

Connecting professional identity and workplace learning in a
public sector context of change:
The case of Danish social workers

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Abstract

Connecting professional identity and workplace learning in a public sector context of change: The case of Danish social workers

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This study explores the inter-related roles of professional identity and informal learning in shaping responses by social workers to the context of change. The background for the study is the multiple policy reforms, changing the modality of public services of Denmark into the requirements of the competition state. Aiming to understand the relations between professional identity and informal learning, the study examines, how workers engage in informal learning in microrelations of everyday practices in a context of change.

The study employs a qualitative research strategy, leaning on an interpretivist and a social constructivist approach. The data collection is done through semi-structured interviews, involving 20 social workers located in different municipalities in Denmark.

The study concludes that the social workers' adjustment of professional identity in response to organisational change is mediated and facilitated by informal learning through microrelations of the workplace. Confirming the essential role of microrelations, the study illustrates, how the microrelations at work provide a space that facilitates informal learning to strengthen the capacity to act and to adjust professional capacity in relation to the context of change. Finally, the study documents how professional identity is based on a core of professional autonomy that itself is formed by exclusion of 'the other'.

The study adds to an area of research that is not yet well documented. Giving a voice to social workers, this study is the first to explore the narratives of social workers in terms of, how workers adjust professional capacity in a context of change as well as documenting how microrelations emerge at the workplace, offering a space for informal learning and adjustment of professional identity.

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Contents

ABSTRACT.....	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
CONTENTS	V
THE LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	VII
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
INTRODUCTION	1
THE CONTEXT.....	1
THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	2
THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS	4
RESEARCH PROCESS BACK-STORY	6
THESIS STRUCTURED	7
CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	9
INTRODUCTION	9
LITERATURE FRAMEWORK - DERIVING KEY ANALYTICAL THEMES FOR REVIEW	11
THE COMPETITION STATE AND THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC SECTOR CHANGE.....	12
LEARNING AT THE WORKPLACE.....	17
PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE - MEETING THE NEW REQUIREMENTS	22
MICRORELATIONS AT THE WORKPLACE AND LEARNING	26
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY.....	31
INFORMAL LEARNING	35
CONCLUSION.....	39
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	44
INTRODUCTION	44
RESEARCH STRATEGY - A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN	44
DATA COLLECTION METHOD	46
SAMPLE AND ANALYSIS	47
INTERVIEW PROCESS	53
FROM TRANSCRIPTION TO NARRATIVE	55
DATA ANALYSIS	58
RELATION BETWEEN CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGY:.....	61
REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH ETHICS	63
CONCLUSION.....	64
CHAPTER 4: PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE – MEETING THE NEW REQUIREMENTS.....	68
INTRODUCTION	68
RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	69
FRAMING PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE.....	70
RESPONDING TO REGULATORY CHANGE.....	74
MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE.....	77
STANDARDS, DECISION-MAKING AND OTHER SOCIOMATERIAL CONDITIONS.....	83
CONCLUSION.....	90
CHAPTER 5: MICRORELATIONS AT WORK	93

INTRODUCTION	93
RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	94
THE WORKPLACE AS A SPACE FOR LEARNING	95
MAPPING OF MICRORELATIONS	98
MICRORELATIONS – OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFORMAL LEARNING	104
(RE)ENFORCING ASPECTS OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY.....	110
CONCLUSION.....	114
CHAPTER 6: INFORMAL LEARNING, CHANGE AND PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY	
.....	117
INTRODUCTION	117
RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	118
INFORMAL LEARNING – NEGOTIATIONS, REFLECTIONS AND DIALOGUE	119
BUILDING AND EXPANDING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY	124
REACTING TO THREATS TO PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY	129
IN THE ‘BORDERLAND’ – EXPANDING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY	134
CONCLUSION.....	139
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS.....	142
INTRODUCTION	142
BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE.....	142
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND INFORMAL LEARNING – EXAMINING CONNECTIONS.....	144
EXTENDING EXISTING THEORY	148
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE	152
LIMITATIONS.....	157
FURTHER RESEARCH.....	158
ANNEX A.....	160
ANNEX B.....	165
ANNEX C.....	166
ANNEX D.....	169
ANNEX E.....	171
ANNEX F	172
ANNEX G	173
BIBLIOGRAPHY	180

The list of tables and figures

Table #	Title	Page
3.1	Share of social workers and place of employment 2016	48
3.2	Participant age distribution	50
3.3	Comparison of age distribution of participants and survey of public sector social workers	51
3.4	Number of years since graduation and seniority in municipality	52
3.5	Distribution of interviewees in teams	53
3.6	Themes - Code manual sample	60
3.7	Overview of research strategy and design	66
5.1	Implications of Microrelations for Practitioner Competences	115
6.1	Everyday practices of informal learning	122

Figure #	Title	Page
3.1	Map of Denmark	49
3.2	Content analysis process	59
3.3	Linking concepts to research method	62
4.1	Mapping of microrelations	99

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The Danish public sector has undergone a deep transformation during the last decade, shifting the modality from a welfare state to a competition state (Pedersen, 2011: 12). The concept 'competition state' reflects a shift from the egalitarian rationale of the welfare state that dominated Denmark for fifty years to strengthen capacity to compete on the global scene as the main driver for public governance.

A consistent flow of policy and sectoral reforms has adjusted how the Danish national authorities and local governments are organised, implement legislation and local strategies (Greve, 2012), eventually influencing how local government employees execute their tasks.

However, research is yet to ascertain how this context of change is perceived and seen to influence professional identity by employees. Through the case of social workers in public sector employment this study is the first to address this undocumented field of transformation of the Danish welfare state. It is also the first study to examine, how social workers adjust to the context of change through informal learning in relations of everyday practices, pointing to microrelations as a potential space of learning. Thus, this study makes an original contribution to existing knowledge and theories of the connectedness between professional identity and learning at the workplace in the context of change.

This chapter introduces the context, details the objective of the study further, as well as presents the research questions that guided the data collection and analysis.

The context

Building on principles of universality of rights and welfare of the individual as a matter for all (Esping-Andersen & Korpi, 1983: 5), the main trust of welfare services has been delivery of services for all. The emergence of the competition state erodes this basis of

traditional welfare policies, crowding out egalitarian policies and instead targeting particular client groups and questioning the universality of the traditional welfare state.

In a historical perspective, the building blocks of contemporary social services emerged with national social reforms in the nineteen thirties that established general and equal rights to social benefits. Defining social benefits as a general right, benefits were to be administered in the same way no matter the geographic location or social characteristics of clients (Nørrelykke, 2013: 22) a situation persisting until the emergence of the welfare state in the mid-fifties linking social welfare services to the requirements of the industrial society. Welfare services become a facilitator of social order and a highly mobile and flexible labour force by improving conditions for reproduction and rehabilitation, and in the process putting the individual into the centre and introducing the method of case work (Nørrelykke, 2013: 27), delineating social work from disciplines such as medicine and law.

During the period 1972-2006, local government reforms reduce the number of municipalities to 98, resulting in still more centralised practices that counter the classical notion of social policy (Johansen, 2013: 67) with legislation prescribing specialised efforts, methods and processes. In particular, the reforms and policy changes of the last decade have shifted the welfare benefit systems, including substantial changes to the norms and tasks of public sector employees in general and social workers in particular.

The political and administrative reforms specifically address services for a majority of the 747.800 Danes or 14% of the population (Danmarks Statistik, 2016), who enjoys a form of welfare benefits. Social workers employ an essential role at local government level, as they are in direct, physical contact with citizens, eligible to receive welfare benefits. Thus, the public sector context for social workers is challenging and emerging, as social workers become directly involved in the implementation of new regulations, local policies and/or strategies.

The purpose of the study

The shift away from the welfare state materialises in two research tendencies.

First, public sector change in Denmark has been researched extensively over the last decade (Pedersen, 2011, Illeris, 2014, Greve and Ejersbo, 2013, Pedersen, Greve and Højlund, 2008, Greve 2012), and the primary perspective has been a macro approach searching for general structural impacts and pointing to centralisation, performance orientation, productivity, objective case management among others as main change effects. As such, substantial parts of this research have been pragmatic from a management and development perspective (DJØFbladet, 2011) focusing on why changes do not succeed, but not on how employees adjust to the context of change.

Secondly, the shift is seen as a requirement for learning new competences and employing new skills (Illeris, 2014: 8, Pedersen, 2011: 247) that, however, primarily is studied from a perspective of didactics, pedagogical technologies and curricula (Mårtensson, 2015). Surprisingly, relative little research is done into the relationship between the context of change, identity and learning among public sector employees, even if changes address the organisation in which people works.

In the Danish context, this is the first study to address this gap of how social workers experience the context of changes and the confluence with professional identity and informal learning. It does so by giving voice to a sample of social workers of municipalities and in effect examining how frontline officers adjust to the context of change in the Danish public sector. Hence, it is the intention to capture the insights and lived experiences of changes of social workers rather than the changes themselves. In this way, this study shifts the lens from study of change in the public sector at the macro level to study micro experiences of public sector employees, examining if and how social workers are directly influenced by and adjust to changes.

The purpose of this study is to provide empirical evidence to further the understanding of the relationship between professional identity and learning within a context of public sector change. Entering a dialogue with social workers about how they experience changes influence their professional identity, and how they adjust to the changes is at the centre of the research. Ultimately, the study aims to add to the understanding of dynamics of public sector change by exploring the potential of informal learning in relation to professional identity.

Finally, the study ends discussing the practical implication of findings and by drafting suggestions for future research.

The research questions

In line with Hasenfeld, the social worker is employed in a citizen serving organisation, where the raw material is human beings and organisational objectives are vague and involving multiple interpretations (2003). Historically, the role of the social worker has been to assess social challenges of needy clients and come up with measures to ensure 'a good life' and restore normal conditions.

In this way, the professional identity of the social worker is inscribed in change as also the Danish Association of Social Workers adopts the international definition of social work as '*social change and development, social cohesion and empowerment and liberation of people*' and declares, '*social work is both inter-agency and interdisciplinary and draws upon a broad range of scientific theories and research*' (IFSW, 2015, unpagged). Following this definition the social worker is to operate within a relatively wide framework of practices impregnated with general humanistic and social values and open to wide and individual definitions of the professional identity. The operational consequences invite the social worker to make normative decisions and choices by employing transformation activities to maintain or improve human wellbeing.

Further, it appears that social work, as a profession, is not grounded on a specific theoretical and methodological basis as law, medicine, psychology or psychiatry is. Social work applies methods and theoretical elements from a number of disciplines. Consequently, social work as a profession is open-ended and situated with respect to the direction of the professional development.

These characteristics constitute a potential work life tension for workers as the transformation into the competition state shifts the focus of social work into specialised services. Social workers will have to learn to adjust to the new tasks and re-apply knowledge, experience and methods.

Departing from the context described above, the intention is to research how professional identity and workplace learning connect in the context of public sector change and the main research question is:

- How are informal learning and professional identity implicated in shaping social workers' responses to the context of public sector change

Using social workers as a case, the study is set to extend existing theories and knowledge by addressing four research sub-questions, reflecting gaps and inadequacies in contemporary research:

- How do social workers perceive the context of contemporary public sector change in Denmark, in terms of how it affects their professional identity?
- How do informal learning opportunities or requirements for professional development actually emerge in microrelations at the workplace?
- How does informal learning influence the development of professional identity among social workers in multiple and complex relations of public sector change?
- How, if at all, are processes of informal learning involved in enabling social workers to build the capacity required to adapt to the processes and practices of public sector change.

The detailed research questions serve to clarify issues that will be in particular focus and guide the empirical part of the research project.

The research is expected to potentially be of value for a wide variety of national and local government service providers, social workers, educators and competence development agencies that will be able to benefit from insights into drivers and barriers to change and learning at the work place.

Research process back-story

The personal context of the research was grounded in 30 years of experience as a public sector manager and independent consultant where the researcher has specialised in organisational development and turn-arounds, frequently seeing change initiatives fall short of objectives or outright fail due to a number of reasons. Hence, a personal research objective was deepening knowledge on the connection between organisational change, professional identity and learning at the work place, linking existing work experience with new academic knowledge and in the process developing knowledge-based strategies, methods and approaches to organisational change, turning learning into something operational.

The literature framework was constructed into three different phases. First, three reviews of the essential concepts of ‘context of change’, ‘micro-relations’, ‘professional identity’ and ‘workplace learning’ was read and analysed to extract keywords for a search on literature. Secondly, the keywords were organised in a process of mind mapping, illustrating the connection – or lack thereof – of the concepts. Thirdly, having made a literature review mapping, literature searches were conducted, articles extracted based on abstracts for further reading, and after reading and rereading of the relevant articles entered into a review table, reflecting and comparing concepts and positions. Further, the table provided the basis for the writing of the literature review including themes, subthemes and headings.

At the time of empirical data collection, this researcher was no longer employed in the public sector and had no direct access to social workers. Attempts to involve three municipalities in the research work failed due to management priorities and therefore, this researcher was left with approaching social workers as individuals using social media and own networks.

As an organisational development expert, this researcher has had an extensive work relationship with among others, public sector employees. Choosing social workers as a case added a human perspective to the topic, as this researcher was intent on giving something back to a group of professionals very much involved in various development projects. Hence, research project participants were extensively involved, being

interviewed and receiving a narrative in the form of a professional short story after contributing to the editing and validation of the interviewee transcript. Finally, interviewees and co-workers were offered a live presentation of findings and implications after the completion of the thesis. Giving social workers a voice in the context of change as well as supplying a narrative and presenting findings and implication aimed at adding participatory and emancipatory perspectives to the research work.

In this sense, the thesis is about changes to the welfare state, and how a particular group of public sector employees adapt to this context of change, but it is also about an organisational development expert giving knowledge and experience back to a group of dedicated professionals who are immersed in a sea of change.

Thesis structured

The study makes use of a qualitative research design, involving an interpretivist and constructivist approach. The thesis is divided into seven chapters:

Chapter 2 presents a critical review of a range of research, important to set the context and the scene of the study. The critical analysis identifies key themes relevant to the exploration of the research questions and sourcing the questionnaire for the interviews. The review identifies the key themes as perception of the context of change, microrelations, professional identity and informal learning as well as identifying a number of unresolved theoretical issues with regard to the same themes.

Chapter 3 introduces the research design as the study is based on semi-structured interviews as the empirical data source. The collection of data is regarded as a '*Bildungsreise*' and '*a conversation*' (Kvale, 1997: 18-19) that focus on daily practices (Højrup, 1983). Efforts are undertaken to work with and around the tension between interpretation and representation, inviting the interviewee to communicatively validate (Mayring, 2002: 147) the narrative and optimising the outcome for both interviewer and interviewee.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the key findings from the data analysis organised in themes that emerge through the interviews and accrued through a basic form of content analysis. Findings suggest importance of professional autonomy and confirm microrelations as an essential vehicle for the development of professional identity. Findings also illustrate how professional identity is developing through informal learning, and how informal learning is situated in the space of microrelations.

Chapter 7 brings together conclusions from key findings, comparing findings with gaps derived from the literature review, extending existing theory and suggesting implications for policy and future research.

Chapter 2: A review of the literature

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to establish a theoretical warrant for the study going through a body of relevant research literature to establish the research context of the study, and to identify unresolved issues and gaps in existing literature.

This study is situated in a wide and general body of research of the context of public sector change, identity and workplace learning. However, as the particular research into the Danish change context of social work has been focused on the system-client relation and in particular how social workers use this relation to compel clients to certain solutions (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003), an opportunity opens to study how social workers respond to these changes.

Thus, the review aims to survey aspects of literature of informal learning and professional identity development in the context of contemporary public sector change to highlight key themes and analytical categories necessary to answer the main research question:

- How are informal learning and professional identity implicated in shaping social workers' response to the context of public sector change?

The survey of literature identifies and explores two major themes grounding an understanding of key aspects of the context of change and requirements for adjustment. The first theme is:

- The competition state and the context of public sector change

The chapter begins with a setting of the contemporary public sector reform scene in Denmark providing a brief overview of transition into the competition state and the subsequent accelerated workplace changes, leading to polycentric structures and new requirements for skills and competences. Hence, the section identifies learning at the

workplace as an essential element of public sector change and the second theme concerns:

- Learning at the workplace

The purpose of this section is to draw attention to the increasing importance of learning at the workplace grounding a working definition of what learning is and identifying four key analytical categories, essential to the understanding of how social workers are impacted and responding to the context of change through processes of informal learning. Hence, the subject of the next section is the first analytical category:

- Perceptions of change and meeting the new requirements

The section reflects on the understanding of how the context of change is perceived by social workers and what emerges as crucial drivers for adjustment. This sets the scene for the second analytical category that covers:

- Microrelations at the workplace and learning

This section examines contemporary research on the emergence of a concept of microrelations and discusses key aspects that will support the analysis of findings. The third analytical category addresses how social workers acquire, maintain and develop a:

- Professional identity through informal learning

The section explores literature on how professional identity develops within an organisational setting, highlighting the dynamics of sociomaterial practices. Having addressed professional identity, the fourth analytical category is the subject of the last section:

- Informal learning

Building on the meta-learning, reflected in the section on workplace learning, this section sets out to delineate informal learning as a particular aspect of workplace learning identifying its characteristics and suggesting new areas of focus.

The categories for the analysis of data collection are identified, inspired by the '*frame analysis*' (Goffman, 1974) that depart from the assumption that people interpret message meanings through a framework. This is taken for granted and influence how, for example, people engage in daily social interaction and practices. Rather than segmenting the approach to the study, the two themes and the four analytical categories are aspects of a holistic approach and only specified for the purpose of clarification. In particular, the analytical categories also serve to name and focus the chapters, presenting the analysis of findings.

In sum, the review identifies emergent themes, develop working definitions and analytical pointers as well as identifying gaps and unresolved issues in existing theoretical literature with regard to, how professional identity and informal learning may facilitate adjustments to a context of change at the workplace.

Literature framework - deriving key analytical themes for review

The literature framework for the review was based on a brainstorming of possible key words for concepts like 'change in organisations', 'microrelations', 'professional identity' and 'learning at the workplace', scoping up literature with a lot of citations. Initially, three to four articles were identified and used to further identify key analytical themes, key words, articles of potential interest etc. Further, literature searches followed, exploring key words and themes from the initial identification process. This was followed by reading abstracts and further re-finishing keywords for further literature searches within the four areas and preference given to literature that would refer to keywords inclusive to more than one area. Additional literature was picked up from reading of bibliographies and references from the initially selected literature.

Throughout the research, new editions of main academic journals were checked and relevant literature added by reading abstracts to base the review on the most recent literature as possible. This conceptual and literature framework was further consolidated

and qualified by extracting key words from reading and re-reading of the interview narratives.

Hence, the literature review framework was dynamic and up until the very end of the thesis writing process, new literature was added, widening and/or deepening review themes and concepts.

Literature searches were consolidated with assistance from the University of Leicester Library staff and staff from university libraries in Denmark.

A simple template was used to record and establish an overview of relevant concepts and keywords. A sample template is shown as Annex F.

Structuring the presentation of the review was done in a simple mind-mapping process, using ‘post-its’ with concepts, themes and sub-themes that visualised a structure for the review. In this manner, central literature was organised and as well as literatures of primary and secondary importance were organised in relation to each other.

The mind-mapping process was also employed with respect to structuring the analytical chapters. Departing from the review and reading of transcripts, a total of 16 sub-themes for analysis were identified in and placed in relation to the generic themes of context of change, microrelations and informal learning that eventually formed the analytical chapters. Due to research presentation management four sub-themes – IT, embodiment of change, networking and social media usage – were subsumed into the other sub-themes. The total number of sub-themes was twelve and they eventually structured the analytical chapters.

The competition state and the context of public sector change

The first review theme is broadly outlining the public sector reform context in Denmark that has dominated the political agenda since beginning of the millennium and picking up speed with the aftermath of the financial crises of 2008 (Greve 2012) and the emergence of the competition state (Pedersen, 2011: 12) to form a backdrop for the remaining review.

This section sets a scene for the understanding of how the context of public sector changes influence the professional identities of employees, and how the employees adjust to the changes. In other words, the section is not specifically examining change in the public sector in Denmark, but briefly presenting the context of public sector change in terms of regulations, a re-orientation of organisational structures and importance for social worker knowledge development.

Quite a substantial amount of effort is done researching public sector changes in Denmark, a major trust of which has been focusing on policies, reform processes, centrality of management, focus on structural-functional levels and desire for organisational development (Greve, 2012, Pedersen, Greve, Højlund, 2008). A recent analysis of the diffusion of new public management into local government in Denmark (Balle Hansen, 2011) provides evidence of this approach to research of management of organisational change.

The context of public sector change is wide and penetrating all levels of public governance and regulations. Since 2001, the Danish welfare state has been the subject of more than 10 structural reforms (Greve and Ejersbo, 2013: 31, Greve, 2012: 49) the majority of which took place from 2006 and onwards. In this context, a public sector reform signifies a prepared and politically motivated change to the existing organisational set-up of public service delivery at national and local level (Greve and Ejersbo, 2013: 24) underlining the political dimension and the potential contradictory objectives. The reforms are qualitative as well as structural in nature and mean a reordering of what is perceived as private or public service, central or local government responsibility, etc. As a consequence of the reforms, national and local government organisations are reorganised and employees reassigned new and changed functional responsibilities. In their analysis, Bundgaard and Vrangbæk include a comprehensive overview of the process of the structural reform from 2002 to 2006 summarising changes to local government (2007).

The changes impact on the politically managed 98 municipalities that organise and deliver services, although the delivery may differ due to the local government autonomy. The local government autonomy is a corner stone of the Danish democracy

set-up and may mean that the implementation of reforms and policies may involve '*opposing principles*' (Greve, 2008: 71) or that management methods and approaches may be different (Ingstrup and Crookall, 1998) as national and local government levels do not follow a common organisational design. Hence, reform and policy processes require follow-up and interpretation (Pedersen, Greve og Højlund, 2008) at local government levels and become dependent on internal processes of the individual municipality, managing and organising human resources.

Consequently, the reform and sector policy changes drive a re-orientation of the way, the municipal execution of services is organised. However, changes are penetrated by the growing importance of international competition to generate growth and the internationalisation of financial governance that institutions has become '*a factor of competition*' (Pedersen, 2011: 32), marking a generalisation and disciplining of social discourses. This implies a need for constant initiatives to adjust and optimize local government organisations to new demands and objectives in a '*re-invention of the public sector*' (Pedersen, Greve and Højlund 2008: 331) that aims to achieve more structural flexibility and adjustability.

The cumulated organisational effect of this shift in the public sector orientation is described as an evolution of the polycentric organisation (Pedersen, Greve and Højlund 2008), breaking up larger units in smaller and more specialised units as well as introducing external service delivery suppliers. Moreover, as change is now a constant in the competition state (Pedersen 2011), the polycentric organisation is described as more complex, challenged by multiple logics of decisions and shifting of responsibility (Højlund and Knudsen, 2008: 274) requiring continuous construction and re-construction of unity. Hence, the emergence of polycentric structures as the organising principle of public sector organisations may also influence the relations between management and workers. The consequences of these changes are also argued to involve a shift from occupational to organisational control (Evetts, 2009: 249) and at the expense of professional autonomy and self-management. In addition, it is also suggested that the administrative and professional bureaucracies are transformed into managerial bureaucracies (Horton, 2006: 533), a process that deposits new norms, values and organisational designs, among others resulting in employees losing their uniqueness, and forcing public sector employees to adjust their professional identity.

Thus, the context of change seems to influence and transform the core of practices and contexts (Højlund and Knudsen 2008: 276, Greve 2012: 39) that employees are educated and trained for. Eventually, this builds a tension between a top-down decided professionalism and a subjective need for a balanced and sustainable professional identity (Illeris, 2014: 10), which will impact front line officers such as the social worker.

The context of change has the potential to question individual professional capacity as efficacy is now required in terms of competences such as imagination, innovation, creativity and quality (Illeris 2014a: 582) apart from communication proficiency and ability to negotiate social media. The outcome is a dependency on the capacity of actors to act independently, simultaneously and consistently in differing contexts and potent complexities. This overall shift in professional knowledge requirement seems to be potentially at odds with findings of research that concluded that *'intrinsic motivation'* and *'prosocial motivation'* (Bøgh Andersen, 2012: 7) is the most important motivational factors for public sector employee ethos. In this way, the context of change tables a *'challenge to social work, the professional and individual competences of social workers'* (Nørrelykke, 2013: 46) that may force social workers into reshaping their professional identities in ways that correspond to complexity of change and adapting to the context of changes through dynamics of workplace learning emerge as essential in relation to changes to the domain of social work.

A comparison between the perceived development of public sector restructuring in Denmark and UK shows some similarities but also differences. In general, the national attention is to decentralisation and devolution, discussing the status of 'countries' but also emerging as far less uniform than in Denmark. However, the trend is noted as *'downsizing and layering and of changing organizational boundaries'* to *'reduce costs and in response to policy agendas'* (Morris & Farrell, 2007: 1585), and another study indicating *'little evidence of integrated, consistently applied performance management processes designed to promote synergy and visibility between organisational goals, departmental plans and individual objectives'* (Harris, 2005: 692). A third study explores the dilemmas of the *'habitual reorganisation'* (Elcock et al., 2010: 331) of local government and concludes local government in England is *'a patchwork'* and the *'structure and size of sub-national governance in England is far*

from settled' (Elcock et al., 2010: 337), pointing to successive change processes to come.

Comparing the operational consequences, the structural tendencies in the UK seem to be more diverse from a national perspective, suggesting a deeper '*pervasiveness of market exchange relationships*' with private providers supply services that fall outside what is considered core public sector activities leading to an '*associated fragmentation of service delivery responsibilities*' (Painter, 2012: 14). However, consequences at the organisational level could be seen as relatively uniform in comparison and identical tendencies are noted with respect to the emergence of hybrid, '*sedimented*' organisational forms, increases in work complexity and more performance intense environments.

The public sector ethos has been seen to reassure individual employees and impose values on external changes (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996: 654), and studies indicate that decentralisation modify it '*as a frame of reference in practice*' (Clifford, 2012: 571), impacting on professional identity. More specifically research suggests that the public service ethos are '*felt by some to be under threat*' (Needham & Mangan, 2016: 272) due to pressures to the organisation becoming more commercial or that the experience of frequent change can leave '*employees feeling cynical*' (Greasley et al, 2009: 395) when facing new initiatives. The public sector ethos in a context of change will be taken up in the analytical chapters, but at the moment it is hard to see a reason why the general direction of how the public sector ethos reacts in a context of change should be different from the UK to Denmark.

In sum, comparing the trends in public sector development in UK and Denmark it seems that the structural orientation varies in terms of depth and that organisational consequences and influence on a perceived generic public sector ethos point in the same direction.

Setting the scene, the first review theme launches some important pointers for the coming sections. The transition into the competition state seems to penetrate all levels of public governance, where changes are constant, polycentric structures emerge and new skills and requirements for competences become urgent. However, it also appears

that research into the impact of the transition is still emerging and primarily examines changes from a macro perspective. Hence, it is not known how public sector employees respond to the context of change, although it is assumed that workplace learning becomes more essential to adjust to the context of change and the cohesion of the polycentric public sector organisation. The next section of the review briefly reviews literature of learning at the workplace.

Learning at the workplace

The second theme of the review introduces the concept of workplace learning and in particular seeking to clarify how learning can be seen and how it relates to the workplace learning. The concept has attracted considerable interest over the last two decades, but much literature on workplace learning does not really explore the learning concept of learning. To amend this gap, this section will briefly outline an understanding of workplace learning, establishing a working definition, apart from locating contemporary literature on workplace learning that frames the remaining review as well as the analysis of findings.

Learning is studied from many perspectives and using a multitude of different approaches including that of biology, psychology as well as sociology. Thus, learning is the subject of different definitions such as learning as acquisition or participation (Sfard, 1998), learning through participation in communities (Lave and Wenger, 1991), constitution of identity and/or subjectivity (Billett, 2008), competence development and human resource management (Un-Hwa and Hsi-An, 2011) just to mention a few. Yet, most research into learning seem to have gained inspiration from Dewey's thinking of learning as a social and interactive process (1936), eventually also introducing the aspect of informal learning.

The workplace becomes increasingly recognised as a location where new competences, skills and knowledge are acquired. In a meta-review of research of workplace learning between 1999-2004, Fenwick examines some 200 articles noting among others that approaches may originate from different theoretical disciplines (economy, organisational theory, education, management studies) with different perspectives, contexts and using *'fundamentally different starting points and purposes'* (Fenwick,

2010: 79) to examine workplace learning. Altogether, this underscores that there is *'no one-size-fits-all'* approach to workplace learning (Vaughan, 2008: 26), but makes learning at the workplace appear as a *'messy object, existing in different states'* or *'a series of different objects that are patched together through some manufactured linkages'* (Fenwick, 2010: 80) enacted in different logics and situations.

The lack of a clear or consistent definition of workplace learning (Le Clus, 2011, Manauti et al., 2015) leads to a conclusion that the literature is *'somewhat confusing'* and workplace learning becomes a *'contested notion'* (Le Clus, 2011: 357). Yet, it does not mean that commonalities cannot be found, which eventually may be used for a working definition.

Reflecting a shift at the beginning of the turn of the millennium from learning as acquisition to a more constructivist notion of sense-making, learning and work become *'synonymous as experiences accumulate in the course of everyday participation in work activities'* (Le Clus, 2011: 358), where learning is *'contingent on work flow and organisational practices'* (Boud & Middleton, 2003: 199). Workplace learning is frequently regarded as situated and enabling a continuous modification of work practices that appear meaningful in individual and collective relations (Bauer and Gruber, 2007: 676). On one hand, these positions suggest that learning conceptually is kept within and restricted to the framework of the formal organisation of work becoming a by-product of everyday work practices. On the other hand, the positions on workplace learning also exemplifies, what Fenwick critically has stated, that learning often is considered as *'a single object, self-evident and mutually understood'* (2010: 80), suggesting that learning at the workplace is aligned, universal and without diversity.

Further, the abundance of studies does not always address the *'emerging complexities'* (Fenwick et al., 2012: 2) of changes to organisation and workplace, which means that workplace learning is locked in a discretionary and individual reflective development paradigm. As an example of the emerging complexities, Fenwick et al. identifies the impact of the changes as new forms of management, prioritising 'customer' orientation and new responsibilities for professionals, deskilling as outcome of performance management measures and potentially richer resources for learning and requirements

for collaboration with other forms of experts as the expertise of practitioners are becoming narrower and deeper (2012: 2). In terms of professional knowledge the emerging complexities mean that knowledge is not stable, but challenged and subject to continuous changes (Fenwick et al., 2012: 3), pointing to informal learning in everyday practices as the important element of workplace learning and as a measure of constituting and influencing professional identity.

As such, this theoretical observation supports earlier research by Marsick that concluded that the majority of learning at the workplace is informal (2006: 52).

The above observations suggest that the thinking of workplace learning needs to move beyond the confines of individual reflection, set knowledge and stable communities. This has implications for situating workplace learning in the notion of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) that implies an understanding of the community as a unit, unified and identifiable, a container of stored experience with a prime objective of knowledge transfer. The observations also have implications for metaphors of learning, such as acquisition and participation (Sfard, 1998: 5), as they imply some form of a priori prescriptions of learning as something that has to be '*consumed*' (Boud and Hager, 2012: 20) implicitly suggesting priority to formal elements of learning.

From a meta-theory perspective learning is described as an outcome of a combination of meaning and efficacy, motivation of the learner and social interaction (Illeris, 2006: 42). As workplace learning evolves through participation in social practices it also means that learning is not restricted to a cognitive phenomenon, but involves non-cognitive and social elements. Resounding the '*learning-as-participation*' metaphor (Sfard, 1998: 6), Illeris suggests that learning is individual and dependent on social interaction in a process within a designated space resulting in a '*lasting change of capacity*' (Illeris, 2012: 15), and is set in practice and therefore a capacity to act differently. The 'change of capacity' concept of learning unfolds in cumulative, assimilative, accommodative or transformative typologies of learning (Illeris, 2006: 52-61) and involves the learner to mobilise motivation, emotions and will to learning processes. Important to this context is that accommodative learning is characterised by a restructuring of existing mental schemes when new information cannot be attached to the existing schemes, whereas transformative learning also involves change in the organization of the self as '*a large*

number of schemes is restructured simultaneously' (Illeris, 2006: 58), involving changes to the identity of the individual. Mental schemes refer to a metaphor for perceptions of the already existing (Illeris, 2006: 51) and the process of learning becomes relating something already known to something new.

Both learning terms imply that changes in capacity take place, although primarily transformative learning implies a change of identity.

