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**JOY AND STRUGGLE FOR RENEWAL**  
**A Narrative Inquiry into Expertise in Job Transitions**

Helsinki 2005

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**Abstract**

This study focuses on expertise under changing circumstances. The purpose is to understand how professionals narratively make sense of expertise and how confusing role transitions impact interpretations of expertise. The study presents “renewal” as a struggle for professional recognition. The intention is to show how corporate competence management and development discourses impact the definition of expertise. Professionals have to negotiate the value of their experience and adjust to prevailing ways of presenting expertise.

The meaning of expertise has expanded during the last decade from plain information processing capacity to advanced knowledge structures, and further, to contextual and intuitive knowing. In human resource development literature, expertise has become synonymous with experiential learning, competence and reflective practice. Therefore, the theoretical analysis and critique in this study is pointed to discourse that constructs a socially correct interpretation of how expertise is understood and who are justified in declaring themselves as experts.

The study illustrates in what kind of circumstances and with what kinds of consequences professionals adapt to the prevailing expertise discourse. The analysis is based on empirical data that consists of interviews, group discussions and journals of nine information technology experts (males and females) who were working in an international data-communications company. Participants had heterogeneous educational and working experiences and several years of professional experience, and all were about to change their job roles in a significant way. The study applied a narrative and life history approach. First, episodic stories, their structure and the mode of telling were analyzed. Then individual stories were read as part of the historical and social context.

Participants narratively constructed themselves as competent and adaptable actors. The fact that work was in a constant flux was complained about only if it prevented learning. The need for personal renewal was not questioned. Instead, participants talked about themselves with the vocabulary of “self-management, life-long learning, creative problem solving and opportunity catching.” According to the scripts adopted from the developmental discourse, one’s own career was seen as a growth of expertise that progressed layer-by-layer, from one wave to another or in an outward spiral. Transitions and the acquisition of new responsibilities were seen as a necessary part of expertise.

Nevertheless, all experiences did not fit the scripts of development. Participants were able to turn even the risk of outsourcing and lay-offs into “possibilities,” but they had to simultaneously admit that their current situation was not what they had planned for their careers. In many cases, role transitions were simply about adjustment, anticipation and the ensuring of one’s position in changing circumstances.

Information technology professionals seem to divide into two groups: those who have the right skills and a positive attitude towards learning (they are the experts) and those whose knowledge is no longer needed and who do not have the means and resources to update their competence. The negotiation about the status of expertise requires acceptance of the prevailing developmental discourse and a definition of one’s value in terms of project resourcing. At the same time it is impossible to find words for expressing dissatisfaction – since no one wants to be taken as “change resistant and out-of-date.”

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**ILOA JA KAMPPAILUA UUSIUTUMISEN TÄHDEN**

**Narratiivinen tutkimus asiantuntijuudesta työtehtävien vaihtuessa**

### **Tiivistelmä**

Väitöskirjan tavoitteena on tulkita muuttuvaa asiantuntijuutta. Tutkimustehtävänä on selvittää millä tavalla asiantuntijuutta tehdään ymmärrettäväksi ja mielekkääksi arkisten tarinoiden avulla ja millä tavalla siirtyminen työtehtävästä toiseen hämmentää tulkintoja asiantuntijuudesta. Tutkimuksen näkökulmasta “uusiutuminen” esittäytyy uuden oppimisen lisäksi ponnisteluna saada ammatillista hyväksyntää. Tarkoituksena on tehdä näkyväksi, kuinka yritys-elämässä vallitsevat osaamisenjohtamisen ja kehittämisen diskurssit hallitsevat asiantuntijuuden määrittelyä. Kokeneet ammatillaiset joutuvat neuvottelemaan osaamisensa arvosta ja heidän on mukauduttava vallitseviin tapoihin esittää asiantuntemustaan.

Asiantuntijuuden käsite on laajentunut viime vuosikymmenen aikana pelkästä asioiden tuntemisesta ja tiedonkäsittelykapasiteetista kehittyneiden tiedonrakenteiden ja tilannesidonnaisen, intuitiivisen tietämyksen suuntaan. Henkilöstön kehittämiskirjallisuudessa asiantuntijuus on alkanut tarkoittamaan samaa kuin kokemuksellinen oppiminen, kompetenssi ja reflektiiviset käytännöt. Niinpä tämän tutkimuksen teoreettinen ja kriittinen tarkastelu suuntautuukin niihin diskursiivisiin käytänteisiin, joilla luodaan sosiaalisesti hyväksyttyä käsitystä siitä, mitä asiantuntijuus on ja ketkä voivat perustellusti kutsua itseään asiantuntijoiksi.

Tutkimus osoittaa millaisissa olosuhteissa ja millä ehdoin ammatillaiset omakusuvat vallitsevan puhettavan. Tutkimuskontekstina on tietoliikennealan monikansallisen yrityksen tietohallinnon organisaatio 2000-luvun alkupuolella. Tutkimusaineisto koostuu yhdeksän kokeneen tietotekniikka-asiantuntijan (miesten ja naisten) haastatteluista, ryhmäkeskusteluista ja muistiinpanoista. Erilaisista taustoistaan ja työtehtävistään huolimatta osallistujia yhdisti se, että he olivat kaikki vaihtamassa työtehtäviään tavalla tai toisella tutkimuksen aikana. Tutkimusanalysissa sovellettiin narratiivista ja elämäkerrallista lähestymistapaa. Ensin analysoitiin yksittäisten tarinoiden sisältöä, rakennetta ja kerrontatapoja. Tämän jälkeen tarinoita luettiin osana historiallista ja sosiaalista kontekstia.

Tutkimukseen osallistuvat rakensivat tarinoidensa kautta itsestään muuntautumiskykyisiä ja osaavia toimijoita. Työn jatkuvaa muutoksessa oloa moitittiin ai-noastaan silloin, kun se esti uuden oppimisen. Tarvetta omaan uusiutumiseen ei kyseenalaistettu, vaan itsestä puhuttiin “itseohjautuvan, elinikäisen oppijan, luovan ongelmanratkaisijan ja tilaisuuteen tarttujan” sanastoilla. Kehittämispuheesta lainatuilla juonenkänteillä oma työura rakennettiin asteittain eteneväksi jatkumoksi, jolla oma asiantuntemus kasvoi kerros kerrokselta, aallon harjalta toiselle nousten

tai spiraalimaisesti laajeten. Oman roolin muutos ja uusien vastuualueiden opettelu nähtiin välttämättömänä osana asiantuntijuutta.

Kaikki kokemukset eivät kuitenkaan mahtuneet kehittämisen kaavoihin. Vaikka puheissa onnistuttiin kääntämään jopa ulkoistaminen ja työttömyysuhka “mahdollisuuksiksi,” oli toisaalta todettava, että nykyinen tilanne ei ollut oman tahdon ja urahaaveidensa mukaista. Monelle siirtyminen uusiin tehtäviin oli puhtaasti sopeutumista, ennakoimista ja oman aseman varmistelua muuttuneissa olosuhteissa.

