

# MOTIVATION FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION



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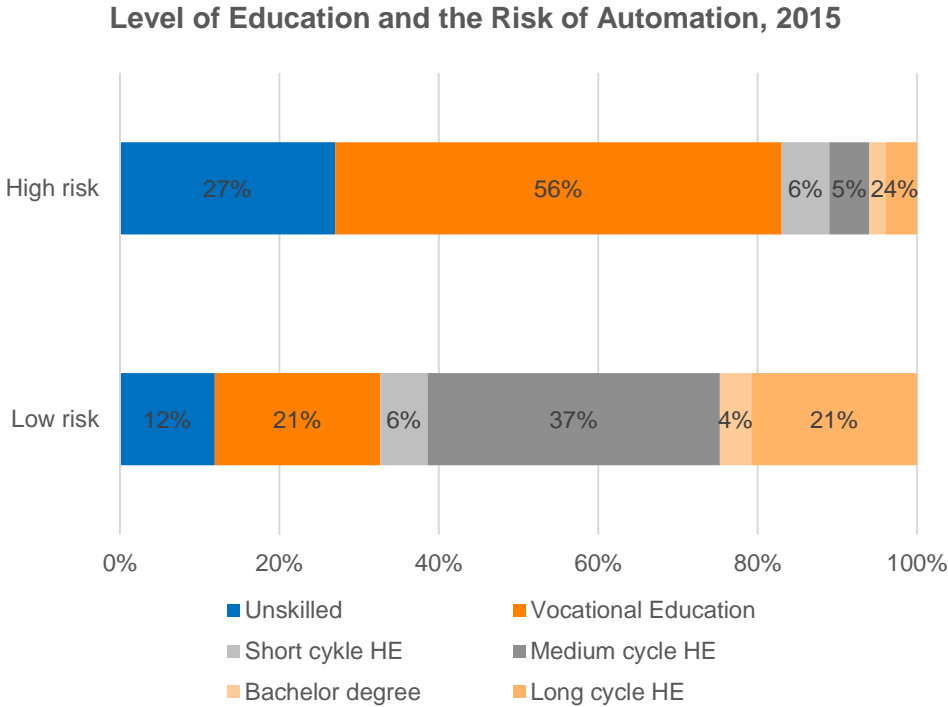
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## INTRODUCTION

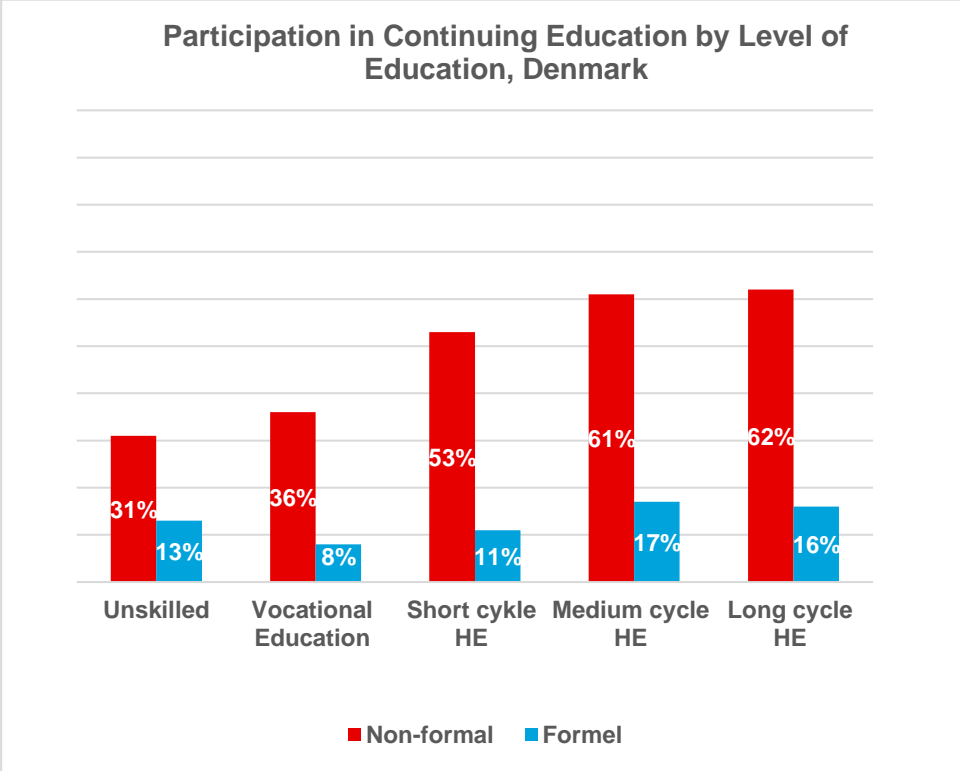
It is difficult to predict how the Danish labour market will look in the future, and how new technologies will affect different industries and professions. Several studies suggest that unskilled and skilled workers will experience the largest changes to their roles due to new technology (DEA 2019):