Accommodative and transformative learning relate to situations where professionals act on the basis of serious threats to knowledge, experience and practices, implying that *'learning opportunities grows from the disturbance of habits that creates tensions and cracks'* (Elkjær and Brandi, 2011: 74) within the different worlds of the organisation. In particular, accommodative and transformative learning partly enable the individual to adjust the knowledge and practices to changing circumstances (Illeris, 2014a: 580). Supplementary to this general feature the transformative learning also have a regressive element that involves a retreat to something known and often requiring forms of assistance (Illeris, 2014a: 582). Thus, learning becomes an immensely complex process, involving a large number of schemes and resulting in a social construction of and continuous redefining of identity. In this line of thinking, learning facilitates a *'becoming a competent participant in a social and organizational process'* (Easterby-Smith, Crossan and Nicolini, 2000: 790) rather than being restricted to the individual or didactics of learning.

To meet the emerging complexities in a sustainable manner a working definition of learning at workplace should involve two aspects, taking into account processes of constant change.

First of all, it should recognise that the conventional association of the concept of workplace to a site, a finite enclosure is rather imprecise in the context of knowledge work such as social work. Rather, it is suggested seeing workplace learning within a context of sociomaterial perspectives. In this context, sociomaterial is used to emphasise *'the materiality of knowledge, its embodiment and its enactment in practice'* and how *'the social and material elements of knowledge practices [emerge] as entangled and mutually constitutive'* (Fenwick, 2014a: 265) to eventually *'view things as effects of connections and activity'* (Fenwick, 2014a: 269). The sociomaterial

approach is relevant in the sense that knowing becomes *'more as dynamic, relational learning processes than as the internalised mental or behavioural properties of individuals'* (McMurtry et al., 2016: 172), shifting focus of learning processes of team collaboration and diversity and useable to *'trace interactions among non-human as well as human parts of the system'* (Fenwick, 2012: 6), transcending *'conventional assumptions about interprofessional learning'* (McMurtry et al., 2016: 2) and reflecting that *'social relations are constituted by and mediated by materiality, materiality per se is enacted in a social context'* (Styhre, 2011: 384). Hence, workplace practices emerge and influence social relations from an already constituted state that is embodied and materially mediated (Boud and Hager, 2012: 22) yet social relations also influence practices. Sociomaterial practices as the expression of a workplace emerge as a complex, enacted and embodied constitution of social and material relations that may be particular for a team or viewed upon from an aggregate level.

Secondly, learning at the workplace should be inspired by the definition emerging from the meta-theory of learning, discussed earlier together with a focus on the gap in research into workplace learning, as a *'need for more fine-grained work in examining micro-relations [...] exploring, how knowledge actually emerges and how practices are reconfigured at their interfaces'* (Fenwick, 2008: 240) and as a call for empirical research into *'what people actually do and think in everyday work activity'* (Fenwick 2008a: 25) to understand dynamics of learning and adjustment at the workplace. This gap seems to be not only general, but also is noted with regard to social workers in particular as research has observed that informal learning processes of this particular group of public sector employees are *'not well documented'* as well as, it is *'yet to be explored'* how informal interaction with peers is *'influencing workers in their relationship with their employing organisation and the broader sector'* (Carson et al., 2011: 272), indicating the scarceness of research into workplace learning in the public sector and among social workers in particular.

The definition of learning is considered relevant, as social workers involve in direct physical contact with clients or co-workers consistently impacted by encounters of the known and the new.

In sum, rather than taking learning for granted, this section has explored a meta-concept of learning and this approach could sustain a need to develop the concept into a working definition of workplace learning that refers to this exploration and the need to be adaptable to the emerging complexities. Workplace learning should not be set a priori as formal or informal, but emerges as agile and flexible to the context of change as well as reflect that everyday sociomaterial practices in the polycentric organisation increasingly are based on relations. This working definition will be further addressed in the conclusion.

Further, the exploration points to tabling four analytical categories, essential to answer the research questions that may be summarised as:

- Perceptions of change – meeting the new requirements
- Microrelations and learning
- Professional identity
- Informal learning

The remainder of this chapter will examine these analytical categories to further ground the theoretical basis for the analysis of findings.

Perceptions of change - meeting the new requirements

The context of public sector change seems to challenge the cohesion of organisations as well as it – at least partly – redefines requirements for professional capacity, skills and competences. In other words, changes also seem to challenge how employees of public sector organisations experience the dynamics of the organisational changes and how they interact with fellow employees, sharing, refining understanding of these experiences and potentially modifying material circumstances, such as social, physical and organisational practices.

In general, when studying the relationship between organisational change and workplace learning one of the challenges is the enormous amount of theories, literature and studies of organisational change. Yet, despite the richness of literature, a considerable amount of research literature is found to have primary focus on a duality of

continuity and change (Wetzel and Gorp, 2014: 132) that is analysed with a particular perspective such as economy of change, success of the change process, management of change, efficiency of changes, etc. Hence, a choice is made to present basic assumptions of change in organisations and the implications of emerging alternatives only.

To establish the context, it should be recalled that fundamentally public sector organisations are organisations of bureaucracy and constructed on a rational ontological statute of governance, reflected in the hierarchy of regulatory and organisational framework. The essential ontological presumption is that the public administration practices serves the greater good, comply with regulations and therefore is logical, objective and operational. In the Danish context, the public sector administrative tradition is manifest in the constitution and balancing between national legislation and local autonomy. This means that national changes filter down to the local governments and may be implemented in a localised manner at that level.

The context of public sector change implies an understanding that change is characterised by '*embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity, centrally organized around shared practical understanding*' (Schatzki, 2001: 11). The key words here are references to 1) human activity, 2) centrally organised and 3) shared practical understanding which seems to direct dominant understandings of what change is. This position interacts well with other studies that conclude that the dominant assumptions of change ignore important aspects of social interaction or that more attention has to be given to context, particularity and power as well as modes of self-governing (Wetzel & Gorp, 2014), when studying organisational change.

The gaps identified by Jansson (2013) and Wetzel and Gorp (2014) could briefly be illustrated by referring to the typology of the pragmatic business management approaches of Lewin and Kotter. Lewin's model for systems of change is based on a naturalist ontology, where organisational dysfunctionality can be amended by a three-stage model progressing from '*unfreezing*' via change to '*freezing*' (Burnes, 2004: 985). It indicates change as a medium to restore balance by top management interventions that unfolds within a rational framework. Changes to organisations become a matter of correct designs and the capacity to execute adequate planning procedures such as the '*eight steps to change*', advocated by Kotter (2012: 37), illustrating how change

becomes a test of the '*strategic fitness*' (Kotter, 2012: unpagged) to follow the design of change processes, promulgating the capacity of organisational hierarchy. Hence, organisational change is seen as an episodic, staged and continuous progression from position A to position B, as the organisation is already constituted, locating change as in-between the different stages. Consequently, research into organisational change is often focused on how the organisation orchestrates and manages the N-steps from A to B overcoming barriers and resistance to change (Kotter 1996, Jansson, 2013), or why organisational change fails and/or the role of management to devise an adequate strategy of change (Washington and Hacker 2005).

The dominant perception of what change is leaves a series of unresolved issues, calling for a need to engage with a view of organisations through practice-based approaches (Jansson, 2011: 1013) supporting the development of constructivist assumptions of change. However, the emerging notions of the competition state (Pedersen, 2011) and of complexities (Fenwick et al., 2011), question this unidimensional and naturalistic approach by understanding change as a single and momentary disturbance to the balance of the generic organisation.

Already, '*the polycentric administration*' that exists without '*a central point wherefrom everything can be foreseen*' (Nørrelykke, 2013: 36) is noted as a contemporary form of organisation that is situated, mediated and requires constant articulation of relations between mission, capacity and resource distribution. This alternative paradigm prioritises an understanding of organisation that is consistently being constituted in an on-going process as well as being constitutive of reality through a continuous '*reweaving their webs of beliefs and practices to accommodate new experiences*' (Tsoukas and Chia 2002: 580). However, a tension arises, questioning how employees navigate this organisational reweaving in everyday practices, when at the same time employees as civil servant perform services according to legality and political-administrative hierarchy. In the existing theoretical assumptions the tension remains unresolved.

When the organisational setting is considered dynamic (Doolin 2003: 751, Graetz and Smith 2012: 148, Oswick, et al. 2005: 386) the organisation evolves as an accomplishment of sociomaterial enactments of team-based learning and collaboration

(McMurtry et al., 2016: 172), which means that perceptions of change are constituting and being constituted by shifts in professional relations, the relative autonomy of professional activity and emergence of organisational artefacts, such as new technologies and methods. It follows that organisations emerge as being built from the inside by members of the organisation who navigate the continuously changing context by rearticulating it.

From a theoretical perspective, the shift has two implications for the study of how the context of change impacts on professional identity and learning at the workplace.

Firstly, subsuming the concept of organisation to different forms of sociomaterial practices introduces instability into the concept, as practitioners may not experience the narrative of the organisation as identical to own narratives. This may introduce a distance between the official narrative and the narrative of practitioners (Wackerhausen, 2002: 53) blurring the boundaries, the mission and practices of the organisation. Further, this means that the organisation may be described by many different narratives and as what Czarniawska refers to as '*assemblies of organising processes*' (2008: 32) and '*constructing stories seems to facilitate organizing, at least to some people; and it certainly helps their understanding*' (2008: 39). Analytically, the consequences seem to be that practitioners of the organisation cannot be regarded as a unified mass, who practice a pre-set organisational positions, and that the perception of change is subjected to how practitioners approach, understand and practice implications of the context of change. This should be expected to be reflected in everyday narratives and imply some distancing to the official narrative and organisational diagrammatic design.

Secondly, it shifts the understanding of the organisation into an interpretative and constructivist ontology that suggests the organisation to be polycentric, multi-layered, evolving and complex. This suggests that organising processes are in need of '*stabilization*' (Czarniawska, 2008: 28) or social relations and interaction that make use of a shared language to establish an inside and outside of the organising. Thus, the interpretative and constructivist concept of the organisation points to everyday practices and relations between members - rather than the macro perspective - as constitutive of what is considered as the organisation.

Consequently, change must involve a temporary fix in order to facilitate adaptations of sociomaterial knowledge, experience and artefacts to the new narrative. In other words, the stability of organisational change depends on how members perceive the context of change as an adequate cognitive balance between the official organisational narrative and non-institutional practices that reflect lived experience and practices. Further, these practices may temporarily suspend the official narrative, as practices exist outside the preliminary closure of the organisation and they have to be learned informally. Relations between employees could constitute these practices.

In sum, the shift in perceptions of organisations and change implies an analytical lens that shifts from the universality of organisation to sociomaterial practices, from a fixed form to organising alternatives, from the official narrative to the importance of professional autonomy and from a diagrammatic reflection to continuous articulation in relations of everyday practices. Yet, change also requires a temporary fixation.

Having briefly discussed key elements of perceptions of emerging complexities of organisations of change, the coming section of the review will address a key aspect of how organisations form this stable core. This is seen as microrelations of the workplace and the section review the emerging literature on microrelations and informal learning.

Microrelations at the workplace and learning

The context of change indicates that relations between individuals and groups of individuals become a centrepiece of analysis into how organisational change impacts on professional identity and informal learning. Over time, approaches to learning at the workplace has pointed to the '*importance of social relationships and mutual support to enhance individual performance at work*' (Felstead et al., 2005: 359) as well as the relationship between '*individual and collective identities*' (Felstead et al., 2009: 7) as essential analytical points of attention.

Micro-sociology is an approach to sociology, studying everyday practices in contrast to macro-sociology associated with entire populations, patterns and trends (Bryman, 2008: 44-45). Research into everyday practices is often associated with Goffman who explores how performances by individuals and teams are constructed and maintained

(1959) through analysis of the relationship between interpersonal meaning and social structures. Within a framework of relations, a shared professional identity and professional legitimacy emerges as part of everyday practices, when *'an individual appears before others, he knowingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part'* (Goffman, 1959: 242) which also brings importance to trust and reciprocity.

Essentially, this double process of identity and relationship creation is based on three main activities such as 'the impression management' (Goffman, 1959: 4) an individual uses to manage other individuals' impressions of him or herself through communication, whereas 'framing' (Goffman, 1974: 8) denotes a process of interpretation that filters activities to make them meaningful in social relations. Finally, 'footing' concerns the position of participants in interaction (Goffman, 1981), establishing trust and authenticity.

The appearing before others may at times be disrupted and efforts have to be made to save face in situations of threat, negotiating a social terrain of relations through bridging, amplifying and/or integrating existing frameworks while encountering the context of change. However, as relations are mostly asymmetrical they may emerge as power differences, and relations may be transformed in a domain specific or a global frame (Goffman, 1974: 45) with the latter being a broader framework that aligns with change but building on the domain specific frame.

Further grounding microrelations within a Goffmanian thinking, relations are always situated and material as a relation *'is (a) 'seeable': something one sees, behaviour, not a value, a belief, or an attitude'* (Manning, 2008: 680) which means that the study of social relations in organisations must focus on how individuals *'rationalize or explain the whys and wherefores of that work'* (Manning, 2008: 684) having the consequence that the organisation is constructed through a variable set of relations and very much in line with Czarniawska's (2008) concept of organising. Further, this also means that in a composition of set of relations, 1) individuals verify each other as worthy others (trust and duality) and as 2) organising is a relational process of co-creators, the organising may conflict with the organisational narrative and hierarchy (power). The potential conflict emerges if - in a particular domain - specific frames cannot unfold, meaning 'a

member of an organisation employs unauthorised means, or obtains unauthorised ends, or both, thus getting around the organisation's assumptions as to what he should do and get and hence what he should be' (Goffman, 1961: 171), and forming an 'underlife' (Goffman, 1961: 180) of modes of interacting in time and place that emerge contrary to the overall organisational narrative when these practices of all members come together. This 'underlife' is further qualified by connecting relations to the context as it categorises professional identity as *'a something that takes up a position somewhere between identification with an organisation and opposition to it, and is ready at the slightest pressure to regain its balance by shifting its involvement in either direction. It is thus against something that the self can emerge'* (Goffman, 1961: 280). Hence, the professional identity is seen a psychosocial relation, reflecting 'the values, norms, and power differentials inherent' (Adams, 2011: 118) that is made and reconstructed in social relationships within an overall social context and that lives to be told.

The remaining section identifies key aspects of microrelations at the workplace that may inform the analysis of findings.

The first aspect departs from the feasibility to identify how relations are fixed, endure pressure and navigate continuous processes of negotiations at work. The interpretative and constructivist approach to everyday practices stresses that action is born in situations and within smaller groups of individuals. Work by Hoobs and Sagae includes defining a number of formal conditions for the existence of microrelations. In short, the microrelations were suggested to emerge between 'acquaintances' and involve 'at least one interaction' between practitioners they 'remember' and where they share 'identity properties' of each other that 'allows one agent to identify another across time' and 'commitment and shared plans' in common (Hoobs and Sagae, 2011: unpagged), indicating a materiality to microrelations. Microrelations emerge as a space between two or more individuals who share some common ground or what is termed a shared image of the self (Goffman, 2004). Another research examined 'positive relationships at work' (Dutton & Ragins 2007: 12) with an analytical purpose to explore relations at individual, dyad and group based levels and at organisational level. Here, relations were defined as a *'reoccurring connection between two people that takes place within the context of work and careers and is experienced as mutually beneficial.'* (Dutton and Ragins, 2007: 9) stressing the repetitiveness of relations, as well as expanding the

shared image of the self into a beneficial relation for practitioners. Yet, while describing this key aspect of the constitution of microrelations, Dutton and Ragins do not move into how the relation is constituted and becomes valued as beneficial.

The second aspect relates to discussions on the advantages of micro approaches. Bauer et al. suggest that organisational change and its influence cannot adequately be understood from a macro perspective, but will have to zoom in on the day-to-day events (2007). Hence, Bauer et al. study how new practices at the workplace emerge as an outcome of modification of artifacts such as scripts and routines triggered in particular when the learner is '*encountering novelty*' (Bauer et al, 2007: 682). Overall, the approach directs analytical attention to individual and reflective processes, based on discrepancies between an emerging situation and the responses to that situation. However, the approach by Bauer et al. seems to place too much weight on the possibility of there being a single, objective reading of a given situation or shared objectives within any workplace situation. Further, the approach by Bauer et al seems to primarily involve referential cognitive aspects falling short of acknowledging the non-cognitive aspects of microrelations. This aspect is addressed by other research into relations, stating that the relations '*people create, are key determinants of their attachment to their organizations*' (Kahn, 2007: 204) pointing to a emotion of attachment that is generated through relations. This attachment is only to be examined by exploring the process of forming relations.

The advantage by addressing the belonging to sociomaterial practices is further substantiated by relating relations to sociomaterial practices that facilitates an examination of how '*the microdynamics that influence everyday practices can be unpicked*' (Fenwick, 2014: 45), exploring the interaction between '*diverse forces and the enactments of practice they produce together*' (Fenwick, 2014: 51). This focus stresses the interaction between individuals, groups and practices that exists without a formal center in terms of management, an official narrative or a standard of practices. In terms of learning, the sociomaterial approach to microrelations circumvents '*individualistic, acquisition-oriented notions*' (McMurtry, 2016: 169), directing learning processes towards becoming and participation. Further, the sociomaterial approach to microrelations involves cognitive as well as non-cognitive elements besides material practices that all influence how microrelations are constituted. The sociomaterial focus

on microrelations centres learning at the workplace, embedded in social practices and by a relational space emerging from dynamics between individuals, professional and social interaction as well as organisational artefacts that is recognised as meaningful for participants. In this sense, changes to the context of these practices, combining the old and the new, catalyses microrelations to emerge as a space for learning, consistent with thinking of learning as a capacity to change through restructuring of mental schemes.

The third aspect of practices of microrelations continues from the suggestion above that microrelations at work are neither centred nor decentred, as this would suggest that microrelations - at the moment of identification - are deviating from their generic condition. Yet, microrelations seem not to be totally open-ended but require temporary closure to exclude those not part of the professional discourse. This may to some extent be ritualised and involving access codes, as it was illustrated by Boud et al. mentioning an example of a coding, when an employee calls out '*who wants tea*' followed by '*lets meet in the tearoom*' (2009: 325), calling out for only those co-workers who know that the intention is to enable an informal chat about workplace responses in the light of a professional challenge. Hence, this means that microrelations are the expression of the emergence of a space, on the whole independent of the formal organisation, as they are embedded in everyday practices that are shared between relatively few practitioners. In relation to learning it also means that learning in microrelations is predominantly informal as this is basic mode of constitution of microrelations. It is only predominantly informal, as it should not be excluded that microrelations emerge from formal circumstances, indicating a very complex context for learning at the workplace.

In sum, the emerging concept of microrelations is presented as a potentially useful space that emerge from disruptions to existing sociomaterial practices, involving cognitive as well as non-cognitive practices. Microrelations seems to be constituted by the interaction of acquaintances, indicating that microrelations are enacted in social and professional practices, but also relating to material practices such as conferences, methods, technologies and material practices like office locations. Finally, microrelations appear as a temporal space that only comes into existence at particular times and places and seem to be coded in terms of access. However, the literature on microrelations is undeveloped, but opens an opportunity to further explore the key aspects of microrelations at work and in

particular how they interact with other aspects of professional life such as identity and learning.

Hence, professional identity and informal learning are the subjects of the remaining sections of this chapter.

Professional identity

The review, so far, illustrates the perceptions of the context of change, and suggesting that microrelations at the workplace become essential, as organisations turn into more and more polycentric structures, responding to new demands and requirements for competences and qualifications. In this way, microrelations seem to contribute to the generation and maintenance of the professional identity.

Individual mental processes have often been given priority in terms of explaining identity development, framing and detailing a coherent perspective of the self. However, contemporary research such as discourse analysis in general ((Doolin, 2003, Oswick et al, 2005) or situated learning by Lave & Wenger locates the identity formation inside a community of practice (1991) or relates identity to the construction of the life story narrative (Adams, 2001).

Whereas there is a general understanding that work and employment influences professional identity (Felstead et. al, 2009: 17) research also indicates that the relationship between identity and learning is mutually reinforcing, facilitated by individual mental schemes (Illeris, 2006), illustrating that you learn in relation to the social context that you engage in. Transferred to the workplace, this relationship suggests that workplace learning may be restricted by the mental schemes belonging to the professional narrative and conversely that professional identity is strengthened, as the narrative is addressed directly in processes of workplace learning. In this context, it is chosen to define an educated social worker as a professional, who embodies '*a double sense of being knowledge based and subjectively involved in their role within the division of labour*' (Salling Olesen, 2001: 290) indicating that if and how the social worker identifies with the profession, it is a considerable aspect of the professional identity. However, as the context of change deposits new norms and values in

sociomaterial practices, resulting in civil servants losing their uniqueness and forcing adjustments to the professional identity (Horton, 2006: 534), the research also points to an inherent tension in professional identity. The research underline that professional identity is a dynamic, demanding consistent re-articulation and re-positioning of the professional identity, leaving professionals to potentially navigate several different identities. The tension unfolds, as the professional identity of social workers emerges from sharing of values, knowledge, skills and experience between individuals in a group of co-working professional that are under pressure from the context of change.

In this context, the narrative life story perspective is particularly interesting, as this is a space, where people *'selectively appropriate aspects of their experience and imaginatively construe both past and future to construct stories that make sense to them and to their audiences'* and identity emerges as *'psychosocial constructions, co-authored by the person himself or herself and the cultural context within which that person's life is embedded and given meaning'* (Adams, 2011: 101) suggesting a relationship between professional identity and learning from contextual relations at the workplace.

The professional identity itself emerges, as the social worker perceives *'some degree of unity and purpose'* (Adams, 2011: 102) of professional activity as the worker situates in a workplace context that appears to be meaningful to the social worker. The professional identity is perceived and becomes factual as it establishes and is established by a professional narrative and forms a bonded community, representing the unity and formed in a balance of external and internal organisational forces.

In this sense, professional identity function as an action oriented guide for 'how do I do' (Wackerhausen, 2002: 55) and suggested to emerge partly from cognitive mental schemes and partly from practice- based scripts. Following this line of thinking, professional identity becomes attached directly to a specific professional practice of individual practitioners introducing a micro perspective but also a context of power relations into the constitution of identity.

The perspectives also underscore the importance of the context of the activities you need to perform to become a professional. For social workers in municipalities,

activities are primarily defined within a specialized and professional team that carry out a set of activities for a particular group of clients as well as professional identity as a mark of '*unquestioned expertise*' (Salling Olesen, 2001: 290). As municipal team based activities do not necessarily take place at one physical location or consists of identical tasks, the team appears to be a defined space where co-workers socialise and professionalise through sharing of norms and values that relate to the specialisation of the team and implicitly differentiating it from other teams. Hence, the professional identity is also defined as distinctive by the marker of a team based belonging that itself is situated, relational and abstract (Ashforth and Mael 1989) as well as referring to an interaction with the context (Illeris, 2014). The team marker establishes a common ground for sharing of meaning, differentiating the individual team practitioner from other professionals as well as reflecting a distance to the external team context, avoiding seeing identity as a result of individual entrepreneurship set within the team (Fenwick, 2014, McMurtry et al., 2016). Yet, as distinctions are dynamic, professional identity embodies a capacity to '*self-regulation*' (Salling Olesen, 2001: 296) that installs a professional autonomy to balance shifting relations as well as providing professional identity with a purpose of action, sense of control as well as values and self-esteem (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2005). The implication here is that the dynamics of team-based distinctions enable adjustments to professional identity related to collective practices and material circumstances and not only as a matter of cognition.

As professional identity seems to emerge from complex relations of practices, embodying cognitive as well as non-cognitive elements, professional identity also emerges from within tensions. Acknowledging that the organisation is already constituted in time and space, professional identity is also suggested to include an institutional and a practitioner dimension (Wackerhausen, 2002: 53). This double dimension introduces a potential tension into the perspectives of professional identity. On one hand, the institutional dimension enables the individual to draw upon earlier socialisation (Salling Olesen, 2001) that signifies a continuous struggle to gain recognition of its particular definition of professional. On the other hand, the institutional dimension is coexisting with the practitioners' definition of professionalism, as everyday practices are experiences that may differ from the institutional definition of what the professional is. This potential conflict or tension becomes a constant of work life and may turn the institutional dimension into wishful

thinking if the difference between the institutional and practitioner dimensions becomes too explicit (Wackerhausen, 2002: 54). In relation to the context of change, this difference may ignite powerful social dynamics in terms of adjustments to professional identity (Gover and Duxbury 2012: 66, Nag, Gorley and Gioia 2007: 829, Ashton 2004: 50, Warhurst 2013: 521) that eventually may be quite counterproductive to the intentions of the processes of change itself. In other words, if the context of change is considered as implausible, not meaningful and hence constraining the professional identity to answer '*who we are*' (Weick and Sutcliffe 2005: 416, Maitlis and Sonensheim 2010: 563), parts of the wider professional community may not accept the context of changes, whereas others do.

Then the unity of the professional identity is also an outcome of a power relation as professionals challenged by new structures *seek 'to recuperate its boundaries'* (Heldal, 2015: 188) that constitutes a '*boundary war triggered by an imposed change programme*' where professionals are '*struggling to retain their professional boundaries when challenged by managers to remove them. It is a fight for diversity and sovereignty over one's own domain, which may continue even after a phase of stabilization*' (Heldal, 2015: 189), which means that professional identity is a generic part of any context of change. Yet, it also means that professional autonomy is an '*ongoing mechanisms used by social work professionals to develop the knowledge and strategies that enable them to remain as committed professionals*' (Carson et al., 2011: 272-273) that on one hand enables social workers to distinguish professional identity from the official imagery and on the other a selective adaptation to the context of change.

In sum, professional identity is social construct that is embedded and enacted in relations of power. Connecting with a context of change and learning at the workplace, professional identity emerges as subject and object of the activities and exactly because it is subject and object of the context of change and learning, they themselves become meaningful. Yet, as the professional is a construct of knowledge and subjectivity, the cohesion of the professional identity is consistently being threatened, as changes are ongoing impacting on the divide between the institutional and practical understanding of professional identity. In other words, a reflexive facilitator for professionals is needed to serve continuous (re)construction of professional identity by enhancing the

capacity to change, involving social interaction and material practices of the organisation.

Informal learning could be this facilitator, which makes it the subject of the remaining part of this review.

Informal learning

Informal learning comes into attention as an important aspect of workplace learning, as research suggests that a majority of learning at the workplace is informal (Boud and Hager, 2012, Marsick, 2006) in line with the thinking that '*informal interactions with peers are a major mechanism of work-relevant learning*' (Carson et al., 2011: 272) when focusing on social workers in particular. The section considers conceptual characteristics of informal learning and examines three studies into the factors that influence informal learning to provide a framework for the analysis of the relationship between microrelations at work and professional identity.

Historically, informal learning as a theoretical perspective emerges from the first modern writings on learning (Dewey, 1936) and in a more practical context in the publications of UNESCO (1947) as a means of social inclusion, tying informal learning to pedagogical practices, recognition, validation and accreditation. However, over the last two decades, informal learning has emerged as a subject of workplace research, linking learning to the workplace and increasingly in its own right. As is the case with the concept of learning at the workplace, informal learning is conceptually confusing and unclear. The concept ranges, among others from positing formal learning against other forms of learning, making informal learning emerge from formal learning (Bednall and Sanders, 2016), requiring informal learning to be measurable (Skule, 2004), discussing informal learning in the context of lifelong learning (Elsborg and Høyrup, 2013), work life (Bottrup, 2001), organisational learning (Elkjær), informal learning as HRD (Garrick, 2012, Horton III et al, 2000) as well as applying a plenitude of denotations to informal learning such as non-formal learning, incidental learning, implicit learning (Eraut, 2004,) just to mention some.

It is argued that informal learning shall be conceived as existing on a continuum with formal learning, sitting at one end of the continuum (Eraut, 2004, Eraut 2009), a position also supported by Sawchuk (2008) who continues to describe the model of learning by Illeris as *'a mediational theory of informal learning and work'* (2008: 8) that encourages integrated analysis. The one end of the continuum thinking involves a typology of implicit, reactive and deliberate informal learning measured in time – the past, the present and the future (Eraut, 2004: 250). One of the outcomes is to denote a range of keywords to the phenomenon of informal learning such as, *'implicit, unintended, opportunistic and unstructured learning and the absence of a teacher'* (2004: 250) pointing to an embedded, enacted and practice-based form of learning. Hence, informal learning is situated in *'participation in group activities; working alongside others; tackling challenging tasks and working with clients'* (Eraut, 2004: 266-267) reflecting a schism when describing keywords as several of the learning situations are to be associated with performing formal tasks such as *'audit', 'on-the-job-learning', 'review of policy'* (Eraut, 2004: 266) that moves informal learning towards the formal end of the continuum. The theoretical implication is that informal learning is distinct from formal learning in that individuals learn when confronted with new situations, involving extraction of potentially relevant knowledge and understanding of the new situation, practice challenge to recognise and transform relevant skills and knowledge accordingly (Eraut, 2004a: 114). The keyword here is the frequent reference to the 'new', as if learning is triggered outside the subject, associating learning with, for example a transfer of knowledge and further suggesting that learning is locked in an episodic form of exchange of knowledge, experience and new practices as a kind of a zero-sum game between an instructor and a learner. Finally, it also reflects a position that does not seem compatible to the situation of emerging complexities, described earlier that involves a constant and (re)articulation of practices to match the situation that is being experienced.

As the focus of learning shifts to the informal and becomes situated in professional relations, the way the individual relates to the construction of knowledge, experience and practices becomes essential. Central to this process is individual engagement and construction of knowledge and is fundamentally about how the subjective dispositions of individuals *'shape and direct their thinking and acting, including how they construed and construct what they experience (i.e. what they learn)'* (Billett, 2010: 2). In this line

of thinking subjectivity *'is about conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions and ways of understanding relations with world'* (Billett, 2012: 13) that is shaped by the dispositions of the individual. In particular, *'resisting, out-manoeuving and negotiating with strong social suggestions and locating a role, and sense of self that is consistent with individuals' emerging subjectivities'* (Billett, 2012: 13) points to a continuous formation of professional identity, facilitated by learning that is necessarily informal in character as it is not directed or managed a priori.

The consequence is that as professionals involve in many activities, processes and situations, the dispositions also differ at the individual level, as factors triggering the disposition are diverse. A result of informal learning as situated and incidental based on subjective dispositions, involves a blend of *'different constructs, such as intellectual curiosity, self-directedness and self-efficacy'* (Manauti et al., 2015: 5) that suggests and supports actions. The implications of this are twofold. First, informal learning is potentially powerful as it is situated in practices, at hand and applicable if, when and how challenges so require. In situations of emerging complexities it also signals the potential of informal learning. Secondly, the diversity means that informal learning will be in a position to attach a wide range of competences, skills, experiences and knowledge to the individual social worker. However, to enable a professional identity to be shared by groups of social workers, some mechanism needs to be in place to reduce, simplify and control a main core of professional identity that the social worker may embody and enact.

In this way, informal learning is and becomes dynamic in terms of the constitution of relations between professionals and other stakeholders as well as the learning itself is framed by the culture, inscribed in relations at the workplace. Actions originate from within the relations in order to provide *'security in work performance as the individual professional practitioner can substantiate and legitimise his action on this background'* (Wahlgren and Aarkrog, 2012: 55) and therefore appear as legitimate to workers and stakeholders. This indicates a purposeful approach to informal learning that contrast other research that states that knowledge is accessed *'through participation in social activities, and much is often so 'taken for granted' that people are unaware of its influence on their behaviour'* (Eraut, 2004: 263), implicitly assuming that informal learning is *'not highly conscious'* (Manauti et al., 2015: 6). This position constitutes the

learner as an unknowing recipient of processes of learning, signalling a potential weakness in the understanding of what informal learning is. Further, the dynamic also means that what is being learned through informal learning may not be in the long-term interest of the learner.

Having presented how informal learning appears as incidental and through expressions of subjective dispositions, the remaining section is devoted to research practices when informal learning emerges. However, as social work is not well researched in terms of informal learning it is necessary to address research that deals with other professions.

One study researched how organisational and task factors influence informal learning, concluding that there is a correlation between new tasks and situations and the effectiveness of informal learning and that trust and openness is more relevant for the effectiveness of informal learning than an innovative culture.

The study is interesting as it consistently points to a positive influence of informal learning on task and organisational effectiveness, as well as pointing to some arenas of informal learning such as interaction with peers, learning by doing, engaging with non-cognitive factors. However, the study does not venture deeper into how informal learning emerges at these arenas, leaving this issue unresolved.

Another study, ranking the types of informal learning activities of knowledge workers in technology, management and organisational development as well as training and e-learning and the findings support the conclusion that informal learning is more frequent than formal learning. Informal learning activities are ranked as 'reflect, face to face talk, email, trial and error, web search, read journal, observe and electronic mailing list' (Berg and Chyung, 2008: 234) in that order. Finally, the study ranks factors that effect informal learning as 'interest in current field, computer access, personality, professional capability, relationship with colleagues, job satisfaction, job itself, work environment, physical proximity and monetary rewards' (Berg and Chyung, 2008: 237), although the study does not explore how the engagement effect individual capacity in general or the specific factors in particular.

The study is relevant as it identifies a range of aspects that seem to have some influence on professional capacity, but it does not examine in more detail how the social interaction actually takes place, leaving learning to be understood as a mark of individual activity.