Tietotekniikka-alan ammattilaiset näyttävät jakautuvan kahteen leiriin: niihin joilla on oikeanlaista osaamista ja myönteinen asenne jatkuvaan oppimiseen (eli alan asiantuntijoihin), sekä niihin joiden tietämys ei kelpaa muuttuvilla markkinoilla ja joilla ei ole keinoja ja voimavaroja päivittää osaamistaan. Asiantuntijuus edellyttää vallitsevaan kehittämisen puhetapaan suostumista ja oman arvon määrittämistä “projektiresurssina.” Samalla oman tyytymättömyyden ilmaisemiselle ei löydy sanoja – sillä kukapa haluaisi leimautua “muutosvastaiseksi ja ajastaan jälkeenkäänneeksi.”

*For the one whom we soon get to know better...*





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## Preface: Role Transition and Confusion

The “struggle for renewal” started before the actual research proposal was initiated. While working in human resource development (HRD) in data communications business from 1997 to 2002, I observed the field before actually focusing on any particular research question or gathering data for research purposes. Therefore, insider knowledge is part of my inquiry. I am writing reflexively on my practice, and moreover, triangulating beyond my experience in collaboration with research participants and with academic community. The “insider” and “outsider” voices, the voice of a practitioner and the voice of an academic researcher, are not opposites but they engage one another in a reflective dialogue (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). By seeing my own experiences as part of my research data, discrete and disparate events become parts of a larger interpretation (p. 48).

In the beginning of my career I was committed to learning and development because of their intrinsic value. I believed in employees’ personal and professional growth, learning teams, and empowerment. Business factors were not really my concern. I possessed an adult educator’s perspective<sup>1</sup> toward the work environment and my job. Later on, in a HRD function, the competence management perspective made me see that personnel development does not have a life of its own, but is always connected to the prevailing business strategy and profitability.

My transformation from adult educator’s perspective toward competence management perspective did not happen overnight. It happened as part of my role transition. I started to question the premises of my prior professional expertise. I had relevant know-how, a clear idea what my goals were and how to develop my job, and good results. However, I was confused and doubted even my own expertise. Moreover, questions arose: why did this change from one job to another – even within the same company and the field of responsibility – make me feel so different; why were things that I was perfectly capable of doing in the first job laborious in the new one; and how was I to apply the seeds of wisdom learned in my prior job in new circumstances?

My first job was in a well-established product development department. The organization had 20 years of history with the product line including major technological improvements and business scope changes. There were people who could remember “how it all began,” people who could share their collective work history with me. Business had just recovered from the deep recession of early the 1990s. Economical growth was high, working morale was good, material resources were available, and expectations for the future were positive.

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<sup>1</sup> What I call here an *adult educator’s perspective* refers to the way of seeing work places primarily as learning places, employees as learners, and jobs as learning assignments. This is not to say that all adult educators operate based on unified perspective, and in many cases adult educators are very aware of business factors that are part of personnel development (Hytönen, 2002a).

Nevertheless, business was facing strong competitors and needed both new technical competence and new ways of operating. The company hired technically competent graduates from Polytechnics and Universities. By cooperating with newcomers, seasoned employees were learning new skills. Their job descriptions were updated and new kinds of tasks required them to learn new skills. The challenge was to make experienced employees believe that they needed to change and renew their expertise.

My first job was to develop internal communication. However, I soon understood that my role was not only to develop day-to-day communication practices, but also to facilitate communication between newcomers and experienced employees. The role shifted toward competence development, including definitions of what needed to be learned, as well as activities that enhanced learning. For example, I organized regular sessions in which employees could share their expertise and learn from each other. Well-established HRD processes like developmental discussions and induction and training practices provided me a smooth start as a developer. I gained expertise in development of communication, teamwork and competence, and learned the following assumptions regarding my role as a developer:

*(1) Well-defined plans and procedures lead to success and enhance collaboration.* I was able to work in a very systematic manner. The organization had all needed project management structures in place to support my work, and usually I led 3-6 month development projects.

*(2) Developmental solutions work best when they are built upon people's strengths.* In the beginning of each development project I studied the common history of people and how they were used to doing things.

*(3) It is better to facilitate individual ways of learning than to provide ready training and development solutions.* People in the department had personal contact with me and during the development activities I was a co-learner with them.

*(4) Communication and cooperation is a key for learning.* I worked both with newcomers and with experienced employees, and concluded that people have different needs in the beginning of their careers than they do in their mid-careers, and thus need different kinds of developmental solutions.

*(5) People development is an essential aspect of business.* In a climate where business was investing in people development I naively assumed that everyone would be in agreement with that point.

When my third year started things were running smoothly and there was no longer need for my full-time development effort. I started to look for another position to further develop my expertise. Coincidentally, there was also an announcement that the department would split apart, and that confirmed my need to move on. I moved to a global information technology (IT) unit<sup>2</sup> within the same company.

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<sup>2</sup> The unit provided solutions to advance business with information technology. It developed and maintained computer networks, systems and applications. The variety of solutions ranged from everyday business communication systems, like emailing, to online product development and delivery systems.

The new organization had been established about one year earlier. IT departments from all around the company had been combined in order to provide world-class information management services to the business units. The young organization was in a constant change; it had fixed neither its structure nor its operational mode. A lot of effort was put to establish commonly agreed working processes and practices. One or two organizational changes occurred yearly. Operations were moved away from the unit by outsourcing them and new services were included by moving teams from other parts of the company to the IT unit. Additionally, during the three-year period the unit tripled its size and enlarged its strategic scope. As a consequence, people needed to change their roles often. There were open positions (including leadership positions) for job rotation due to the organizational growth. All these transitions happened simultaneously and rapidly, and thus demanded pro-activity, self-leadership and flexibility in people development.

In these new settings old solutions for development did not suffice. The role transition was not only a move from one unit to another to do the same kind of a job. Rather, a totally new perspective toward development was needed (Filander, 1999; 2000). The organization was doing things that had never been done before. I was hitting my head against the wall because the assumptions that have worked well in my first job were conflicting with the new role. The role transition triggered reflection. To carry on and succeed, renewal was needed regarding my ways of doing, guiding principles, and basic assumptions about people development.

I noticed an evolution of thinking. First, I realized that my prior approach was too slow and learned to use the “fast track” by transferring “best practices” from elsewhere in the company and modifying them to fit the new unit. Second, asking people about their history was impossible – there was no common past and the target group of my development activities extended to thousands of employees. Due to the lack of commonly shared strengths to build on, development solutions had to be built upon strategic vision. Furthermore, my role was to put forward ready solutions, like HRD policies, guidelines, and training.

