks. Learning activities are organised as both informal learning where employees learn from each other as well as formal education and vocational training. The trade union is active in pursuing the national learning agreement at local level. Both the management and the trade union view workplace and work task development as important goals for learning activities. By collaborating with the agencies in the community, the management and the trade union can find new methods and opportunities for learning in order to create favourable conditions that can lead to developmental learning (Ellström 2002). The new owners also stresses that the company employees are their greatest asset, which creates an atmosphere where the employees can feel and experience that they contribute towards the company’s success on the market. As the employees understand, the meaning of learning, there has been an increase in learning opportunities at company B.

In this report, I made a presentation of how two different trade unions were involved in the management of change; however, their roles have been very different in the process. On the surface, both companies are successful in coping with the process of restructuring. However, the companies are different in an important aspect, will the changes lead to long-standing effects measured as positive or negative? The analysis presented in this report is that company B is more likely to develop sustainable conditions for change as they have managed the change process in a partnership-based solution with a responsive and proactive strategy. Employees have the opportunity to influence and understand their role in creating favourable conditions for change. Local authorities and their agencies are involved in the change process in a networking strategy (Svensson, Jacobsson & Åberg, 2001)). Their joint interest in the change process is based on the needs found for regional growth. The conditions created at company B, seem to harmonise with the idea to create conditions where human resources can regenerate and grow (Docherty et al 2002).

5.7 Dissemination of results

I had a meeting at each plant to discuss the research results together with the trade union people.

At company A, the trade union people did recognise the described picture, however they pointed out that the two different plants exist under quite different conditions. Nevertheless, they did agree that they have been successful in managing the restructuring process at plant level, due to the committed employees and to the process of cutting cost. When asked about why the employees share a high degree of commitment when they carry out their duties they described a situation where the employees are well aware of the high risk of becoming unemployed as the company is an important employer in the community if the company would not become successful in cutting costs. They also explained the high degree of commitment to the necessity of having a well functioning workflow, if it functions well then there is least problems. Thorsrud & Emery (1969) and Lysgaard (1985) show in their research that a strong relationship exist between working class culture and workteam commitment. The workteams find ways to sustain loyal social bonds with workmates where committed workteams take on a greater responsibility for the well-being of the company and their employees. The employees have learnt from the past that to minimise the amount of work
then they should make sure that the manufacturing process runs without any incidents. The trade union people described that the employees takes a great pride in doing their jobs well. Roethlisberger & Dickson describe that workteams set up ground rules for social behaviour – which includes rules for helping each other out when necessary- if you do not play by the rules you cannot sustain your membership in the team (Roethlisberger & Dickson: 1964).

However, they did stress that the restructuring process has had some consequences, such as increased sick leave; tougher working conditions for the majority of employees and that some workteams only have single workers. They also reckon that the situation at the plant provides very few opportunities and time to socialise with workmates, which they regard as an important factor for sustaining a healthy and comfortable working climate. The trade union people predicts that the degree of commitment will eventually decrease as employees have to work more on their own and there is less time to talk to workmates. When asked about the fact that they still call single workers as workteams they explained that they still think of the tasks as people doing them together, although this does not happen, and they all arrive to the work place at the same time.

The trade union people reckon that the company should invest more in learning, as it would benefit the company. The employees could take on even greater responsibilities in the workteams. Instead, the company management regards all activities related to learning as costs and they have not been successful in showing an acceptable connection between learning and increased company performance. The trade union people also described a potential risk if the company would invest in more training and education. If employees acquire a higher degree of skills and knowledge then the workers would actually become a threat to the company as more people could seek employment elsewhere. On the other hand, they said that the employee’s long experience from working at the plant made the idea of multi skilled workteams a reality. However, the trade union people described that they can already see that the people who enter into the company through learning programmes only get to work as temporary employees and therefore the company will not provide them with many opportunities to learn more than one skill. The trade union people predict that the employee skills levels will not develop in the future as it has done in the past. Consequently, this will work contradictory to the whole idea of lean production, as it depends on multi skilled employees and workteams. The trade union people recognised the presented picture of how industrial relations works at the plant, as they are not provided with enough influence in the decision making process. They also pointed out that the trade union is still experiencing it difficult to get information from the management of the plant.

At company B, the trade union could also recognise the described picture and their opinion was that the comparison between the two plants was slightly unfair. The plant has been very successful when it comes to adjusting to the required changes, and the trade union reckons it is due to the employees liking their jobs and they have a high degree of change competence. They understand that they must adapt their manufacturing to adjust to market and customer demands and therefore each employee must be willing to make changes in their work and learn more skills when required. The employees know their customer sites and therefore understand why the customers require changes in the manufacturing process.