The final study to be referred to here is research into how newly educated doctors perceive, they learn from nurses. In this study, Burford et al (2013) identify informal learning in two parallel hierarchies. The first hierarchy is a normative structural hierarchy dominated by doctors' learning, whereas second hierarchy is pragmatic and grounded on nurses' expertise and occurring most frequently during ad hoc encounters in the staff room. The study by Burford et al. is interesting as it suggests that despite the hierarchies the role and identity of nurses and doctors are mutable as relations are dynamic and nurses seen as gatekeepers of learning opportunities (Burford et al, 2013: 399). Taken together, the research suggests that informal learning is positioned in shared sociomaterial practices, but rather than being value free it is inscribed in professional traditions, positions and informal hierarchies.

This section provides additional information to a working definition of workplace learning, placing informal learning as the single most aspect of learning at the workplace and further identifies informal learning as incidental and situational, triggered by subjective dispositions, balancing diversity and the need to support a coherent professional identity. In the process, theoretical inconsistencies and unresolved issues are identified with respect to how the worker consciously uses informal learning and where informal learning emerges as well as what triggers the process of informal learning.

Conclusion

The last section of the review sums up how the intentions for the research have been informed, what gaps have been identified as well as how specific research questions were identified.

The review examined literature on changes to the rationale of the Danish welfare state, shifting towards what is termed the competition state and identified emerging

complexities and polycentric forms of organisation as key aspects that may impact on competences and skills. The review also examined literature on learning at the workplace, identifying a need to develop a working definition of workplace learning based on an understanding of learning as a lasting capacity to change. Further, four analytical categories are identified. They are:

- Perceptions of change – meeting the new requirements
- Microrelations and learning
- Professional identity
- Informal learning

The first category examined literature that illustrated how perceptions of change are based on a duality of continuity and stability, grounding a dominant paradigm of perceptions that itself is based on a naturalistic ontology. However, the review also illustrated, how the constructivist and interpretivist concept of sociomateriality that focused on organising alternatives and the emergence of stabilisers (Czarniawska, 2008), seems to be more adequate to reflect the context of change.

Earlier research in workplace learning is consistently pointing to the need to examine relationships and encounters at the workplace as a relatively unexplored issue in terms of understanding informal learning. Hence, the review identifies microrelations at the workplace as a generative space for mutually beneficial interaction structuring and being structured by professional knowledge, experience and practices and involving non-cognitive elements that stress the psychology of attachment to the organisation. This seems to emerge from practices, coded and involving an exclusive element that establishes ‘the other’ of the relations.

The third analytical category concerned professional identity, as microrelations seems to be generative of professional knowledge and experience. Professional identity is seen as a dynamic social construct and encompassing a double sense (Salling-Olesen, 2001) of knowledge and subjectivity related to practices and the division of labour. The professional identity appears to attach professional autonomy and distinctiveness to the individual in a self-regulating manner. The self-regulating professional identity enables

processes of continuous adjustment as well as potentially differentiating the professional identity from the official narrative of the organisation.

The final analytical category was informal learning that further informed the working definition of workplace learning that will be described later in the conclusion. The review situated informal learning as the most essential element of workplace learning as well as expanding the processes of learning into being situated, unstructured and incidental. Hence, informal learning is outside the controls of the official organisational imagery, as subjective dispositions in a practice related environment seems to determine the learning opportunities. The section concluded by referring to a series of research into factors that influence informal learning at the workplace, including pointing to informal learning as inscribed in relations of power.

The experience of conducting a literature review could be divided in two. As a novice to a literature review, the process was exhilarating as well as exhausting and at times moments of a sense of overview and potential command of concepts, themes and perspectives were reduced when introducing new literature, based on different ontological and epistemological positions. An exorbitant amount of potential literature on change, identity and learning that departs from different ontologies and epistemological points of departure to discuss the same research issues and testing the resolve to prioritise literature as well as maintaining an overview of directions and pointers for research. Adding to this temporary sense of confusion was the fact that a wide range of research does not define main or key concepts utilised but relies on implicit definitions, assuming common understandings or simply being inconsistent with respect to use of concepts. In this sense, the review became an exploratory expedition rather than a venture into something known and already set by others.

Another main issue of the research strategy was to depart from the everyday story of social workers, meaning that the literature framework would have to be robust and allow for a comprehensive approach in terms of themes and epistemological positions to be included. However, literature on professional identity development and workplace learning of social workers is indeed very scarce, forcing the review to include articles that originate from the field of nursing or university college educations. For example,

only a handful of articles dating from 2010 to 2016¹ on social worker workplace learning were found – less than 1% of the published articles. Most academic work seems preoccupied with service and diagnostic activity experiences as well as social work education and the research literature shows a disproportionate relation between importance and role of social workers and little interest in their professional development. By recording and analysing the narratives of everyday practices of social workers, it is intended to contribute to filling a gap in contemporary research, where informal learning of social workers is '*not well documented*' (Carson et al., 2011: 272) and at the same time expand on existing theoretical concepts.

The study adds further development to three theoretical concepts:

Pulling the findings of the literature review together with respect to linking the main concepts of the research a strong relationship emerges. Professional identity emerges as a negotiated construct as it unfolds in social interaction and recent research underline the dependency between professional identity and the social context (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Reissner, 2010), suggesting that the context of change and professional identity of social workers is connected. Similarly, other contemporary research has underlined the connection between learning and identity (Illeris, 2014, Salling-Olesen, 2001) supporting this linkage.

However, connecting the three concepts – context of change, professional identity and learning at the workplace – is still relatively unexplored, presumably because concepts primarily seems to be repetitively, recording again and again the fundamental characteristics of say, informal learning, as '*a single object*' (Fenwick, 2010: 80) and yet without discussing how informal learning becomes learning. The findings of this review open to breaking this enclosure by employing concepts like the sociomaterial and microrelations as they seem to form enablers and spaces for social workers to adapt and adjust to the impact of the context of change. The analytical chapters will move further into the substance of this interconnection between concepts.

¹ Checked all editions of 'Social Work' (US), 'Journal of Comparative Social Work' (N), 'British Journal of Social Work' (UK), 'European Journal of Social Work' (EU) and 'Journal of Social Work Practice' (UK) from 2010 to 2016.

The review clarified that the existing perception of change to organisations does not align with the emerging complexities and polycentric organisation that seem to be the consequence of contemporary development. To move beyond this limitation to existing research, the study seeks to expand the understanding of the perception of the context of change. Here it is seen as a constant alternative organising of practices that involve the concept of sociomateriality and embodying cognitive as well as non-cognitive aspects apart from practices, establishing '*the other*' through professional autonomy.

Further, the review noted a lack in current research regarding detailed studies of how everyday practices are unfolding and how relationships between co-workers emerge in order to fulfil which role at the workplace. Microrelations are seen as an emerging concept able to expand understanding of workplace dynamics, and the study seeks to contribute to this by identifying if and how microrelations may emerge as a space for informal learning and constructing the professional identity of social workers. Among other things, this involves pinpointing the aspects that facilitate the emergence of microrelations as well as the typical relations that social workers involve with and how the microrelations enable an access to the realm of informal learning.

Finally, the review illustrated how workplace learning is a generic term for a kind of learning that in practice holds significant informal aspects. The learning of informal learning is defined in a working definition and the study seeks to further document and illustrate the practices where informal learning emerges and how it does connect to the concept of professional identity. This involves identifying a range of practices where informal learning occurs as well as examining, how informal learning interacts with microrelations to impact on professional identity.

The next chapter presents the methodological strategy for collection of data, analysis of findings as well as briefly introducing summarised data on participants.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to identify, roll out and justify the choice of methodological approach that has been applied to the study. The objective of the study is to learn how relations between the context of change, professional identity and workplace learning unfold among social workers in the public sector of Denmark.

The chapter presents the choice of research strategy, method and processes undertaken as part of the data collection, processing and analysis of data as well as the ethical issues that relate to the data collection process.

Research strategy - a qualitative research design

The research approach consisted of two elements: a research strategy and a research design that is presented below.

With regard to the research strategy, it was decided to engage a qualitative approach as it was considered more appropriate to focus on the inductive and generative aspects of theory development than testing existing theory of workplace learning. Further, the choice of an inductive approach carried with it epistemological and ontological assumptions that had implications for the design of the research and the analysis by facilitating a focus on how social workers constantly construct and interpret their identity in narratives of professional life

The ontological assumption behind constructivism challenges the positivist position that social actors are external to the reality (Bryman, 2008: 19) of organisations, as activities and cultures are given a priori. In this context, the positivist position is associated with much of the traditional theory of organisational change as seen in the literature review (Chapter 2). Disrupting the a priori assumption of the municipal organisation and social worker culture and engaging relativism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 32), constructivism

implies that the organisational context of and the professional identity is continuously changing and being constructed by social workers involved.

Assuming that the organisational world is an outcome of production in and through social interaction, the research strategy is challenged to develop an epistemological understanding of the social interaction that corresponds to the ontological constructivism. The epistemological approach is supposed to gain access to the values, thinking and actions of individuals to interpret the impact of the context of change on professional identity and learning from the perspective of the social worker. The answer to this challenge was to adopt an interpretivist position that sees the *'people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings, as the primary data source'* (Mason, 2002: 56), and in this context the voices of social workers as this source. A further implication was that interviews are read and interpreted in terms of what it may mean and how it relates to phenomena outside the interview situation.

The research design was organised around 'the exemplifying case' to capture everyday life circumstances and *'epitomize a broader category of cases'* (Bryman, 2008: 57) of social workers, employed in Danish municipalities. The unit of analysis for the case was made up of the sample of narratives of individual social workers, pointing to the sample of narratives as *'the focus of interest in its own rights'* (Bryman, 2008: 53) and not the municipality or the actual changes.

The epistemological basis of the empirical data collection was the semistructured interview, providing a face-to-face opportunity of dialogue between researcher and interviewee. To gain insight into social worker values, attitudes and perceptions this opportunity was considered essential for two reasons. Firstly, it was presumed that the interviewee would not refer to a uniform language, reflecting the context of change, professional identity and learning at the workplace. Secondly, the semi-structured interview would reflect contextual and relational aspects, as and when the interviewee regarded it as essential. Hence, the semi-structured interview would allow for agility and flexibility in the data collection.

Further underscoring an interpretivist practice, it was decided to rely solely on the voice of the social workers to generate rich data through a close focus on *'everyday realities'*

as a '*stock of meaning-making possibilities, resources, and constraints to which members orient*' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000: 97), and to bracket other social contextual elements from the data collection and hence the analysis. The bracketing meant that the data collection was not extended to involve, for example, local government documents, interviews with department managers and/or team leaders etc. to corroborate and qualify the narratives and/or extend the explanation of the narratives. Departing from the voices of the social workers in their own rights, the interpretivist practice was grounded in an experience centred method that examined the attitudes and interactional relations that workers use to describe their experiences and what they consider as real.

Hence, the advantage of using a qualitative research strategy stands out to better capture '*the object of study in some form of social process or meaning or experience which needs to be understood and explained in a rounded way*' (Mason, 2002: 134) and in particular using narratives to access and expand individual memories and interpretations of social events and relations.

The research strategy and design had a number of practical implications that is described below.

Data collection method

To elicit the knowledge and lived professional experiences and narratives of social workers, a semi-structured interview design was considered the best opportunity (Mason, 2002, Fontana and Frey, 2008, Bryman, 2008).

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews is '*to collect descriptions of the life worlds of the interviewee with respect to interpret the meaning of described phenomena*' (Kvale, 1997: 19) and takes place within a two-way communication and a relatively open framework. The advantage of the semi-structured interview is among others that it allows the interview a certain degree of freedom to pursue special issues while at the same time maintaining a relatively systematic and identical approach to each interview (Kvale, 1997). Keeping in mind the particular characteristics of informal learning as incidental and unstructured (Eraut, 2004, Illeris 2006), semistructured interviews seem proficient to gain access to the experiences of the interviewee as

observation and/or embedding in the departments for some time was not an option due to practical reasons.

The structure of the interview is pre-defined with respect to objective and purpose and the interviewees made aware of both objective and purpose beforehand. An interview guide serve a double function as interview framework and checklist and help to ensure that respondents shared information on the same type of issues. The guide is listed as Annex A. The development of the guide was informed by the literature review findings as well as a review by two peers with solid knowledge of social workers in public employment.

All but three interviewees choose to be interviewed at the workplace. The remaining three interviewees are interviewed at own apartments for reasons of convenience.

Sample and analysis

From the outset, a choice is made to focus on social workers in municipalities. Due to the nature of their work assignments the group of social worker are one of the professional groups most affected by the context of change to the public sector, legislation, etc.

In Denmark, a social worker qualifies as a bachelor in social work at University Colleges and universities, and designates an individual who solves and prevents social challenges for individuals, advancing social change and enhancing wellbeing (DS, 2005) in a professional and social context. Primarily, the social worker deals with counselling and advisory services, targeting individuals belonging to vulnerable groups such as unemployed, handicapped, refugees and migrants, substance misusers, crime and homelessness. According to The Danish Association of Social Workers, a majority of social workers are employed at the local government level (DS 2016). Table 3.1 provides an overview of the occupational placement.

Table 3.1: Share of social workers in place of employment 2016.

Place of employment	Social workers
Municipalities and local government projects	67%
Counties and projects	17%
State and state contracted institutions	7%
Private and others	9% ²
No. of social workers 2016	17.000

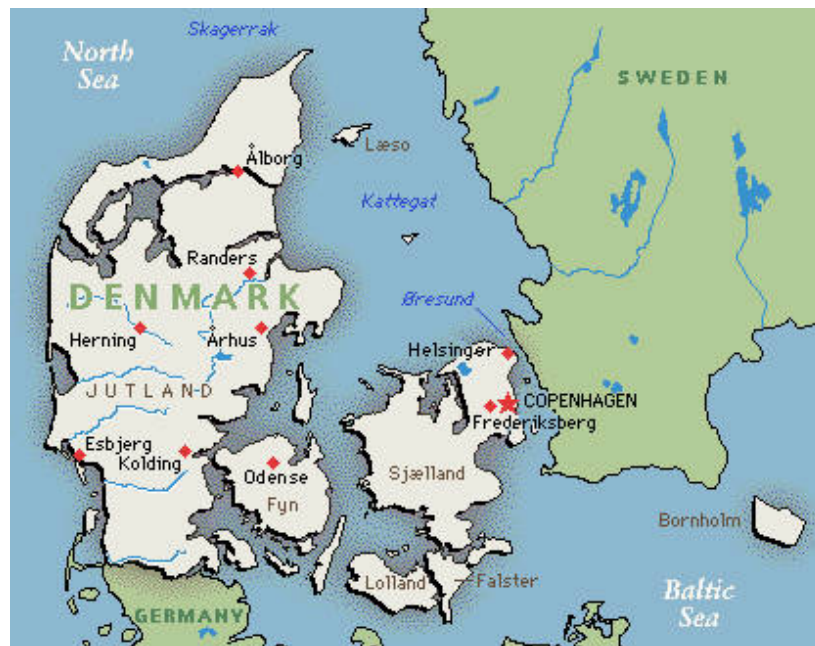
Interviewees were recruited combining ‘*theoretical sampling*’ (Mason, 2002: 124) with ‘*snow-balling*’ (Bryman, 2008: 184-185), targeting social workers employed in local government. The call for participation is advertised on social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn, being used monthly by approximately 3.5 million Danes (Social.medier.dk, 2016). Further, the National Association of Social Workers kindly agree to share the call to participate to 360 members of a network working with integration issues.

Finally, the call to participate was shared in 4 municipalities by employees reaching out to 5 to 75 social workers respectively. Those sharing are part of the network of this researcher.

Inviting interviewees using ‘open sources’ result in respondents from 8 different municipalities and 23 social workers initially consent to be interviewed. The municipalities are located in Jutland (3), Fyn (1) and Sjælland (4), shown in Figure 3.1.

² The figure includes 2,5% unemployed. Socialrådgiveren 02.16.
<http://Repeal.socialraadgiverne.dk/Files/Filer/10-Publikationer/Blad/2016-02-Socialraadgiveren.pdf>

Figure 3.1: Map of Denmark



Eventually, 20 interviews were conducted. The interviewees volunteered and the method of self-selecting recruitment involves a risk of promoting bias within the sample (Kvale, 1997), as it may be expected here that the sample represented a segment of the total population of social workers that is particularly active or critical in terms of willingness to share individual experience. However, *‘The quality of knowledge .. as well of the ethical assessment of the interview rests on the interpretation of the purpose and content of the interview’* (Kvale, 1997: 156) as the participation risk cannot be eliminated fully. Hence, a process of validation was included in the data processing.

During the empirical data collection process the 20 interviewees were asked to submit information on age, seniority, prior vocation, team size and occupational record. The professional details of individual data are documented below in a brief presentation to set the scene for the analysis in chapters 4-6 and an overview of interviewees is listed as Annex B.

The overwhelming majority of interviewees was female (90%), indicating a small overrepresentation of female respondents when compared to the national sex

composition of social workers that stands at female workers 82,2% and 17,8% male workers respectively (Folkeskolen.dk, 2011).

Further, the group of participants represented a spread in terms of age, seniority and seniority in municipality at the time of interview. The age distribution is presented in table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Participant age distribution:

Interviewee age distribution	
Age group (years)	Number
20 - 29	1
30 - 39	5
40 - 49	8
50 - 59	5
60 -	1

The majority of interviewees were in their late thirties and beginning fifties, reflecting high seniority and prior education.

Age wise, the interviewees turned out to be relatively comparable to national statistics. A comparison of the distribution is shown in table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Comparison of age distribution of participants and survey of public sector social workers.

Percentage wise comparison of age distribution between interviewees (2015) and survey of public sector social workers (2007)		
Age group (years)	Participants	Public sector survey
20 - 29	5%	12%
30 - 39	25%	27%
40 - 49	40%	27%
50 - 59	25%	30%
60 -	5%	5%

The age group distribution corresponds closely to a survey of the age distribution of social workers in public employment (Ubalancer, 2007) based on Statistics Denmark data.

Prior to being educated as a social worker, 45% of the interviewees held a different vocational education. Two interviewees provided no information on the question of possible prior vocation. Industrial injuries were the primary reason given by four of the nine participants with a prior vocation, as the cause to shift occupation. Two interviewees held a vocation as a waiter, three as nursery teachers and four as social and health care workers. The average age for commencement of social worker employment for the group with prior vocation was 34 years, whereas the age of those without a prior vocation before graduating as a social worker averaged 26,5.

Inspiration from network and/or family is a decisive factor for the choice of education for four of the social workers. Another three mentioned a choice between training as a nursery teacher or as a social worker as decisive, and 12 interviewees shared that they entered the education in order to generate change at the social level.

Looking at the years since graduation and seniority in terms of number of years within the municipality, the distribution is presented in table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Number of years since graduation and seniority in municipality:

Number of years since graduation and seniority in municipality		
Years	Workers since graduation	Workers with seniority in current municipality
0 - 4	3	7
5 – 9	5	8
10 - 14	4	3
15 - 19	3	1
20 - 24	1	
25 - 29	3	1
30 -	1	

Out of the sample, 13 participants were employed in the same municipality for five years or more with the most senior working employed by the same municipality for 27 years. Data illustrates a high degree of employment stability with only three interviewees shifting employment from one municipality to another within the last year and 85% of interviewees only been employed in the public sector.

In general, interviewees work within areas of ‘families’, ‘integration of refugees’, ‘youth’, ‘addiction’, ‘children’ and ‘employment’, and job titles illustrate how the interviewees relate to different groups of clients, but also different legal regulations and different organisational set-ups.

The social workers interviewed are all members of a team organised in a formal hierarchy, but – for a majority of participants – without a team leader or a manager directly involved in daily practices. Table 3.5 highlights the average team size:

Table 3.5: Distribution of interviewees in teams

Teams size	Number of teams
Up to 5 members	7
6-10 members	10
10-15 members	3

Details are found in Annex B. The team size distribution illustrates a specialisation of operations that is quite detailed, involving fundamentally different job assignments. This is mentioned by some interviewees (A19, A16) as tabling a higher need for inter-team collaboration and relations as well as a solid management strategy for knowledge sharing to protect the team from the effect of substitutions in cases of retirement, maternity leave, job shifts, etc. The impact of this organising is discussed in the analytical chapters.

Interview process

The conduct of the interviewing process was considered carefully as it was considered essential to build a relation with interviewees that would encourage, sharing and building of trust and do no harm.

Hence, the interviewee process was organised into three different stages.

The first stage consisted of the initial contact after responding to the call for contributions, where the potential interviewee was sent a Participant Information Sheet (Annex C) by email further introducing and explaining details of research project, professional narratives and expectations of the researcher, signalling an open process that could be influenced by the interviewee. The interviewees were advised on freedom of speech of public sector employees, referring to an instruction by the Ministry of Justice (Justitsministeriet, 2006). None of the interviewees considered that it was necessary to take permission to participate and only 6 interviewees informed management about their participation. The email also contained a Letter of Consent that was to be signed and returned to the researcher and besides settling form, date and time for interview during this stage, questions about the study were answered. The Letter of

Consent is listed as Annex D.

The next stage consisted of the actual interview that started with the researcher giving a brief introduction to the purpose of the research as well as a break down of the intended course of interview. The interviewee was asked to re-confirm her acceptance of the recording of the interview using a Samsung Smartphone MP3 recorder, as well as interviewees were ensured anonymity and the right to withdraw from all phases of the research project. The researcher also answered questions about (for example) his professional career, knowledge of municipalities and experience of working with social workers. The interview began by the researcher prompting the interviewee to share why she had chosen to educate as a social worker. Interviews lasted 1-2 hours.

To rely on social worker narratives demanded that a safe and trustworthy interview context was established which was accomplished by a conscious and comprehensive interviewing plan. The plan was based on an extensive sharing of information and dialogue between interviewee and researcher about the purpose, set up and follow-up on the interview, fundamentally letting the interviewee decide time and place of the interview as well as inviting the interviewee into the process of transcribing and editing the interview transcript as part of an emancipatory and participatory strategy. Further, it was decided to use everyday language mixed with professional concepts and references to ground the interview dialogue to minimise the requirement for explanations to be as few as possible and also balancing the power relation between the researcher and the interviewee. In practice, questions were kept simple – consisting mainly of one sentence and being open, beginning with a ‘how’ – and interviewees prompted to recall and share experiences relating to specific workplace situations and circumstances. Another effect was that the interview was conducted – although within a framework - without any form of rigid and structure progression, but as free-flowing reflections on behalf of the interviewee. This also meant that narratives emerged without being a chronological account, where the narrative was constructed around a sequence of clauses that together carried the story from A to B and its conclusion in C. Rather, from the individual interviews multiple narratives emerged, challenging the researcher to understand where one narrative started and ended as well as what constituted the boundaries between narratives. In sum, these initiatives meant that the interview turned into a site of production, grounding and expanding the narrative without interruptions or having to

limit answers to statements rather than transmitting knowledge. Hence, the interviewee was prompted to be epistemologically active and unfolding an interpretive capacity whereas the role of the researcher was limited to facilitate the narrative production through prompting and indicating questions.

From transcription to narrative

The overall outcome of this form of interviewing was an abundance of information and narratives that emerged as challenging during the process of transcription and preparatory analysis. From the data multiple narratives emerged within the individual interview and developed in many different directions or had different threads potentially connecting with other narratives. Basically, the transcription turned out to be '*not a trivial, mechanical task*' (Elliot, 2005: 51), but a living example that transcription can be done in different ways and that choices had to be made from the outset of the transcription.

The transcription was organised to enable the interviewee to continue constructing the individual professional narrative, beyond the time and space of the interview itself. Hence, the interview would yield two outcomes in the form of processed material for analytical interpretation and a narrative that was handed over to the interviewee. To accomplish this latter emancipatory and participatory objective, two choices were made respect to the transcription. First of all, it was decided to make a '*clean transcript*' (Elliott, 2005: 52) omitting repetition, false starts and utterances, to enable a focus on what was said and subsequently facilitating an analysis and reporting of findings that departed from a sample of references. This clean transcription was intended to make the transcription of the narrative more readable, reaching out to the empowerment of the interviewee that was part of the interviewing plan.

Secondly, it was decided to edit the transcript into a unified auto-professional narrative, presenting, '*experiences into meaningful episodes*' (Moen, 2006: 62) to frame the reflections and mirroring the professional identity for two reasons. A transcript can never become a pure reflection of the interview that generically captures all meaning present at the interviewing situation. Rather, transcription constitutes a processing of text that inhibits the space between the oral and the literate. Hence, the transcript is not

a re-representation of the talk, but '*a re-telling that constructs a new world*' (Kvale, 1996: 209) and where '*transcription may turn out differently*' (Kvale, 1996: 164) if done by different persons. This means that the editing process should be seen as part of the transcription process, an advanced re-telling process. Further, the research design explored new avenues of the classic sociological question of how humans relate and how situating the research in a context of everyday practices restricts the relations. This was done to allow for a study of how the social worker '*holds himself off from fully embracing all the self-implications of his affiliation, allowing some of this disaffection to be seen, even while fulfilling his major obligations*' (Goffman, 1961: 161) engaging with an approach that acknowledged diversity and difference of respondent positions. Editing the transcript meant it was possible to engage and continue the dialogue with respondents beyond the interview and eventually involve respondent in processing the data material for analysis, but in an individual manner to suit particular perspectives of individual respondents.

However, this engagement provided an alternative to tackle the rigour of standards of research designs, meaning as the conventional approach using a naturalistic framework explores '*the truth value of the inquiry or evaluation (internal validity), its applicability (external validity or generalizability), its consistency (reliability or replicability), and its neutrality (objectivity)*' (Lincoln & Guba, 2007:16). The point is here that the naturalistic paradigm of evaluation ignores '*multiple value structures, social pluralism, conflict rather than consensus, accountability demands, and the like*' (Lincoln & Guba, 2007:16), and to account for an alternative approach, '*fairness*' is suggested to be the most important as a criteria of research quality management in value bound and value plural research contexts. Using '*fairness*' as a validation criteria acknowledges that '*different constructions will emerge from persons and groups with differing value systems. The task of the evaluation team is to expose and explicate these several, possibly conflicting, constructions and value structures (and of course, the evaluators themselves operate from some value framework)*' (Lincoln & Guba, 2007: 20). From this perspective, the editing enhanced the credibility and confirmability of the data collection by having interviewees '*communicatively validate*' (Mayring, 2003: 112) the narrative. This involved a process of continuous testing of interview data by encouraging respondents to comment upon the researcher's reconstruction of what he had been told during the interview. Further, the validation enabled the encoding of the

tacit knowledge of the interviewee, by making the narrative plausible, manifest and grounded in the context of work place relations.

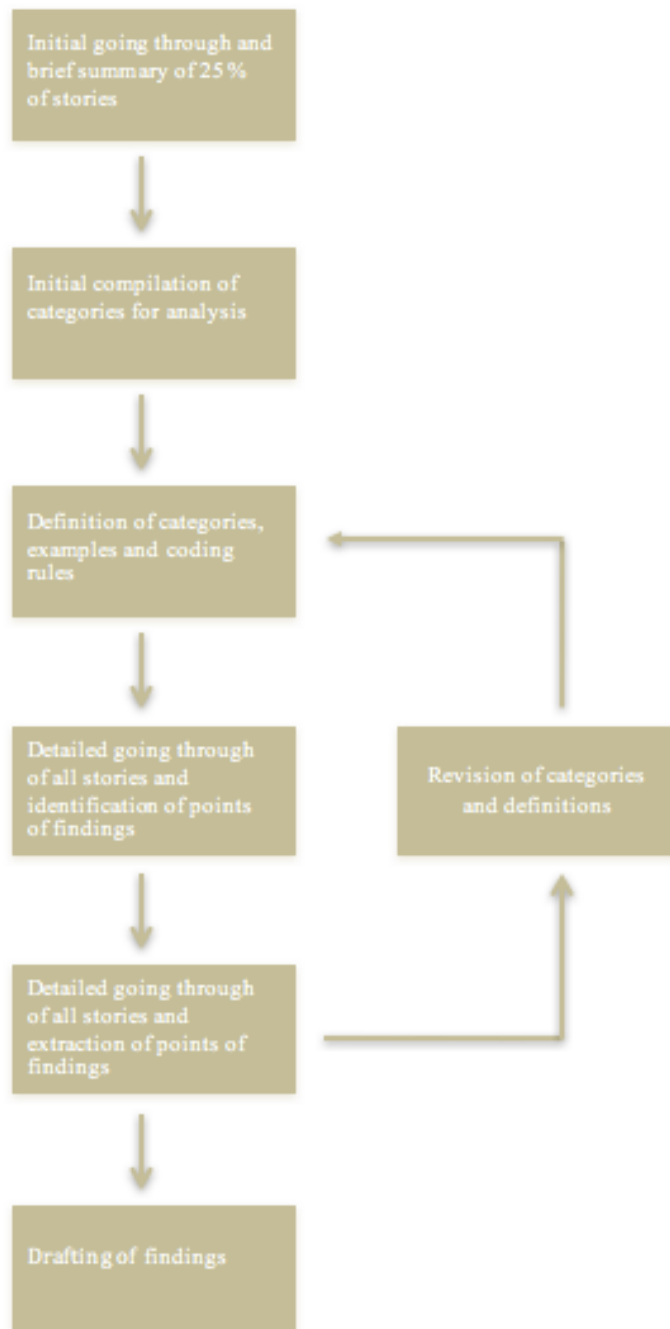
Thirdly, from the outset of the research design, it was acknowledged that not '*everyone finds it easy to express themselves*' in an interview situation, and that a '*transcription is always partial*' (Mason, 2002: 77) calling for measures that would facilitate a shift of the power balance as well as enabling a reinforcement of subtle, understated and implied understandings. Editing the narrative was intended to enhance the empowerment of the interviewee, disrupting the conventional and disproportional relation of power between interviewee and interviewer by sharing the judgement of validity of perceptions between the interviewer and the interviewee. Further, transcription entails an ethical challenge as the literal transcribed oral may stand out as incoherent and confused speech (Kvale, 1996: 167) that may offend the interviewee and disrupt the empowerment and participatory intentions. An essential research assumption was to involve the interviewees in validation of the narratives as well as enter into a forum for continuous dialogue. The shift from free-flowing transcription to a comprehensive representation of a professional narrative was intended to enable this further involvement of interviewees in the research beyond the interview itself. Therefore, it was decided to edit the transcript into readable narratives that were forwarded to interviewees for possible comments and approval. The editing remained true to substance and spirit while making sure that the final result was clear, concise and linear while the relational co-creation also allowed the interviewee to contribute by formulating, modifying, and re-formulate sections, paragraphs or words.

Hence, the edited interview narrative reflected a subjectivist and interpretivist epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 32) approach, where interviewer and interviewee cocreated the narrative and understanding of everyday practices based on the transcription. This approach was highly appreciated by interviewees, several of whom, in feedback to the researcher, noted that the edited narrative came out as a helpful reflection of their professional identity and an opportunity to further reflect on connections between the context of change, professional identity and learning at the workplace. In this sense, it is not considered that the edited and cleaned transcript had any inhibiting biasing effects on the analysis.

Data analysis

The data analysis was organised through a design of an analytical framework. Themes occurred repeatedly across stories were identified in a process that started during the transcription and continued through re-reading of the transcripts and later the narratives. In line with a content analysis methodology (Mayring, 2002), analytical categories were defined a priori to analysis, drawing inspiration from the literature review and further developed during reading and analysis of transcripts and narratives. The process of recording analytical categories is graphically shown in figure 3.2:

Figure 3.2: Content analysis process.



The analytical purpose was to filter the narratives through a structure of categories to anchor analytical pointers with references to narratives and rules to facilitate avoidance of clashes between categories.

To facilitate the reading and recording of identified points of narratives, a table was created. A sample is shown in table 3.6:

Table 3.6: Themes - Code manual sample

Theme: Impact of regulatory change				
Code	Definition	Coding rules	Examples	Storyline
Strong negative impact	Regulatory change leads to strong negative impact and demands substantial adjustments	Change impact is described negatively and furnished with adjectives		
Moderate negative impact	Regulatory change leads to moderate negative impact and possibly demands adjustments	Change impact is described negatively		
Modest negative impact	Regulatory change leads to modest negative impact and do not demand adjustments	Change impact is described briefly or not explicitly		
Strong positive impact	Regulatory change leads to full or partial positive impact in the field of action	Change impact is described positively		
High impact uncertainty	Regulatory change impact is uncertain and cannot be assessed	No clear assertions of impact of regulatory change		

The result of the preparatory process of analysis could be likened to a bird's perspective, zooming in and out, layering representations on how social workers experience the context of change at the workplace and being lively in the sense of diversity. Data processing and analysis posed a number of challenges for the researcher as it involved transforming the orally told into written text, releasing the outcome from the moment of occurrence, entering a new interpretative frame and assuming *'importance that goes beyond the initial situation and becomes relevant in other contexts'* (Moen, 2006: 62). There is no way to fully ensure that the subjective and selective narrative presented to the researcher is true, yet the design of the entire data collection and processing was intended to ensure that the desire not to be truthful would

be as little as possible. This could be done as the story was already fixed in a narrative, already interpreted and infused with meaning.