**Chart 2: Skilled and unskilled jobs most at risk from technological change**



Source: Own calculations based on numbers from Statistics Denmark

The labour market of the future will put ever greater demands on the ability of individual workers to adapt to changes in their working lives, which for most will mean acquiring new skills and knowledge. Denmark has a strong tradition of continuing education and ranks highly in the OECD’s adult learning index (OECD 2017).



Source: Statistics Denmark  
 Note: The chart reflects data collected in a randomly sampled survey of 3,432 respondents aged 25 to 64 from 2017.

Despite this high ranking, it is far from a majority of adults in the labour force who participate in continuing education activities -- and workers who does not hold a higher education degree, whether formally skilled or unskilled, are the least likely to avail themselves of the system. Approximately one in three unskilled or skilled workers have taken part in non-formal continuing education within the past 12 months, whereas approximately one in 10 had accessed the formal continuing education system in the same time frame. For context, more than half of adults with tertiary educations have received non-formal continuing education, and between 11 and 17 per cent of adults with short, medium and long-cycle higher educations had completed a formal continuing education activity. (Statistics Denmark, 2018).

Based on a review of the literature and the analysis of technological risk exposure by level of education undertaken in the 2019 report (DEA 2019), it was decided that this report would focus on clerical workers, carpenters and bricklayers. As these professional groups are at risk from technological change, it is safe to assume that continuing education will be of particular importance as a way of equipping them with the skills needed to meet the changing demands of the labour market. This report is conducted as an examination of the factors that work, respectively, as motivators and barriers to their participation in continuing education. It is based on eight biographical interviews as well as ethnographic fieldwork

## SUMMARY

The academic literature, research and studies into drivers and barriers of adult and continuing education typically analyse the factors affecting participation in continuing education through the lens of micro (individual), meso (institutional) and macro-level (societal) factors. The micro-level includes factors such as professional identity or a lack of confidence in education. Meso-level factors include the available range of training and access to information, while macro-level factors will be the structure of the labour market as well as the education and benefits system (Illeris 2006, Kondrup 2012, Epiniou 2017, Norman & Hyland 2003).

The interview study and fieldwork identified three clusters of factors that influence participation in continuing education:

- Individual drivers and barriers
- Drivers and barriers in the workplace
- The importance of information and guidance

## Drivers and Barriers to Continuing Education

Together, the two studies were able to identify a number of concrete factors that impact how skilled workers decide whether to pursue continuing education. There are some common factors, but others are specific to particular industries or professional groups.

### Individual Drivers and Barriers

#### **Work-Life Balance Priorities**

Both studies found that skilled workers want to set clear boundaries for their working lives. Personal life is highly prioritized, and this has implications for the degree to which they are willing to allow any continuing education activities to take time and energy away from their personal lives. There might be concerns about how a multi-year continuing education program spent living as a student and on a student grant will impact their living standards, both regard to their personal finances and family life, or for shorter courses, whether they would entail a longer commute or deviation from normal working hours.

### **Professional Identity**

The research showed that skilled workers' decisions around continuing education are influenced by how they perceive their profession, their skill set, and their identities specifically as carpenters, bricklayers, clerical workers or medical secretaries. For instance, the ethnographic study revealed an apparent shared understanding among medical secretaries that they should avoid drawing attention to themselves, which can be a barrier to requesting continuing education both on an individual level and through collective bargaining. Unless employers factor in these professional self-images when planning continuing education, they can pose a barrier to employees seeking and participating in continuing education.

Generally, participating skilled workers express a strong sense of professional identities. Skilled workers are proud of their profession and their skills e.g. as a carpenter, and it can be a challenge to persuading skilled workers to participate in continuing education if they feel they are being *educated out of their professional identity*.