The trade union at plant B, also recognised the described picture of how investments in learning activities are part of developing their own workplace and how learning contributes to the increased change competence, which Ellström describes as developmental learning (1996). They agreed on the fact that their workplace provides good opportunities for learning.
both from the perspective of regarding learning as essential to maintain key skills, but also from the fact that the workteams can take charge of planning the work flow and consequently shut down production if necessary to participate in learning activities.

The trade union at plant B, explained the reason why the employees are highly committed to their work as a natural connection between employees maintaining highly skilled jobs, high degree of autonomy and great opportunities to develop individual careers, they have opportunities to learn and develop more skills and they can sustain interesting job. The workteams have power to influence resources and work planning, in this sense they are autonomous workteams as Thorsrud & Emery describes (1969).

The trade union at plant B, also recognised that the trade union is important for the company as the trade union people share the company history, have high skills in areas related to company compatibility, regional growth, educational issues etc. The management recognises the trade union voice as important especially when they are about to plan for changes. The trade union means that the company management regard them as partners and not adversaries when it comes to discussing issues related to running the company. They also think that the company has good chances of sustaining future change processes as they manage the change processes in a partnership-based solution.

In table 5, below I have illustrated similarities and differences between the plants described as key areas for analysis.
Table 5  Analysed differences between the two companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECTS IN THE ANALYSIS</th>
<th>PLANT A</th>
<th>PLANT B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global market</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company owners outside country</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial relations based on trust</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial relations based on negotiations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Industrial relations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade union participates in decision making process</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade union participation in strategic networks</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long trade union history</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership-based approach in industrial relations</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High union density</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning agreement based on national agreements</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade union active in pursuing the learning agreement</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low entry level</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High entry level</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High average age in employees</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High average in years of employment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High rate of retention</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house training based on informal learning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house training supplemented with formal learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training centre on plant</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning programmes in collaboration with education providers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-skilled workers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work organisation based on process manufacturing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work organisation based on item manufacturing</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work organisation based on flexible workteams</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work organisation based on autonomous workteams</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Span of control in workteams corresponds with their responsibilities</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workteams develop changes in workflow</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing numbers of employees on sick leave</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up the differences between the plants; there is a big difference in the climate in the industrial relations, it is based on trust in one plant and based on negotiation in the other. The level of trade union participation in decision-making processes differs between the two plants and the two companies choose to use strategic networks for learning very differently, especially when comparing the trade unions.

A major difference between the plants is the organisation of work and workflow. The level of autonomy in the workteams differs between the plants. The span of control corresponds with workteam responsibilities in one plant and not the other. How workteams can develop changes in workflow differs.

How formal learning supplements in-house training and the entry level of knowledge and skills varies between the plants, especially when recruiting new employees. Finally, in one plant the number of people on sick leave is increasing while it is quite stable in the other.
6. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

I have outlined the main results below:

- The trade union that have a higher participation and a stronger influence on the management of organisational change are more successful in creating sustainable conditions for change – that means creating conditions that are good for their members.

- Trade union opportunity to influence work organisation and learning is dependent on the skills, the degree of teamwork and on the autonomy among their members.

- It is easier to participate and influence if the union is part of an established and legitimate partnership solution.

- To accomplish sustainable conditions for change the partnership will benefit from participation in strategic networks. The level of change competence in the partnership is also important.

- The success factor of the union participation is depending on the strength of the union and the democracy in the union organisation.

The empirical findings suggest that I need to modify the conceptual model (Figure 3) as certain components seem to play a more important role for the results than others do.

![Figure 3 Interrelationship between Work organisation, Learning and Industrial relations as part of change management.](image)

The strength of partnership-based developmental work in the management of organisational change has been the focus of this report. The empirical findings suggest that well functioning
industrial relations is a key factor deciding the level of success. It is evident that industrial relations are essential when it comes to creating sustainable conditions for change. Industrial relations will influence and make up the structure for how to approach issues related to developing the work organisations and the agenda for learning in a systematic way.

Trade unions can take active part in setting the agenda for change, which means that they can participate in making the decisions related to learning and developing the work organisation. In this sense, the outcomes of organisational change and the level of success at local sites can derive from the level of trade union activity.