In this context, the narrative served the purpose to ensure the quality of the raw material for analysis, which was further consolidated when the narrative was exposed to '*communicative validation*' (Mayring, 2003: 112) by the interviewee to ensure agreement and consistency between interviewee and researcher. The drafting of the narrative served to validate the understanding of the researcher, reflecting an approach to the issue of authenticity (Bryman, 2008: 379-380) mentioned as a critical issue with respect to interviewing and qualitative research. Criteria such as documentation of process interpretation is argued, analytical rules are followed proximity to the everyday of the interviewee, and communicative validation was seen as a measure for good quality of data (Mayring, 2002: 144-147), working the tension between interpretation and representation (Chase, 2008: 82).

The approach to data collection is consistent with a discursive approach to analysis of narratives (Chase, 2008) and it follows that there will be no finite end to the research or the interpretation of the collected data. Data was not seen as information to explain social phenomena but rather as illustrations of the phenomena that required explanation.

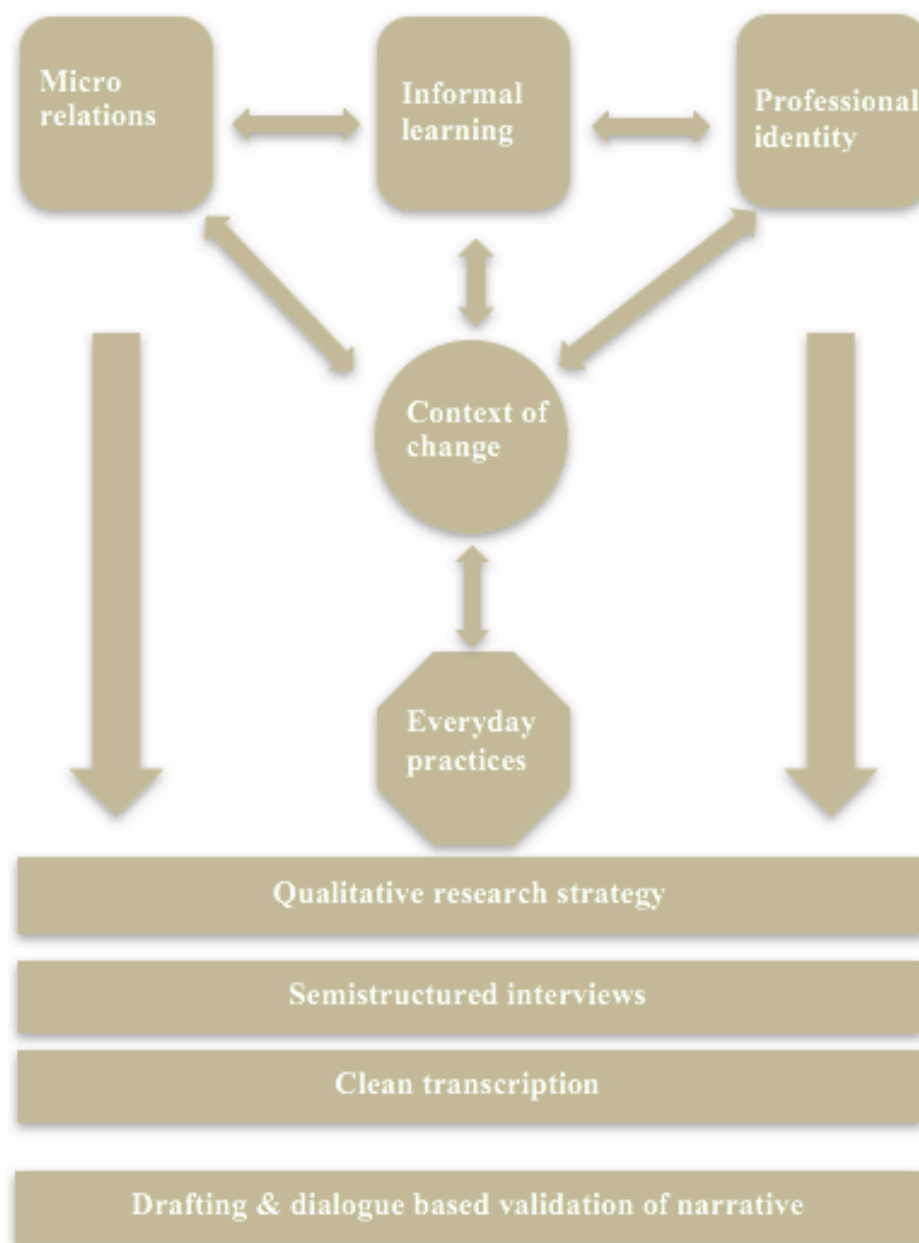
In retrospect, the approach to interview process was successful. Positive relations were built with the interviewees, a sign of which was that a majority of interviewees continued to share information and knowledge for more than the one hour allocated on their own initiative.

Relation between concepts and methodology:

The literature review discussed main research concepts and subthemes, suggesting that the social worker narrative is organised in terms of 'scenes and scripts' (Adams, 2011: 117) of themes, time and space and eventually constituting professional identity. The review has also illustrated essential pointers of this organisation as aspects like values, sociomateriality and relations.

In principle, the organising process is continuously ongoing as the social interaction and cultural context is exposed to a context of change. Capturing this potentially highly fluid process of organising practices of everyday interaction was supposed to be done best by an agile and flexible semi-structured interviewing process and hence a qualitative research approach. The linkage between the concepts of the review and the methodology is illustrated in the below figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: Linking concepts to research method



The figure reflects a continuum between identified key concepts and assumed linkage between concepts as microrelations influences professional identity through learning at the workplace. The connection is organised by a narrative, emerges from a complex and dynamic interplay with narrative subthemes such as autonomy, sociomaterial conditions and professional values or ethos respectively. The narrative subthemes also interact. Together this constitutes the conceptual framework of the professional social worker narrative.

The context of change has a potential disruptive and/or facilitating impact on the key concepts and is shown as bridging between social worker professional identity and learning with everyday practices.

The lower part of the figure reflects the choice of research focus and consequently research and analytical strategies, capturing how data of the construction-in-practice of relations, sociomaterial conditions and professional values is collected through a qualitative methodology, employing open-ended, semistructured interviews as well as a post-interview dialogue with the interviewee on the drafting of the interview narrative, re-constructed as a text, submitted and validated by the interviewee.

Reflections on research ethics

The research project presents a number of challenges and dilemmas that were addressed as part of the research design. Below follows a brief presentation of challenges and the handling of the dilemmas.

The research project related to rules and regulations at University of Leicester and in Denmark. As the study did not handle information, sensitive to a third party, the study did not have to register with The Danish Data Protection Authority (Authority 2000) and did not conflict with the Act on Processing of Personal Data, sections 7 and 8 (Authority 2000).

Following the Code of Practice (University of Leicester, 2011), the project was dedicated to bring no harm and seeking equality, information on access and handling of data was prepared and presented to all interviewees. Interviewees were ensured

anonymity in all phases of the project, all data has been made anonymous; stories coded and recordings, transcripts, stories stored in a cloud based service protected by double passwords. The code manual was stored in a different location.

The research process is part of the social context it develops within (Howarth, C. 2002: 26) and no pretence should be given that research does not interact with that context. This had implications, as interviewees did disclose internal information of organisational importance, showed discontent with the organisation and informed on co-workers and/or other interviewees, touching upon the professionalism and position of the researcher (Howarth 2002) and exposing the researcher to risks (University of Leicester 2010) possible compromising the value of the data collection.

However, care was taken to avoid and prevent any undue influence, while at the same time applying high ethical standards in all aspects of the research process. Further, this researcher did not work in any of the municipalities drawn upon in this study and did not have any prior work relationship with any of the interviewees.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the considerations of a qualitative research strategy, design and conduct of the interviewing process as well as ethical concerns that were dealt with in preparing, during and after the interviewing processes. The chapter also presented a break down of the sample of 20 social workers employed in municipalities in Denmark to provide a back ground for the analytical chapters.

The ontological and epistemological point of departure for the research project is that knowledge stocks are social and *'part and parcel of everyday life; not separate and distinct from it; they are always incomplete and open-ended, sensitive to and yet informing, the on-going practice of reality construction'* (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000: 86). Hence, using a concept of the narrative as a capacity *'to organize a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood its relations to that whole'* (Elliott, 2005: 3), such as how attitudes, ideas, values etc. become embedded in social constructions that meaningfully frame the professional identity of social workers. In this research context, the social worker narrative is not transmitted

but produced in the course of the interview, devoting attention to what workers know and treat as real.

Given the scope of the research project and the research questions, a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews in particular, gave space to an interpretivist analysis that was considered epistemologically justifiable and a relevant match with the research intentions for three main reasons.

Firstly, the specific research strategy was expected to facilitate a focus on multiple real-life situations and the qualitative method was considered adequate as it enables a penetration of multiple constructed realities. Hence, it would allow for a flexible data collection that would be adjustable to an expected criss-crossing network of narratives in which respondents would potentially display multiple identities.

Secondly, the choice to employ a dynamic research strategy would allow for a study of the full complexity of the contribution by the respondent and not be tied to any kind of canonical perception of social work, including paying equal attention to both dominant narratives and variations/alternatives and to possibly reflect this potential diversity analytically.

Thirdly, pairing the semi-structured interviewing with content analysis makes it possible to analytically reflect a multitude of values, intentions and attitudes, hereby maintaining richness of meaning of contributions. Hence, the qualitative research choice facilitates a move of analysis and findings to a wider context without losing sight of the individual contribution.

In sum, the research strategy and design has been summarised in the below table 3.7.

Table 3.7: Overview of research strategy and design.

Overview of research strategy and design		
Strategy	Design	Implications
Qualitative and inductive	Case study	Access to perceptions and behaviour – difficult to draw conclusion on causes.
Constructive ontology	Analytical bracketing of anything but the experienced reality	Real produced in relations – the narrative reflects what the worker experiences as real.
Interpretivist epistemology	Semi-structured interviewing	Producing rather than transferring knowledge. Knowledge production is subjectivist and not linear. Any transcription disrupts the generic interview narrative.
Content analysis	Cleaning and editing transcripts to facilitate empowering and participatory elements	Enhancement of credibility and communicatively validated data collection.

Throughout the entire process of involving social workers care was taken to maintain a high level of communication and information sharing about the process and upcoming steps. Ethical issues were identified and appropriate steps taken in accordance with University of Leicester guidelines. Challenges were solved in collaboration with interviewees, several of which gave positive feedback on the process and the professional life story material.

The next chapters build on the outline of the research strategy and analytical design, examining the key findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Perceptions of change – meeting the new requirements

Introduction

This chapter presents findings and analysis of the data capturing perceptions of social workers with respect to change processes that relate to the first research question of this research project. The first research sub-question was to explore:

- How do social workers perceive the context of contemporary public sector change in Denmark, in terms of, how it affects their professional identity?

This question explores those sociomaterial perspectives that enable the social worker to generate a perception of the change processes.

The literature review identified that the context of change is characterised by a shift to a competition state (Pedersen, 2011) posing new demands for employee skills and competences. Following this line of thinking, the review opened up to some limitations of the existing understanding of how you learn in the context of change (Fenwick, 2013), prompting the need to develop a dynamic and complex understanding of the context of change. Further, the literature review identified studies that have argued for the advantage of taking a particular approach to perceptions of change, grounded in understanding change as a meaningful (Weick, 1999) and a continuous process (Czarniawska, 2008) within a sociomaterial context (Fenwick et al, 2014, McMurtry et al. 2016) to better grasp how professionals perceive and navigate a context of changes.

The chapter explores these findings further, illustrating through social worker narratives how the context of change is perceived and its perceived demands met.

Research findings

The chapter presents findings thematically as they emerged through the content analysis of narratives, exploring perceptions and experiences of social workers with regard to the context of change.

Setting out with a brief presentation of the local government system in Denmark, this theme frames the analysis of perceptions of change by social workers, forming a background for the remaining chapters. This section addresses:

- Framing perceptions of change.

The findings from the narratives broadly relate to the understanding of the context of change to experiences and how different types of perceptions are articulated. This exploration of the understanding of the context of change feeds into the subsequent theme:

- Responding to regulatory change

This theme addresses key aspects of, how social workers respond to new regulations that form a substantial part of the civil servant everyday life. Thirdly, as executive management implements regulations the next section zooms in on the central theme of:

- Management of change

The theme explores how social workers perceive the management of change that emerges from new regulations or other changes. Pointing to the mobilisation of certain aspects of professional identity, the last theme illustrates how this mobilisation seems to be advanced by the sociomaterial context of social workers:

- Standards, decision-making and other sociomaterial conditions

In this theme, the findings illustrate how social workers relate to sociomaterial conditions as processes of (among others) standardisation, repeal decision-making authority and new IT-systems.

Finally, the chapter summarises the implications of findings in relation to the first research question and suggests how existing theories might be expanded.

Framing perceptions of change

The first theme presents findings that illustrate how social workers perceive the context of change in general. To facilitate the understanding of findings, the section briefly outlines the organisation of municipalities in Denmark including a prototypical diagram of the organisation.

Each of the 98 municipalities in Denmark constitutes a governing entity and the political leadership of the municipality has authority and responsibility to design local service policies and practices within the national regulation framework, as practically all legislation is a general reference framework. The Council of the Municipality formally delegates responsibility to the system of committees to oversee the implementation of policies and budgets. An executive manager is responsible for an area that corresponds to a specific political committee and tasked with the management of administrative affairs, overseeing day-to-day operations and compliance with political decisions of his/her department. Hence, an executive manager, responsible for Social Affairs, will serve and report to the Social Affairs committee. An organogram is attached as Annex E.

Interviewees report to either a department head or a team leader, who again reports to the executive management and subject to local organisation social workers may have identical functional responsibility, but may not necessarily perform the same functions in the same manner, when comparing different municipalities.

The municipality enjoys considerable autonomy to organise itself and this autonomy is also reflected in the internal organisation as functional diversity *within* the municipality.

An interviewee, who described her surprise following an internal meeting to coordinate efforts for disabled refugee children, highlighted that:

'It [the meeting] became a wake-up call as not all departments of the municipality operate a flat structure [like her team]' (A26: 7).

These inter-municipality differences become relevant as background to findings, as they may indicate that social workers have very different exposures to the context of change and what it means.

This point is reflected in the description in narratives of what constitutes a context of change. The responses vary immensely, ranging from legal changes, structural changes by management, changes to delegation of authority, novices coming to the team, new technologies and methods, team office relocation, attempts to repeal decision-making authority, scrapping of coffee or informal breaks, etc. This suggests interviewees are not identifying the context of change or voicing concerns in the same manner, when referring to how they have experienced and perceive as a context of change.

Despite this diversity, the understanding of the context of change is quite similar across the interviewees, as one worker observes *'few like changes'* (A15, p. 8), supplemented by another, who shares that the changes *'are too many'* (A10: 7)³, pointing to a perception that change is seen as an unwelcome chain of successive events adding to the complexity of work. A third interviewee gives an example of this speed and complexity as she shared:

'500 things happen at the Jobcentre at the same time. A Call Centre or whatever they call it is made; three or four computer systems are tabled, Planner, Opera, E-Doc. You have to relate to all of them at the same time.' (A28: 11).

³ To illustrate the speed and quantity changes to regulations that concern social workers, it has been calculated that the unemployment benefits regulation has grown by 5556 pages, up from 23.675 to 29.231 pages in the period 2011-2016. This is the equivalent of three new pages of regulations (net) every day for five years.

<http://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/video-bureaukrati-paa-bogform-saa-meget-fylder-dagpenge-regler> downloaded on 03 October 2016.

In all, a majority of interviewees refers to change as something negative with negative individual repercussions, as it becomes difficult to adapt individually because the '*speed of change is unpredictable*' (A19: 8). Along the same line of thinking, another worker reflects that change for her means that it is not possible to give '*what is needed*' (A30: 11), referring to a perceived discrepancy between an understanding of professional obligations and space provided for operations. An interviewee, having 17 years of experience, documents this further as she opines that changes mean that '*Work becomes a matter of survival*' (A15: 11) and continued:

'I shifted work area completely during the reform and had to change again here on January 1st. [2015]. I am one of those, who got so shaken last time that I could not manage these resource cases. I had to say; 'I cannot do it'. It was simply not possible for me to keep up professionally and I had to do so many compromises in areas that are important to me and the values, I have. I, simply, could not live with it. And then, they come up with a new legislation again (A15: 5).

The extract suggests a widening distinction between the organisational and the professional identity, compromising professional values of the social worker and making changes unlikeable. Further, the extract indicates a strong relationship between perception of change and professional identity via a psychological attachment to value-based professional practices. The context of change becomes unwanted as it is seen as unsettling a perceived balance between assignments and individual resources, putting the professional identity of the social worker at stake.

Another worker with almost thirty years of experience in the area of Child Measures, the subject of two major reforms within a few years⁴, involving obligatory formal training, standards and common methods, further grounds the perspectives of professional identity in a context of change, when she states:

'I do not experience I have been exposed to many organisational changes during my time. Change is not something that I think about. I have had the same team leader [for the last nine years] and have more or less worked in the same manner.

⁴ Child's Reform of 2011 and the Compliance Reform of 2014.

As an ordinary human being you think about organisational change as something top-down. For me, changes are coloured. If a departmental head says, 'the act, this clause, now it says so and so, then I want you to do so and so'. Somebody who instructs that I will have to do this and that and now we have to be organised in terms of geography instead of case numbers and all those things. Somebody, who comes, and sort of puts down a structure. Then, I would really think, 'well, this organisation, come on, now we are in for a change, pooh' - Here, I will really feel, it was a change of the organisation.

The act [the Act of Social Services] dictates a lot of things, but as we are free to implement it, changes to the act do not come out as a change. I don't consider that as an organisational change. I find out what my share of the new is; what I can do and what I think best. Subsequently, the team leader backs it up. This is maybe, why I do not think, I have been exposed to many changes' (A25: 15).

This lengthy extract holds a number of key aspects of how the context of change is perceived by several interviewees. First, the interviewee indicates that working in the same manner and for the same team leader for many years frames her perception. Change becomes everything that changes her practices, implying the importance of professional autonomy for the understanding of change. Secondly, building on the above point, the interviewee seems to regard change negatively if it originates from executive management that is somebody else holding the power to influence her professional practice. Her negative position does not appear to be a matter of assessment of the quality of the proposed change but rather powered by the potential infringement of her professional autonomy. This implicitly points to a strong normative and subjective perception of professional identity, combining basic knowledge and individual experience, and again underlining the importance of professional autonomy to professional identity. Thirdly, the extract also points to a level of professional pragmatism as the interviewee embraces change by identifying 'her share', eventually suggesting a very compartmentalised and individual coping strategy. It may need management acknowledgement, but she is content that this is done retroactively, further strengthening the professional autonomy. Hence, the importance of professional autonomy is so that it seems to be able to neutralise the potentially threatening appearance of the context of changes.

The findings of this theme suggest that social workers perceive the context of change as increasing complexity, as changes are seen as too frequent and too many. In general, findings illustrate a dislike of changes as well as a potential disruption of the balance between the official and practitioner image of what the social worker is. Further, the context of change is assessed by social workers through a filter of professional autonomy, determining what is perceived as change or not, situating professional autonomy at the core of perceptions.

From this point of view, the framework of perception of change opens to multiple sub-themes. The first of these sub-themes is the legal regulations of municipal activities that social workers to a very large degree are supposed to implement. The coming section explores this sub-theme.

Responding to regulatory change

The preceding section suggests a relationship between perceptions of change and the professional identity of social workers highlighting autonomy. This section further adds to the narrative of this relationship by presenting findings of how social workers perceive regulatory changes.

The social worker is dealing directly with clients, vulnerable and marginalised citizens. Hence, the social worker is directly exposed to the consequences of the majority of municipal legislative changes.

In general, interviewees find regulatory changes acceptable, making it easier to accomplish assignments with a beneficial outcome for clients. Interviewees often refer to their loyalty as local government officers and imply that this loyalty overrides individual perceptions of, whether changes are relevant, reasonable or not. For example, a senior interviewee is straightforward when reflecting on her status as a civil servant:

'I am loyal to the legislation; I have to be. When you get to the bricks and mortar of the legislation, I actually think that the opportunity to carry out good social work is present. However, there may be circumstances in individual municipalities that makes it

difficult to do something specific ... but the legislation is by and large reasonable' (A22: 2).

Another interviewee offers an identical position:

'there is an act [the Integration Act], I live with even though, by God, it is not meaningful' (A30: 4)

The extract points to the loyalty of social workers, even though the extracts indicate a professional dilemma of having to implement legislation not seen as (entirely) meaningful according to her professional knowledge and experience. This dilemma is found consistently in narratives, as for example, one senior interviewee observes that he found contemporary legal changes professionally challenging, as they included *'a different view of humanity'* (A20: 4). A point supplemented by another senior interviewee as she reflects that current legislation gives:

'priority to those with the fewest resources', crowding out 'those more resourceful, who just need little assistance' (A19: 7).

Implicitly, the workers invoke their own values and priorities, suggesting the depth of the professional dilemma. This is further illustrated by a third worker, who – finding regulatory changes positive as they coincide with her professional observations of needed amendments – finds herself to be challenged as she now has to collaborate with foster care families, who *'do not fit in'* because they are *'not used to relate to the municipality'* (A25: 7). Narratives provide evidence of a tension between loyalty towards regulatory changes and individual professional values that social workers have to negotiate. Hence, changes increase the complexity of the context for the professional discourse, making an interviewee suggest a personal coping strategy based on the necessity to *'stick to skills of social workers and an open door to clients'* (A28: 14), countering the intentions of the regulation to make the client personally responsible for their lives.

The tension is further illustrated when an interviewee shares that much legislation is *'not thought through'* (A29: 3), but rushed to be implemented a few days after

Parliament approval or even worse *'implemented retrospectively'* (A29: 3). As social workers are front line officers, who meet face to face with clients, issues of retrospective implementation and/or lack of proper guidance and IT systems modifications is seen to impact the case worker-client relation negatively. This interviewee shares:

'... when changes are so many, it can be difficult to know what you can do. And I become unsure and when I am unsure, it can be difficult to be honest [long pause], to maintain the trust, the client holds in me' (A15: 8).

Here, the interviewee reflects on a dilemma of regulatory change that not only touches upon her fundamental professional value – to maintain client trust – but also influences non-cognitive aspects such as self-esteem and efficacy. This may suggest that professional values prevail and a temporal dimension in the construction of the professional discourse enters. The intention of regulatory changes is – for the time being – potentially excluded from the practices of the interviewee as values of trust in and respect for the client rank higher than regulations. This potential undermining of regulatory changes seems to point to the formation of individual protective strategies, guiding perceptions of the context of change.

The imagery of influence of change on professional identity becomes further complicated when the same interviewee also suggests that changes have a positive influence, as she states:

'You start to become some more professional, as it becomes ok to think into social factors. Unemployment may now also be a social issue, having not been so for many years. I think, it is fantastic that you may think in a multidisciplinary manner again – it impacts professionalism in the good way' (A15, pp.5).

Taken together, the two extracts indicate a potential duality in the professional narrative on regulatory changes, where on one hand the worker perceives regulatory changes as an opportunity to outlive individual professional ambitions, and on the other hand the same worker suggests that her individual, professional values become compromised by regulatory changes. However, embracing legal changes positively or negatively do not

appear to follow a pattern between interviewees. Interviewees hold different views, even if employed by the same department, indicating a thin line in the composition of professional identity in a context of regulatory change. Yet, the professional discourse seems to be able to contain contrasting and even conflicting practices, norms and cognition.

In sum, the findings suggest that the regulatory change influences professional identity within a complex framework. Here, an occupational civil servant identity implies compliance with legislative changes, but in an awkward and fragile balance with professional social work identity. This tension seems to materialise through a complex perception of changes to values of regulations and individual, professional values that may be seen as degrading professionalism and provide opportunities for professional development at the same time. Hence, by employing core individual, professional values, it becomes possible to create a space for individual protective strategies that – temporarily and partially – may suspend or destabilise the regulatory change discourse.

Seen from the perspective of the identified tensions, the outcome of implementation of regulatory changes is far from certain. Therefore, management of change becomes an element of utmost importance and the relation between perceptions of change and management is examined in the next section.

Management of change

As seen earlier in the chapter, the outline of the municipal organisation is following the principles of political-administrative management with an executive management activity responsible for execution of policies. Interviewees made reference to this management set-up undergoing substantial changes. Thirteen interviewees report organisational changes, where the team leader either is terminated or is assumed responsibility for two or more teams, impacting on the sensation of presence and accessibility in terms of day-to-day operations. Two interviewees report the opposite tendency – now having a team leader who is placed in the office next door. The remaining five interviewees do not indicate any changes to the management structure.

Many narratives share the same perception of the management of change and how it relates to professional identity development. Many interviewees react directly and negatively to management change initiatives, as:

'The pressure on norms and culture, of course, comes in waves. When the external pressure and pressure from management increases, it becomes a little bit a 'them against us' culture' (A27: 7).

The extract suggests the existence of a tension, located in the translation of the meaning of change between management and the interviewee that may relate to the purpose and objectives of changes, but fundamentally establishes an antagonistic zone of exclusion. Change becomes something *'management'* wants and the interviewees seem to regard it as a restriction of professional autonomy that needs to be reacted to.

Another extract reflects an approach of resistance to the management of change that unfolds within the tension of *'them against us'*:

'Changes happen all the time. New systems, new efforts and 'now you must do this and now you must do that'. Again, I sense from my co-workers a huge difference on, how they react to it. Either, you put on 'the blinkers', as you do not want to relate to it, never learn the new email-system, the new electronic document system or you say; 'well, it will function'. I am more the latter (A18: 6).

The extract illustrates how the worker situates herself within an either/or dichotomy, putting on the blinkers, ignoring changes or simply going along, but managing change as external to her sense of professionalism. The following extracts add to this observation as in some instances interviewees refer to how operational managers seek to attempt to influence work practices. This is seen as a threat to the perceived professionalism of work and conflict with widely-held professional values as the following examples show:

'We do §50 assessments of children that sometimes are a bit long and now we have a new professional leader from the Municipality of Copenhagen. Here, they tick boxes and have a lot of pre-printed text [in the assessment report template]. When the

manager receives our very comprehensive assessment reports, it is really difficult for him and you can hear a want to change something there. It is really difficult, as we have had really good feedback on our §50 assessments' (A27: 6).

The interviewee acknowledges that the length of the assessment is critical, but justifies the length by referring to the feedback they are getting (from other social workers involved in the specific case). Hence, management intervention is seen as potentially disruptive to what is perceived as professional integrity.

Another worker is a member of a Youth Team, whose case management has been criticised. The team subsequently enters into collaboration with the Permanent Task Force of the Ministry to reform their practices and expedite cases. However, the worker pitches the lack of qualified case management in a management-employee antagonism:

'We cannot always abide the interval between appointments: we cannot always manage to report to the Appeals Board in time. When first we are reminded, a manager arrives, saying: 'now it has to be done'. Well. Then, something else must wait. It is all the time about saying that we have this many cases, but only this little time. I think, we all the time have to observe, how we protect ourselves. Little by little, a large part of work is to have energy to protect one-self and the colleagues' (A21: 5).

The interviewee frames the antagonism as originated from a lack of resources and the need to protect the work environment of workers. In a space of exclusion, this normative protection of the professional identity becomes justified, as it plays on the implicit lack of management understanding of real work conditions as perceived by the worker.

Hence, the extracts seem to point to the legitimacy of a practice-based professional discourse where change may be opposed and/or at best met in a resigned manner and without fully embracing it. From an operational point of view the obvious consequence is the risk of the municipality operating in different, but parallel strategic directions, yet it also consolidates a temporary closure to the professional social worker identity, stressing that the manager is different and therefore not to be included in the professional practices of social workers.

The aspect of exclusion as an essential element of the perception of change management seems to be supplemented by an aspect of autonomy, as the following extracts suggests. Referring to the municipal development planning, an interviewee working within the area of Children, sums up the feelings of change expressed by several interviewees:

'Instead of making development plans the municipality has turned to this 'thematic fuss', where as a group at the bottom we describe, how we relate to the theme. It is not something that has a particular impact. The strategy, we pursue, we by and large articulate ourselves (A 25: 11).

The worker is part of a group with a leader located in the same corridor, and yet the social worker manages the longer-term perspectives of her professional activities in very much her own manner. The use of the term *'fuss'* signifies how official planning is considered an externality without out any real connection to everyday practices and therefore unnecessary, useless and unimportant to workers. It also signifies a dominance of a direct practice-based perception over a textualised practice outside the control of the organisational discourse.

Another interviewee, whose team leader simultaneously is managing another team and not present at the location, pursues the same line of thinking reflecting on how she and the team develop their relationship with potential alcohol and drugs addicts within the context of a walk-in service:

'We have ourselves decided to open a profile on Facebook. It is a good idea. This is something that we ourselves decided. ... This is where you reach out to people' (A18: 12).

The extract illustrates how the professional autonomy enables social workers to connect with clients, keeping professional identity alive. Yet, the professional rationale seems questionable, as only addicts and their relations using Facebook will be reached. Thus, the extract is an example of how social workers adopt own change strategies and implicitly sustain professional autonomy that may not be in line with interests of all clients.

Management assistance, adapting to changes, seems to occur in a primarily operational and ad hoc based manner. Interviewees do not refer to strategic support understood as consistent building of capacity to enable interviewees to act differently and adequately as a direct extension of the overall strategy. Eleven interviewees describe their team leader as being absent or inaccessible. A worker comments on the effect of change management in her municipality, comparing it to the beginning of her tenure eight years ago:

'In the beginning, co-workers did not take up a lot of space, as management was very accessible and distinct. Today, I sometimes think that it has become the opposite way round. Management is more withdrawn and members of staff are crowding the space' (A19: 12).

The worker expresses a common sensation felt by interviewees that after changes are implemented a vacant space is found that management occupied earlier, leaving individual team members to fend for them. This shifts importance from management to internal team dynamics in order to stabilise and maintain work relations. A worker reflects on the impact on day-to-day operations pointing to the lack of direct management relations:

'The individual member of the group manages her work life pretty much herself. As a point of departure, I have a case audit with the leader every six months. Sometimes, a whole year may pass. We are fairly self-managed' (A22: 13).

Notably, the shift from direct management to self-management does not appear to be the expression of an explicit management strategy - although one interviewee refer to self-governing teams as a management choice (A26: 3) – but rather an organisational form that appears as a by-product of changes as one interviewee reports:

'Self-management emerged, when a reorganisation did away with the management level and turned the professional coordinator into a combined professional coordinator and department head and at the same time made the department twice as big' (A26: 6).

Self-management as a by-product of the change processes enhances the importance of the management of meaning of change in relation to the professional identity.

Illustrating how workers are left to organise work themselves, an interviewee working within the Jobcentre that has just been restructured lamented the outcome of the change that left her team with only a distant departmental management. She notes the consequences as:

'I often sit and reinvent the wheel myself. It is one of the reasons that it is a pity that the management does not have more legal proficiency. The wheel, I invent, is not necessarily the one, management wants. But there is no real framework, where we are clear what the management thinks about this legislation and what level we have in this municipality. That debate, we do not have.' (A19: 12).

The interviewee perceives herself to be left to 'invent the wheel' and with little professional relation to management, exemplifying a de-linking of executive management from operational management, creating a vacant space that enables organising alternative practices. This constitutes another tension the social worker has to navigate by moving into a borderland of management responsibility that she by official definition does not have. Still, she is very conscious that her solutions may not be the ones wanted by management. The next extract elaborates on the self-management of changes:

'There has been quite a bit of legislative changes that has impacted our area and where we have tried to involve our team leader in order to assume responsibility. The team leader expresses that things are running smoothly and 'you can easily do it yourselves'. There is a lot of confidence that we manage the area ourselves as we are the ones who hold the professional knowledge within the area' (A25: 11-12).

The observation is quite common and the interviewee regards the confidence vested in the team's ability to deal with changes as a positive professional value. Yet, it also points to a team leader, who apparently is withdrawn and offering little direct support. Hence, members of the team are put in a position to assume responsibility for making sense of the changes and modifying practices accordingly, but without a formal management mandate. Further, these practices of management of change stabilise a

narrative of professional autonomy and implicitly legitimises resistance to formal management involvement in the form of them and us.

To sum up, the extracts suggest a complex relationship between the context of change and professional identity, but one that builds on exclusion by constituting ‘an other’ where interviewees perceive management of changes as something that disrupts stability or coherence, creating confusion and uncertainty. By excluding the change management initiatives from professional practices a space is created for re-formulating alternative courses of action that comply better with individual professional norms and values. By establishing this perception of management of change the organising of alternative practices is legitimised, hereby potentially structuring a distance between images of social work professional identity and the official organisational imagery. Hence, the narratives indicate a standoff with the classical discourse of change management, discarding the understanding of change as a management monopoly of visioning and making objectives.