There was pressure to set up standard practices for people management in a scattered organization. Effort was not left for differentiation between the needs of newcomers and experienced employees. I learned that modular development solutions gave people possibilities to choose what they needed and network with people who had the same learning needs – not only with people who had the same hierarchical position and similar experiences. Modularity emphasized communication between different perspectives. Finally, my assumption that development is a natural part of business was also questioned. People development was not driven by the human need to grow, but by the fact that without investing in people there was a risk to lose time, money and human potential.

Two years later, at the end of 2001, my role changed again and I started a doctoral research program. The idea to study the renewal of expertise matured as a result of my own role transition. I discussed this with people around me and we shared common transition experiences. Most of my colleagues, friends and family members had gone through a professional role transition at least once. A common reflection was that role transitions had become more and more frequent and, as a consequence, professional identity was actually in constant flux. Some people felt

comfortable with the situation and saw a lot of possibilities in such hybrid professionalism. Even if they did not know what kind of job they would do next, they expected it to be something new and interesting. Others were less excited about the continuous change and feared professional obsolescence. Their concern was to avoid ending up in a situation in which nobody needed them anymore. That is why they kept learning new things all the time.

The experience of renewal in role transition provided me a deep motivation and commitment to study this phenomenon. Moreover, the conflicting assumptions about people development and the renewal of expertise that I had personally experienced provided a creative source to formulate an interpretative framework for this study.



# 1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand how people in transition make sense of expertise, and moreover, what lies beyond the struggle for the renewal of expertise. I use an interpretive and hermeneutical<sup>3</sup> approach that does not lead to a prediction or control, but rather to an understanding of human experience (Polkinghorne, 1988). The study has both practical and theoretical value. Through comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, it offers a mirror to people who want to reflect their own experiences and to human recourse development (HRD) professionals who want to know more about corporate learning settings and learning in role transitions. Furthermore, it stimulates the critical discussion on what expertise is and who are legitimate or able to define themselves as experts.

Expertise<sup>4</sup> – having and displaying special know-how derived from training or experience – has been one of the most popular concepts in working life and in society since the 1990s. Expertise has grown to the extent that it does not only explain what people do in their professional settings, but also defines a sense of self. Concurrently, expertise still relates to particular professions and to a constituting knowledge and the social practices of professionals. Expertise is thus socially constructed and exclusive to people who are not highly skilled professionals. For example information technology expertise is often related to a group of designers, programmers and other professionals, and excludes the know-how of non-professional users (Vehviläinen, 1997).

I described my initial concerns about expertise and transition in the preface. Next I will link them to the research questions. I will explain how the research was designed and conducted. I will also clarify how my interpretative standpoint evolved during the research process and give reasons why I have chosen a critical framework to understand expertise.

## 1.1. Research Questions for Data Gathering

In the first place, I wanted to understand the narrative construction of expertise and whether people started to look at their own expertise from a new perspective and within a new frame of reference after job role transitions. I formulated the following research questions for these purposes:

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term “hermeneutics” not in a sense of a methodology but as a theory of a real experience that thinking is (Gadamer, 1989, p. xxxvi); hermeneutics is an *art of understanding*.

<sup>4</sup> This study was conducted in Finland and that brings into it the emphasis of Finnish language and culture. The Finnish concept “*asiantuntijuus*” has the same core meaning, but differs in breadth from the English concept “expertise.” It has a meaning that refers to professionalism or professional practice, as well as to a special knowledge and skills (see chapter 2.4.).

- (1) How do people actually make sense of their own expertise?
- (2) How are discontinuity and confusion related to transition impact experience of having expertise?
- (3) How do people experience the renewal of expertise as a result of their role transition at work?

I decided to use a research context that was available and familiar to me. That was an information technology (IT) organization in a leading, international data communications company. The IT organization was responsible for all aspects of the design, development, support, and management of computer software, hardware, and networks. Moreover, it created solutions to integrate information technology into business processes. In the organization, change has escalated and led to several organizational restructurings in the last few years; many people changed roles, teams or job responsibilities.

I organized a coaching program for IT professionals who had several years of experience, who had gained certain seniority in their own domain, and who were about to move to a new role within the target company. I sent an open invitation for employees in the capital area of Finland, and nine people (men and women) voluntarily wanted to participate. Participants had diverse professional background and prior role transition experiences.

I conducted the first few interviews at the outset of a coaching program. Participants had just moved to their new roles or were about to do so. I asked questions about their careers and how they had acquired their expertise. I also asked what they expected from their new jobs, and what was problematic in the beginning of the role transition. Then participants conducted a Learning Agility assessment (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000), and got feedback about their learning skills and tactics. Assessment was followed by five group sessions within a five month period. Finally, I interviewed people again (eight months after the first interview) when they had worked about half a year in their new jobs. I asked how the transition went, what was actually problematic, and what the biggest changes were. Data gathering was complemented with emails and personal journals that some of the participants kept during the research process.

## **1.2. Evolving Interpretations**

The data gathering was guided by a willingness to know whether role transition at work triggered critical reflection and transformation on the premises of expertise. I was influenced by Mezirow's (1990; 1991; 2000) ideas about adult learning and reflection. The purpose was to gain data to compare "before" and "after" assumptions regarding expertise. In order to answer this question I needed to understand first, how these people made sense of their expertise before they moved to their new roles; second, how their thinking changed after the transition. Did they face any obstacles, perpetual dilemmas, or difficulties when transferring to new jobs? If so, why – in their words – did these dilemmas arise and how did they deal with them (e.g., emotional reactions, reflective thoughts, new kinds of action)?

In the attempt to keep an open mind, I listened carefully and became attentive to different modes of conversation. It made me see more clearly my assumptions (prejudices) about transformative learning, and I started to reflect accordingly. The critical questioning and dialogical justification did not really represent how people learned to use their prior expertise in new circumstances. Changing circumstances (e.g., new working teams, bosses, colleagues, projects, and job responsibilities) did not trigger reflection in any straightforward way. There was not really a critical moment that separated the “before” and “after,” and that would have allowed me to compare perspectives prior to and after the role transition. However, transformations did happen at least for some people: they made sense of their expertise in a different way as a result of role transition.

I altered my analytical focus from stated assumptions to narrative patterns. I wanted to know how people created narrative coherence<sup>5</sup> with their past and how they integrated ongoing transitions with prior expertise in their stories. My questions became more phenomenological. For example, I started to ask why people wanted to have expertise in the first place and how they identify with expertise. Therefore, I started to contradict the socially and historically developed constructions of expertise. I did not, however, criticize expertise in terms of professional knowledge and practices, as is done, for example, in the gender and technology studies (Vehviläinen, 1997). I pointed my analysis and critique to the developmental discourse – shown in discussions, artifacts, texts, and practices related to it - that constructs the socially correct interpretation of “who is justified in claiming expertise” (p. 1).