### **Actionable Learning**

The greatest driver of continuing education lies in cases where skilled workers encounter a concrete opportunity to improve skills that are central to their profession, equipping them to solve a task in a better or more efficient way. As many of the workers put it, they would be more than happy to participate in courses that could help them do their jobs -- especially if it were organized with their employers, who stand to benefit the most from efficiency gains.

### **Lack of Academic Self-Confidence**

The interview study found that many skilled workers feel a lack of confidence in their skills as students, which is typically based on bad experiences from their school years or previous continuing education activities, where they struggled to keep up. The literature review also indicated that bad experiences of schooling can influence how positive potential applicants are about continuing education.

### **An Internalized Educational Ceiling or Correcting Bad Habits**

The two studies identified a range of perceptions that can serve as barriers or drivers of continuing education. The interview study showed that carpenters were particularly likely to experience an internalised 'educational ceiling', by which they perceive their training as carpenters as the completion of their education, and hence that they do not need any further training, continuing or otherwise. Several bricklayers, on the other hand, point out that continuing education can help rectify the bad habits they tend to pick up over the years.



## Drivers and Barriers in the Workplace

### **Casual Employment**

Workers in the construction industry are often employed on a casual, project-by-project basis. The interview study indicated that carpenters working under these conditions do not believe that their employers are interested in offering continuing education, as they do not necessarily stand to benefit from workers' improved skill set in the future.

### **Personal Finances - Salary as a Barrier**

Both studies found that skilled construction workers on piece-rate pay saw the risk of reduced pay because of continuing education activities as a barrier to participation. The carpenters interviewed had not experienced any increase in earnings after participating in continuing education. Together, it seems that a lack of financial incentives is having a major impact on continuing education in the construction industry.

### **Responsibility toward Employers and Colleagues**

Working on a task-by-task basis takes focus away from continuing education, and day-to-day duties take precedence because of a sense of responsibility to employers and colleagues. Carpenters are mainly concerned with their obligations toward colleagues, while clerical workers focus on employers as well as colleagues. Carpenters, bricklayers, medical secretaries and clerical workers pay attention to whether continuing education will be worth the cost to their employers and/or the company.

### **Continuing Education does not Fit in with Workflows**

Both studies found that the day-to-day work of skilled workers is characterized by short deadlines and concrete assignments. The clerical workers interviewed also noted that their salary does not obligate them to participate in continuing education that falls outside the normal structure of their work -- which includes training that takes place outside their normal working hours. Both studies also found that skilled workers who do participate were most drawn to training that took place within working hours, in their regular workplace and with colleagues, e.g. learning from other colleagues.

### **Ongoing, Non-Formal Professional Development**

The interview study found that a great deal of skilled workers' training took place on the job through ongoing, non-formal professional development, often by learning from other colleagues. This can, however, become a barrier to participation in cases where non-formal training replaces more foundational forms of continuing education.

### **Perceived Risk from Technology**

Skilled workers vary in their expectations for technology: Some are already seeing changes to their ways of working due to technology, whereas others might not yet have seen technologically driven changes, but are expecting them in the near futures, and yet others do not know what changes to expect. Some skilled workers did imagine that technology could put them at greater risk of redundancy, which

was typically based on past experiences of being let go because of digitization or automation of their roles.

### **Unclear Division of Responsibility between Employer and Employee**

It is often unclear whether responsibility for exploring continuing education lies with employees themselves or the employer. It was particularly apparent from the fieldwork that there is an everyday division of labour where employers are responsible for assigning duties and specifying requirements, and workers are responsible for solving the tasks within the given parameters. This division of labour does not allocate a clear place for continuing education, which is neither assigned as a duty or defined as a requirement. Fieldwork also found a perception among several of the skilled workers that long-term planning for continuing education was a management responsibility, but equally that management sometimes finds it difficult to motivate employees to participate.

### **Lack of Information and Guidance**

#### **Continuing Education is an Undefined, Abstract Category**

Continuing education refers to such a wide range of training and activities that the category itself becomes rather abstract. Rather than presenting as a range of concrete options, the category of continuing education comes across as unclear and difficult to define.

#### **Lack of Training Options**

Medical secretaries find that there is a discrepancy between their needs for training and their current options. They compare their experience to that of colleagues with professions, such as nurses, who often receive continuing education which, as medical secretaries see it, is usually tailored to their particular skill set.