Standards, decision-making and other sociomaterial conditions

The findings have illustrated how social workers are quite apprehensive of the context of change as they sense a material impact on the core of a professional integrity and autonomy. This anxiety is further fuelled, when the analytical lens is moved from the general perspective to the specific change activities that relate directly to the everyday practices of social workers. The relationship between the context of change and professional identity appears to be complex and equipped with a number of different tensions. For example, one interviewee comments on changes, saying:

‘It is a daily compromise to balance, how I think I can live with it [change] so it still makes sense for me. It is very important that it makes sense’ (A10: 9).

The interviewee engages in daily reflections on how to modify practices so they become meaningful to her. The extract also illustrates a strong connection between work life and private life. In relation to specific changes another interviewee observes that:

'It is some challenge in relation to the reality, I am facing. But it also contributes to keep up our professionalism, make us indispensable in order to navigate in a field, where changes are so often and significant. Yet, you do not get a footing: get things in place, what does it mean to us? We do not manage that. It becomes more, 'now we do this' (A19: 16).

The extract points to a more pragmatic strategy – getting it done – when faced with incompatible aspects such as the lived experience of everyday tasks and the new practices introduced. This sentiment is echoed by a third who states that:

'Routines become individual' and 'there is no time to reflect' (A30: 5-6).

Hence, the narratives point to a need for initiatives that reduce complexity and ensure common approaches. This section illustrates in more detail how social workers perceive the specific emerging sociomaterial conditions, involving among others professional coordinators, a repeal of decision-making authority and introducing new IT standards that seem to be aimed at mitigating the consequences of change.

The emergence of the function of professional coordinators seems linked to the emerging complexity of change, introducing a link between caseworkers and a department head responsible for day-to-day operations. Three of the interviewees name their title as professional coordinator. One of the professional coordinators describe her general function as:

'I do sparring⁵ on cases, clarify and explain professional questions, questions of legislation, both in terms of what the Act is saying, but also in relation to the procedures and case practices we have in the municipality...

In this manner, I have the authority to correct cases through sparring, but of course, it is not me, who says it has a bearing for the worker, if she does not do it' (A30: 2).

⁵ Sparring is a professional term, serving to establish a distance between professional challenges and the individual.

Qualifying decisions and ensuring compliance with rules and regulations are matters of focus for the professional coordinator, yet at the same time the function enters the domain of the professional autonomy of individual social workers. It is not surprising that the interviewees embrace the professional coordinators rather critically, as they were seen to exclude social workers from comprehensive case-management processes and information sharing:

'Until now, I have received information in the section meetings about what happens daily, whether you are thriving or not. Now it is as if there is no talk about these things anymore. Suddenly, we feel completely left out of influence; left out except for the fact that we are here.

'The 'gate keeper' who is supposed to strengthen professionalism adds a filter. The arrangement impacts upon our professionalism negatively as we do not feel we get any personal learning or sparring in this manner' (A23: 5).

The extract exemplifies how direct involvement with management and participation in processes of dissemination of information is valued as an important form of professional dialogue and involvement by social workers. The learning outcome is seen as negative and the lack of correspondence between perceived need and management responses opens an understanding that change is not in the interest of the social worker, due to exclusion and a subsequent negative impact on professional autonomy. An initiative that may have been intended to reduce complexity and uncertainty associated with change may result in the emergence of another parallel professional practice, as the coordinator is regarded as a function designed to restrict the professional autonomy of the social worker.

Repeal of delegated authority is another specific change to sociomaterial conditions and half of the interviewees share that their professional authority recently has been repealed. Approaches to delegation are different with ten interviewees revealing that they recently experienced changes to delegation and four interviewees still enjoying a comprehensive delegation without having to consult management. One of the four interviewees explains that:

'I do not have to go and ask my leader if it is ok to request a psychological personality assessment. The standing instruction is that I request what I have to and what I know is necessary. This is job satisfaction' (A22: 15-16).

Delegation is not only based on instructions, but also relies on delicate balance between experience and qualified judgement of the interviewee and trust by management. A worker, who at the beginning of her recent team employment has been positive towards the level of delegation, as it *'showed trust from management'* (A12: 6), now experience a repeal of delegation and explain that:

'... we have just been told that the decision-making authority has been repealed. In the future, we cannot allocate anything without the presence of a manager. Our decision-making authority has disappeared' (A12: 6).

The disappointment stands out and the reference to the presence of a manager indicates a fundamental restriction of professional autonomy and break down of relations of employee-management trust. As a paradox, the repeal collides with the withdrawal of the team leader that is announced at the same time. Another interviewee points to how the repeal influences direct decision-making, as she dryly notes that:

'The process may become a little longhaired – that you have to wait until a Tuesday meeting, where it [the decision] has to be debated. And then she [the team leader] called in sick that Tuesday. That may be a little frustrating' (A24: 5).

The new practice adds to a sensation of work pressure and becomes meaningless, as the team leader is absent. A third interviewee, who had also seen the decision-making authority disappear, observes:

'All allocation and decision-making authority has been withdrawn and everything has to be forwarded to a Central Allocation Committee, headed by our department head. A co-worker of mine said, he needed to know; 'what is expected from me now, as you have cut my balls off?' The professional ones, that is! What is it we have to deliver? The answer is that we still have to deliver a professional assessment to the Committee and that mostly it is followed.

There is no doubt, that I have co-workers, who feel degraded to pure administrative work.... to maintain socio-professional pride becomes a task. The question is, what they want social workers for, if they want to decide all by themselves anyway?’ (A21: 10).

The extract reflects how the repeal of delegation of authority is seen as a deep intrusion into existing professional practices as well as the professional autonomy of workers. The new practice furthermore appears symbolic as the committee follows his assessments and the new practices seem to lead a sense of being professionally excluded. Hence, the new practice only seems to obstruct the generic professional efforts as the worker sees them. In this way, repeal of decision-making authority is shifting work conditions fundamentally, installing a sense of professional degrading and restricting professional autonomy in a way that is perceived to be threatening the humanistic and social justice values of social workers.

Practices are also becoming standardised through new IT systems and common methods. The IT systems are among others an outcome of national strategies of digitalisation that involves the entire public sector. However, the new standards and integrated IT systems have not gone down well with interviewees. An interviewee, for example, first having described the overall situation as ‘hell’ (A25: 7), shared how she manages the new IT system:

‘I still have paper files, but in theory I do not need to. Unfortunately, E-dok⁶ will not disappear. I have been very quick to give people my email-address so all mails circumvent the system...

Sometimes, I hardly remember the procedure because the system is not logical and I become so pissed with this shitty system. You have to enter every day to see if you have received mail, but you can forget that when you receive all of your mails outside the system [as she does]’ (A25: 8-9).

⁶ E-Dok is a file management system that follows standards of The Danish Quality Model for the Social Services. <http://www.socialkvalitetsmodel.dk/english/>

As the extract suggests, the newly introduced IT systems are purposely circumvented, basically due to a perception of technical glitches, which means that work processes have to be repeated. Resistance is not restricted to systems but also expands to include the way in which the new systems are used – or not used. One interviewee reflects on the experience with a new system that introduces new forms and templates:

'We spent a lot of time on it, but it just did not function. The solution by the Consultancy Company was wasted, having used half a million Danish kroner and many man hours to develop it, because all of us boycotted it' (A27: 5).

The extract is another illustration of how the force of professional autonomy is capable of turning an official process around, if it appears to be meaningless to social workers. Another interviewee, who found a conflict between the new templates and the method, and was taught at University College, shares that:

'They [the templates] do not develop me to do things in a different manner. They [the templates] just make things a little more complicated, until I realise, how I have to do it, as I really think, it should be done' (A10: 7).

The extract highlights how the worker works her way round the new templates, finding a fit with her professional approach, indicating the organising of an alternative that suits her own perception of true social work. This process of constructing alternatives is an option pursued by some social workers in the context of change, although others are a bit more resigned as this interviewee remarks:

'Everything has to be electronic and you buy systems that ensures that follow-up dates are timely, so the municipality secures its reimbursements. They are generated by the systems and you do not have to think. You just do it. (30:13)

The extract illustrates how new IT systems are not value-free, but hold a disciplining capacity that eventually influences individual approaches to social work. In this way, another tension is formed pitching the new 'IT and new methods' against social worker 'professional autonomy and skills degrading'. Hence, IT and new methods become an almost universal symbol of change that impacts on both the right to plan and execute

everyday practices according to own standards. Standards and new IT become threatening, opposing the social care and justice values as the next extract illustrates:

'Social workers are here to be meaningful to the family, but we are very much faced with extraneous demands' (A27: 6).

Touching upon the inner core of social work professional identity the extraneous demand of documentation and administration does not only appear meaningless in itself, but also influences what is perceived to be generic social work negatively. This seems to be a general recognition among interviewees and legitimises an unfolding of professional autonomy that overrides organisationally approved practices and promotes the construction of alternatives as this extract suggests:

'We have descriptions of the standard, but sometimes we go beyond it. If you want to do a good social work, this is something you end up doing. Therefore, what is beyond the standard is where some of the really good social work is, where I think out of the box' (A18: 6).

The last extract here is a strong testament to perception of the context of changes, employed by social workers, suggesting that changes are seen as detrimental to the inner core of social work values and that professional autonomy is a practice-based mechanism that connects between generic social work and justice values with the specific real life experiences and needs of clients.

In general, the emerging sociomaterial conditions are seen as opposing generic social work values and in an interesting twist the new practices strengthens the social work identity and in particular the professional autonomy. Several interviewees shared specific examples of how reacting to new practices results in organising alternatives as individual coping strategies, aiming to circumvent the emerging sociomaterial conditions. The individual coping strategies seem to serve to maintain a shared perception of a generic social case management practice that is client-based and grounded on individual social work and justice values.

With these indications of the power of the individual construct of professional social worker identity in the context of change, the final and concluding section summarises the chapter findings.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the empirical findings and thematic analysis of how the social workers perceive the context of public sector change and the potential influence on their professional identity upon this perception. In doing so, the primary aim is to answer the first research sub-question:

- How do social workers perceive the context of contemporary public sector change in Denmark in terms of how it affects their professional identity?

Generally, the interviewees perceive the processes of change as a unique, localised and a particular phenomenon that is not liked by social workers. Underlying this common assumption is an acknowledgement that change is regarded as constant with work practices becoming increasingly complex and impacting on professional capacity, which resonates with the literature discussed earlier (Pedersen, 2011, Fenwick, 2013, Illeris, 2014). Findings also suggest that social workers do not perceive the context of change to be aligned with the conventional paradigm that considers change to be episodic.

However, the findings identify perceptions of change and its impact to be social, polysemic and emerging in micro aspects of work life, like the new e-mail system. Perceptions are polysemic as for example regulatory changes are generally regarded as positive and seen as enforcing professional development, if and when they appear to be based upon the values and experiences interviewees share. Yet, resistance to change appears and seems particularly strong and explicit, in instances, where changes are understood to originate from local executive management, and/or if they include the strengthening of new sociomaterial conditions, such as the implementation of specific initiatives such as IT systems or professional coordinators.

When change is seen as impacting on professional autonomy and authority it generates opposition and resistance, indicating a distance between the official and the practitioner imaginary of the social worker, which is in line with findings of the literature review (Wackerhausen, 2002). The interview narratives reflect apprehensive attitudes to the context of change, yet this apprehension should not be understood, as social workers essentially are negative about the context. The narratives clearly refer to diverse and nuanced attitudes towards the context of the change, some positive and some negative, forming an antagonistic dilemma that the social workers have to negotiate in every day practices.

In a context of change, the social workers interviewed broadly referred to change having positive as well as negative implications, as it was seen unfolding as a general appreciation of regulatory change and apprehension towards management induced changes. Other research also identified dilemmas as an implied premise for working in public sector change context, such as dilemmas relating to '*privacy, authenticity and self-care*' with employees '*expected to bring more of themselves to work*' (Needham & Mangan, 2016: 272) impacting what has been referred to as the '*principled framework for action*' (Greasley, 2008: 384) that consists of the social values or public sector ethos of workers although may not be entirely negative or positive but more likely situated and localised.

Hence, change acceptance as it is seen as inevitable and respondents accept the changing environment as a part of working life. However, differences in attitudes towards the context of change were noted which also means that the context of change is something the respondent has no control over, but that has to be dealt with.

In this sense, preservation of professional autonomy becomes a key aspect of the social worker's professional identity and the assessment of whether a given change is appropriate or not.

Findings also suggest that the professional identity of social workers is internally strong, client-based and subjectively grounded on normative perceptions of social work and justice, supported by a robust combination of practice-based professional knowledge and experience. In order to meet emerging complexities, relations of

professional autonomy and practices seem to consolidate an exclusive imagery of which the social worker is by establishing 'an other'.

However, as the organisational context is also somewhat fluid, adjustments seem to be necessary. In this context, the findings also indicate that professional autonomy provides and is provided with a space that enables social workers to develop separate narratives of perceptions of change within the organisation. Findings indicate that social workers navigate the context of change outside the hierarchical decision-making structure by strengthening of the distinctiveness of professional autonomy explicit individual coping strategy.

The next chapter will explore how this strengthening, and adjustment to the context of changes comes about, introducing the notion of microrelation.

Chapter 5: Microrelations at work

Introduction

The previous chapter explores perceptions of the context of change among social workers in municipalities in Denmark and the findings point (among others things) to an apprehensive perception, reflecting tensions and a strong professional identity involving individual coping strategies to enable adjustment to changes. Building on these findings and exploring spaces of professional identity and capacity development, the second research question examines:

- How informal learning opportunities or requirements for professional development actually emerge in microrelations at the workplace.

The chapter explores an emerging aspect of research into workplace learning, examining the characteristics and role of relations (Eraut, 2004, Dutton and Ragins, 2007, Fenwick et al, 2011) and everyday practices (Goffman, 2004, Carson et al, 2016) at the workplace.

Despite massive interest into changes to organisations, the review identifies little research that has been conducted with respect to how relations at the workplace influence practices and professional identity and that research into microrelations at work is also underdeveloped. Further, the literature review establishes that conventional research seems at odds with the thinking of the polycentric organisation and polysemic professional identities and practices that emerges from the contemporary context of change. Hence, the review illustrates the need for an understanding of generative practices. These could be microrelations understood as multiple encounters between acquaintances that hold a positive value for each participant.

The chapter aims to widen the understanding of how microrelations form a space for informal learning, relating sociomaterial practices to the individual narratives of social workers. The chapter ends with a summary and indications of further research perspectives.

Research findings

The chapter departs from findings of the earlier chapters and thematically discusses the emergence and importance of microrelations for informal learning at the work place.

To stage the workplace as a learning place, the chapter briefly presents findings on how interviewees recollect formal education at University Colleges and how it prepared them for working life as social workers. This constitutes a baseline for understanding how interviewees engage with other forms of learning throughout their professional career as well as pointing to potential gaps of professional proficiency as interviewees experience it. The chapter adopts the following structure:

- The workplace as a space for learning

The section acts as a steppingstone to understand how social workers react and reach out to mechanisms to positively compensate for perceived educational inadequacies and to construct a more adequate professional identity. The next section expands on how social workers engage with one particular mechanism by:

- Mapping of microrelations

This theme addresses the centrality that social workers appear to assign to microrelations, a perspective of workplace learning that is further expanded in the third section, exploring the possible linkages between microrelations and informal learning:

- Microrelations and opportunities for informal learning

Microrelations have to be about something, and this section indicates how microrelations emerge in sociomaterial practices and the value that social workers attribute to them. This section establishes a possible linkage between microrelations and informal learning and this potential is further expanded in the next section that highlights the dynamics of informal learning in relation to professional identity:

- (Re)enforcing aspects of professional identity

The last section provides insights into certain aspects of the linkages between microrelations, informal relations and professional identity, illustrating not only the complexity of the formation of the professional discourse but also how microrelations contribute directly to professional identity into certain areas.

The chapter ends with a summary of observations expanding the concept of microrelations at the workplace and contrasting the findings with the concept of communities of practice.

The workplace as a space for learning

To ground the understanding of the dynamic between microrelations and informal learning, this section illustrates how interviewees assess the quality and relevance of their education as social workers in their current occupation.

The social worker education is offered at 11 different colleges in Denmark and the education refers to a joint curriculum. Interviewees graduated from geographically different University Colleges.

A large proportion of interviewees express satisfaction with their choice of profession due to an intention to work, help and/or support vulnerable people to improve poor living conditions and contribute to social justice (A9, A10, A18, A19, A22, A26, A27). The motivation to train as a social worker still appears high and for some grounded in decisions that happened 10-15 years ago or more (A9, A19, A22, A23, A27). This intrinsic motivation suggests a general engagement with social issues, but also of a professional stability at an individual level that has been more or less unchanged throughout the professional career. For several interviewees social work seems to be more than a job, embodying and enacting humanistic values, highlighting the importance of individual values and assumptions for professional identity.

However, while the interviewees are highly motivated in terms of their professional choice, they are much more negative about the education they receive at the Colleges.

In general, the content of the curriculum as well as the proficiency with which the Colleges prepare them for entry into the context of a public sector workplace is negatively referred to.

The following extracts point to the general sentiments of interviewees towards the College education. It is observed that the:

‘education does not prepare the novice social worker for the situation that you encounter’ (A21: 3),

‘work is far more complex than I expected’ (A24: 1), and

‘education does not connect with reality. I think that education is much more about the ideal world with many more opportunities and more time for clients. When you arrive in the municipality you get a little bit of a culture shock’ (A29: 1).

The extracts univocally point to an inadequacy and lack of connection between experienced reality and the College education, leaving social workers with little or no choice in terms of developing a professional identity. For example, an interviewee observes that:

‘education as a social worker starts when you get out into reality and it is a long process. One thing is, all the tools you need to have in place, but the other part is to be ready as an individual to meet the challenges that come’ (A20: 1).

It appears from the extract that professional and individual competences are taken together as one. Also, there is little or no separation between the cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of professional identity. The narratives offer different perspectives of how workers in retrospect experience the first period of their work life as for example *‘It was almost completely dark for me’ (A12: 1)* and *‘I felt more green than green. Like a bull in china shop’ (A19: 3).*

The open acknowledgement of the ‘postponed’ understanding not only suggests a lack of connection between the initial education and training, and the actual context and

environment of work. It also suggests an implicit acceptance of the gaps, as the following extracts indicate. As work conditions of municipalities is about balancing regulatory and administrative requirements against needs of clients in a context of politics it was surprising to learn that social workers are not educationally sensitised to the fact that:

'public sector organisations are run according to legality, organised in structures and operating guidelines for work functions' (A24: 1),

suggesting that College teaching is staging professional autonomy beyond the actual context and missing out on the structural conditions of work. Another interviewee pointing to a lack of orientation to actual work conditions such as:

'working in workgroups, reflecting on new work methods, new forms of organising and working in a politically managed reality' (A26: 12),

The performance of administrative duties is a substantial and important element of the job functions of the social worker and from the extracts above, it is suggested that the education and training as a social worker is insufficient and inadequate from an individual as well as a professional perspective. High assignment complexity, opportunities narrowed by policies or budgets and little time for clients, seems to produce a gap between the education curriculum and realities of work life and individual consequences in terms of proficiency and preparedness.

In sum, respondents' accounts strongly indicate that following graduation and taking up a first professional job, a social worker needs to identify spaces where she may quickly gain a proficiency needed in terms of job efficacy. Becoming one's own theoretical and methodological master by seeking out opportunities of individual professional learning constitutes a generic part of professional identity formation. This may in itself not be unique among professional occupations, but it does do point to a challenging 'education to work transition' that inscribes a need for social and professional learning at the workplace.

The need to learn seems to be a shared aspect of working life and points to situations, where everyday practices and tasks facilitate encounters between practitioners, clients and other stakeholders as a space from where learning at the workplace emerges. The emergence of these practice-based relations or encounters is the subject of the next section.

Mapping of microrelations

The preceding section observed how social workers experience deficiencies in professional capacity to perform tasks when initially taking up positions as social workers.

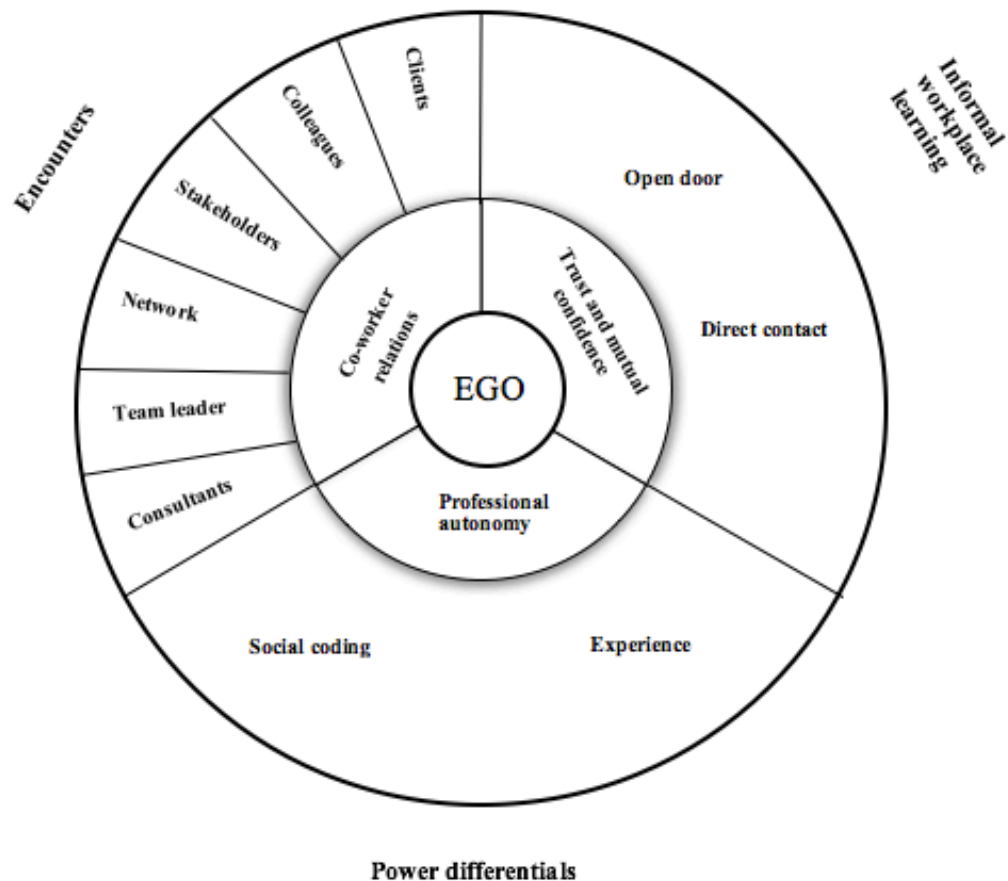
One of the ways social workers seem to work around this gap is through a conscious approach to interactions in the team they are seconded to. As social workers perform their assignments in and through teams, the team constitute a framework of relations between individual members, client cases and methods.

This section aims to expand on the nature and arrangement of the microrelations understood as multiple encounters between acquaintances that hold a positive value to each participant, as discussed in chapter 2. This is accomplished through a mapping of relations as far as possible identifying basic characteristics with regard to the context of change, professional identity and learning at the workplace.

Analytically, the mapping of microrelations was achieved by categorising references by interviewees according to relations and the type of relationship. The mapping also includes the informal learning assumptions and the power attributed to the relation. The power attribution refers to how the interviewee assessed the importance of microrelations in relation to their case management.

In all 85 references to microrelations were recorded and documented 15 different types of potential relations as all interviewees shared two or more references to specific microrelations. A mapping of the connections between microrelations, informal learning and power differentials is shown in Figure 4.1 and a more detailed overview is included as Annex F.

Figure 4.1: Mapping of microrelations



The map is divided into three parts, where the upper left part reflects the encounter that the interviewees referred to as the most dominant and essential relations. The upper right part illustrates the learning aspects of the microrelations and finally the bottom part of the figure is concerned with the power perspectives of microrelations. The parts are subdivided in two rings that signify a tentative graduation of importance with the inner ring assuming the highest importance.

The center of the figure illustrates the Ego or the social workers' 'who am I', channelling and synthesising social positions and dynamics from the encounters, learning and power perspectives into a professional identity.

The figure suggests that the microrelations are purposeful by contributing to the professional identity of the social workers as well as illustrating that one primary enabler of the professional identity is informal learning. Informal learning seems primarily to impact professional identity through the trust and confidence that contributes to establishing relations as well as the so-called 'open door' and direct contact among individuals in microrelations. The encounter with co-workers is the most important of all relations, but relations are spread on a range of contacts and no respondents reporting no relations at all. Finally, the mapping also situates microrelations in a context of power, pointing to professional autonomy experience and social coding as key aspects of which turns out to be a capacity to enter into the relations. The power relations seem to be structured in two different directions, one being the power relations as dichotomy between management and social worker values and ethos, and the other seeming to rank social workers among each other. Chapter 6 will further illustrate these points in relation to learning at the workplace.

In the narratives, it is also suggested that microrelations form a space for trivial, everyday encounters between social workers, fluid at occasions as you may never entirely know where and how they emerge, but restricted in terms of time and space. Only six interviewees do not refer to a social dimension of the professional microrelations; a space, typically organised around occasional gatherings such as the team morning coffee, lunch breaks and Thursday coffee-cake⁷. The 14 interviewees, who mentioned a social dimension of microrelations, assess these microrelations as very important to professional development, social well-being or a combination of both.

An interviewee locates the emergence of microrelations as a space where relations interact with values, learning and professional identity:

'We have collegial supervision, but also spend a lot of time coming together and discussing cases, debating challenges and sparring with each other in relation to what is good and bad. We have realised that this is necessary to function in this line of work' (A19: 3-4).

⁷ In many municipalities, opening hours extend to 5 or 6 pm. on Thursdays and in many cases, workers will meet for a coffee break in the afternoon, often bringing home-made cakes or sweets

The extract illustrates how social workers deal with professional challenges by ‘*coming together, discussing cases*’ as a form of an informal reflective team event that they consider as ‘*necessary*’, illustrating the value attributed by social workers to the microrelations. The same interviewee more directly locates the emergence of microrelations in the context of change when she states:

‘The need for a forum to consult about things has increased after the restructuring as we have gone from being a house, where it was not dictated, who did what. We had some overall functions, but really also shared a joint responsibility. If you do not manage, I do. We did not have this segregation ‘these are your clients, these are mine and I do not ‘touch’ yours’. It was much about pulling together’ (A19: 5).

The extract also illustrates a confluence of formal and informal relations as the microrelations emerge as a space – ‘*a forum to consult*’ – that seems to act as a clearinghouse for how co-workers assign task responsibility informally. This is possible only if microrelations are embedded and to some extent based on non-cognitive elements such as self-esteem, sensations of efficacy, motivation and shared values as well as social interaction. The following three extracts point to how the workers connect with microrelations and social and professional values and non-cognitive elements are reflected. The first extract originates from a professional co-ordinator, who shares that:

‘... sometimes I think it is good to remember that it is ok to expose yourself professionally to some degree, because we ‘cannot damn well know everything’. None of us can. It requires trust and comfort, as you shall not sit, wondering about whether to be able to stay with your work or not. It has to be somebody you trust – I think co-workers – where it is ok to expose yourself and say, I know nothing’ (A30: 9).

Here, the interviewee makes the point that even in a formal function as coordinator, you cannot know everything, meaning that you have to rely on relations with co-workers and colleagues for joint professional development. Further, the extract reflects the importance of professional values and assumptions like openness and trust, forming the basis for a self-exposure that is seen as necessary to professional development. Thus, the respondent’s message seems to be that microrelations must build on mutual trust to transcend individual limitations. This position resonates with other narratives and

denotes a situation, where dealing with challenges to professional identity is seen to involve team based trust and confidence as essential aspects. The common trust evolves into a sharing of identity and this appears to be key to the facilitation of learning-supportive microrelations. One interviewee reflects on where and how such trust emerges:

'Trust does not only emerge in the decision-making meeting. It also emerges when we are having morning coffee. Make fun of each other and where I tell about my impossible kids. In reality, how trust originates contains many elements, but fundamentally I think it is about respect and the experience of being respected. Even, if I do not agree' (A10: 2).

The extract further indicates how trustful relations may, it appears, emerge in many different contexts, but if and when it does, it contributes decisively to the social team cohesion, centred on mutual and experienced respect. The following extract further suggests how microrelations have become so inscribed in norms and practices of the team that they weave together institutional and non-institutional elements such as the official coffee break as one interviewee notes:

'We have a solid framework for handling birthdays, weddings and so on. I was told about these [when she started working], but participation, is of course, completely voluntary. You decide yourself if you want to be part, but most tend to do it. We also have a Thursday afternoon cake scheme – some participate some do not – but if you would like to be part you should realise, the group is rather large. You decide yourself, but don't bring fruit, because you will be booed. It is the time we sin. It has great impact, because then you also dare contribute in difficult situations' (A29:8).

Pointing to how participation in social activities as anniversaries is voluntary, but also forms a partnership – 'we sin' – 'don't bring fruit' – establishes team cohesion and transfers trust and mutual confidence among interviewees, as it enhances a sense of efficacy. The microrelations seem to appear within a social and professional context, and to be framed by a specific situation – exchanging views on professional challenges, Thursday afternoon coffee and cake etc. The social elements of work life such as mutual trust and respect seem to be socially coded entry points for the constitution of

microrelations as well as taking part. Many other examples of social practices such as *'saying hello to team members in the morning'* (A26), or *'knowing details about the private life of colleagues like name of husband, details of children and sometimes the quality of marriage'* (A23), and what *'my children were doing this morning'* (A10), as well as *'commenting on a new haircut'* (A09) and *'being an open book'* [to colleagues] (A19) suggest the importance of small, incidental and unassuming everyday occurrences that acts as a social entry code to the professional relations. It seems evident that if you do not participate, you do not enjoy the same intimacy with fellow social workers as those who do.

The extracts seem to suggest an explicit overlap between professional and social elements of microrelations, pointing to an absence of discreteness between the private and the professional life of the social worker. This is further illustrated in the following extract:

'The break is where we get a sense of each other. At the same time, the private is important in the morning breaks. We have to know each other. You support each other best, when you know that a colleague is challenged. When the husband and I plan to do something at home, and become mortal enemies and are to be divorced. And when the project is done, we become as newly in love. It also impacts on the day here that we have had a decent quarrel at home and I have not slept properly. Maybe, I am a little short headed, when I come here and others need to benefit from my knowledge.

I think it is a way of looking after each other, knowing who you are as a person. What your values are and how you can be of use to me? Sometimes, we draw on each other; when is it I can draw on you and when is it better to leave it?' (A23: 10).

The extract documents a blurring between the private and the professional and how it influences the professional collaboration of their team, confirming the importance of the social aspect of the microrelations. When the interviewee refers to *'that a colleague is challenged'*, she obviously refers to a challenge related to the family life, but at the same time stresses the linkage to the professional life and the importance for how the team collaborates in a specific time and space. Hence, the blurring between the private and the professional seems to be an essential part of establishing a space for unfolding

and toning of professional identity. Several other interviewees make similar suggestions that in order to develop professionally, attention to social wellbeing, individual and team based comfort are regarded as a prerequisite.

However, the narratives also indicate that microrelations do not always emerge from face-to-face interaction and not within the formal organisation. Hence, two interviewees (A19, A26) refer to Facebook and LinkedIn respectively as means of interacting with social workers acknowledged as specialists, extending the sociomateriality of relations beyond a geographical boundary. The findings suggest that social media relations seem to emerge as an essential aspect of workplace learning, bridging both a spatial limitation as well as a gap of professional knowledge by reaching outside the boundaries of the team to provide inspirations for further development of the current professional practices.

In sum, the existence and importance of microrelations is illustrated by the findings. Also, it is noted that while microrelations are separate to and independent of formal organisational activities and structures, they are only partially independent from them, although use of social media and networking with colleagues from say other municipalities may point in other directions. The span of microrelations is wide ranging and is mostly but not necessarily characterised by physical encounters, as microrelations may also be digitalised. In general, interviewees attribute high value to the microrelations, assessing their impact as very important for individual and common professional development as well as workplace social well-being and cohesion, the latter acting as an a priori assumption or condition for professional development.

Microrelations – opportunities for informal learning

The previous section illustrates the key aspect of the composition and importance of microrelations that social workers attribute to them. Further, the narratives seem to indicate that microrelations serve to facilitate access to and development of professional knowledge. This section aims to illustrate further how microrelations seem to enhance the professional capacity to act in a complex relationship with informal learning.