The study brought me deeper into the developmental discourse that redefined the concept of expertise in 1990s. In such discourse, continuous learning, development, and improvement became inseparable parts of the definition of expertise. Expertise literature moved extensively toward reflective practices and introduced new concepts like self-regulation and meta-competencies to (Finnish) practitioners (Ruohotie, 1993; Eteläpelto, 1994; Kirjonen, Remes & Eteläpelto, 1997; Eteläpelto & Tynjälä, 1999; Tynjälä 1999). Educational policy, vocational and professional institutions, universities, and organizational management adopted such developmental expertise discourse. HRD had a major role in implementing developmental expertise discourse in work place practices. One concrete implementa-

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<sup>5</sup> Looking at the narrative coherence means that I was interested in how single stories were put together and how they related to other stories in the research data. Having a narrative coherence does not assume that there is only one uniform way of representing self or that life experiences are non-ambiguous. Narratives that are part of personal life stories are discontinuous in the sense that people can tell about the same events differently, at different times, for different people, and for different purposes (Linde, 1993, p. 25). Yet, they can be coherent at a particular moment of telling.

tion example is the development discussion<sup>6</sup> between managers and subordinates that became general practice in many (Finnish) corporations in the 1990s.

As the study progressed, a critical stance toward the starting points of my study evolved. Even if I continued to use the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) in the interpretative framework, I placed it into a collision with the competence management, career and human resource development discourses of expertise<sup>7</sup>. During the process of study I began to see clearly that rational reflection was actually used as one main carrier of the new “ideology” regarding expertise. In other words, the technologies of reflection were used to regulate people. In the process of reflective learning, governance was inserted by naturalizing the hierarchies of competence and by narrating messy experience as rational knowledge (Fenwick, 2000). No longer was a professional education or special know-how enough to define oneself to claim expertise. The value of expertise was tied to the capacity and willingness to conduct one’s own conduct in multiple forms of self-surveillance and correction, as well as to the relevance of professional competence (Davies, 2003).

I came to the conclusion that the developmental discourse that defines expertise is political. At the same time as it forces everybody to define themselves either as experts or as non-experts, it includes to the group of experts only those who are ready to learn, to develop personally and professionally, and to adapt for changing circumstances. Heikkinen and associates (2001) criticizes the fact that expertise discourse promises omnipotent capacity to exceed one’s own limits all the time, and that by doing so, it constricts everybody to a constant state of earning of respect and recognition, and to continuous improvement of performance. Those of us who can identify with the widespread definition of expertise are bound to always be *in a process of becoming better*. After all, the prevailing definition of expertise never allows us to be good enough, to be complete, and to be sure that we are worth approval. It denies the existence of qualified professionals.

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<sup>6</sup> As defined by Slotte, Palonen & Salminen (2004), “the aim of development discussion is to have shared strategy, vision and goals, commitment, motivated personnel and right competences in the organization, to increase communication and flexibility to meet changes in the work environment” (p. 103). Aims are defined from the organization’s point of view and an employee’s task is to internalize how to contribute to the success of the employer, and to place one’s own performance in a larger business context.

<sup>7</sup> Mezirow, in his writings does not really discuss with other scholars. He uses other’s texts instrumentally to advance his own intentions (Ahteenmäki-Pelkonen, 1997). Basically, he reviews a large amount of literature and introduces different theories and conceptions, and then he defines his own stance toward the earlier scholars and presents his own points (Ibid.). The connection between the earlier texts and Mezirow’s own viewpoints is not clear. No matter how different referred sources are, they always seem to enforce Mezirow’s theoretical points that remind unchanged. Thus, there is no evolving dialogue between scholarly texts.

In theoretical terms, I wanted to explore the phenomenon by going against the dominant paradigms of expertise studies. I did not focus on the mastery of substance know-how or particular skills. Nor did I describe how expertise know-how was demonstrated or developed in particular jobs or tasks. I focused instead on cultural categories, and on the frames of reference that permit and constrain the definitions of expertise. By doing things differently, I purposefully “misunderstood” expertise and made space for alternative understanding and definitions.

### 1.3. The Organization of the Content

The target audience for this study is primarily comprised of the international and interdisciplinary scholars of expertise and adult learning. Therefore, the organization of the text adopts academic conventions. Content includes introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, data analysis and interpretation, and conclusion. Nevertheless, the aim is to make visible the interpretative shift from prevailing discourse toward critical approach accompanied by my personal growth as a researcher. I use personal voice and auto-ethnographical connotations as part of my writing and represented data in inventive ways. Expertise is seen differently in the beginning and in the end of the study as we walk through the evolving pathway. For that purpose, I have organized the study in the following way:

*In the preface* I will share my own role transition narrative. By doing that I will explain why I got involved with the topic in the first place. Moreover, I will claim that I have useful experience for interpreting the phenomena at hand.

*In the introduction (Chapter 1)*, I will define the purpose of the study and orient readers to the problems, context and design of the study. I will ask whether there is a way to understand or “misunderstand” expertise anew. The introduction was written at the end of the study and therefore includes retrospective thoughts about my growth as a researcher (evolving interpretations).

*In the literature review (Chapter 2)* I will present the prevailing expertise discourse. First, I will bring in a discussion about knowledge organizations and competence management. Second, I will consider how the meaning of expertise is understood in the discussion about careers and job role transitions. Third, I will review the expertise definitions commonly referred to in educational and human resource development discussions about expert thinking and performance, adult learning, and work development. This chapter will summarize the theoretical interpretations about what expertise is, how it is gained, and how it is (self-) regulated. It will also offer critical thoughts about what is problematic in the prevailing perspectives toward competence, career, and reflection.

Finally, I will draw together a glossary of terms and compare English and Finnish terms related to expertise. The purpose of the glossary of terms is to show that the same terms can be interpreted differently according to the discursive practices that they are part of, and to show that meanings of terms also have cultural connotations that are dependent on the natural languages that carry the expertise discourses in different contexts.

While doing the literature review, I read through a huge amount of literature on expertise. I was a little disturbed about the variety of approaches, definitions, and

settings in different studies. I wanted to know what expertise “really” is. I focused on primary sources and on authors who have initiated expertise as a “new” thing into the educational discussion. I was unaware of the way I funneled according to the prevailing learning and development discourses that had gained ground in management and development literature. Only after working with my data for some time, was I able to take distance from the literature and see clearer how the dominant discourse had organized my thoughts about expertise.

*In the methodology (Chapter 3)* I will first introduce the principles of hermeneutics by using the metaphor of play. Understanding and play have the same essence that guided my interpretative efforts. Then, I will explain the practical research endeavor – how the participants were selected, how the interviews were conducted, and what the discussion in small groups was about. Finally, I will demonstrate step by step how the narrative analysis was carried out and what the guiding principles in the analytical process were. Additionally, I will reflect on the bi-linguistic aspect of the inquiry.