Trade unions can take active part in the early stages of the planning process by involving themselves both in setting the agenda for change and through planning and developing the organisation of work. To influence the consequences of changes in the work organisation, trade unions, and employees expects to participate in developing the prerequisites for the sustainable workplace. In addition, they should have change competence, which gives them the ability to cope with change. Successful trade unions have a change competence and they have the knowledge required to be active partners (trade union skills). In addition, they have overall understanding of matters related to business. The trade union members and activists can learn to have change competence by taking active parts in strategic networks and by organising their work in democratic ways, where the members learn to take active part in setting the agenda for change.

The change process can mean that employees must participate in learning to become full members of the working community, to avoid displacement. There is also an expectation on the employees to carry out new work tasks and to change their work tasks. To manage change processes in co-operation between the company’s management and the employees can lead to successful organisational development. The basis for successful industrial relations is to establish a legitimate relation/partnership between the trade union and company management, where the trade union is a resourceful and competent partner. The state of the industrial relations is essential when the trade union wishes to influence management decisions in order to view matters in a longer perspective and to achieve sustainable conditions for change. To be regarded as a credible partner in the decision making process and when negotiating with local management the trade union must be united in their ideas, which means few internal conflicts and the absence of power struggle.

The extent of trade union involvement in developmental work is depending on the level of activity from their members and their internal organisation as well as the tradition of working in partnership at the particular workplace. If democratic values permeate the trade union organisation, it can inspire members to become more active in developmental work.

6.1 Summing up above conclusion

To be able to reach sustainable conditions for change, it is particularly important that the employees and the trade unions are taking an active part in the management of change to ensure the avoidance of short-term solutions; they should at the very least regard matters with a long-term perspective in mind. A successful partnership-based approach towards the management of change is depending on the level of participation from the employees, trade unions, and the employer and their tradition to work in co-operation. People who represent the
trade unions and the management need to have the knowledge of how to influence and participate in developmental work combined with a high level of change competence.

The objectives in the research programme concerning Learning-in-Partnership was to present best practice for partnership based work as a response to the restructuring in the steel and metal industry in Europe. Is it possible to make any general conclusions from this research report that can apply to other countries in Europe and serve as best practise?

There is a tradition of partnership-based developmental work in companies in Sweden, where the trade unions are strong, and the union density is high (Huzzard 2000, Kjellberg 2003, Nyström 2000). This particular report and research gives some examples that even in Sweden the partnership-based approach is changing when compared to the traditional Swedish model. We can find examples of a partnership-based approach at the local level. Previously the Swedish model described initiatives from the employer’s and the trade union’s organisations at national level in collaboration with government agencies. Today, local management experience that they are not free to manage change processes that can fit well with local interests and requirements, as global owners make the strategic decision. These are not always understood by local management or trade unions and the rarely make any sense to either of them if looking at the consequences or from a long-term perspective. The examples in this report show that the employee’s knowledge, experience and commitment does not come to full use in one of the plants although the trade union density is high. The report shows that it is possible to change the conditions for trade union involvement in strategic decision-making at local level.

It is quite difficult to present benefits from copying Swedish examples. Instead, I would propose networking between enterprises, which involve researchers, and practitioners in the development of change process. By involving the practitioners in the research, in the analysis and in dissemination activities it can be possible to try out ideas of a best practice and it will be possible to test and evaluate them for the likelihood of success. Researchers can aid in this process to provide the practitioners, company managers, and trade unions with different perspectives that can function as tools for reflection.

The perspective in this report was to find out how the trade unions have participated and influenced the management of organisational change as a response to the consequences of restructuring. If the focus instead had been put to describe and analyse if the trade unions have the rights, resources and strategies to influence the management of organisational change as a response to the consequences of restructuring, the answer would probably have been quite different but non the less interesting.

Further research can answer that question.
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APPENDIX - INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. INTERVIEWS WITH EMPLOYEES

1.1 Workteams

1. Has technical changes affected the workteams in any way – describe how.
2. In what way can the workteams influence work tasks?
3. In what way do the workteams participate in developing work tasks?
4. In what way do the workteams influence the introduction of new technique in their work?
5. Does each employee belong to a workteam?
6. Do the workteams have social ranks and positions – describe how it works?
7. What describes functional behaviour in workteams – and dysfunctional behaviour?
8. Has there been a change in the workteam climate during the last two decades – for example describing commitment and loyalty?
9. Can each employee use their skills and knowledge in their work?
10. How do you learn to do the job?
11. Do you practice peer learning?
12. Are there any differences between how learning is organised now and 20 years ago?