In line with the mapping of microrelations the opportunities for a possible linkage between microrelations and informal learning emerge over a wide range of everyday practices. A worker, acting as a professional coordinator, recalls how she began her first tenure and the processes she went through in learning the job:

'I learned the job by doing it. In the beginning, it was 'learning-by-doing' and exchange of experiences with co-workers.... Then I spoke a lot with co-workers about how you do. Sparring on cases, at team meetings, a lot of sparring on individual cases with co-workers. Door open; 'what do I do here, this one is difficult?' or 'I don't get anywhere here, I know he is an addict, but he doesn't say anything and I don't get anywhere'. In the beginning, it was co-workers, who were pushing the learning' (A16: 3).

Building on the perceived inadequacy of the education mentioned earlier, the extract identifies microrelations that supports her induction as a novice. The worker has to be active (*'doing it'*), involve *'with co-workers'*, sparring in teams or individually, *'door open'* indicating the basis for learning how to become a social worker as being active, engaging and being engaged. Other narratives also point to an active choice by team members and this extract illustrates how the choice leads to establishing a formal framework for professional development:

'The meeting is led by us and the meeting was established upon our own initiative. We realised that every day passes very quickly and if we are going to discover our professionalism again – realise why we do, as we do – we simply had to schedule it. Otherwise, there are too many other things as; 'aii, then I have to' and 'then I also can' and then an acute case arrives and we never get to it. The meeting is not structured in any other way than we talk about what is of concern and what is currently important to us' (A19: 4).

Here, the worker illustrates how the team takes upon itself a self-professed professional autonomy to establish a formal space (*'the meeting'*) to host informal opportunities for removing barriers and individual obstacles for managing job related challenges, articulating and adjusting meaning of the professional practices with regard to how and why assignments are executed as they are. Yet, the space assumes some formality to it as they *'had to schedule it'*, even if it is *'not structured in any other way'* and subjected

to *'talk about what is of concern'*, blending forms of organisational practices, microrelations and informal learning. Interviewees, when describing microrelations, often refer to an unstructured form and also referring to what is *'of concern'* and *'currently important'* as the main objective. In this sense, the microrelations function as a kind of debriefing session with therapeutic perspectives, directed at detailed everyday occurrences. However, the last two extracts also point to a functional diversity of microrelations as novices seems to be building capacity of how to perform tasks, whereas more senior workers seem to be focused on expanding already existing practices, adapting to different situations. A worker, who shares how her team reacts to new change initiatives, illustrates the modality of microrelations sharing:

'We [the team members] chat about it – back and forth' (A10: 2),

The extracts relate directly to the main method (chatting) employed to build strategies to cope with impacts of changes and illustrates how essential informal learning in microrelations is to construct and adjust the meanings of practices. Learning may emerge suddenly and surprisingly from relations with co-workers as this extract from a professional coordinator suggests, when she reflects on relations with co-workers:

'Sometimes, I have this 'I see' experience; 'God, that is why'. That is how it is'. It is what makes me realise that I am not burned out. That I still can learn and I can get these 'I see' experiences and still think that it is interesting when somebody turns up with a case'. (A9: 8).

The extract illustrates how microrelations may provoke sudden and unplanned learning on how to navigate changes as a *'natural'* part of everyday practices that seemingly are relatively isolated from other organisational practices. Hence, this also indicates the existence of an independent space where teams engage in alternative organising and modifying practices, including using microrelations to filter change initiatives and hereby opening a space for potential alternative interpretations and translations of the change.

This may indicate a set of microrelations that are incidental and separated from formal organisational practices. However, interviewees indicate that this is not necessarily so at

all times. One interviewee shares that management, following a merger of two Jobcentre departments and changes to regulations, invites employees to participate in informal social activities, aiming to form relations between employees:

'As an example [of management sponsored microrelations], we go jogging at quarter past 12 today. It has an effect on relations. Maybe, it becomes a little bit easier to tell my colleague, who has been here for many years, if you go jogging with her – 'I haven't got a clue about this'. The more, you know people, the easier it is; the more professionally safe it is. Thus, it provides comfort' (A15: 12).

The extract provides support for the importance of trust and mutual comfort and at the same time it also illustrates how microrelations may exist in a complex relationship with formal practices and to some extent encouraged or tolerated by management, permitting social workers to organise meetings during work hours. The following extract provides further insight into the dynamics of this complex relationship with management-sponsored activities in the form of supervision, a regular debriefing with external or internal experts. A worker also refers to an 'I see' surprise when she reflects:

'The more professional debates force the experiences forward. It is for example, to encounter disagreement. That people see things in a different manner than I do. It may occur at the decision-making meeting, during a professional debate or when popping into the office of co-workers' (A10: 4-5).

The worker does not see the learning outcomes from different encounters as dichotomous, but as part of the same process of adjusting professional identity incrementally to the capacity to act. As suggested previously, these informal processes of learning are practice-based and embedded in everyday activities.

A particular feature of social work is physical contact with clients and narratives address two aspects of this physical contact in the context of microrelations. One illustrates how co-workers engage each other in a practice-based therapy, and the other aspect shows how a social worker enters a client relationship to develop and bolster individual capacity and practices. The first extract reveals how the dynamics of microrelations are utilised to articulate a coping strategy and to adjust professional

practices, as one interviewee describes how the team deals with the aftermath of difficult and occasionally violent client appointments:

'At the workplace we really use one another and emphasise strongly that we spend time to look each other in the eyes, when for example, we have had a difficult client appointment. Often, we listen to violent stories and if you don't have the opportunity to unload it. Here, we use one another a lot [...]. It has maybe happened two or three times during my tenure that I have called somebody or somebody else have called me, saying 'you know what, I speculate like mad tonight. I don't think I can sleep because of it. Do you have the opportunity to turn it over with me, so I can get it out of the system?'. We do it for each other. It is not for fun that we call each other in private, but if the need is there we share a common understanding that it is ok' (A26: 3).

The extract illustrates how microrelations can be supportive of team members dealing with the potentially traumatising and stigmatising elements of work, by enabling co-worker coaching and/or form of occupational therapy. This is apparently done in situations, where microrelations crowd out more formal relations and mechanisms⁸ in place to immediately handle the undesired effects of client encounters. Here, informal learning is facilitated by the microrelation and the informal learning outcome is structured by co-workers being familiar with each other, sharing common insights into clients and patterns of earlier incidents that are borne by an explicit and reciprocal co-worker solidarity expressed as *'we do it for each other'*. The extract also indicates how microrelations have a capacity to emerge as a parallel to the official organisation and irrespective of boundaries of the organisation and functioning in real-time.

The second extract here highlights another interesting perspective of a combine between microrelations, informal learning and the professional identity of social workers. The logic of the profession of social work is built on an uneven power relation between a qualified social worker with access to resources and a vulnerable client lacking the resources the social worker has the authority to distribute. The client as the unempowered part of the relation is a silent assumption of social work, but as the extract shows this may not always be the case. The client, referred to here, is a newly

⁸ In general, municipalities subscribe to professional psychological emergency services as part of a mental health policy.

arrived refugee and without any knowledge of language, customs or the functionality of the public sector. The extract illustrates how the interviewee attempts to facilitate the conversation by showing the client images that the client is supposed to react to:

'The client inspires me immensely. As a rule, it is not planned beforehand. I had a client and the conversation did not function at all. The client could not at all understand, what she had to do. Then I became curious about, how I could make the client understand. The client indicated that she felt much more comfortable dealing with numbers and graphs than abstract images and together we ventured into finding a new way of inspiring the conversation. I was challenged myself, as I am not a particularly strong math person, but I worked on it. The client came back after some time and then we continued work on how the client could better put words to her thoughts and feelings by plotting a graph. Now, I have this tool in my toolbox' (A26: 11).

The extract suggests how microrelations may emerge in a client – social worker context, cancelling out the uneven power distribution and underlining the complex, overlapping and surprising character of the microrelations. Further, the extract also seems to underscore that the microrelation may emerge in multiple forms and locations, as long as entering into the microrelation is considered meaningful to those, who engage with the microrelation. The extract points to a very complex dynamic of microrelations and informal learning, driven by professional autonomy to plan and execute daily appointments.

Summing up, this section illustrates how microrelations seem to present a number of different opportunities for informal learning, ranging from team based reflections over management-sponsored activities to client-based relations. During the process of fostering professional development, the linkage between microrelations and informal learning emerges as embedded, practice-based and incidental, yet also dependent on the active involvement by interviewees and acknowledging that microrelations are based on a connection between private and professional life. An all, microrelations also seem to hold a generative perspective that grounds and further forms the professional identity of the social worker.

The next section takes a closer look into how interviewees reflect upon this more generative aspect of microrelations for professional identity.

(Re)Enforcing aspects of professional identity

Following from the previous section, it seems that social workers to a large degree are inducted into and learn social work practices in microrelations, formed and evolving in what is essentially the context of the team the social worker is seconded to. It follows that this would also involve – in a setting of professional autonomy and the construction of alternatives of organising – a relationship with professional identity.

The narratives illustrate two aspects of how a (re)enforcing of the professional identity takes place. These generative aspects of the microrelations are in this context presented as disidentification and social control, enabling adjustments to processes of change.

Disidentification is theoretically associated with psychoanalysis and reflects a process where the individual withdraws mentally from stressful job situations and into a conscious and professional self. Supervision, mentioned earlier, is part of a formalised response to the need for disidentification. Hence, the process of disidentification is connected to a universal requirement for social workers to cope with the considerable emotional demands of dealing with vulnerable clients. Social workers are expected to maintain physical contact with clients at the public office, going on home visits and assisting and accompanying clients to for example, health services, banks etc. – a function reported by more than half of the interviewees (A9, A10, A11, A12, A22, A23, A23, A25, A26, A27 and A28). Part of the supervision is grounded in a process of disidentification, where the individual deconstructs the meaning of the professional identity, shielding workers from unwanted elements of job function occurrences.

In this context, interviewees refer to the meaning of microrelations as a space where you can *'take care of each other'* (A29: 6) or *'to unload it'* (A26: 3) as referred to earlier. A worker gave an example of how the microrelations provide a space making it possible to address the strain of the work through using cynicism as a disidentification perspective:

'This morning, I experienced a younger co-worker share that she was feeling it was necessary for her to move on. When she interacted with a client about alcohol addiction, she knew the story already and that made her worried; she was not present enough. I have heard it too many times and this is, what I call cynicism. Perhaps I am bit too pragmatic for that thing, as it comes and goes. It seems to be a condition you have to accept. To imagine that you on an everyday basis turn up and are curious about other people is to me a too high bar to install. (20: 2).

The interviewee shares how it is necessary to be cynical – stop pretending that every client case is a new and different case. The proper strategy to mitigate this is to create a distance to and disengage from a relationship with the client. This aspect of professional identity development, facilitated by the emergence of microrelations, becomes more evident in the next extract, where one worker invoked humour as being part of the process of disidentification and directly linked it to strains of everyday assignment and the physical context with clients:

'We emphasise a great deal that you preserve a certain level of humour, because from time to time, we are having a troublesome everyday with a lot of conflict situations and clients, who are feeling very miserable. We can be filled with this and then it becomes important that we can share a laugh. Hence, humour is really important as humour becomes sort of a co-worker supervision' (A29: 6).

Humour seems to establish a distance to emotional strains, putting organisational norms, values and assumptions at stake, but not involving the cessation of emotional involvement. The interviewee makes a linkage between *'the laugh'* and *'a co-worker supervision'* in a space, where members are known to and trust each other. Several other interviewees refer to microrelations as a kind of protective shield from the strains of workplace practices and events (A11, A19, A25, A26). Disidentification through microrelations is not a matter of simple detachment but signifies an interruption of client involvement and coping with emotional effects, opening a neutral space vis-à-vis the client that allows the social worker to continue to maintain a dignified sense of professional identity and hereby opening opportunities for (re)enforcing professional identity, as the strain and stress is coped with. In this way, it appears that microrelations not only generate opportunities for professional development through informal learning,

but also a distinctive and almost therapeutic direction by facilitating individual strategies to deal with mental health issues that come with the job. In other words, microrelations seem to reflect a need for a space, where social workers learn to adjust to changing conditions.

Humour and cynicism emerge as mechanisms of a disidentification strategy, embedded in microrelations and supporting the continuity and adjustment of professional identity, by constructing variations of meaning in order to separate the interviewees from the constraints of work. The disidentification in microrelations seems to serve a learning function, enabling workers to further develop their professional identity or management of client relations by creating a reflective and critical distance to everyday events.

The narratives also illustrate another aspect of how microrelations may (re)enforce professional identity. Social control as an informal form of socialising is a perspective of projecting challenges away from the self-image and the findings seem to indicate that microrelations provide a space of such projection, establishing an arena that serves a purpose of regulating and simplifying work place practices. For example, a worker shares how he is frustrated by novice workers who carry larger workloads than average, starting earlier in the morning and working Saturdays, resorting into a controlling strategy:

'Some of the novices are often those who sit here when other leaves at 3.15-3.30 pm. Or already have arrived when other comes in the morning and sometimes you hear that 'she was also here Saturday'One way or the other, you contribute to keep up the management position that we make it anyway, because you want to stand out as the good and competent employee... But I think ... that we have to take care and be better at providing management a realistic impression of how many cases it is possible to manage within their 37 hours of work and pay' (A21: 6).

The extract illustrates how the worker articulates a need for social control at the workplace through regulating professional identity, when the interviewee reflects on the emergence of new – and until now uncontrolled - work practices by novices that requires an intervention to re-establish and exercise the boundaries of the work hours. In

another extract an interviewee, who switched careers to become a social worker at the age of 34, reflects upon her role as more senior to her co-workers:

'My earlier work life influences my professionalism as a social worker. Right now, I get really many young co-workers, who have followed the beaten track. They do not have the same life experience, because an age of 34 as opposed to twenty something does mean that you have experienced something else, met some other things. If I and another younger co-worker handle sick leave benefits I would be the stronger in relation to such a weeny, little 24 year old, newly educated worker. You see I would give the colleague a good run for the money. I am older and a lot more mature' A23: 2-3).

Having positioned herself centrally in terms of maturity and seniority she makes her work experience authentic, which is decisive for the understanding of workplace positions and relations. The implicit consequence is that the *'weeny, little 24 year old, newly educated worker'* complies with the interpretation of work methods and practices suggested by the dominant (more experienced) worker. The same interviewee further engages in a description of how she unfolds the dominance of her self-acclaimed position by continuing:

'I have always had a principle, asking my co-workers, 'do you believe it is vital?' when co-workers suggest that 'it is urgent', 'it is vital'; 'we also have to...'. Then, I tell them 'yeah, yeah, easy does it, easy does it, if it is so vital, then we cannot save them anyway. Is it something they die from then it is 999. We cannot save them if they are dying; it is 999'. I try to state that we run fast enough as it is, which is why we sometimes need to touch base and ask, 'how important is this? Could we not permit ourselves to say no, we don't have the time right now?'. I really try to inspire all my young co-workers. I very well hear some of them laughing and saying, 'we have learned this from you – do they die from it, no; it can wait until tomorrow, yes'. Then you can say they can wait or get an appointment tomorrow. Learning that 'I should like to talk with you but you will have to wait until tomorrow, because that is when I have an opening', harms nobody. No humans will be harmed by that' (A23: 6).

The extract again demonstrates how the microrelations are embedded in relations of practice, involving normative connotations and projections that socially control the constitution of the professional practices. The social control mechanism interacts very closely with the processes of disidentification in the sense that it establishes a protective shield around team members, and potentially constituting a critical distance to parallel official and management narratives of quality standards and efficiency. By doing this, microrelations anchor professional autonomy in practices and this also indicates how microrelations and informal learning may not necessarily be explorative and innovative. Microrelations and informal learning may be dominated and controlled by ‘an informal team leader’, who assumes the position on the basis of authority of experience.

This last section illustrates how microrelations offer a specific space for the development of professional identity. Using extracts that point to processes of disidentification and social control, it seems that microrelations hold a distinctive potential to reign in challenges to the normative aspects of professional identity. The findings of processes of disidentification resonate with a study of how Danish prison guards use disidentification to deal with the mental strains of the job, eventually becoming professionally indifferent to inmates (Lemmergard and Muhr, 2012), which shall be mentioned is not the case here. Hence, microrelations interact with professional identity and informal learning in a complex arrangement that enables adjustment to changes and at the same time restricts adjustment.

Conclusion

The chapter maps and explores the emergence of microrelations to answer the second research question:

- How do informal learning opportunities or requirements for professional development actually emerge in microrelation at the workplace?

The findings suggest the existence of workplace microrelations as all interviewees report to be involved in two or more relations. Further, interviewees indicate that workplace microrelations emerge as a space for informal learning embedded and enacted in sociomaterial practices that are deliberately and actively utilised to boost

social workers professional capacity. Microrelations emerge as fluid in form, relatively unstructured and not managed, but governed by social and professional norms, assumptions and expectations, involving also aspects of disidentification and social control. Microrelations are embraced positively and combine professional, private and social aspects.

The findings also illustrate that relations are more than a mediating element of individual learning. Microrelations appear as a mutually constructing and constructed space that brings stability within a context of emerging complexities (Hoobs et al, 2011, Fenwick, 2013) to professional identity making it adaptable. Informal learning may emerge at any point in time in microrelations, but microrelations also seem to influence the composition of social worker competences. Table 5.1 illustrates competences that social workers need to accommodate in order to learn informally in microrelations.

Table 5.1: Implications of Microrelations for Practitioner Competences:

Implications of Microrelations for Practitioner Competences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigate multitude of diverse relations • Contribute to practice-based knowledge production • Shift between fields of practice • Champion professional autonomy • Internalise normative and dynamic professional identity • Combine social empathy with professional focus • Operate beyond physical borders of workplace

The informal learning opportunities occur on a practice and need-based basis, suggesting one of the strengths of microrelations to be the immediate availability of potential relations.

Further, learning emerging from microrelations appears to be multifaceted and hence professional identity does not appear as anything but a temporarily fixed entity and

engaged in consistent and comprehensive value based exchanges of information, knowledge and experience. However, autonomy seems to be at the core of professional identity.

The findings suggest that the informally mediated exchanges in microrelations – whether gossiping, disclosure of private information, sharing of professional knowledge and experiences, encounters with material practices – seem to define how the social worker is positioned in the team, by among others enabling the individual worker to sense the hierarchy in relation to their own reputation. In sum, microrelations seem to reflect a social need for a space that enables workers to experience and live with changing contexts, socially as well as professionally, as it interconnects practitioners, clients and other stakeholders.

This chapter examined microrelations at the work place. The next chapter sets out to examine further how processes of informal learning emerge in microrelations and how this informal learning in microrelations supports the adjustment of professional identity in the context of change.

Chapter 6: Informal learning, change and professional capacity

Introduction

The previous chapter confirms the existence and details some of the key aspects of microrelations at the workplace. The findings suggest that microrelations influence professional identity and informal learning at the workplace. This chapter addresses the research findings related to the third and the fourth research questions. The third research question sounds:

- How informal learning influences the development of professional identity among social workers in multiple and complex relations of public sector change?

while the fourth and last research question addresses:

- How, if at all, processes of informal learning are involved in enabling the social workers to build the capacity required to adapt to the processes and practices of public sector change?

The literature review outlines various perspectives into the constitution and generative dynamics of informal learning as unstructured (Eraut, 2006), as incidental (Illeris, 2006, Illeris, 2014) as well as being sociomaterial (Fenwick et al, 2012, Fenwick, 2014, McMurtry et al., 2016). However, the review also identifies some limitations in existing research with respect to how informal learning actually emerges in everyday practices, influences professional identity and how it enables workers to adjust and improve their capacity to adapt to the context of change.

From the findings outlined in the preceding chapters, a narrative emerges that social workers engage with informal learning in microrelations at work in order to adjust professional identity to a context of increasing complexity. The last analytical chapter

sets out to further detail if and how this informal learning and capacity adjustment takes place.

Research findings

Exploring how informal learning influences professional identity and strengthens the worker's capacity to deal professionally with the context of change. The first section will present findings relating to how interviewees make use of informal learning and will explore how social workers perceive informal learning to build capacity. This section addresses:

- Informal learning – negotiations, reflections and dialogue.

Informal learning in microrelations seems to influence professional identity as a double sense of knowledge and subjectivity. This section expands on this observation by further exploring how informal learning may contribute to:

- Building and expanding professional identity.

Professional identity seems partly to emerge from a context that among others is dependent on active participation in situated practice-based microrelations where learning takes places. Shifting to the fourth research subquestion, the next section addresses how informal learning supports social workers to adjust to the context of change, using two different perspectives. The first is:

- Reacting to threats to professional identity

The context of change is seen as a threat to professional identity and resistance seems to lead to organising alternative practices as a way of excluding and distancing professional identity from the perceived threats. However, a more expansive perspective contrasts this apparently defensive position, when social workers move in to occupy spaces:

- In the borderland – expanding professional identity

The borderland is a vacant zone between management and regular social work that emerges as an effect of the context of change that social workers fill through inclusive and expansive measures, enhancing the capacity and outreach of the professional identity.

The chapter concludes with a summary of observations on the relationships between informal learning, professional identity and the capacity to adjust to the context of change.

Informal learning – negotiations, reflections and dialogue

This section expands on previous findings that found social workers worrying about professional and individual development. It does so by examining how social workers seem to make active use of informal learning to boost their workplace capabilities.

Throughout the interviews interest in professional development is manifest, although the workplace only provides what seems to be a limited range of formal learning opportunities for many of the workers. Therefore, the findings indicate the existence of a tension between a desire to excel further through formal training and becoming frustrated, as budgets are pre-empted by management decisions on allocation of funds. From this tension, informal learning emerges as a self-directed response that further grounds and consolidates professional autonomy. In the absence of formal programs, an interviewee described how informal learning unfolds in everyday practices:

‘... it is often the way we learn to know the area. That is, via each other. It is also the difficult things like interpretations of the Act, where it can be really important to make a guide to the new Act. But it is first when you get to talk to each other that you begin to understand.’ (A15: 4).

The extract suggests that this social worker actively seeks out informal opportunities in microrelations to strengthen capacity to act in a context of change by entering into negotiations of understanding. Another worker also involves in negotiations with co-

workers, but points to reflections as her starting point, when attempting to improve her case management skills:

'Also, I value to reflect on things when I am with a client. I sit down and look at how it comes out. Do I like this? Could I see it in a different manner? You see, spar with myself or somebody else on what I see. Many clients and the challenges I meet are not simple. Most often, they are complex and therefore sometimes, I have to think about it. Reflect a little bit about the challenge and how I can solve it; sometimes discuss with both leader and co-workers, also too get more eyes on the case' (A11: 3).

As client appointments appear to be diverse, the interviewee actively reflects on the complexity of cases and her own practices involving co-workers and the team leader. Key words are 'a little bit' and 'sometimes' pointing to informal learning as incremental transformations to the capacity to case manage, however unstructured and incidental steps may occur. Thus, informal learning is also emerging from face-to-face dialogue with clients, sometimes provoking reflections and maybe changes to practices. The worker continues:

'I seek to involve co-workers a lot and when you do that and others let you do it, they have to take in some of my reflections.

My clients also support me improving. In reality, it is when they are 'arduous' and 'unwieldy' and where I think, 'shit, she calls all the time'. You see this is what forces you to reflect – 'what can I do?' If on the contrary, it is one who just goes as it is supposed to without major issues, you do not arrive at an occasion to do something else, but what you have been doing all the time. And, by God, you also need those' (A11: 5).

The extracts suggest that in particular informal learning seems to emerge from disruptions to everyday practices that occur as part of the practices. From this perspective of disruption, informal learning involves active choices and co-creative practices that are being negotiated between co-workers. Choices of learning also seem to involve mimesis or imitation, as this novice worker shares:

'I observed a lot in the beginning. Co-workers all have several years of experience in the field, where they might say; 'you know what, often it is good if you do like this and this. If it does not come out well, just take it easy and do so and so'' (A12: 3).

The worker points to a common feature of the narratives where social workers imitate and copy specific practices from older and nominally more experienced co-workers, indicating different approaches to learning as per your seniority. An effect of this practice of mimesis is that experience becomes authenticated, indirectly establishing positions of power and dominance with regard to informal learning. However, a potential downside is that these positions may not necessarily relate proactively to the long-term interests of stakeholders or even the social worker positively.

Further, it appears from the narratives that team based informal learning seems to be critical for a sense of professional development, as it offers an opportunity to establish a distance between the self and the case being reflected upon. It becomes meaningful to engage in informal learning in microrelations, as this is where the confluence of individual and professional values is found. A junior worker reflects on professional challenges as she started managing cases with a higher complexity:

'That, I think, is a huge challenge and something cool. And it develops me as an individual all the time. Looking at myself asking where my limits are and what, I think, I have a right to know. Develop all the time, so I not only sit, noting, 'that is how it is. And that is how it has always been'. I think it is possible to think anew and different and develop yourself and what you do simultaneously. The individual development plays an important role for the professional development, I think' (A11: 7).

The approach by the interviewee to professional development is closely linked to individual values and the worker does not see any difference between professional and individual development being, in this sense, one with her job.

The findings therefore suggest four main categories that illustrate how interviewees engage with informal learning. The main categories are 1) negotiated understanding of changes, 2) reflections on experiences, 3) mimesis of practices and 4) combining individual and professional development. Earlier in chapter five, findings have pointed

to an additional category 5) a relationship between formal and informal learning (A19: 3-4). The five categories reflect findings relating to how informal learning is enacted in everyday practices, influencing understanding and approaches to practices. Transferring the abstract level of informal learning categories into everyday practices, a wide range of unique and specific practices that triggers opportunities for informal learning emerged from the narratives. Table 6.1 is a compilation of these practices that illustrate potential spaces for changes to professional capacity:

Table 6.1: Everyday practices of informal learning

Everyday practices of informal learning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chatting with and listening to co-workers • Reflecting jointly/individually • Learning by doing - unknown cases, and/or clients • Dialogue and conversations with colleagues • Interaction with clients • Participation in social gatherings and activities – socially coded • Informal case management quality assessment • Counselling and interaction with interns • Team-based brainstorming • Participation in networking / projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue with stakeholders, such as police, politicians etc. • Observations and evaluation – participation in client conferences and peer support • Co-worker coaching and mitigating emotional reactions • Browsing knowledge hubs on the Internet • Connecting to external specialist knowledge, including use of social media • Interpreting and sharing practices, methods and documents • Sharing of experience and ideas • Enforcement of prescribed knowledge and practices • Mimesis

The table does not prioritise practices by its way of composition, but narratives indicate that chatting with co-workers carries far more weight than say reading and sharing of

documents. This underscores how microrelations emerge as a space for informal learning in a field of shifting professional knowledge, where two or more individuals come into contact and share knowledge and experiences.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the narratives consistently refer to the value of shared norms and trust as basic assumptions for the opportunity to learn informally. Reflecting on the importance of this issue, one worker asserts:

'The social knowledge of my co-workers means tremendously to the work and me. We trust each other and dare show the good days and the poor days and talk a lot about what happens in our private lives' (A19. pp. 8-9).

The extract illustrates the increasing importance of shared values for processes of informal learning in a context of emerging complexities and the main issue for the worker is the general grounding of her work life in mutual social knowledge, which to some extent is employed as a substitute for an exclusive and knowledge based professional arena.

In summary, informal learning appears to be a matter of a zone of exchange of knowledge, experience and practices that is voluntary and involving a professional vulnerability.

In this sense, informal learning appears as a pro-active choice made consciously and unfolding in particular in microrelations between co-workers and clients, drawing upon negotiations, reflections and dialogue as the main aspects of the capacity building processes. Informal learning is more than filling gaps, as this would indicate alignment to a primordial situation. Rather, informal learning seems to be generative and explorative in terms of sociomaterial practices, although within the framework of authentic experience.

Hence, the section illustrates that informal learning to some extent influence professional identity. The next section will explore this theme further.

Building and expanding professional identity

As illustrated in chapter 5, the professional identity of social workers seems firmly grounded in a political and social engagement that also is a contributing factor to most interviewees' decision to train as a social worker. Referring to the literature review, professional identity is defined as a double sense of '*knowledge and subjectivity*' (Salling Olesen, 2001) and in the context of social work constructed around bettering life conditions of clients. This construct establishes an interesting dichotomy for professional identity between resenting the implications of the context of organisational changes and the change logic of the physical contact with clients.

This built-in tension to professional identity suggests that the professional identity of social workers must be continuously evolving, adapting to the context.

Social workers work in physical contact with clients, counselling in relation to distress and uncertainties. This experience forms a basis for social work as this interviewee explains:

'.... social workers deal with the most vulnerable groups; those who really have been hiding under the duvet in the bedroom, door locked and simply cannot get up, into the corridor and out the door. Social workers are supremely skilled to help those groups; none are better; nor are anyone better with vulnerable children' (A28: 5).

The close physical contact with vulnerable clients will impact on social worker identity, requiring continuous evaluation of professional values and practices that are closely linked to individual client challenges and requirements. As the professional identity does not occupy an a priori space the distinctive professional capital is weak and seems to suggest that professional identity in social work is established and demarcated, because they work with vulnerable clients. The implicit claim to professional proficiency suggests that social workers embody an adequate professional identity by differentiating it from the professional practices of others due to the nature of client contact. To a large degree, professional identity becomes the accumulated expression of outcomes of specific practices over time.

However, the outcomes of informal learning in microrelations emerge as anything but one-dimensional. Reflecting on her professional development, a coordinator clearly distinguishes forms of learning:

'Measuring the formal space of learning against the informal, I get most 'aha' experiences from the informal space, but the structure of work functions from the formal. The structured contexts can be used to comprehend a certain part of the change, but it is the informal relations that provide the opportunity to question the structured context. It is what gives me a clue to whether to accept or to pose more questions than I originally intended to' (A30: 11).

Hence, the interviewee not only points to a stratified approach to forms of learning, distinguishing distinctive arenas of operations for formal and informal learning respectively. She also attributes informal learning a position – because it links to individual values – that appears to play a decisive role in forming a deeper and more critical understanding of professional and workplace issues.

The lack of a distinctive and well-established space for a professional social worker identity means that professional identity develops over time and includes self-categorisations and delineation in a terrain of professional social work. The categories and delineation appear to be enforced by a theme of exclusivity running throughout the social workers' narratives, which were re-enforced through the microrelations. In this way, cumulative professional experience is part of a logic that attributes a higher value the more cumulative professional experience the worker holds. Consequently, for workers, experience becomes authentic and a measure for how you are positioned in terms of being a focal point for informal learning, as this interviewee ascertains,

'I feel that with my 15 years of luggage I am one of those who are being extensively drawn upon ... I sometimes have a feeling that I am behind what happens with regard to this professionalism. I would also like to be part. On the other hand, I am still the one others have to draw upon.' (A23: 5-6).

The worker deals with refugees and integration and implicitly addresses an increasing work pressure and frequent changes to the regulations. Yet, she is also concerned about

her own professional development as she is so busy being an informal learning buddy. Implicitly, this dilemma illustrates how the quality of informal learning is structured by co-workers, who may be experienced but may or may not hold the latest, the best and the most relevant professional knowledge available. Consequently, the experience transferred through informal learning may effectively compromise the insights and outlook of more inexperienced workers. However, these insights and outlook come to constitute the field of professional identity within social work no matter how adequate or sufficient the knowledge may be to others.

Experience is not only a matter of the number of years spent in the same function at the same workplace. Indeed, experience is also something relative to construct of the professional identity as the following extracts shows. The interviewee, who works with measures for vulnerable children in a team, has seen several changes to the composition of the team despite her only two years of seniority. Consequently, the worker is now:

‘the most senior and really, I think, it means that if some of my co-workers have to make a judgement, it may often be so that they send it to me, asking if I can validate it. ‘Is it ok’’ (A24: 10).

The extract points to a practice, based on basic trust and confidence, even if she still is relatively junior in the context of the profession as a whole, but senior in the sense that she is the longest-serving team member. The junior worker went on, reflecting on where this trust and confidence puts her professionally and personally, stating:

‘It is challenging, as I am still a newcomer to this area I get some of the little bit more exciting and complex cases and one way or the other I have built something during my two years here. I think this is intriguing. But it can also be difficult, still with only two years after graduation under my belt. There are still lot things, I do not know or may be doubtful about’ (A24: 10-11).

She discloses a strong dedication to assume responsibility and position in the team even if it is transferred to her as a consequence of many team changes and despite her few years of experience in an area of very high complexity. At the same time, she also points to a professional sensitivity or individual humbleness when she points to a

perceived need for more experience and supervision. However, the same worker further reflects on the process of elevation into the position as the knowledge pool of the team that other team members seek out and learn from and what the team position does in terms of professional identity development:

'But I experience that I become professionally stronger from it. It is much about the positions in the team where you are stationed. Being one of the novices, you are positioned as a newcomer and it is definitely not her [the novice] you are asking. In the beginning, you are just in another position and especially behind those, who have been here for a very long time. If others end their tenure, positions change and sometimes, naturally and without really thinking about it, you have become the one, who is the most senior and has seen the most. If newcomers arrive management may say, 'let's go ask her [the interviewee], she made a judgement earlier' or 'ask if she [the interviewee] will email, what she did'. Then you do that. I have stepped up a bit, one way or the other, but it is difficult precisely for me to put words to how I improved professionally or developed as a professional' (A24: 11).