*In the context of the study (Chapter 4)*, I will present the HRD discourse that uses computer professionals and information technology (IT) organizations as the exemplars of a new era of expertise. I will illustrate the main trends in the IT domain at the end of 1990s and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, I will focus on discussions about the particularities of expertise in the IT domain.

In the discourses during the IT boom, an idealistic picture was created by talking about the “virtue” of craftsmanship computing, equal certifications, and “boundaryless” career opportunities. Nevertheless, there were increasing regulations of IT work, segregation and unequal expertise practices, and decreasing employment security in the domain. Furthermore, even if the discussions on IT were gender neutral on a surface level, masculine practices were taken as a norm, including the norm of technical expertise.

The way the participants of the study discussed about work in group sessions was an eye opener for me. It reflected well the prevailing discourses in the IT domain. On one hand, the participants of the group discussions took prevailing things for granted. On the other hand, they negotiated their ways out of the widespread assumptions. I will include citations from the group discussions into the context chapter to illustrate how participants use and question the dominant discourse.

The creation of the context for interpreting personal transition experiences did not precede the narrative analysis of personal stories. I wrote about context and narratives side by side and both activities impacted each other’s. Thus, the definition of a research context is a part of data analysis and interpretation. There are no historical and cultural circumstances in which personal narratives can be situated “naturally” or “automatically.” Context is built by the series of choices.

*In the narrative analysis (Chapter 5)*, I will shed light on how prevailing expertise discourse is shaping personal experiences on role transition. I will represent how the participants of the study talked about expertise and their on-going transitions. Particularly, I will illustrate stories about joys and struggles for being recognized as an expert in the IT domain and about gaining confidence anew after the transition.



As much as it is a choice to decide what the context to which narratives are related is, it is a choice to focus on certain things in personal narratives and pass by some other things. My aim is to let multiple voices prevail and represent data in a way that it is possible to hear what participants actually emphasized in their narratives.

*In the comparative interpretation of narratives (Chapter 6)*, I will focus on common themes and narrative patterns in personal narratives. Each person had his or her own joys and dilemmatic struggle experiences. However, commonalities also emerged. Expertise, as experienced by participants, was narratively constructed, adjustive, progressive and consistent with the prevailing expertise discourse. Furthermore, the dichotomies of masculinity and femininity constructed how women and men negotiated for appropriate expert positions. Similarly, organizational status, technological specialization areas, age, educational background, and class created unspoken but limiting categories for expertise<sup>8</sup>.

At the end of the chapter, I will expand the analysis on social and political implications. My main point is to show how individualistic and omnipotent expertise discourse is actually confining participants to define themselves and their own positions within certain discursive limits. Even if the talk on life-long learning and continuous improvement states otherwise, there are constraints on who can gain the status of an expert. The notions that define expertise, like time, responsibility, and authority, are culturally – not only individually – in transition.

In a way, I will re-contextualize transition narratives and compare my findings to the results from other similar studies and theorizations. I will reflect some overall changes in the working life in the IT industry. Here again, I will use citations from the data that emphasize points made in the prior interpretation of narratives. I will attempt to make the questions that arose in the earlier discussions about the margins of IT expertise even more obvious and urgent.

*In the conclusions (Chapter 7)* I will draw together the elements of expertise expressed in narratives. The participants talked about professional knowledge, the capacity to act, a feeling of confidence, and how all these elements were interacting. I will conclude how personal renewal was experienced and how personal narratives reflected change in the social and political conditions of expertise. Finally, I will put together what implications this new understanding of expertise has for HRD policy and further research. I will call for a critical approach among the discipline. I will also summarize how this study contributes to the further development of hermeneutic-narrative methodology.

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<sup>8</sup> Race and nationality are also important aspects in the social construction of expertise, even if they were not included in the settings of this study.





## 2. Prevailing Expertise Discourse

This inquiry does not strongly commit to any one theory on expertise. Instead, the interpretative framework is built by presenting and reflecting upon a variety of different research-based models, concepts and theoretical constructions on expertise. Findings from the earlier studies are presented as alternative interpretations of the content and quality of expertise. Three distinctive perspectives on expertise, namely competence management, career theories, and human resource development, are presented. All of them are viewed as *discourses*, i.e., ways of talking about professional expertise within corporate settings.

Each of the three discourses is first presented according to its own vocabulary, and modes of presenting what expertise is and justifying why it is an important construction. Thereafter, I will purposefully “misunderstand” expertise as defined by individualistic competence management, career, and human resource development theories. I will take distance, offer some critical observations, and direct readers attention to problematic assumptions beyond prevailing interpretations.

### 2.1. Expertise in Competence Management Literature

The sector of so-called knowledge organizations has increased enormously during the last decade. It does not consist of any homogenous group of businesses. The common indicator is that they all sell information, knowledge, or other services, and that the most of the revenue of these companies comes from intangible assets. Training, Management Consulting, Engineering, Information Management, Advertising and Communication, Investment Banking, Health Care, and Legal Advice, among others, are examples of knowledge organizations (Sveiby, 1997). Competence management theory became very popular in knowledge-intensive high-tech companies in 1990's. It was implemented as part of everyday people management practices, like recruitment, project resourcing, rewarding, training and development. One of the main goals was to gain, retain, and develop expertise, and to create circumstances for continuous improvement.

Competence management is a highly pragmatic approach to knowledge and expertise. Accordingly, relevant research questions would be formulated so that answers could clearly improve existing practice and make things better. Some of those questions are:

1. How does one transform tacit knowledge into *measurable* assets?
2. How can knowledge be made *operational* and accessible to those who need it
3. How does one create and implement media for knowledge *transfer*?

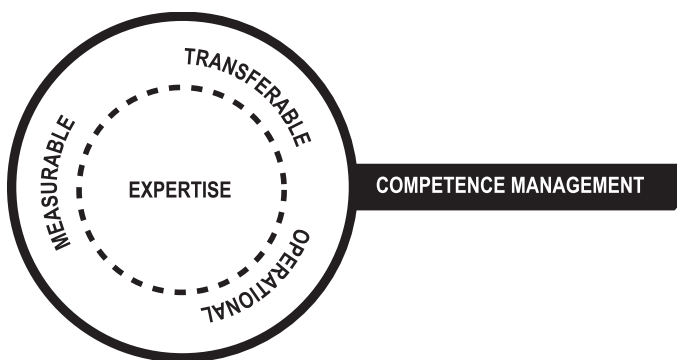
These questions are framed within a management perspective. Therefore, success is evaluated in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, and monetary revenue. So, even if ways of doing are altered, status quo of deep structures is maintained in the implementation of competence management practices.

Knowledge organizations, as defined earlier, mainly manage and develop knowledge. Intuitively, we have a sense that knowledge is broader, deeper, and richer

than data or information. Knowledge is indeed a fluid mix of knowing what has happen to us before, what our values are, what contextual information we do have, and, furthermore, expertise insight (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Knowledge provides framework for evaluating and incorporating new experience and information (Ibid.).