#### **Who Pays for Continuing Education?**

Fieldwork revealed that a lack of clarity around who would be paying for continuing education can limit workers' motivation to participate. The literature review indicates that finances can be a barrier to some businesses sending their employees off for continuing education -- both in terms of the direct cost of the training, but also in terms of the loss of an employee for the duration.

## DESK STUDY: BARRIERS TOWARDS PARTICIPATION IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

The academic literature and past studies identify different factors that affect the rate of participation in continuing education. In a 2017 survey by Epinion, 62 per cent of unskilled workers and 49 per cent of skilled workers responded that they had “no” or “limited” need for further education. The same applies to 36 per cent of respondents with higher educations. Forty per cent of unskilled and 25 per cent of skilled workers are not interested in participating in continuing education during working hours, compared to 16 per cent of workers with higher education. This suggests that the length of formal education affects how people perceive the need for further education.

Other barriers identified in the literature include professional identity, a passive learning culture in the workplace, perceived lack of time during the workday, the employer’s finances and perceived need of the employee, existing negative experiences from education and lack of academic self-esteem, trust in education, and self-perceptions (Illeris 2006, Kondrup 2012, Epinion 2017, Norman & Hylland 2003).

### Micro level

Socio-economic	Socio-demographic	Socio-cultural	Psychological	Relevant others
Employment status Occupational status Income	Gender Age Ethnicity Civil status Educational Attainment Educational attainment of parents	Cultural participation Social participation	Attitudes Motives Barriers Confidence Satisfaction Intentions	Family Employer Reference group Services

### Meso level

Organization institution	Organization programme
Institutional size Promotion Attraction of disadvantaged groups Quality system Accessible place Services Partnerships Vision and mission	Group size Didactics Preperational programme Modular versus linear structure Theoretical versus vocational education Study discipline Entrance conditions APL and APEL Teacher’s attitude Flexible learning routes Enrollment fee

### Macro level

- Economic context
- Welfare context
- Labour market context
- Initial education system context
- Skill formation system context

Overall, the literature discusses three levels of barriers to participation: micro, meso and macro-levels.

**Micro-level:** Individual-level factors, such as socioeconomic background, attitudes and relevant others, such as the employer or family.

**Meso-level:** Institutional-level factors, such as the geographic location, organisation, teaching methods, team sizes and marketing of the educational institutions.

**Macro-level:** The social context, such as the Danish flexicurity system, structure of the continuing education system and the type of welfare state.

Participation in continuing education will generally be affected by a combination of factors from the different levels (Cf. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), Radovan (2012) and Boeren et al (2010)).

## EVERYDAY FUTURES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF SKILLED WORKERS' RELATIONSHIP WITH CONTINUING EDUCATION

The foreman is standing at the top of the scaffolding. Even if it's only a four-story building, my heart still skips a beat as I climb up the ladder. 'Were you expecting me to come pick you up?' the foreman asks, laughing from atop. He hasn't been told much about why I'm coming, so I explain that I'm there to try and understand why continuing education isn't more common among skilled workers. His response takes me by surprise: *"The reason we don't have any continuing education is that we aren't offered any. I've been a foreman for almost ten years now, and we've been asking for it all the time I've been there. But nothing seems to happen. You can see for yourself from minutes of the foremen's meetings."* Later that day as he lays down tiles, he returns to the subject, adding that in his opinion, there should be two weeks' of mandatory training every year. *"I've been a bricklayer for more than 30 years, but that doesn't mean I know all there is to know. You can't be an expert in everything, after all. Some people only do bathrooms -- 1500 of them, and that's it. That's good and fine, but we all pick up individual peculiarities as time goes on. And we have to do a lot of different kinds of work, so you just end up moving mistakes from one site to the other. That's why we need training courses. It's a very good idea to take the time and "set yourself straight", as I always say. Besides, we should get out and meet some more people, so we aren't always spending time with all the same crowd."*

The fieldwork underlying this report was driven initially by a sense of curiosity about why skilled workers pursue as little continuing education as they do. During the course of fieldwork, it became apparent that for the bricklayers and medical secretaries we visited, it was not a matter of motivation or willingness to participate. In fact, many of the workers we spoke to expressed that they did want to attend courses of varying kinds. As the foreman explains in the vignette above, many of the bricklayers have actually requested continuing education, and several of the medical secretaries had examples of specific courses they were interested in -- medical English and law, for instance -- and wanted to see more training days and courses at the hospital. They look with some envy when they see others at the hospital, for instances the nurses, and note that they have monthly training days and are often "off on a course."