1.2 Work organisation, new technique and technical improvements

1. What are the differences in the production process if comparing yesterday’s production with today’s?
2. How does technical improvements and new technique reflect workteam experience, knowledge and skills?
3. What kind of effects has technical improvements and new technique have on individual workers?
4. Are work tasks more advanced now than before?
5. Does it take longer time to learn to do the job than before?

1.3 Learning

1. How do you become a team member when new at the job?
2. How do you get best use of knowledge, skills and experience in the workteams?
3. How do workteams participate in developmental work?
4. What knowledge is important to learn when coming new to this company?
5. Do you emphasise education or skills when you learn to do the job?
6. How do workteam members contribute to newcomers learning – to make sure they get to learn necessary knowledge and skills?
7. If I was new at work here, how would you go about to assess my skills and knowledge?
8. Is there any specific knowledge that is necessary to learn to be able to handle new technique?
9. Is it possible to organise learning at work in order to acquire the skills necessary for the job – learning the job as a guild?
10. If you would be responsible for teaching each newcomer the right working methods, what would you teach them?
11. Is there a gap between what they learn today and what you would like them to learn?
12. When do you have time to work with developmental issues at this workplace?
1.4 The role of the trade union

1. How do you experience the trade union involvement in managing change processes?

1.5 Unemployment

1. Describe the process of becoming unemployed.
2. Learning history.
3. About getting a new job.
5. How do you approach uncertainty.
6. What is your family’s reaction to your becoming unemployed?
7. Life without a job.
8. What is negative about not having a job?
9. What is the worse part?
10. Support from the local trade union.
12. Dreams for the future.

1.6 Employees on a long term sick leave

Group interview
1. What made you choose to take part in this course?
2. What do you suggest that could engage more people to take part in the same course?
3. How can you use your new knowledge that you have learnt in this course?
4. Do you regard your situation with another perspective now?
5. Do you think you would have learnt the same about your self if the contents in the course had been different?
6. What are your expectations for the immediate future?
7. What initiatives would you like your employer to take as a next step?
8. How can your employer support you in your situation from today?
9. Do you think that your employer must cooperate with other organisations in order to solve your situation or to make your situation better?
10. If you had the freedom of choice, what would you like to do?
11. Can you describe barriers that hinder your situation to develop?
12. Who should be responsible for solving these problems?
13. Would you like to keep in touch in this group – how?
14. What would be your motives to continue to meet the rest of the group?
15. If you had the chance to change the answers in the survey – would you do that based on this discussion?

Survey questions
1. I have changed my thoughts about taking part in learning activities.
2. I would like to continue my studies.
3. I would like to take part in learning activities if organised by my workplace.
4. I think participation in this course was very valuable to me more so than learning the contents in the course.
5. I feel that I have learnt a new approach to set up plans for my future.
6. I feel that the community of this group have strengthened my self-esteem.
7. I feel that the contents in the course connected to my situation.
8. My employer will benefit from my participation in this course.
9. I would like my employer to provide more activities for people on sick leave.
10. I would like to receive more information from my workplace.
11. I would like to meet my old workmates more often.
12. I would like to meet my new mates in the course more often.
13. The information from the company about the course made me curious.
14. I have had opportunities to influence the contents in the course.
15. The contents of the course were adapted to my earlier experiences.
16. This method to learn can suit all the employees at our company.
17. The contents of the course will fit all the employees at our company.
18. My study mates and my new group are important for me, and to my studies.
19. The groups give me support when I need it.
20. The study instructor plays an important role for my studying.
21. I have received help and support whenever I needed.
22. The outcomes of the participation in this course gave me more than I could expect.
23. I could access study materials when I needed during the course.
24. It is important for me to have the support from my surroundings.
25. I suggest the organisation to make following changes to the course.
26. The responsibility to take part and provide opportunities for my learning; is my own, the employer, the community.
27. I have heard about the concept of lifelong learning.
28. I have previously taken part in courses in my spare time.
29. What comes into your head when you hear people talking about studies and skills enhancement at work?
30. Your comments about your own situation.