A concept of competence<sup>9</sup> has become a common way to describe knowledge in the business context. Competence embraces factual knowledge, skill, experience, value judgments, and social networks (Sveiby, 1997). Moreover, it refers to a capacity to act within a situation (Ibid.); thus, beyond competence lies performance. Competence is gained via education and workplace learning. Most employees in knowledge organizations are highly educated professionals and are often called knowledge workers or *experts*. By definition, expertise is deep subject knowledge that has been tested by experience (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Experience provides historical perspective from which people view new situations and events, recognize patterns, and make connections between now and then (p. 8). Experts are the masters of competence (Sveiby, 1997). They do not only have ability to recite and apply rules, but also confidence to break and replace existing rules with better rules (p. 37).

Even if the construction of expertise is older than knowledge industry, the concept is “re-invented” for the purposes of the new economy. Expertise in the framework of competence management seems to become “objectified” to a measurable, operational, and transferable entity (see model 1).



Model 1: Expertise in the Framework of Competence Management

<sup>9</sup> Here I present the concept of competence as embedded in management practices in large corporations. The term competence is also used in continuous professional education (CPE), and in the beginning of the 21st century there has been an attempt to cross-translate competence literature between the disciplines of human resource development (HRD) and CPE (Jeris & Johnson, 2004). To compare how the approaches to competence have varied in different national contexts, see Delamare Le Deist & Winterton, 2005.

In order to manage competence, organizations need policies to attract and retain skilled professionals. Paradoxically, management also has an objective to decrease a company's dependence on experts (Sveiby, 1997). A few key people – their knowledge, problem-solving experience, and contact network outside the firm – can become so crucial to the company's survival, that if those people decide to leave the company, the company will lose business. To prevent loss of talent, information sharing and competence transfer are the key activities in knowledge-intensive organizations. Companies have moved from training to a holistic concept of learning. Learning is no longer associated only with formal training programs, seminars, or online courses, but it is an integral part of the job itself. For example, learning occurs in meeting rooms and offices when people are brainstorming and discussing issues, sharing project management practices, or showing how to use software applications.

### *Expertise is Measurable*

Competence management emphasizes competencies that are unique, firm-specific, and add competitive advantage (Delamare Le Deist & Winterton, 2005). Part of competence management – like any management – is to monitor daily progress of a business, and to take (corrective) actions when needed. In knowledge organizations, it is not useful to convert people into money (in terms of costs), but rather to create superior shareholder value by focusing on intangible assets like competence (Sveiby, 1997). Investment in people is inspired by the motive to achieve higher profitability in the long run by sacrificing cash flow in the short-term (p. 152).

Traditional management views money spent on learning as a cost rather than an investment, because individual competence is “owned” by individuals and not by a company. Ideally, knowledge organizations know that competence is their most valuable asset, and they do not see it only as a cost (Sveiby, 1997). They want to have tools for competence measurement, and for converting the individual ownership of competence into an intellectual property of a company. The problem is not that intangible measures are difficult to design. Rather the outcomes of competence measurement seem difficult to interpret (p. 157).

Before competence can be measured, it needs to be classified. Professional competence is first classified by the degree of responsibility (for the customer). For example, the following employee categories can be created: (a) people who work in a project; (b) people who manage projects; and (c) people who have the overall customer responsibility (Sveiby, 1997). Second, competence is classified by the core areas of responsibility (Ibid.). For example, in the software consultancy business, categories are set according to different types of technologies, systems, and applications.

Competence measurement triggers trends, changes and flows (Sveiby, 1997). Accuracy is not the most important thing in competence measurement (p. 164). Measurements are compared against trends in previous years or trends in other companies. According to Sveiby (1997), the following simple measures are useful in quantifying competence:

- The total number of years in the profession indicates experience.
- The academic level of formal education indicates competence and capacity to process a huge amount of information.
- Grading in an organization specific scale indicates the level of competence.
- And the overall training costs indicate the new knowledge acquisition of the company.

Furthermore, turnover tells whether company has gain or lost competence; the competence of newcomers is divided by the competence of those who left the company.

### *Expertise is Operational*

In knowledge organizations, knowledge and skills are operational. In other words, they are not in reserve or under training as distinct from being used. Learning and doing-the-job are not two separate entities. Learning does not happen in isolation, but is tightly linked to the skills needed in the job. There are various ways to support employees who are willing to prevent professional obsolescence and renew their expertise (e.g., induction, training, mentoring, coaching, development discussion, and job rotation, see Slotte, Palonen & Salminen, 2004, pp. 101–103). Most of the methods define, assess or develop occupational skills. Focus is kept on learning the essential skills that can improve business results. A learning contract is a useful tool in specifying the knowledge and skills that employees must acquire in order to get the job done (Tobin, 1998). Such contract focuses on a defined short-term period of time and individual goals are tied directly to functional, departmental, and business unit goals, as well as to the overall business strategies (Ibid.). Goals are clearly stated, measurable, and translatable to knowledge and skill requirements.

Once the needed level of competence is determined, the current level of employee knowledge and skills can be assessed (Tobin, 1998). Employees create personal competence profiles describing what skills they can perform well and what skills they need to develop. The “gap” between required level of competence and actual qualifications illustrates the development need. Company’s competence models help to define the required level of knowledge and skills. According to Norris (1991), competence models can be constructed in a “behavioristic” or “generic” way. The first is more commonly used. It describes behavior and the situation(s) in which competence is to take place, and defines competence based on “ideal” outcome expectations. The second requires empirical investigation and interviewing of expert performers. It distinguishes between average and expert performers and set competence based on what the most effective people actually do.

According to competence management, formal training offering is organized so that employees can find and combine exactly the courses they want. They can choose activities that accurately address their development needs. In other words, personal competence models are associated with professional learning solutions. Training is tailored to fit the needs of a particular organization. High-quality learning paths can be designed for each profile to overcome the competence gaps. Most of the learning activities are integrated into the job. Learning progresses from the

“basic” level to the “advanced” level. Training provides not only learning of mechanical behavioral patterns but also mental models that connect pieces of information to an organizing principle.

In the end of training, learned competence can be certified by tests. Certification tests can be offered by the training organizer or by an independent assessment center. Certification procedure also allows people to learn their skills on-the-job and yet demonstrate their competence formally.

Part of competence transfer is to move the needed knowledge and skills within the organization to where it is most needed. Job rotation enables competence transfer and personal learning. People can acquire new competence in a new domain by changing their jobs. Later, they can continue in the new job or go back to their previous domain and apply new skills there. Existing competence profiles are compared to potential new jobs. People can select a new role that is, in many important ways, similar to their existing competence, but also includes new competence. In that way, transition to a new job role develops their expertise.