We were surprised by the level of interest in continuing education among both professional groups, since several of the managers we met and spoke to during fieldwork indicated that they found it difficult to persuade their employees to participate in continuing education. Given that employers and employees seem to share a desire and openness toward continuing education, why does it so happen so rarely?

This report, *Everyday Futures: An ethnographic study of skilled workers' relationship with continuing education*, pursues the overall aim of identifying the motivators and barriers to skilled workers' participation in continuing education using ethnographic methods. It is based on five weeks of fieldwork among a crew of bricklayers in a large construction company in the Greater Copenhagen area, as well as the medical secretarial staff of a large hospital department also in Greater Copenhagen<sup>1</sup>. Combining participant observation in the workplace and informal ethnographic interviews with select workers, the fieldwork project yielded insight into the professional lives of the participating groups of workers: what their work entails, how it is conceived of, and what relational dynamics affect the daily working relationships among colleagues and between managers and employees, and how individual workers perceive continuing education as an opportunity in their lives. Fieldwork was grounded in an anthropological assumption that individual workers' choices regarding continuing education would be influenced by their colleagues, professional identity and workplace social patterns, and that gaining a deeper understanding of the working lives of skilled workers would provide insight into the factors -- expected or otherwise -- that shape skilled workers' approach to continuing education.

Based on the ethnographic study, we have been able to uncover a number of insights into the motivations for and barriers to continuing education as seen by skilled workers themselves. We have organised our findings into three main headings:

- 1) Continuing education as growth
- 2) Continuing education as work
- 3) Continuing education as a jungle

## Continuing Education as Growth: Developing in, not Leaving the Profession

Many of the skilled workers who participated in the study voice an interest in something that would qualify as continuing education. For instance, they are interested in training days in the office, training in particular machines and systems, law, business English, and team away-days that can create a sense of shared purpose and foster a positive working environment. The main factor that motivates skilled workers to pursue continuing education is a desire to improve their performance in their current roles. Hence when they express an interest in continuing education, it reflects a desire to grow as practitioners in their chosen profession, correct errors or to be able to take on new tasks as they are assigned to them, rather than to move into a new job or become managers. Many of them express joy in their work and in their professional identities, which they would not be inclined to leave behind, even if they could.

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<sup>1</sup> The specific employers and research participants have been anonymized based on a desire to avoid contributing to any conflicts of interests, disagreements, personal disputes that can exist in the relationships between colleagues and between employers and employees.

If “continuing education” is thought of as something that is intended as a step toward a management role and hence away from their current roles and professions, it loses its appeal.

In this context, it is crucial to note that skilled workers do not think of themselves as being at risk from technology, at least not in the sense that their jobs might disappear because of new technologies. In scenarios they imagine for the future, they are more likely to see their roles *evolved* than *eliminated*. They want continuing education that will help them develop and keep up with their profession. For this reason, some workers -- particularly medical secretaries -- will request training that has not yet been created, because the future of their profession has not taken shape. From their point of view, it can seem as though those responsible for continuing education do not fully understand what their roles entail, or even whether they will continue to exist, and hence cannot predict what kind of continuing education that medical secretaries will need. What is more, medical secretaries as well as bricklayers both feel that they are learning to use new technologies and developing professional through their day-to-day work. They develop new techniques and incorporate the best tools they can feasibly access that will help them discharge their daily duties. Bricklayers are regularly given new equipment to master, and the IT systems that medical secretaries use are constantly being updated. Skilled workers must learn and adapt to a steady flow of changes to their roles. Non-formal education is constantly taking place through on-the-job training and knowledge sharing among colleagues, which for these workers can be considered a source of ongoing professional development. Seen in this light, continuing education based on best practice is already a part of their everyday working lives.

Research with the two groups of workers revealed a range of shared values and self-perceptions relating to their trade and their professional community. Working with the medical secretaries, for instance, revealed a belief that as medical secretaries, they should avoid drawing attention to themselves. This is a case where professional self-identity (even according to the medical secretaries) can get in the way of making the case for more continuing education. Other professional groups will have different self-perceptions.