2. INTERVIEW WITH TRADE UNION PEOPLE

2.1 Trade union and partnership

1. Describe the history of the branch in short.
2. How do you collaborate in a partnership with,
   Employer’s organisations
   Education agencies
   Government agencies
3. What is the practice of collaboration,
   At national level
   Regional level
   Local level
4. How has trade unions and employers organisations contributed to establish developmental work that deals with learning issues?
5. Has restructuring and the development in the branch, changed the practice in recruitment for example in setting new requirements in education levels and knowledge?
6. Has the trade union contributed to these changes?
7. Has the employer’s organisation contributed to these changes by setting new standards?
8. Have the parties on the labour market developed any national strategies or policies for how to cooperate in new projects that deal with learning?
9. Are there any national strategies of how to start developmental work based on partnership?
10. What does working in partnership mean in a practice?
11. Have the trade unions contributed to this development?
12. What issues can the trade union influence?
13. Does the trade union have any real power to influence issues when working in partnership?
14. What influence do trade unions have on issues relating to learning in organisations?
15. Do issues that relate to learning promote trade union involvement as change agents?
16. Are there any benefits in working in a close cooperation in a partnership in issues that relate to learning for the local trade unions?
17. Are there any barriers to partnership work and cooperation?
18. Can you give examples of plants that have developed innovative partnership-based work?
19. What are their strengths and weaknesses?
20. Do you have any experience of which rules to go by to be sure of becoming successful in partnership-based developmental work?
21. What role do regional organisations in trade unions have when developing regions?
22. How do you learn to become a learning representative?
23. What role can the trade union have in the local community – when dealing with restructuring?
24. How does the trade union in the local community cooperate with other agencies in the community to deal with unemployment and employability?

2.2 Trade union work at local level

1. How do the employees participate in organisational changes?
2. How do organisational changes affect the employees?
3. Do the national agreements for competence development make the basis for planning competence developmental activities?
4. What role does the trade union Metall play to promote competence development activities?
5. Do you have any people assigned with the new role as learning representative in the trade union?
6. Do the trade unions at this plant cooperate around issues relating to competence development?
7. Do the trade union people talk to their members about competence development and lifelong learning?

2.3 Developing the organisation of work

1. Is manufacturing going to change in the future if compared to the manufacturing of today?
2. Will it require new knowledge and skills?
3. How do you motivate and promote the employees to be a step ahead when it comes to acquiring new skills and knowledge?
4. How do you maintain employee’s high skills and competence?
5. How will their knowledge and competence develop in the future?
6. Do the employees have developmental talks on a regular basis with their managers?
7. Do you use developmental talks to map competencies (knowledge, experience and skills)?
8. Does the mapping result in individual plans?
9. How do the individual plans relate to the development of the organisation?
10. How do the employees contribute and participate in developing the organisation?
11. Do the employees have the power to influence their own work situation?
2.4 Learning

1. How do the employees develop their skills and knowledge – which methods are used?
2. Is there an introduction programme for newcomers?
3. How do get in to the job and learn to do the job?
4. Do you run any formalised education programmes or trainee programmes?
5. Does the company collaborate with education agencies, which could provide opportunities for employees to take part in formalised education?
6. Do you issue any vocational certificates at the company or in collaboration with education agencies?
7. Have you agreed on any specifics regarding investments in learning for the employees, for example per year?
8. Which employees get the opportunity to take part in training and education activities?
9. What kind of learning activities has priority?

3. INTERVIEW WITH COMPANY MANAGER

The research partner representing Germany provided following questions in section 3.

3.1 About ECSC treaty (European Coal and Steel Cooperation)

1. Which role has the ECSC treaty played on the enterprise level (cross dimension of all other topics)?
2. Do you expect any problems through the end of the ECSC treaty?
3. How are you going to handle this?

3.2 Technological changes and production programme

1. What major technological developments did take place in the enterprise during the last two decades?
2. Please describe the impact for work organisation in your enterprise (e.g. teamwork, flexible working time schemes, changing shift systems).
3. What was the driving force for this investment?
4. How has productivity developed in the last two decades?
5. Did the value chain change within recent years? If so, how?
6. Please describe the supply chains your enterprise is part of.
7. Did they change significantly in the last years?

3.3 Redundancies

1. How many employees have been made redundant in the last twenty years?
2. What were the reasons (mainly technological or due to enterprise restructuring)?
3. Which groups of employees were mainly affected?
4. What is the explanation to this?
5. When were the peaks of such redundancies?
6. Do you expect further redundancies in the near future?
7. What kind of measures was used to avoid major social frictions (e.g. early retirement, training programmes)?
8. How were they financed?
9. What role did the worker’s representatives play in these processes?
10. In what extend was the community or region affected by this structural changes?
11. How did local authorities handle this?