### *Expertise is Transferable*

According to Sveiby (1997), the job of knowledge workers is to convert information into knowledge and to make sense of and interpret information. Information sharing is a pre-requisite for such knowledge creation. People compare one piece of information to another, think about consequences and connections, and, in conversation, share these thoughts with each other (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Information technology speeds up, enables, and extends such activities. It can help to create, store, and distribute information. However, it does not solve the question of transfer. Effective management creates structures for information sharing and makes maximum information available for everybody. It also rewards for learning and competence transfer, and ensures that expertise is not only an asset of few employees.

Competence transfer means that people who have knowledge communicate it in a form of explicit data. People who receive the data see its relevance, apply it to their jobs, and, as a result, transform data back to knowledge (Tobin, 1998). Therefore, a relevant question is how to make individual competence usable to the larger community. How is knowledge put into a form that is accessible for people in an organization? “Codification” of competence means that knowledge is made organized, explicit, portable, and easy to understand (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Codified knowledge can be articulated in a form of language (including computer languages). Different users of knowledge can then categorize, describe, map, model, simulate, and embed it in rules and recipes (p. 68). It can be represented in the text or it can be embedded into the processes and services of the company. For example, “how to do” procedures are embedded into computer applications, and people do not need training to learn how to create a standard product specification document or how to make a transaction. Computer programs guide users toward the right way of doing things.

However, codified knowledge represents only a part – though a significant part – of what is known and how the knowledge is applied in practice. Deep expertise

is hard (even impossible) to express in an explicit form. According to Davenport & Prusak (1998), codifying process for such tacit knowledge means that someone who has expertise is located in an organization and information seekers are pointed to that person. Interaction is encouraged between people. Tacit knowledge is transferred via socialization, for example, by learning from a role model, or by watching a simulation. A good story can also convey meaningful knowledge from person to person.

Graphically and/or textually illustrated “competence maps” define what kind of knowledge and skills are available in a particular organization (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). They help to make connections between people who have problems and people who have the knowledge to solve them. Such maps point to knowledge – to people, documents, or databases – but do not contain knowledge (Ibid.). Organizations who develop competence maps usually ask employees what knowledge do they have and where they get the knowledge they need to get their jobs done. Large amounts of data are then typically stored in databases, where people can search and retrieve information about particular expertise.

The challenge is to create accurate profiles (in a form of a resume or a skill list) of people who have expertise and to keep that information up-to-date. To help people to “map” their own profiles, knowledge organizations create competence models. They specify competencies needed in major job classifications, for example, by defining what kinds of skills are needed in project management jobs. People can then use and modify standard models to fit their individual profiles. In the mapping process, individual knowledge is transferred into organizational knowledge, and it becomes usable for anybody who needs it. Expertise becomes a shared property.

### *What is Problematic in Competence*

In the competence management discourse, explicit competence becomes a measure of expertise. Nevertheless, the relation between competence standards, good practice, and performance is not straightforward. Tidy and precise competence models are far from preserving the essential features of expertise, and they underestimate the very things they try to represent (Norris, 1991). Moreover, standards are often not empirically determined at all, but based on conventional thought and the use of strategic power to define what people need to know and be able to do (p. 135).

Competence management focuses ultimately on knowledge and on a capacity to act based on knowledge. Competence-based structure of recognized qualifications fits the needs of modern employment (Norris, 1991). Expertise is defined in a manner that is both context-free and person-free. The competence approach limits professional expertise to refer only to qualified knowledge and skills, i.e., to suitable, adequate, and sufficient know-how; thus, the meaning of expertise is narrowed to encompass only specialized and technical know-how.

The simple constructivist approach argues that subjects within a given context can define their competence. However, the nature of employment in any organization is not cut from its surrounding politics. It is not possible to manage – recruit, reward, retain, and train – only competence. There are always people who possess



certain competence and who cannot be reduced to the business-relevant know-how they have. The rapidly increasing regulation of professional practice, through standards, certification, or mandatory professional degrees, makes it necessary to analyze the use of power as part of a term competence (Jeris & Johnson, 2004). Competence mapping is a political action, and skill lists emanate from power (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). A map is a representation of reality and thus always in favor of one perspective over others. It describes who has the most valuable knowledge. In other words, a good position in the map represents power status in the organization (Ibid.).

To translate expertise into operational competence via functional analysis includes the following steps (Jones & Moore, 1993, pp. 387–388):

- (1) Competence is divided into elements that describe what can (or should) be done (an action, a behavior or an outcome).
- (2) Criteria for an expected level of performance or for an “ideal person” are defined for each element.
- (3) Forms of competent behavior are classified, ranked, and ordered.

In the definition process, skills are de-contextualized from constitutive practices of everyday life, and abstract representations of complex social interactions are constructed<sup>10</sup>. As a consequence, competence-based approach is changing the social control of expertise in society (Ibid.).

It is also problematic that competence management is concerned with how to get the knowledge from the head of experts – how to extract knowledge from people (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Competence management literature clearly states that people who have expertise are hard to manage, because they do not explicitly know what they know (they have tacit knowledge), or they do not want to give up their knowledge for the others to use. The main interest in competence management is in to control and use expertise rather than to really develop it. Human know-how is instrumentally approached.

In the end, does competence management really encourage development of in-depth expertise? Many knowledge companies have compensation and benefit practices that reward job transferring instead of long-lasting experience in one job. Novelty is preferred, although people neither have time to learn the situational know-how, nor to socialize with the group of professionals before they change jobs again and learn something new. Short-term job experiences and formal learning are easier to prove in terms of competence. Experience that has been gained during a long period of time becomes tacit and difficult to explicate and measure.

Competence management is useful for storing, sharing, and transferring knowledge. However, experienced professionals who produce most of the information

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<sup>10</sup> Traditionally professional communities have defined what counts as expertise within their own intellectual and cultural fields, but with competence movement “external body of expert knowledge and practice” is rationalizing professional communities in terms of general skills (Jones & Moore, 1993, p. 386).

may feel that their know-how is only taken from them and used for purposes that are out of their control. They may feel that they cannot expand their expertise in return. If I “give away” my expertise, what is left for me? Some argue that knowledge is never given away, but only grows when shared. I wonder, however, if people have more expertise when they have limitless access to information sources and networks, via Internet, databanks, and mobile devices. Do people get wiser while connected whenever and wherever for the purpose of information exchange? After all, is competence management the fairest way to gain expertise and to build relationships among people? Or, as Fenwick (2004) asks, are human knowledge, skills, and relationships just subjugated to organizational and shareholder gain, in competence management practices?

## **2.2. Expertise in Career Literature**

As Collin & Young (2002) point out, career is one of the key constructions in twentieth century Western societies for representing work histories and patterns, and for attributing coherence, continuity and social meaning to lives of people.