## The Jungle of Continuing Education: Opaque and Inaccessible Paths to Continuing Education

There are a myriad of continuing education programs, activities and institutions in Denmark, and to skilled workers, the term itself refers to everything from standalone training days in the office, three-day offsite courses organised by their union, to multi-year diploma degree programmes. This can make the concept of ‘continuing education’ itself seem rather opaque and difficult to navigate; “what are we even referring to when we talk about ‘continuing education’?” they ask. Instead of presenting a range of tangible options, “continuing education” is seen as an abstract concept that it is easy to dismiss as irrelevant. This perception constitutes a major barrier to participating in formal continuing education.

Another barrier is the perceived gap between idea and realization for skilled workers wanting to pursue some form of continuing education. A number of the workers we spoke with were considering or had

considered one or other continuing education option, but the process of accessing it had seemed long-drawn, convoluted and full of obstacles because of uncertainty about: 1) how to find information about educational programmes and options, 2) how to interpret the information provided, 3) what courses would prove worthwhile, 4) who to speak to in order to begin the process, 5) who would be paying for it, 6) what consequences it would have for their income, 7) what consequences it would have for their workplace -- especially their colleagues, and 8) benefits and consequences it would have for their careers going forward. Together, all of these uncertainties make the process of accessing continuing education seem long and arduous -- especially for people who may not be accustomed to navigating educational systems -- and as a major (potentially unprofitable) commitment.

Finally, in many cases it seems that skilled workers are left to consider and decide on continuing education on an individual basis. The research revealed that workers lack relevant forums to discuss continuing education in the workplace, which means that their decisions about continuing education will be based on assumptions made in isolation.

## Continuing Education as Work: Integrating Continuing Education within the Work Setting

However, many aspects of the workplace are set into formal structures for skilled workers, with a clear division of labour and responsibility, this does not apply to continuing education. It has not been institutionalised in the same way as bricklayers' participation in meetings and activities through their unions, for instance, or given a regular, recurring slot in the calendar for medical secretaries, as they see it has been with other professional groups at the hospital. There does not appear to be an obvious *tradition* of continuing education. In most cases, continuing education is a voluntary activity that takes place at the worker's own initiative. It is a *possibility*, not a *requirement*, in other words. From the point of view of the workers, this does not sit well within the prevailing culture in the workplace, where the relationship between employers and employees is built around rights and duties. Skilled workers work in environments that have a clear dividing line between employers and employees and their respective role and responsibilities in the workplace. Yet continuing education does not have a clear place in this structure -- it is not clear whether the desire or responsibility for continuing education belongs with one or the other party. Continuing education falls between two stools as a result.

In the same vein, a number of skilled workers from both groups expressed a desire that continuing education should no longer be offered but mandated by employers. Many would like to participate in continuing education as long as it takes place at their regular place of work and as a scheduled part of their works. In other words, it needs to be an integral part of the work -- or even be considered work in its own right. This is partly because pursuing continuing education is thought of as an *expense*. Although many of the skilled workers are aware that continuing education is paid for by their employer, they still expect that it will decrease their pay compared to their standard piece-rate pay. Employers and employees *both* see this a barrier. It is partly also in order to make room for continuing education within the



day-to-day work situation and structure, e.g. in when planning shifts and schedules, and in everyday life, where the distinction between work and personal time needs to be maintained.

As mentioned before, continuing education is also welcomed by skilled workers when it can help them correct bad habits or improve their skills in ways they can put to use here and now. Skilled workers are mindful that their formal educations do not mean that '*they can do everything equally well*' and that there is always more to learn. In this light, it can sometimes be problematic that employers are both the ones assigning work and facilitating continuing education, since it can put employees in an awkward situation where asking for continuing education could be interpreted as a sign that they are less competent or not qualified to take on assignments.

The unclear division of responsibilities between employers and employees is not the only reason skilled workers lose sight of continuing education. *Their day-to-day workflows also instil a sense of time that makes it difficult to plan for continuing education.* The everyday labour of a skilled worker takes place within a short time horizon - laying one brick at a time as a bricklayer, responding to queries as they appear in the moment as a medical secretary, and a structure where management is responsible for laying long-term plans. Many of the workers associate continuing education with an abstract future, far removed from their current work and personal lives. Because of the timeframes that govern the daily work and tasks of skilled workers, continuing education can easily disappear beyond their time horizon.

## EIGHT STORIES OF EDUCATION

The following chapter highlights the key findings of the 8 biographic interviews, which can broadly be classified as individual-level factors, such as professional identity and work-life balance, and factors that pertain to the workplace, such as unsteady employment, piece-rate pay, and relationships with colleagues.