This and the other two extracts carry a number of aspects that seem essential to the understanding of how informal learning influence professional identity development.

First of all, the worker puts words to the social norms of the team, pointing to authenticity and seniority of experience being the main enabler of professional identity development. At the same time, the extracts also point to disruptions of practices – fellow workers leaving the tenure – that are considered temporarily upsetting and resulting in a rearrangement of the social positions of the team and hereby disrupting the experience-based linearity of informal learning processes. Identity development through informal learning is seen to become more fragile and uncertain, as it is based on less experience.

Secondly, whereas many extracts indicate a relatively low degree of management involvement in day-to-day operations, the extracts here point to how informal learning relations are encouraged by the team leader and the team leader catalyses the informal learning aspects, explicitly encouraging and legitimising the relations and the outcomes. Addressing client needs in a microrelation-based framework indicates a professional

identity development that takes into account and customises learning from client case management challenges across different organisational configurations, suspending and eliminating potential disruptions as well as grounding continuity for professional identity. By linking novices to nodal points for informal learning, professional identity is developed as well as informal learning is integrated into formal organisational practices, hereby authorising the practice as official.

Thirdly, the worker is sensing that her professional identity is strengthened, and in a broader perspective, developing professional identity through informal learning seems to frame the way social workers make sense of their role as professionals. As the microrelations embed professional identity, mitigating unwanted and undesirable consequences of the context of change but also strengthening a professional conformity, the informal learning influence may extend beyond the formal mission statement of the organisation. Potentially, this may place social workers in conflict with the organisation, challenging organisational implications of legislation and the context of change as detrimental to the interests of the social worker but further enhancing the professional autonomy of social workers.

In sum, the first section of this chapter has addressed the third research sub-question of how informal learning influences the development of professional identity among social workers in multiple and complex relations of public sector change. Findings indicate that informal learning indeed plays a crucial part in shaping and influencing professional identity and that the process of influencing is highly complicated. The process involves the construction of a distinctive space of exclusiveness that professional identity may occupy and the fundamentals of this process seem to be client and practice-based. Supported by dynamic and relational dialectic of co-creating practices, involving co-workers and clients as well as treating professional experience as authentic, enables the modification of practices and eventually professional identity. Hence, informal learning influences professional identity as an embodiment of a tension between a need to know more and wanting to know within a specific practice-based space. In this sense, the influence of informal learning on professional identity may be pragmatic and have the effect of establishing a critical distance, but it is not strategic.

However, informal learning influences professional identity in processes of tension. The professional identity development may involve silent conflicts with the official organisational imagery, as practices are embedded and originating from social worker interpretations of strategies and mission statements. Conversely, influencing professional identity through informal learning, endorsed by team leaders, may also result in the consolidation or modification of practices that hereby assume official authority.

The next section takes up this issue of how informal learning enables workers to adjust professional identity to the context of changes.

Reacting to threats to professional identity

The first two sections of this chapter present findings to answer the third research sub-question, relating to informal learning practices and the influence of professional identity upon that informal learning. The fourth and final research sub-question continues from these findings and is focused on if and how informal learning leads social workers to adjust their professional identity to the consequences of organisational changes.

The remaining two sections of this chapter suggest two different ways that informal learning enables social workers to adjust to the context of change. The first section is focused on the role of shared values and team-based practices.

The sheer number of changes social workers is exposed to demands resilience to endure the strains and the additional work pressure of changes to public sector organisations. Throughout the reporting of findings, interviewees have been seeing the context of public sector changes to promote sensations of uncertainty. This sensation is further illustrated by a series of extracts showing how the adjustment of capacity takes a specific direction. One worker explains her reaction to an announcement concerning the re-organisation of the team management:

'Professionalism is challenged by those changes, I think. I will have to use my co-workers somewhat more' (A12: 7).

In adding more detail to what 'using' one's co-workers could entail, another worker adds how important team-based informal learning is for professional development in a context of change and ambiguity:

'If you do not feel professionally safe, feel on top or have time to discover it, it really means something to have somebody around you, who can assist and guide' (A15: 12)

This extract seems to manifest the team, as the prime space where workers are learning to cope with changes by seeking an alternative by relying on co-workers. A third worker explains, why it becomes obvious to turn to co-workers and informal learning:

'Really, the speed is very high and when things are changed, it is over the weekend. You see, it does not come with a three-month induction period. Now is now and that is how it was when we got restructured. It was almost from Friday to Monday. That is why, it is my personal feeling that my co-workers are all-decisive, if I have to be in this field' (A19:8).

Besides providing another example of how sudden and unprepared changes emerge to interviewees and how such changes are perceived to overwhelm the worker while crowding out all other concerns, it also illustrates that co-workers are to be relied on, presumably because they are a relatively stable point of the organisation. The team becomes a consistent centre of informal learning, building capacity to adjust to the consequences of change, implying that this is also an essential space for transformative learning processes. Further, the transformative influence of the team notwithstanding, narratives indicate that individual strategies play an important part of how social workers enhance capacity to deal with the threats presented by the change initiatives. Mitigating the impact of these changes to organisation becomes an essential informal learning enabler but it also has the effect of temporarily locking professional identity on a core of professional values that cannot be moved.

Another worker illustrates this, as she comments that:

'... change is a little bit that you somehow leave your comfort zone and then you have to discover how you can continue working with it, making compromises daily, so I can continue working....

'It is very important it [the change] is meaningful. Otherwise, I think I become indifferent. Then, I cannot be involved. To be involved and think, 'damn, if I have to do more', it has to be meaningful one way or the other. And when I say meaningful, I mean that some of my professional values have to be part, once in a while' (A10: 8-9).

The extract suggests that the social worker negotiates, interprets and modifies the changes until they appear meaningful to her. According to her values, the social worker assesses the implications of change in order to modify practices in a compromise that enables her to continue working. In this way, the extracts seem to suggest that the professional identity is not simply linked to the direct provision of social work, but is authorised as a validated space of practices that combine individual social and humanistic values with new ones that direct how the social worker adjusts existing professional knowledge and experience vis-à-vis the context of change. However, the space appears to be very fragile as it is validated by individual and practice-based references to what constitutes social justice for vulnerable clients.

The following three extracts point to different ways, in which informal learning influences capacity building in response to change.

As seen in chapter 4, in general social workers seem averse to change, characterising the way in which social workers build capacity through informal learning in response to change. For example, this interviewee shares:

'When something new happens, it is not always that I will do something. Operations have to run. If I were in a spot or had a case, where I needed the new guidance, I would reach out for it. And many times, it is a little bit, 'have you seen this guidance in relation to' and then you can talk a little bit about it. You get it and skim it' (A15: 10).

The extracts indicate that the interviewee reacts in an apparently casual manner to the context of changes, but when she does it is through a relation to a co-worker learning from mutual reflections. Yet, this casual appearance may mask a more deliberate and considered cynical approach, based on learning gleaned from previous experiences. This may indicate that changes are best dealt with through the minimal investment of individual resources, and only modifying professional practices when absolutely necessary.

Thus, the extract may also point to two other implications. One implication may be that the meaningfulness of change may at times be dependent on a situational interpretation, merging sense making and informal learning in microrelations. The second implication may be that professionals adjust to changes through a construction of individual coping strategies that also emerge from informal learning in microrelations. The resulting capacity building is not expansive, as the learning becomes very specific, opportune and yet also frugal in terms of resources spent.

However, informal learning is also about learning what is not there, but building individual and team capacity. For some, this turns into a team debugging process as this worker shares:

'I experience changes to the legislation of 'Integration' as enormous and sometimes inconsiderate. Sometimes, we have had a feeling that the proposal of this act has been put forward and now we bloody well have to get it through quickly. Sometimes retroactively. We try to scrutinise the conditions, we now have to work with and time and again we experience 'hey, they don't seem to have thought about that, or this and what about this and that?' (A29: 3)

The extract points to the imposed changes as being incomplete or disjointed and consequently the process of interpreting and adjusting to change becomes an exploratory activity conducted at the team level. The unwelcome process of change is made clear, as the interviewee articulates change as a dichotomy between 'we' and 'they', establishing two distinctive and opposing discourses. Distributing meaningfulness to interpretation by using the 'we' and the 'they' dichotomy further signifies how the legislation does not support work assignments or facilitate social

justice for clients. Hence, the dichotomy may also indicate how the new legislation provides a space for critical and collective reflection at the local level that allows social workers to construct the meaning of new legislation through informal learning.

A critical distance to the context of change seems essential to several interviewees. Sometimes, this distance is translated into actions that directly contravene the direction of changes as this extract illustrates, when an interviewee tried to mitigate the effects of a political decision that resulted in the removal of the informal coffee break. The interviewee considered the coffee break as an essential element of team wellbeing, providing an opportunity for sharing, catching up and team-based planning. The interviewee reflected about the consequences, stating that:

'Honestly, I think informal breaks will take place at offices instead. If I am having an informal break, only few of my colleagues will be able to accommodate themselves in my office, not the entire team' (A26: 9).

Hence, the interviewee sees the decision on their informal breaks as presenting a threat to the cohesion and values of the team. This displays an intention to continue an existing social practice, an intention that becomes more poignant when the interviewee continues, addressing a relocation of team members to different parts of the building and a different address,

'For the time being, I have decided that I go around the house to say good morning. I insist that we are a team' (A26: 9).

The worker puts herself in a position of action and assumes a role, where she becomes the focal point of the team, by insisting on the preservation of team structures and practices. Obviously, the interviewee is worried that distance is threatening a break-up of team-based values – one of the basic assumptions of informal learning - and puts herself in a subtle conflict with the organisation, challenging change initiatives, as she sees them as being opposed to core values of professional identity.

Yet, informal learning is not a magic fix-it mechanism, as this interviewee implies:

'It [the change] poses some demands to you as an individual and the professionalism you have, as you have to be part of discovering the solution. Nothing is necessarily done beforehand. Unfortunately, I have lost colleagues due to that. Not everybody is being ok with it. Especially, if it happens regularly and it does happen regularly.'

Deep down, it is a little bit like 'invent the wheel yourself'. And for some, this is fantastic and for some anxiety provoking' (A19: 13).

Informal learning is not enough to retain those co-workers who find changes anxiety provoking, impacting negatively on professional identity and this illustrates how informal learning is not a one-size-fits-all solution to the consequences of change, but embodies quite explicit limitations. However, if and when the wheel is reinvented it also follows that it is co-created in team-based practices and owned by the social workers, but only those who saw it to the end.

In sum, the findings presented in this section seem to confirm that informal learning indeed enables the consolidation and extension of professional capacity to deal with the impact of change. The findings also illustrate that a main direction of informal learning for capacity building is focused on enlarging opportunities for what is seen as a generic professional identity to continue, intact or relatively intact from the context of changes. This is reflected in exploration and negotiations of the meaningfulness of change. This resistance to change suggests that informal learning processes are directed mainly at learning to accommodate to changes within a relatively stable notion of professional identity, rather than towards a more fundamental transformation of professional practice.

The next and final section of this chapter illustrates how informal learning also enables expansive capacity to deal with the context of change.

In the 'borderland' – expanding professional identity

The previous section shows how a significant part of the capacity development to adjust to the context of changes is enlarging opportunities for staying true to what seems to be a generic professional identity. However, interviewees also illustrate emerging practices

that seem directed to deal with the context of change in a more expansive building of their capacity to adjust to change. In this context, the practices are referred to as the borderland and signify a part of everyday practices that locates the social worker in a space, where she has to and/or chooses to perform managerial operations without formal management authority and yet exercise leadership responsibility. This involves a distinction between management as for example governance, performance efficiency, economy and leadership, for example as collaboration, relations, situational management and team development.

The narratives point to strategies of entering into negotiation with management to alleviate the pressure of the context of change. One interviewee uses the analogy of putting frogs in boiling water, and who will attempt to jump out, to describe the work situation of her team. The interviewee continues:

‘.. none have jumped out yet. But they turn up sick. If I say that many are sick management will say ‘that is not true’. But I see those, who do not sleep at night and I see those, who do not look well. I see it in the corridor’⁹ (A23: 7).

The extract illustrates how the interviewee, based on team-based knowledge and observations, enters into a negotiation with local management to address the current state of work pressure in terms of sick days. Hence, change may translate into the emergence of a leadership space, vacant or not yet occupied, as local management is not engaged in everyday practices and a space that the interviewee occupies by addressing, for example mental health issues and team cohesion. Doing this, the interviewee enters a leadership context where a management-leadership dichotomy is established and with the social worker taking responsibility for leadership issues.

Extracts provide other examples of what seem to be identical expansions of professional identity to adjust to continuous change. Concerned with pressure and experiencing dwindling opportunities to work systematically with clients, due to changing IT-systems and administrative requirements, another interviewee addresses the consequences by stating:

⁹ The Danish Agency of Work Environment presented the municipality an injunction for poor mental health environment and it should not be excluded that this is a reference to the injunction.

'Still, the municipality has a reputation with respect to professionalism and this is what we are fighting for. Accommodating professionalism is the hardest thing for people, when we talk in the group. We will not end up ticking boxes and this is a struggle we always will take' (A27: 7).

The perspective of this extract is a little bit different, as it illustrates, how the team joins hands to lead a self-appointed defence of a municipal reputation of social work professionalism. The interviewee and the team take upon themselves a voluntary leadership to serve what they regard as the long-term professional interest. The reference to ticking of boxes further indicates the justification for the necessity to take this leadership, as it is based on a protection of the interest of clients, establishing a dichotomy between ticking off boxes and a more generic and authentic conception of social work and justice. By assuming leadership the interviewee and the team engage in a safeguarding of professional identity by expanding it, legitimised by referring to the interest of the client. Overall, the message seems to be that she manages cases more proficiently, safeguarding the interest of the client, if and when she moves into this borderland between social work and leadership.

As part of this assumption of leadership in response to the implications of change, respondents also pointed to processes of networking and 'becoming your own expert'. A professional coordinator compared her learning conditions now and then and describing the impact on the development of her professional identity as a social worker:

'In those days, you called the Ministries, when you doubted, if something was correct. You would not dream about doing that today. I do not know if you do it anywhere else, but I do not call any Ministry today. You see, it is years since you could call a government Agency, if you were in doubt about an interpretation. Today, you explore everything yourself. It is really a change. You become your own expert, as accesses to answers where answers can be found are easier. Only, there is no answer to how I discover what the problem really is; why is it that nothing moves, no development takes place; why do we not progress?' (A16: 3).

This extract illustrates a growing feature of everyday life in the municipality; workers find little internal expertise for necessary interpretations of knowledge and information. In short, this means that the social worker is required to become an expert in her own right and yet there are currently no clear means of knowing for certain whether the interpretation is correct, as the problem may not have been properly identified. Here, the professional coordination, responsible for advancing the case management, is left with discretionary decisions and trial and error that the social worker is left to hope, is correct. It constitutes a professional dilemma for social workers that impacts microrelations and informal learning in a leadership context when a team of social workers has to act in concert.

Several interviewees acknowledge this gap as they seek to come to terms with pressure placed upon professional identity and in situations, where the pool of knowledge and experience residing within the team is not sufficient. This is highlighted by the following interviewee, who is part of a team of four, each of whom works on individual and distinctive professional areas relating to different parts of the legislation:

'I network in many places. I use LinkedIn to debate things and gain knowledge of things, I utilise. Relations. If I have been in contact with somebody from a different municipality, I maintain contact to be able to spar at a later stage.

If you read something new, something to be aware about or something that could be an idea, I share it, asking, 'What do you think?' It is also about searching for knowledge. I use the Ministry of Employment hotline a lot to debate cases; something called BM Handicap¹⁰. Some of what I do contribute to my learning on where I can get some sparring in relation to challenges' (A19: 10).

The team leader of the interviewee has the responsibility for keeping staff up to date on legislation and other changes, but her tenure is ended in relation to a recent restructuring process, leaving the team to assume responsibility for updating knowledge. Hence, the interviewee has taken to virtual media to expand her knowledge and experiences as well

¹⁰ BM Handicap is a hotline page <http://bmhandicap.dk> managed by the Ministry of Employment acting as a knowledge hub for information, advice and development of Jobcentre services for citizens with disabilities.

as investing tactically in preserving relations for later possible use. The professional identity is expanded in different directions from developing and applying legal expertise as well as enhancing skills for the identification and processing of knowledge obtained by using digitalised media including social media. These sociomaterial aspects of informal learning and professional identity development are per se positioned outside the authority of the municipality and hence not a part of the hierarchical command structure. Yet, they also have the effect of transferring learning processes to less rich impersonal media that opens new perspectives for advancing professional capacity and identity.

Other interviewees report the same need for utilising external contacts and networks to develop and maintain the required expertise. One interviewee deals with the integration of refugees and participates in a formal network facilitated by the Ministry responsible in combination with an NGO, called Integrationsnet and actively uses the opportunities this presents for accessing external expertise:

'Little by little, we learn to know some lifelines in other municipalities and receive a business card. I also note that the Integrationsnet LinkedIn group is being used more and more. I think, more and more discussion is coming out that way; how we manage this or that. ... Networking means a lot in relation to get new inputs and develop our work. We cannot all get the same good ideas and the frame works of some offer a better opportunity to build something new. Then, we may be able to copy some of it' (A26: 14).

The extract further illustrates how the worker engages actively with building relationships to boost her own learning and professional development as well as overcoming a perceived lack of such opportunities at her workplace. Hence, the social worker moving into a borderland of leadership does not only imply a strengthening of individual professional identity, but may also directly or indirectly impact on existing practices, as learning from network participation is applied but not decided by formal management.

In sum, this final section has illustrated how social workers engage in a more expansive capacity building process moving into a vacant space of leadership. The space enables

individual and common professional adjustment to capacity that becomes vacant in the context of change by engaging in a borderland between social work and authorised management. This borderland involves joint interpretation, setting norms for and motivates co-workers, engaging the team to act in concert as well as optimising professional competence through networking that altogether signifies a larger capacity to adjust to changes.

Hence, informal learning is being used to innovate approaches and practices to enable an increased capacity to adjust in the face of change.

Conclusion

The last chapter has been exploring data from social worker narratives regarding the ways in which informal learning influences professional identity and enables the adjustment of practices in a context of change. This enables an answer the remaining two research questions:

- How does informal learning influence the development of professional identity among social workers in multiple and complex relations of public sector change?
- How, if at all, are processes of informal learning involved in enabling the social workers to build capacity required to adapt to the practices and processes of public sector change?

The main findings suggest that informal learning both influences professional identity and enables adjustments to the impact of changes to the organisation. The findings indicate two arenas, where informal learning is present to influence identity and enable adjustment. The findings also illustrate, how informal learning constitutes a space of capacity building for adjustment to implications of change, wide enough to contain different directions. This chapter presented two of these aspects as reacting to change and the borderland, signifying the occupation of a space of leadership that apparently opens following a stronger reliance on self-governing teams. Informal learning seems to influence professional identity through complex and dynamic but defensive practices,

aimed at maintaining existing sociomaterial practices and linked individual and professional development. The findings point to ways in which social workers react to the threat to professional identity as an individual capacity that enables the individual to counter the stress and arousal of change by organising 'alternative practices' (Czarniawska, 2008) as a method of enhancing professional identity. These alternative practices emerge through occupying a vacant space of leadership that enables the social workers to transgress limitations of the context of change, expanding on professional identity. Leadership in the borderland seems to be relatively restricted to vacated spaces as an outcome of organisational change and formation of self-managed teams in particular and no narratives narrated of other forms of narrated leadership. However, other research has illustrated the general team performance efficacy of informal leaders (Pescosolido, 2001) - and hence implicitly illustrating an aspect of co-worker power relations – although the governance paradigm of the public sector supports a restriction of the outreach of informal leadership due to formal hierarchical responsibility, job descriptions and delegation of decision-making authority.

In this context, informal learning seems to widen the space for critical reflections on practices, resulting in a more comprehensive insight and in the respondents' views serving client social care and justice better. Learning is primarily based on experiences that are considered authentic as they vary with the relations. Professional identity also seems to be able to contain a wide range and occasionally contrasting practices.

Social workers actively engage with informal learning practices, contrary to claims (Manauti et al, 2015) that consider informal learning as highly unconscious. The findings indicate that informal learning is regarded as the most important way to learn how to navigate workplace challenges. This underscores earlier research findings (Marsick 2006, Eraut 2004, Boud and Garrick, 1999) as well as supporting earlier research, which suggests that informal learning seems to be based first and foremost on shared values, involving a high degree of relational stability, trust and mutual confidence. Hence, narratives do not necessarily identify learning practices as 'informal', which suggests that interviewees do not necessarily link practices to a strengthening of professional capacity.

Hence, learning informally in microrelations becomes indispensable to balance interpretations of directions of the organisation in the context of change and maintaining professional autonomy as an indispensable aspect of professional identity.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Introduction

The final chapter synthesises and discusses the findings and the broader implications of the research in relation to the research question. The basis for the discussion is the analysis of collected data from social workers on how they experience they adjust to the context of change as a public sector employee.

First, the chapter looks back, bringing the warrant and the questions for the research project to the forefront once again, briefly summarising the different steps of the research process.

Secondly, discussions of the main findings in response to the research question follow as well as a discussion of the broader implications in terms to contribution to theory and practice. These three sections form the main bulk of the conclusion.

Finally, the chapter closes by discussing potential limitations to findings and research methods as well as describing suggestions for further research.

Background and objective

The study was inspired by the on-going transformation of the public sector in Denmark that impact upon the workplace of the social worker. How public sector employees like social workers adapt to the consequences of this complex context of public sector change emerges as an interesting area of research and challenges existing sociological and political thinking, as only very few studies have been conducted in this area and primarily from an economic and/or policy research angle. While this is interesting in its own right, it leaves a gap in research in terms of how the context of change affects public sector employee according to their experience.

Hence, this study intended to explore linkages between professional identity and informal learning in a context of public sector change by examining everyday practices,

and listening to the voices of social workers and going beyond some of the present research limitations.

The main research question was:

- How are informal learning and professional identity implicated in shaping social workers' responses to the context of public sector change?

The literature review illustrated how existing research primarily treats aspects of professional identity, informal learning and the context of public sector change as separate analytical entities and illustrated gaps in the existing conceptual thinking such as concepts being studied in isolation, without definitions and based on naturalist ontologies. Thus, the review suggested that existing theory does not adequately account for the complexity of relations between the context of change, professional identity and informal learning, and established a need for the development of working definitions of workplace learning and microrelations to support future analysis of findings.

In the circumstances of emerging complexities (Fenwick et al, 2013) that signify challenges to current research on organisational change and workplace learning, the call was for an agile research strategy, grounded in everyday practices and relations workplace that would enable an integrated and holistic perspective. Hence, the study introduced the concept of microrelations as a space where acquaintances interact in mutually beneficial relations that facilitates learning to adjust professional identity to the context of change.

In term of empirical data collection, the study examined the research question by interviewing 20 social workers as a case. The workers were employed in different functions in eight different municipalities of Denmark. The research data collection employed four research subquestions to structure the overall content of research activities:

1. How do social workers perceive the processes of contemporary public sector change in Denmark in terms of how it affects their professional identity?

2. How do informal learning opportunities or requirements for professional development actually emerge in microrelation at the workplace?
3. How does informal learning influence the development of professional identity among social workers in multiple and complex relations of public sector change?
4. How, if at all, are processes of informal learning involved in enabling the social workers to build capacity required to adapt to the practices and processes of public sector change?

Using semi-structured interviewing and an interpretivist analysis approach, the main focus was on how social workers experience and treat the context of change as real. Respondents were involved in the drafting of an interviewee narrative, supporting a dual research objective to have respondents validate the narrative, making the analysis data stronger and engaging in emancipatory activity by reflecting on own professional identity and adjustments to the context of change in a process that went beyond the actual interview.

From this brief resume of the research warrant, literature review and research strategy, the conclusive chapter moves on to discuss findings in relation to the main research question.

Professional identity and informal learning – examining connections

Departing from the narratives of what respondents consider and know as real, the research findings of the interacting between professional identity and informal learning in a context of public sector change were reported in three chapters earlier. Hence, this section of the conclusion builds on findings to further discuss the interaction between professional identity and informal learning in a context of change.

The main research question was:

- How are informal learning and professional identity implicated in shaping social worker's responses to the context of public sector change?

The discussion of the research findings are synthesised in four reflections that each contribute to answering key aspects of the main research question. The four reflections are discussed below.

First, findings support that informal learning and professional identity do connect to shape responses to a context of public sector change, underscoring earlier research as well as opening new perspectives. In a workplace environment that primarily consists of client-based knowledge and relational experience, professional identity and informal learning interact in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship as the interaction enters as a substitute for an absent theoretical and methodological distinctiveness. Hence, the narrative of professional identity is strengthened through an enhancement of the capacity to change by accessing informal learning, and informal learning becomes legitimate as interacting individuals share a professional identity or mutually contribute to professional knowledge that is aligned with generic social worker values or humanistic ethos. In this sense, social worker professional identity and informal learning should be considered an interacting and interdependent social construct, rather than discrete and separate entities. This interacting dependency should be taken into account as an essential aspect of the context of change.

Furthermore, findings confirm earlier research that learning relates to workplace sociomateriality (Fenwick et al., 2012, McMurtry et al, 2016) as the introduction of new IT, new standards, methods and procedures all seem to contribute to a strengthening of social worker professional identity. From a change perspective, it should be noted that sociomaterial changes do not appear as neutral in terms of professional identity, but rather as initiatives challenging the domain and integrity of professional autonomy. Therefore, from a social worker perspective, sociomaterial changes are likely to be resisted and/or crowded out in alternative organising of procedures.

Secondly, the findings suggest that informal learning stages the adjustment of professional identity to a context of change in microrelations that emerges as a material space in a process of co-creation between individuals who are ‘worthy of each other’ (Manning, 2008) and coded as trust, mutual confidence and/or commonalities. The power of inclusion or exclusion in microrelations emerges as a ‘framing’ (Goffman,

1974) that filters activities in terms of acceptability when individuals, mutually trustful or 'framed', reach out and link up in particular situations considered essential by all involved. As this filtering occurs when individuals interact, the space of microrelations becomes real and material. As social workers in everyday practices engage with a multitude of dilemmas and tensions this shaping of narratives of professional identity may not be uniform and/or progressive but rather assume multiple – and sometimes conflicting – narrative aspects, as it was seen in terms of the perceptions of the context of change. Further, this implies, those 'not verified' or 'not framed' as worthy to participate are excluded from participating in the shaping of narratives of professional identity. Being worthy reaches beyond professional life, meaning that the professional identity that emerges become almost impenetrable to outsiders, constituting a space of 'others', who do not share the professional identity of the social workers. As the relationship between informal learning and professional identity is enacted and embedded in practitioners' relations, this exclusion has a narrative as well as a physical and material aspect.

Thirdly, the findings illustrate how informal learning draws on case management experience and professional autonomy to adjust professional identity development to a context of change. Case management experience is essential to establish legitimacy of the informal learning, as social workers do not possess a distinctive professional field underpinned by scientific theory and methods. Learning from seniors is considered an effective solution to workplace challenges as experience becomes authentic, and the social worker assumes experience-graded case management responsibility. In turn, the grading may be expanded by interaction in microrelations with co-workers and a perception of professional autonomy, confirming earlier research (Fuller and Unwin, 2003) that high levels of professional autonomy may catalyse learning at the workplace. The autonomy appears as a key aspect of social worker professional identity and reflects independent control over the work processes, distinctiveness of professional norms and values, and the degree of client service delivery. The practice-based knowledge and experience constitutes and informs professional autonomy, as social workers make an active choice to regulate and guide individual professional identity development through informal learning. In this way, informal learning influences professional identity by facilitating encounters between practitioners and with

stakeholders where knowledge and experience is exchanged and debriefings take place, establishing a shared pool of practices.

The professional autonomy becomes contended in a context of change and is prone to trigger a conflict of case management and participatory boundaries as social workers attempt to maintain their unique right to decide how they relate to clients. As informal learning takes place in microrelations, the professional autonomy contention also becomes a conflict relation, as the authentication of experience and professional autonomy emerge in a context of multiple and asymmetric power relations. In a macro organisational perspective, power relations emerge as a condition for and an outcome of conflicts between organisational management and the professional identity of social workers where as in a micro perspective power relations emerge from the possession of more or less experience among co-workers that establishes the 'footing' (Goffman, 1981) or the positions from which individuals contribute to linking professional identity and informal learning in microrelations.

Fourthly, findings point to the quality of the connection between informal learning and professional identity to shape social worker responses to a context of public sector change. Informal learning does impact professional identity, although it seems that the quality of learning primarily is accommodative, which means that learning in this sense serves to ensure that the individual can cope adequately with the context of change. The power of the professional identity narrative points to responses to a context of change that often are polysemic in character, reflecting a day-to-day balance between the civil servant status of the social workers and the experience of professional autonomy and humanistic values. This opens two additional aspects of the connection between the context of change, professional identity and informal learning. First, informal learning does not in itself result in changes to the professional identity (Illeris, 2013) of social workers, and findings do not suggest a major part of informal learning to be strategic or transformative. This may potentially open and widen 'a divide' (Wackerhausen, 2002) between what social workers subjectively experience as professionally real and the main organisational narrative of 'who we are'. In a wider perspective, the implication for social worker professional identity may be a crowding out of capacity to adjust to new or different workplace conditions, isolating social workers from the domain of organisational narratives. The second aspect of the connection is that it gives rise to

organising of alternative narratives or what in an earlier research project was termed an organisational ‘underlife’ (Goffman, 1961) that grounds apprehension and resistance to the normative and narrative order of change in general and the performance management trend in particular. As the microrelations primarily emerge beyond the practices of the formal organisational framework, microrelations appear as instrumental as a space where sociomaterial change undergoes day-to-day modifications to existing sociomaterial practices and because relations are emerging as a space beyond the formal organisational framework, modifications typically do not include or depend on formal management involvement and/or decisions. This aspect may contribute to modify social workers sensations of exclusion whereas it will be a challenge for the overall organisational narrative that may not be sufficiently agile to include competing narratives.

Findings have shown a close, complex and dynamic relationship between the context of change, professional identity and informal learning besides providing insights into new theoretical and practical perspectives of changes to organisations. Further, the analytical lens of narratives and everyday practices proved relevant to unlock knowledge, experience and sentiments of social workers within domains of informal learning and professional identity. Finally, the findings have broader implications for existing theory as well as practical implications. The implications are the subject of the following two sections.

Extending existing theory

The research findings illustrate that work is a powerful site of social worker professional identity development that emerges from practice-based relations between social workers and stakeholders, strengthening the capacity to act. As the context of change influences the dynamics of the workplace, informal learning becomes an essential enabler of professional identity narratives for social workers through microrelations. From a theoretical perspective, this facilitates a comprehensive approach where essential concepts like the context of change, professional identity and informal learning at the workplace are seen in concert. As discussed in the literature review, findings will be brought into a working definition of workplace learning that is situated at the end of this section.

From an empirical perspective, the research findings highlighted the importance of research into the organisation as organising alternatives (Czarniawska, 2008), context as emerging complexities and sociomaterial practices (Fenwick, 2012, Fenwick et al, 2014, McMurtry et al., 2016), professional identity as a social and evolving construct (McAdams, 2001), learning at the workplace as accommodative or transformative (Illeris, 2014) and at the same time using a comprehensive conceptual approach that co-thinks concept to avoid a silo mentality of concepts often found in conventional research.

The overall theoretical argument is that concepts like the context of change, sociomateriality, professional identity and workplace learning should not be treated as discrete and separate entities but viewed in a dynamic and interaction relationship.

In line with the theory of organizing (Czarniawska, 2008), the findings indicate that informal learning in microrelations in the context of public sector change performs an essential role, interpreting and facilitating an organising of practices that make up the organisation that social workers know and treat as real. The organising is grounded by informal learning in microrelations and further legitimised by the emergence of localised narratives that establish sense and meaning of activities related to the context of change.

In addition, the organising of practices as a way to understand how the organisation comes into everyday existence provides an agile and flexible approach to adjustments to the 'emerging complexities' (Fenwick, 2012) of the competition state, where change is the only constant and workplace learning becomes the primary coping mechanism.

As the social workers' professional identity relies on practice-experience, this identity is invested in the day-to-day articulation of microrelations and practices through informal learning. This also means that the professional identity is exposed to a pressure that follows developments in the context of change and consequently social workers involve in a continuous contention for the integrity of their professional ethos and autonomy, balancing the context of change and professional identity.

Initial steps were taken in the literature review to develop a working definition of workplace learning, synthesising concepts that together illustrate how social workers adjust to a context of public sector change. Pulling the findings together in a working definition, workplace learning emerges as a vehicle for the adjustment to a context of change, as ‘informal learning at work continuously facilitates and shapes opportunities in microrelations to adjust the narrative of professional identity, and expand individual capacity to modify sociomaterial practices in a responsive manner to the context of change’. Hence, the working definition extends the existing understanding of workplace learning by combining a theory of meta-learning with professional identity in sociomaterial practices.