3.4 Skills, Qualification and occupational profiles

1. How is the enterprise’s workforce structure like (occupational profile, age, sex, race)?
2. What kind of qualification level does an average skilled worker require?
3. Did this significantly change in the last years?
4. Please describe the training scheme of your company.
5. How do you assess the effects for both enterprise and employees?
6. Are there any agreements between management and employees representatives regarding this question?
7. How are the expenditures for training financed?
8. Do workers invest by themselves, e.g. through overtime?
9. Which role plays Human Resource Management for the enterprise’s economic performance?

3.5 Competition

1. What are the markets you focus on (geographical and in price or quality level terms)?
2. Did this change significantly?
3. Why have you experienced these change in markets?
4. Who are recently the biggest competitors of your enterprise?
5. Are you affected by low price competition from outside the EU?
6. If so, how is the company responding to this?
7. Is the enterprise itself engaged in low price countries?
8. If so, where?

3.6 Capital Structures and Ownership

1. Is the enterprise embedded into a wider corporation structure?
2. If so, where are the other plants located?
3. Is the company listed at the stock market?
4. Who are the biggest shareholders?
5. Please describe the official strategy the enterprise is acting on?
6. How would you describe the degree of Internationalisation or Europeanization of your company?
4. INTERVIEW WITH HUMAN RESOURCE PEOPLE

1. Which issues do you regard as important to develop in your organisation that relate to competence development and learning?
2. Are you in the process of mapping each employee’s education, skills and experience, if so, where are you in the process?
3. What kind of needs have you focused on during the mapping procedure?
4. How will the activities that relate to competence development influence how work is organised?
5. How do you motivate and promote learning activities to the employees?
6. How will you organise the learning activities – on the plant – outside the plant?
7. When will you initiate activities?
8. How will you monitor and make follow up studies of the learning activities?
9. Will you use any tools for making follow up studies in the system for bookkeeping where you can present fact and figures that relate to learning investments?
10. Have you had success in implementing and anchoring the new value system in the company?
11. Has the new value system had any concrete effects for example relating to how you view people?
12. What steps do you regard are important for the organisation to develop at this moment?
13. Do you have any trainees at this moment in this company?
14. Do you have a strategy for recruiting new trainees?
15. Are you looking for new ways to collaborate with education agencies and the upper secondary school in the nearby community?

5. NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS AND MEETINGS

Table Appendix 1 Number of interviews in company A and company B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company A</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Trade union</th>
<th>Seminars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of people</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company A</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of people</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company B</td>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Trade union</td>
<td>Seminars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of people</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company B</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of people</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of meetings in company A &amp; B</td>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. NOTES

1 For further information about interactive research see; Svensson L, Brulin G, P-E Ellström & Widegren Ö (2002)
2 Demands from the outside world can be new requirements from the society, companies or individuals. For example, new requests for a leaner production or change of production, new standards in environmental requirements, new techniques in production and new standards in work environment requirements.
3 A joint project called, competence, development and learning in working life, managed from the trade union confederation LO between 2001 and 2002. The blue-collar workers trade unions are looking for new ways to test the trade union role in relation to learning in working life. The project resulted in promoting policy changes regarding the issues of learning. For more information, see KUL-rapport 2003.
4 This section is written by Emma Wallis and edited by the author. Title: Learning in Partnership: Responding to the Restructuring of the European Steel and Metal Sector comparative report, Deliverable no 18: Trade unions, Partnership and the Learning agenda in the European Steel and metal sector: A comparative analysis. Leeds University Business School.
5 There is another plant in another region in Sweden that belongs to the group, which employs another 200 people. Case studies from this plant will not be presented in this report.
A partnership approach

The research described in this report aimed to describe “best practice” for partnership based work in the labor market in the steel and metal industry as a response to the process of restructuring in the European steel and metal sector. It is based on case studies at two companies manufacturing goods to a global market and presents how the blue-collar workers union has dealt with the management of organizational change in the steel and metal industry in Sweden. The results in this report show that both companies have been successful when it comes to responding to the restructuring in the steel and metal sector; however there are some differences. The author discusses the differences in the report and search for answers in the trade unions involvement in the change process. Trade unions that have a higher level of participation and a stronger influence on the management of organizational change are more successful in creating sustainable conditions for change – that means creating conditions that are good for their members.

Hanne Randle is working as a research assistant at the R&D centre APel in Lindesberg in Sweden and she is currently involved in two different research projects. The first project is to evaluate investments in the public sector to lower employee sick rates and the second is to take part in a transnational project with the ambition to develop a European standard for employee vocational training and education for the explosives sector.