The eight stories relate the educational histories of four carpenters and four clerical workers - from primary school through to today. They centre on the participants' stories of those years, and how they articulate the factors that were important to them and that guided the choices they made.

If continuing education does not interest the interviewee, which we know is often the case with skilled workers, it can be a difficult subject to discuss. Indeed, the literature indicates that negative experiences of schooling have an impact on the inclination to seek continuing education.

Limiting the scope of the interviews to continuing education would have carried a risk of interviews becoming superficial and omitting key information. For that reason, the carpenters and clerical workers were interviewed on a more general level about learning and education, in order to gain insight into the range of subconscious and tacit drivers and barriers that could be affecting the decision to pursue - and importantly not pursue -- continuing education. As the following series of interviews shows, approaching the interviews through general themes can yield highly specific insights:

*After telling us about his school days, which were marked by troublemaking and a general dislike of learning, Jonas concluded based on his own experience:*

*Jonas: So again, I think a lot of people become builders because they're tired of school. There's no way around it.*

*Interviewer: The idea of hitting the books again wouldn't appeal to them?*

*Interviewer: I think it'd be a hard sell for most of us, especially when you've been in the construction industry for years.*

*Interviewer: Oh, what impact would that have?*

*Jonas: By then you're used to doing practical work all the time. I just don't think you could imagine yourself going back to school again.*

Eight interviews are not sufficient to uncover every driver and barrier to participation among carpenters and clerical workers. Instead, the intention is to conduct an analysis in depth and understand the factors that mattered to our interviewees.

## Key Findings of the Interview Study

### Individual-Level Factors

#### **An internalized educational ceiling - especially among carpenters**

Many skilled workers feel that having learnt their trade, they will have finished their education and that their needs from that point on are limited to gaining practical experience and learning from colleagues on the job. This tendency is most pronounced among the carpenters. As a result, they will typically seek out continuing education when a particular need arises relating to a specific project.

#### **Positive experiences of continuing education**

Some clerical workers express a fundamental need for continuous professional development, which is not based on any particular need they have encountered, but rather relates to the perception of continuing education as inherently positive and desirable. These interviewees will generally have had specific positive experiences that shaped their views of continuing education. They might, for instance, have experienced cases where it affected job security, the allocation of duties, or promotions.

#### **Professional identities and “real” carpentry work**

Many carpenters have a strong professional identity, which in most cases is a positive. However, there are situations where their professional identity can become a barrier to education. Working as a carpenter does carry a long-term risk of injury, ill-health or even disability because of the manual, often repetitive nature of the work. Physical wear and tear can be a driver of continuing education, by enabling the worker to take on new and different other assignments that would reduce their amount of physical labour and hence their long-term risk of injury and disability. But to some of the carpenters, it is precisely the physical aspect that makes it “real carpentry.” Continuing education does not appeal to them as a way of shifting away from physical labour. This is despite the fact that wear and tear, according to some of the carpenters, makes it unlikely that they will be able to do physical construction work until the age of retirement. For these carpenters, professional identity becomes a barrier to continuing education.

#### **Different priorities for work-life balance**

The interviewed skilled workers prioritize their personal lives over their professional lives. Carpenters and clerical workers both highly prioritize their personal lives, and this has implications for 1) how attentive they are to developmental work in their workplaces, as their personal lives are more likely to be the focus of their attention, and 2) their openness to allowing work-related activities to distract from their personal lives. This means that some will postpone seeking continuing education, while others will give it no priority at all.

### **On-the-job training -- faith in own practical abilities, low academic self-confidence**

Several interviewees prefer to grow their skills through on-the-job training and learning from colleagues. Their preference for this way of learning often stems in part, as the skilled workers see it, from the practical and concrete nature of their work, in part from experiences they made in their school days. Many associate continuing education with traditional, passive classroom instruction, as they remember it from school. This is a style of learning that many do not feel they can fully benefit from -- in part because they simply are not suited to it, which they explain with reference to their experiences at school.

### **Exposure to technological change**

The workers had differing expectations for technology. While some are already feeling the impact of technology on workflows in their industry, others are not yet seeing any tech-led changes, even as they expect them to happen in the near future. In their own opinion, the workers who have not been affected by technological change do not need further continuing education here and now. They argue that they still do not know how the technological developments to come will affect their workflows. A few of the clerical workers, however, do foresee that technology could put them at greater risk of redundancy in the job market. This assessment will often be based on specific experiences where their previous roles had been cut because of automation or digitization.