The working definition involves a number of implications with respect to existing research. The definition of workplace learning emerging from this study here marks a move from a workshop related learning to a relational learning that emerges if and when it is needed and further emphasising the perspective of ‘knowledgeability’ and ‘knowledge-related learning’ (Thompson et al., 2001: 939) that may be appropriate for a 21st century work environment in Northern Europe. Stressing that learning at the workplace is not an object with finality, informal learning at the workplace is constitutive of and constituted by relations. The implication is that learning is a matter of becoming-in-participation that is asymmetrical and hence involves power and dominance, illustrated by findings on authenticity of experience and seniority. Learning at the workplace is not value-free, is not a by-product of ‘some other activity’ (Marsick and Watkins (2001) or ‘normal workplace activity’ (Eraut (2007), or simply to be pinpointed as a residual of other activities. Informal learning emerges in its own right within organising practices and therefore is inscribed in the professional autonomy of social work practices. Learning, situated in microrelations, becomes a matter of an actively chosen generation of capacity rather than an implicit transfer. This also means that the question of the rationale of informal learning shifts from ‘if something is being learned’ to ‘what activities generates learning’ and the typology of this learning.

Further, the working definition does not support research suggesting that organisations purposely should promote and encourage informal learning (Eraut, 2004, Marsick and Vole, 1999) as this presumably would encourage tensions by crowding out a space that historically and professionally belongs to social workers. This is in line with the

conclusion by Boud et al., who advises not to co-opt everyday learning (2009) in research on workplace learning, as this would remove the potential of informal learning to interact with professional identity adjusting to the context of change.

In terms of professional identity, the working definition makes it irrelevant to suggest anything but that social worker professional autonomy is internally strong and an essential part of the adjustment and maintenance of professional identity. This counters Evetts conclusions of a shift from professional to organisational control in relations of organisational change (2009) with a subsequent loss of importance of the internal professional practices. Likewise, other research discussing how the role and importance of the professional community is undermined by the new values of change (Adler et al., 2008) is insufficient to explain the complexity of adjustment to the context of change. Rather than focusing on paradigmatic changes, professional identity should be studied from a conflict perspective with social workers trying to maintain and/or expand professional identity boundaries.

The findings also confirm earlier research that professional identity is social and emerges as a dynamic combine of knowledge and subjectivity (Salling-Olesen, 2002) within a framework of perceived and experienced social work values. The framework functions as boundaries to other professions and bodily-embedded practices that subject the professional identity to self-regulation. The self-regulation primarily takes place in microrelations and is facilitated by informal learning and may occur as an outcome of tensions between the formal functions of the social workers and experiences from encounters with clients.

The professional identity framework involves general social and humanistic values that engage and connect social workers. The engagement means that social workers are fully there and willing to engage with all aspects of work if it is considered:

- Meaningful – in accordance with generic social values
- Based on trust and mutual confidence and that
- Co-worker resources are accessible.

In turn, this creates a requirement for informal learning and microrelations as the engagement is on a day-to-day basis, establishing a reciprocal interaction between professional identity and informal learning.

Finally, the findings illustrate how the self-regulation of identity involves bodily performances, as the worker develops and maintains professional identity by (repetitively) performing certain procedures in a certain way. Sociomaterial practices become bodily, as social workers perform acts to maintain the linkage between the body of professional knowledge, practices and the internalised being a social worker. In this case, this could refer to doing office-round saying 'good morning' to maintain team coherency, daily/weekly planning meetings to coordinate resource utilisation as well as operating an individual filing system to circumvent unwanted effects of change, but also partying, eating cake and drinking coffee, fun runs, etc. Hence, professional identity is also born and developed in interaction with sociomateriality that requires a bodily involvement. However, although exiting, this area is only scarcely researched and should be object of further research.

In sum, the study extends the existing theoretical basis by for the first time illuminating the interaction of informal learning and professional identity of social workers in everyday practices and in a context of change. This enabled a working definition of workplace learning that co-thinks the concepts of the context of change, informal learning at the workplace and professional identity. Further, the study picks up and expands the emerging concept of microrelations, besides positioning informal learning at the workplace in sociomaterial practices and makes a case for additional examination of sociomaterial practices, microdynamics and relational processes in a move beyond workplace learning as individual acquisitions and reflections in stable communities. In a further perspective, these findings help detail a meta-theory on learning that is situated in everyday practices, grounded in constructivist ontology.

Implications for practice

The warrant for the research project was based on an assumption that it is underresearched how social workers adjust to a context of change. Social work is a very knowledge intensive sector requiring insights into legislation, social challenges of

clients as well as a capacity to contribute to the a change in life conditions for clients while still maintaining a professional integrity. The decision to approach social workers to study their individual practice of adjustment as a unit of analysis, focusing on the fostering of interaction and relations and shifting the ontology of the organisation from a pre-set framework to a field of continuous construction. Social workers have never previously been studied this way before in DK and the method proved advantageous to gather information on experiences and memories about the interaction between professional identity and informal learning. Hence, the research provides a basis for a discussion of broader practical implications that implies a co-thinking of the context of change, social worker identity and informal learning at the workplace.

The implications are detailed below in four themes. The themes are:

- Social workers and professional identity
- Extend management competences
- Strategy and informal learning
- Change and practice

The themes will briefly be described in terms of findings and thereafter in a range of possible activities, aiming to mitigate some of the negative impacts of the tensions between the context of change and social work profession.

- Social workers and professional identity

The findings provide deep and critical insight into experiences and behaviour of social workers as an essential professional group in a public sector context that stands out a vibrant, dynamic and strongly engaged professional community. However, it also seems clear from the findings that social workers experience how their professionalism is under pressure from the context of change.

The professional identity of social workers seems to be based on internally strong narratives, employing experienced universal social and humanistic values. These values, however, seem to be a main target of the context of change, threatening the professional autonomy of social workers.

In order to continuously position social workers as an essential public sector workforce, it may be relevant to consider opportunities for developing a more inclusive narrative that unfolds professional social work authority but also reaching out to different professional groups and articulating specific and distinctive contributions on essential issues such as how to embrace the economic predicaments of the municipality, to contribute to sector strategies, or to understand management withdrawal as an opportunity to further professional identity that at the same time maintain and develop a professional distinctiveness.

By recognising the importance as well as the duality and tension of informal learning in terms of strengthening and restricting professional development, social workers may encourage and benefit from a capacity development that is strategic and transformative. Naturally, this would involve more and stronger awareness of the informal learning processes in microrelations. Doing that, social workers may learn how to deal with professional autonomy as an asset that is inclusive rather than potentially isolating and champion their own professional cause by demonstrating distinctive professional contributions.

Finally, social workers may benefit from acknowledging that informal learning has disciplining effects that may antagonise professional diversity. Informal learning is restricted in the sense that what you learn is primarily structured by what is already known, preventing an innovative approach that transgresses current professional limitations. Mitigating this potential antagonism could be achieved by a widening of microrelations beyond co-workers, such as social media discussion fora, networks, project works, etc.

- Extend management competences

Throughout the findings, management relations appear in a context of tensions and potential conflict, as parties engage in struggles that relate to the autonomy of narratives and practices. In general, management change strategies appear to warrant little or no attention to the role of professional identity and autonomy in a context of change processes. Changes emerge as insufficient and professionally compromised when

leadership spaces are left vacant, or managers are considered to be inaccessible or passive.

In terms of implications for management, the importance of management interventions should not be overstated, but multiple benefits could be found from taking an ethical leadership of all aspects of change processes and acknowledging the existence, power and value of professional identity.

Further, findings seem to promote a transformational management role that consistently facilitates interaction and connectedness to extend competences and practices of workers, based on trained and agile managers who exercise a leadership that enables the manager to appear authentic and present while leading from behind. This would involve an explicit acknowledgement through training program for managers with respect to importance of microrelations, informal learning and professional identity as well as adopt meta-leadership competences, enabling social workers to learn to lead everyday practice and develop high social capital. This would be further advanced if managers strengthened insights into the potential of individuals and the dynamics of teams in order to nudge and redeem potentials, which would take the discipline of management beyond simple governance.

Finally, findings indicate the importance of a common narrative of management and a systematic recruitment of transformational managers who has learned how to engage, motivate and bring professional along on a journey of change. This could be further expanded by establishing management learning labs to encourage relations among managers and overall programs to train managers to build, implement and maintain a long-term strategy for informal learning at the workplace.

- Strategy and informal learning

The findings have illustrated how organisational strategies and informal learning are discrete entities, unsupportive and involving differing narratives. However, recognising the polycentric organisation, it should also be recognised that the cohesion of the polycentric organisation originates from disparate narratives, which means that many

and different narratives are required that primarily are acquired through informal learning.

This would mean to shift the lens from universal and fixed concept of organisation to a concept of continuous modifications of practices, building from inside and involving more emphasis on construction of inclusive narratives. This would require an improvement of the management of interdependencies in relational coordination as well as competences to continuously articulate narratives that reduce complexity

Supplementing earlier implications leading to a transformational leadership, it would be relevant to adopt a conscious and strategic approach to workplace learning, acknowledging that learning primarily takes place between employers in relations outside the reach of the formal hierarchy. On one hand, this implies to explore and support those activities that generate learning, and on the other hand actively encourage social interaction and development of relations between stakeholders.

The challenge would be to attempt to ensure that informal learning speaks more and directly into the value chain of the organisation, yet without crowding out the incidental and autonomous nature of informal learning. This could mean to acknowledge the potential and necessity of informal learning in microrelations by preserving and shielding the relations, but not directly influencing and/or taking control of relations. This could also include acknowledging that workplace learning takes place outside the physical boundaries of the municipality and the organisation of work would need to reflect that. Yet, it would also imply that to mitigate that informal learning may lead in directions that do not support the official vision and mission, as preserving the professional autonomy seems to take precedence.

Finally, implications point to the emerging importance of sociomateriality and social media technologies in particular for workplace learning. The social media, separated from the official organisational structure and rationale, seem to take on their own meaning and significance within the social relationships that shape learning. Hence, organisations may need to strategically consider the implications of social media for sociomaterial practices.

- Change and practice

The findings show how change is much more than simply a series of discrete and episodic events and the context of change is instead negotiated, open-ended and practice-based. What are of particular concern are the speed and the unpredictability of the context of change. Yet, this concern may stem from an inadequate theoretical and practical knowledge about the rationales behind frequent changes.

Adopting an ethical change charter would have a potential to mitigate effects of frequent change, emphasising change management knowledge, preparation and involvement of practitioners and incorporate practice-based insights. The gain is a strengthening of the totality of organisational capacity as the organisation, as well as the involvement of social workers, will solidify and strengthen the narrative frameworks of the organisation.

Change and practice robustness also depends on the composition of teams and findings seem to point to a structure social capital approach that is proactive and strategic with respect to cohesion of team, narratives and practices, including a balanced approach to professional autonomy rather than one-sided initiatives such as repeals of delegated authority.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that changes to sociomaterial practices – technology, standards, methods, coffee breaks, office locations, etc. - are far from value free, but very sensitive, as they deeply interact with professional identity in ways that may negatively affect service delivery. Strategies for change should reflect that sensitivity to changes of existing practices and provide time and space for reflection and experimentation.

Limitations

The width of the research question proved to be overwhelming, working on four key concepts as ‘public sector change’, ‘microrelations at the workplace’, ‘professional identity’ and ‘informal learning’ of which there are no clear definitions. In general, it is conceded that the scope of the research question limited the ability to move deeper into

particular theories and to focus more thoroughly on the implications of specific concepts as this also had some impact on data collection and analysis. In effect, the broad scope resulted in a series of false steps and pursuing futile that altogether have taken up a good deal of resources in countless rewriting sessions, killing lot of darlings, weeding out points and aspects.

It is also acknowledged that the sample was constructed as a form of self-selection introducing the potential of bias into the data collection and processing. The approach to the semi-structured interviews as conversations and presenting interviewees with a written narrative of the interview established a good and fruitful relation between this researcher and the interviewee. Yet, it should also be shared that although interviewees represented different orientations of social work, positioned in different departments, in different parts of Denmark, narratives were surprisingly identical, pursuing observations and values that point to a strong and shared professional identity.

Further research

This field of research is intriguing as, among other things, it reflects a balance between macro perspective in the form of a national adjustment of the public policy and organisation to those, whose everyday practices are impacted upon, profoundly by the context of change. Certainly, an overwhelming amount of research has gone into this area, but as the findings of this study underline several areas still hold unexplored potential for future research.

The research did not really venture into the power relations of informal learning at the workplace, although indications were noted. From the findings, the issue of who chooses which content of learning to be relevant for the team emerges as unexplored, but could be an interesting area for future research. Researching shifts and compositions of positions of power in workplace microrelations could further expand the dynamics of microrelations, for example how they are triggered and ultimately what it is takes to shift position altogether?

A further analysis into the patterns of learning in teams – what you learn and how you learn – could be an interesting extension of the above proposal.

Finally, findings suggest that informal learning through engagement with social media is emerging as an important field of future study. Studying the rapidly growing importance of social media for informal learning at the workplace is suggested, as indications are that social media is beginning to crowd out local expertise, opening up to knowledge hubs at national or even trans-national levels (EU and strategies for refugee interventions could be an example) and/or changing traditional concepts of what constitutes expertise, as knowledge increasingly becomes detached from individuals.

Annex A

Interview guideline: Narratives on the context of change, professional identity and informal learning

- Information, themes and tentative questions.

Interviewee data:

I collect narratives about relations between the context of change, professional identity and informal learning for a research project that I'm conducting at University of Leicester, UK.

I would like to record a few issues, before we begin.

Interviewee name:		Transcript code:
Age:	Current position:	Graduated social worker:
Gender:	Place of employment:	Seniority:
Team size:	Experience: Public sector only: Private sector also: 1 st . employment:	
Email:	Other relevant information:	

I also need you to verify that you have given your consent to being interviewed and that you have received 'the participant information sheet'.

I forwarded 4 questions prior to the interview in order for you to prepare yourself for the interview.

The interview is confidential and transcript will remain confidential and anonymous.

Do you have any question, before we start the interview?

1. The beginning – education and expectations

To put your development as a social worker into perspective, I should like to learn why you choose to become social worker, if your expectations have been fulfilled and how you see the match between the education and your present functions?

- Will you shortly recount reasons for your choice of education
- Do you remember the expectations you had for your future occupation as a social worker??
- How do you see the relation between your education as a social worker and the functions you carry out now?

2. The workplace and the context of change

Now I would like to shift focus to the context of change and the workplace. First, I should like to learn a little about your day-by-day tasks and functions and secondly, I should to learn what you consider the most important changes you have been exposed to, your involvement and how it influences daily routines and practices?

- How will you describe your tasks and functions?
- What are the most important changes that have happened here over the last couple of years? Could you describe the main points?
- In your opinion, how – if at all - does the context of change impact on the workplace culture and values?
- Does the context of change influence your routines or practices when you are case managing?
- Have you been involved in planning and implementation of changes?

3. Professional identity as social worker

Now, I should like to turn your attention to your professional identity as a social worker. I'm interested in learning about your professional values and how you develop as a social worker, as well as how formal process requirements impacts on your professional identity?

- First of all, I should like you describe the professional values that are most important to you?
- In terms of professional identity, could you give a brief overview of how you develop as a professional? What and who are involved?
- Choosing one factor that in particular is impacting your professional identity development – how will you describe this impact?
- Over recent years, quality standards and professional process requirements have been introduced in many municipalities. If this is the case here – how does this impact your professional identity and how do you adjust to the new requirements?

4. Workplace learning

Turning more specifically to how you adjust your competences and skills at the workplace I'm interested to learn more about what you do and how you do this. Here, I should like to ask you to recall first experience of learning the rules and norms of 'what to do' and 'how to do your job'; how you adjust to new assignments as well as how you engage in own learning and learning of colleagues and how the physical environment interacts with workplace learning?

- Do you remember learning key functions at your workplace for the first time? What happened?
- What do you think are the most important rules and norms of the workplace?
- Do you actively engage in learning in your workplace? Do you participate in supervision, debriefing of critical events, utilise access to knowledge about

management decisions, formal training, job rotation, use of self-learning packages or alike?

- How do you respond if you from time to time get new work assignments with respect to how to carry out the assignment?
- Do you function as mentor or 'learning-buddy' for colleagues new or in need of training?
- Do you engage in joint reflections on professional issues? And how?
- How would you describe the kind of physical environments you work in?
- How would you describe the benefits of your learning in the workplace?

5. Relations between informal learning and the context of change.

Now I should like to bring the parts – the context of change, professional identity and learning – together to see if relations can be made. In particular, I should like to learn how you adjust to the context of change and how you think the context of changes may have impacted on your professional identity development.

- What do you consider the most important factor in terms of translation and understanding of objectives and consequences of changes?
- Does the context changes impact your professional identity development conditions in the workplace?
- How do you learn to perform the new functions that you supposed to do after the changes??

6. Last questions

- Is there something important and relevant for your story that has not been mentioned?
- Do you think the narrative has given a relevant and precise image of you as a social worker?
- What are you thoughts on the interview and what we have talked about?

7. The end

This terminates the interview. Thank you very much for your participation, contribution, time and effort. You did marvellously. Altogether, you have made an important contribution to the project and my understanding of the research problem.

Shortly, I should like to inform you about the next steps. The interview will be transcribed and having done that I will forward the transcript to you for comments.

The transcript will appear as a narrative, which means that I will make a floating narrative, omitting questions, false starts, the 'ummhh' and 'ooohhs'. The narrative will, of course, be in your words.

Also, you have the opportunity to participate in the closed LinkedIn forum where you will be able to meet and further your reflections with colleagues who also have been interviewed. If you want to participate, you just need to let me know and then I will make the necessary arrangements.

Once again thank you for your time and contribution.

Annex B

Overview interviewees										
Code	Job title	Sex	Age	Grad.	Earlier vocation	Seniority	Seniority in Department	Team	Team size	Experience
A30	Professional coordinator	F	44	1999	Yes	16 years	12 years	Integration	1 (3)	Public sector only
A29	Case worker	F	45	2007	Yes	8 years	6,5 years	Job & Vocation	3	Public sector only
A28	Consultant integration	F	60	1982	No	33 years	27 years	Adult II	1	Public sector only
A27	Foster care consultant	F	50	2004	Yes	11 years	11 years	Family care	5	Public sector only
A26	Social worker	F	35	2006	No	9 years	8 years	Integration	15	Public sector only
A25	Foster care consultant	F	54	1986	No	29 years	9 years	Family care	5	Public sector only
A24	Social worker	F	26	2013	No	2 years	2 years	Families	8	Public sector only
A23	Social worker	F	52	2000	Yes	15 years	15 years	Labour market	8	Public sector only
A22	Social worker	F	57	1985	No	30 years	8 years	Welfare & Integration	4	Public sector only
A21	Family counselor	M	43	2010	Yes	5 years	5 years	Families	9	Public sector only
A20	Counselor	M	44	1999	No	16 years	16 years	Youth	14	Public sector only
A19	Social worker	F	36	2007	Yes	8 years	8 years	Youth	4	Public sector only
A18	Social worker	F	37	2005	Yes	10 years	5 years	Addiction	8	Public sector only
A16	Professional coordinator	F	52	1990	No	25 years	2 years	Addiction	9	Public sector only
A15	Adviser	F	43	1998	Yes	17 years	1 year	Job & rehabilitation	8	Public sector only
A14	Adviser	F	49	2012	Yes	3 years	3 years	Social service	9	Private and public
A12	Social worker	F	48	2010	N/A	5 years	2 months	Adults	6	Public sector only
A11	Disability counselor	F	33	2011	No	4 years	2 months	Children	6	Public sector only
A10	Social worker	F	39	2003	No	12 years	5 years	Adults	6	Private and public
A09	Professional coordinator	F	49	1993	No	22 years	1 month	Children & Youths	14	Private and public

Annex C

Participant Information Sheet

Research title: 'Connecting professional identity and workplace learning in a public sector context of change: The case of Danish social workers'.

Mr Karsten Jensen is conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Dan Bishop, the School of Management, University of Leicester, UK.

What is this study about? The purpose of the research is to examine, how organisational development impact on professional identity and learning of social workers employed in municipalities in Denmark. The study requires a number of interviews. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study.

What will I be asked to do? Your participation includes being interviewed which means that you will be asked to share your experience of professional identity and learning. The interviewing will last one-two hours. Further, you will be asked to comment on a transcript of the interview. Finally, it is a voluntary option for you to participate in a closed professional forum, sharing experiencing and further develop individual understanding of the context of changes to professional identity and learning.

Is my participation voluntary? Your participation in all phases of the research is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. You should not feel obliged to participate in any part of the interviewing that you find objectionable or that makes you feel uncomfortable. In the event you withdraw from the project research, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

What do I have to observe when being interviewed? Individuals employed by local government in Denmark have the same right to freedom of speech as everybody else. However, you are encouraged to observe the following:

- You make statements in your own name and as an individual
- You have to stand up for your statements
- You cannot identify individual citizens when referring to cases, as this will break your obligation of professional secrecy.
- You are supposed to be loyal towards your workplace, hence not providing distorted or incorrect information.

What will happen to my interview? The interview will be recorded to facilitate analysis and research project documentation. The recording will be done using a digital device and stored as a mp4 file protected with a password. Transcription will be made and stored as a digital file only and at a secure location, protected by a password. The data from the project may be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings.

What is meant by confidentiality? All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and the interviewing or recording will not be associated with identifying information and I will make sure that you stay anonymous throughout the process. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and no one but the researcher will have access to this information.

How long time will the data be stored? The data preservation plan is to store data until final approval of the thesis + 6 month, during which period data will not be accessed except if requested by University of Leicester representatives. After the 6-month grace period, all data files in whatever form will be permanently deleted.

Will there be any benefit for me? You will be invited to participate in closed professional forum, where interviewees will have the opportunity to further share and debate experiences. You may also be invited to comment on findings, as well as you may opt to receive a copy of findings.

What if I have concerns? Any questions about study participation may be directed to the Karsten Jensen at kj71@le.ac.uk. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to Mrs Jane Pilcher, Departmental Ethics Officer at University of Leicester, UK.

This study has been granted approval according to ethical research principles of University of Leicester, UK

Again, thank you. Your interest in participating in this research study is greatly appreciated.

Kind regards

Karsten Jensen

kj71@le.ac.uk

Annex D

Letter of Consent

Research title: 'Connecting professional identity and workplace learning in a public sector context of change: The case of Danish social workers'.

Name (.....): _____

I agree to take part in the above research conducted by Mr Karsten Jensen. I have read the Participation Information Sheet and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that my participation in the study called 'Connecting professional identity and workplace learning in a public sector context of change: The case of Danish social workers' means that I will be interviewed about my professional identity and learning at the workplace. I may also decide to participate in a closed professional forum, designed to share experience on relations between change, professional identity and learning. I consent that the interview transcripts and submission at the professional forum may be used for the purpose of the research project report findings.

My participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time for any reason.

I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded now and in the future. The data may also be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality. I understanding that I may receive a copy of the findings if I should wish so.

I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet. I'm aware that if I have any questions, concerns, or complaints, I may contact project

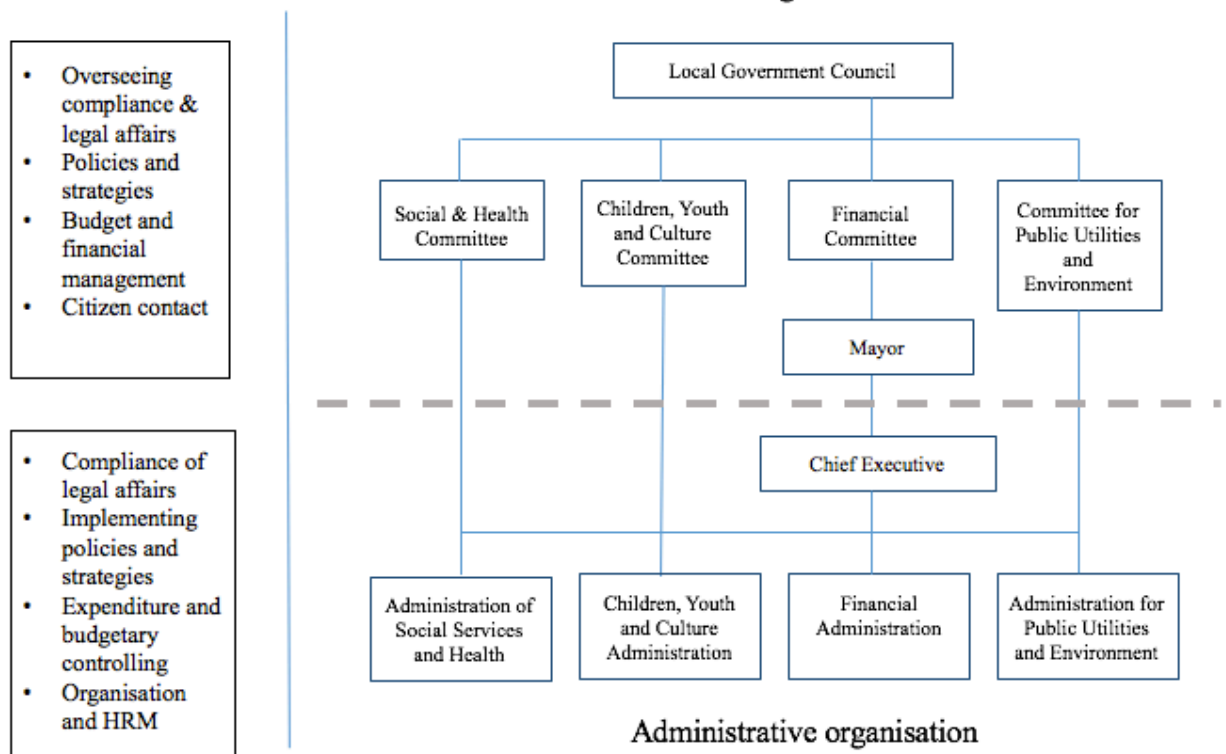
supervisor, Dr. Dan Bishop db137@leicester.ac.uk, or Mrs Jane Pilcher, Departmental Ethics Officer at University of Leicester, UK.

I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent to participate in the research project.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Annex E



Annex F

Literature review template

Name: Title: Publication:	
Themes & keywords	Main pointers
Comments:	

Annex G

Mapping of microrelations						
Code	Person	Relationship type	Location/activity	Trust	Value to interviewee	Stakeholder value
A9	Employee	Professional	Corridor, morning coffee	Medium	Mutual learning	
		Social	Corridor, morning coffee	High	Important as human being	
	Consultant	Professional	Conference - ex post reflections	High	Own case based learning	
A10	Client in house assistants	Professional	Direct contact & occasional appointments	Medium	Own case based learning	
	Co-workers	Professional	Corridor, morning coffee	High	Sparring	
		Social	Corridor, morning coffee	High	Respect	Respect
	Clients	Professional	Home visits and phone contact	Medium	Own case based learning	
	Leader	Professional	Informal conference	Medium	Clarifications and let steam out	Respect
	Internal & external colleagues	Professional	Project participation	Medium	Individual reflections	
A11	Client	Professional	Phone & occasional appointments	High	Mutual expectations	
	Co-workers	Professional	Office	High	Induction, sparring & navigate cases	
		Social	Corridor, morning coffee, lunch breaks	High	Cohesion & feeling of community belonging	
	Interns	Professional	Physical contact /		Reinforce own	

			home visits		experiences	
A12	Co-workers	Professional	Physical contact	High	Sparring & navigate cases	
		Social	Corridor, coffee & lunch breaks	High	Sparring & navigate cases	
	Leader	Professional	Conference reaction	High	Confidence & learn from mistakes	
	Client	Professional	Physical contact / home visits	Medium		
A14	Co-workers	Professional	Open office	High	Important to know each other	
	Leader	Professional	Office next door	High	Accessible & sparring	
	Client	Professional	Participation in appointments	Medium	More comprehensive case management	Positive contributions
	External colleagues	Professional	Joint rehabilitation team	High	More comprehensive case management	
	Interns	Professional	Internship programming & supervision	High	Own learning	
A15	Co-workers	Professional	Shared office	High	Sparring & navigate cases	
	Co-workers	Professional	Team sessions, corridor	High	Interpret act and regulations	
		Social	Lunch breaks, fun run	High	Build relations, trust and confidence	
	Colleagues other municipalities	Professional	Mail or phone	Medium	Clarify questions of doubt	
	Client	Professional	Appointments - ex post reflections	Medium		
A16	Co-workers	Professional	Corridor	High	Induction, sparring & navigate cases	

		Social	Corridor, coffee & lunch breaks	Medium	Sparring & navigate cases	
	Network external participants	Professional	Mail or phone	Medium	Sparring & navigate cases	
A18	Co-workers	Professional	Team meeting exp post	High	Navigate bustle, unpredictability & taking care of each other	
	Client	Professional	Appointments	High	Input to understand the abuse environment	
	External stakeholders	Professional	Making presentations	Medium	Challenging professionalism	
		Professional	Facebook	Medium	Communicate potential clients & stakeholders	
A19	Co-workers	Professional	Team sessions, corridor	High	Sparring & navigate cases	
		Social	Private social arrangements	High	Important to be close	
			Coffee & lunch breaks	High	Instant sparring	
	External colleagues/stakeholders	Professional	LinkedIn	High	Reflections on challenges	
	Interns	Professional	Supervision	Medium	Reflective questions	
	Ministry of Employment	Professional	Hotline	High	Sparring	
A20	Co-workers	Professional	Corridor	Medium	Sharing of his knowledge	Learn from experience

	External colleagues	Professional	Case management/allocations	Medium	Understanding of need for client	
	Business owners	Professional	Placement of youth	Medium	Feedback	
A21	Co-workers	Professional	Corridor & team sessions	High	Advise on norms and behaviour	
		Social	Coffee & lunch breaks	High	Norm setting	Compensate for pressure
	Politicians	Professional	Direct contact	High	General work conditions	Learn the real situation
	Leader	Professional	Informal conference	Medium	General work conditions	
	Social work students	Professional	Presentations	Medium	General work conditions	Learn the real situation
A22	Co-workers	Professional	Self-management	High	Take care of each other	
	Client	Professional	Physical contact / home visits	Medium	Learn the human aspect of the client	
	External colleagues	Professional	Joint case management	Medium	Ensuring proper case management	
	Colleagues other municipalities	Professional	Mail or phone	Medium	Update knowledge and sparring	
	Leader	Professional	Informal conference	Low	Reflections on case management	
A23	Co-workers	Professional	Corridor & team sessions	High	Take care of each other	Learn from experience
		Social	Coffee & lunch breaks	High	Know each other	
	External colleagues/stakeholders	Professional	Appointments - ex post reflections	High	New information & insights	

	lders					
A24	Co-workers	Professional	Open office, corridor & team sessions	High	Sparring and navigate cases	Share knowledge and experience
		Social	Social arrangements, coffee & lunch breaks	High	Comfort and energy	
	Leader	Professional	Informal conference	High	Sparring and navigate cases	
	Foster care families	Professional	Contracting	High	Taboo-breaking	
	Clients	Professional	Appointments - ex post reflections	High	Gain knowledge of her professionalism	
A25	Co-workers	Professional	Corridor & team sessions	Medium	Sharing of worries and joy	
	Foster care families	Professional	Appointments - ex post reflections	Medium	Forced to reflect on professional role	Share knowledge and experience
	Colleagues other municipalities	Professional	Project participation - ex post reflections	High	Sharpens her professional standing	
	Clients	Professional	Appointments - ex post reflections	Medium	Make her reflection on practices	
A26	Colleagues	Professional	Corridor & team sessions	High	Sparring & navigate cases	
		Social	Corridor, morning coffee, lunch breaks	High	Comfort	
	External colleagues	Social	Social arrangements	Medium	Improved mental health environment	
		Professional	Joint case management	Medium	Better joint case management	

	Leader	Professional	Informal conference	Low	Sharing information	
	Network external participants	Professional	Direct contact	High	Inspiration and ideas	
	Client	Professional	Home visits & appointment	High	Develop new tools	
A27	Colleagues	Professional	Corridor & team sessions	High	Debate professional values	Feedback
		Social	Corridor, morning coffee, lunch breaks	High	Facilitate critical interaction	
	Clients	Professional	Appointments - ex post reflections	Low	Adjust and sharpen professional standing	
	External colleagues	Professional	Supervision and follow-up activities	High		Share knowledge and experience
	Interns	Professional	Internship programming & supervision	High		Share knowledge and experience
A28	External colleagues	Professional		Medium	Relation building and networking	
		Social	Smoke break	High	Reflection on workplace issues	
	Politician /chairperson	Professional	Appointments - ex post reflections	High	Support for activities	
A29	Co-workers	Professional	Corridor & team sessions	High	Navigate regulations	
		Social	Corridor, morning coffee, lunch breaks	High	Social knowledge important for comfort	
A30	Co-	Professional	Corridor & team	High	Adjust her	

	workers		sessions		professional standing	
	External colleagues	Professional	Appointments - ex post reflections	High	Challenging professionalism	

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