## **Factors Related to Workplace Relations and Terms of Employment**

### **Preference for non-formal, on-the-job training -- a barrier to formal continuing education**

Clerical workers and carpenters both have a prominent culture of knowledge sharing, where knowledge is shared among colleagues in order to put everyone's skills to the best use in specific tasks. On-the-job training and ongoing knowledge sharing are efficient in a busy, day-to-day working situation where tasks need to be resolved quickly. The limitation of a knowledge sharing culture lies in the skills and knowledge of the employees themselves. When an employee encounters a challenge that none of their colleagues has faced before and developed an appropriate solution for, it will often be resolved through trial and error. In many cases, more time-consuming forms of upskilling, such as formal continuing education, will, according to the skilled workers, not be feasible. This can pose a challenge for skilled workers' participation in certain types of formal continuing education, if every new challenge is handled through non-formal, on-the-job training.

### **Casual employment**

Being employed as a contractor can be a barrier to continuing education for some carpenters. According to those interviewed, this mode of employment entails that employers have a limited incentive to support carpenters in seeking continuing education. Because of the time-limited nature of their employment, there is no guarantee that the employer themselves will be able to benefit from the investment in the long term. It can be particularly difficult for carpenters employed on these terms to access continuing education.

## **Salary**

Salary can be a barrier to seeking further education for members of both professions, albeit in different ways and to generally more so for the carpenters. Some of the *clerical workers* point out, directly or indirectly, that their salary does not require them to participate in continuing education if it means deviating from their normal routines -- including other working hours than they are accustomed to. This would suggest that clerical workers' participation in continuing education depends on their personal sense of motivation -- or that participation is framed as a management decision, on par with the other demands of their roles. The benefits to the business are a key concern of the clerical workers. They will weigh what they would expect to gain from the course against the delays to their core tasks whenever the need to acquire new skills arises. In these cases, clerical workers will often prioritize their everyday duties. For *carpenters*, the barrier stems partly from the fact that they lack a financial incentive to pursue continuing education, as it does not lead directly to a higher salary, partly from the financial 'penalty' they incur in the form of a lower hourly rate if they are on piece-rate pay.

## **Collegial relations**

Clerical workers and carpenters both experience in their own ways how their obligations toward their colleagues can become a barrier to continuing education. With *carpenters*, their sense of obligation toward their teammates or partners can become a barrier to leaving the site for continuing education. The team relies on all of its members, and one person's absence can have a significant impact on the project. This particularly applies to carpenters working on set-piece pay, though not exclusively.

*Clerical workers* in many ways resemble the carpenters in their sense of responsibility toward their colleagues, worrying about those who would be picking up their assignments in their absence. The clerical workers emphasize their responsibility toward their entire workplace - including their employer: If they participate in continuing education, they will be away from the office, and thus prevented from performing their core assignments and duties. This responsibility towards colleagues, employers and tasks acts as a barrier towards their participation in continuing education.

## **Unclear division of responsibilities between employer and employee**

Many workers indicate that a lack of clarity around which of the parties is responsible for identifying and responding to continuing education needs can be a barrier to continuing education. If responsibilities are clearly assigned and it is made clear that employee should seek out continuing education on their own initiative, for instance through the bargaining process, then carpenters and clerical workers are much better able to explore their options and attempt to raise it with their employees. The overall effect of having a clearer division of responsibility is expected to be limited, though, as the majority of the skilled workers still expect continuing education to come at their managers' initiative (Holsbro et al. 2005).

## **Lack of development in the industry**

Some carpenters and clerical workers feel that there is only limited development in their industries, which in turn limits the need to develop new skills. While this feeling is based on particular experiences

where working methods have not changed over a number of years, it nevertheless shapes how the skilled workers perceive the overall state of the industry.

**Lack of awareness of and compliance with health and safety regulations and standards**

According to the interviewed carpenters, it is a regular feature of the construction industry that some building sites will deviate from safety regulations -- intentionally as well as unintentionally. These deviations occur in the operation of heavy machinery and in handling toxic substances, among other areas. Employers and employees both have some responsibility for the deviations, which contribute to a workplace culture where formal continuing education is ignored. The lack of awareness around safety regulations and formal certification requirements -- and the intentional disregard for them -- reflect that some employers and carpenters fail to recognize what value they bring or why they are necessary. This constitutes a barrier to continuing education among some carpenters.

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