[C]areer can refer to the individual’s movement through time and space. It can also focus on the intersection of individual biography and social structures. One way [to define career...] is to refer to the patterns and sequences of occupations and positions occupied by people across their working life. (Collin & Young, 2000, p. 3)

Traditionally career was associated with transitions from one job to another that bring one forward and provide higher status in the organizational hierarchy. Metaphors like “ladders, stairs” and “pipeline” were used to underline the linear and ascending nature of such careers. Nevertheless, the fundamental changes in the late twentieth century, especially the increasing unpredictability and discontinuity at work, challenged the principles and standards on which career theory, research, and practice earlier stood (Collin & Young, 2000).

As a consequence, new metaphors for career are emerging. Instead of relying on progressive assumptions of the industrial era, they are based on post-modern employment market models and demand-supply relations. Career, then, starts to refer to an increasing value of one’s competence in the job market (Kurtén, 2001). Accordingly, individuals look for a competitive advantage and specialize into knowledge and skills, which are especially demanded by the market (Ibid.). People want to have “intelligent capital” and know-how, for which employers are ready to pay well.

Expertise becomes an essential part of a new career concept. Value on the market is independent on any particular career phases or career cycles, status or seniority. Therefore, it does not matter anymore whether person is in the beginning, middle or in the end of his or her career. There are no clear reference points when “mid-career” starts or when the “peek” of a career is. Now, what matters is the continuous expansion and diversification of personal competence and the strengthening of personal expert networks (Hall, 1996). Acquisition of expertise becomes integral to one’s career. So, viewed in the framework of present career concep-



tions, expertise seems to be both unbounded to any one setting, cumulative in nature, and transformable from one appearance, form or mode to another (see model 2). Expertise seems to be able to change its nature, function, or condition during one’s work history.



Model 2: Expertise in the Framework of New Career Theories

### *Expertise is Unbounded*

A popularistic meaning of “boundaryless” (sic) is when a career, like the stereotypical Silicon Valley career, moves across the boundaries of separate employers, draws validation and marketability from outside the present employer, and is sustained by extra-organizational networks (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996a, b). Identification with a particular corporate organization is replaced by identification to an occupation – to a collective of like-minded individuals who work in the same field and have know-how about similar issues (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994). Ideally the new professional identity in the “boundaryless” career, according to Defillippi and Arthur (1994), is independent from the following: (1) any particular employer; (2) employment specialized competence; or (3) hierarchical, employer-prescribed networks. Therefore, self identification is more like: “I’m an application specialist, not only a specialist of this company; I know how to program applications, not only how to program applications of this company; I share information with intra-organizational networks, not only with people from this company.”

Such “boundaryless” career can also occur *within* an organization when traditional boundaries, notably hierarchical reporting and advancement principles are broken and employment authority is decentralized (Arthur, 1994). For example, in such organizations team leaders can recruit employees from other teams of the organization. Most companies try to operate career systems where people can match optimal roles according to their capabilities. A prototype of such a system is to have an open recruitment market inside an organization. Recruiting managers can advertise open vacancies, and employees can apply to open jobs according to defined guidelines. An alternative or complementary way is to allow employees to promote their competence and experience in an information system and let line and project managers find resources that match their needs. Nevertheless, most

organizations are only partially realizing efficient internal job markets (Nicholson, 1996). Several competing career systems exist simultaneously and offer “key people” increasing opportunities to move forward in career. “Others” have fewer promotional opportunities or no choices at all.

New career practices encourage movement toward new and demanding jobs, and away from ceasing business branches and technologies. The internet provides a new, global marketplace and makes it easier to change jobs and companies (Nicholson, 1996; Claman, 1998). Rotation benefits companies and forces employees to apply “boundaryless” career principles even in long-term employment. Experts are placed in a situation where they have to explicitly “sell” their competence even within their own organization (Filander, 1997). In order to promote their expertise, employees have to make clear to themselves just what it is that they are selling – what kind of expertise they are representing (Filander, 2000).

### *Expertise is Cumulative*

Careers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century do not happen in paid work only. So-called “protean” careers consist of education, training, and work experiences in several organizations, occupational transitions, and everything else (Hall, 1976; 2000). The idea enlarges the career concept in time and space, and changes the way people traditionally defined the employment relation.

*Traditional psychological contract, in which an employee entered a firm, worked hard, performed well, was loyal and committed, and thus received ever greater rewards and job security, has been replaced by a new contract based on continuous learning and identity change.*

*(Hall, 1996, p. 1)*

Responsibility to make sense of changing organizational attachments moves to the individual career “actor” (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). One is not supposed to wait and ask others (including one’s own line manager) to offer ready solutions. Predefined career paths – definitions of how to proceed successfully in the organizational hierarchy – are replaced by speculative maps of possible moves (hierarchical as well as horizontal) from one job to another, or between work, studies, or other kinds of leaves of absence. In a way, organizations and managers can feel free of responsibility for employers’ career (Hall, 1996) and leave the choices to the individual.

In such an “entrepreneurial” employment model, the responsibilities for skill acquisition and risk management are also left to employees (Loogma, Umarik & Vilu, 2004). The employer’s role is to provide opportunities for skill development at work, and the employee’s role is to take advantage of these opportunities (Lankard Brown, 1997). Career development becomes much more opportunistic, speculative and focused on “just-as-needed” learning. In other words, employers invest money for their employees’ growth if employees invest time to enhance their skills and thereafter increase their productivity (Ibid.). However, employees need to understand these new conditions, in order to benefit from a novel career development “deal” between employer and employee.

New careers are built on cumulative, experience-based knowledge. Cumulative does not mean that professional knowledge and skills are static or perpetual building blocks. As the career proceeds, expertise is renewed, re-organized, and updated regularly. Career becomes synonymous with professional growth (Ruohotie, 2000a). Expert career is pursued in a manner of increasing skill and wisdom, by constituting new problems rather than reducing the job to what is already known (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). Working on the upper edge makes development of deep knowledge possible. That leads to continuous professional advancement. This kind of expert career can take several paths: one can get better and better in one's occupation; apply expert skills to broader social needs; or "give expertise away," meaning sharing knowledge and making others less dependent on specialized expertise (Ibid.).

To be clear, not every job offers a scope for development of expertise. Repetitious jobs might involve complex skills, but after the skills have been learned, they are mainly practiced and not improved (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). In that case, people simply construct the field of work so that it conforms closely to the routines that they are prepared to execute (p. 11). They switch to new and similar task every time something new becomes too demanding. Acquisition of expertise is a conscious choice. People have to choose on which level they want to tackle problems at their work and whether they want to simplify the problems or address the problems in the higher limits of complexity.

The other risk for non-expertise is to change jobs so often that there is no time to develop deep know-how. Expert career is an opposite of "job hopping" where the motivation to change a position is to gain better compensation and more power rather than in development of expertise. Job rotation that increases expertise is motivated by finding answers to questions that exceed a current know-how, and, therefore, by learning more. Successful career transitions make connections between past and future, and build holistic understanding of the overall field of professional practice.

### *Expertise is Transformable*

According to Nicholson (1984), work role<sup>11</sup> transitions are defined as changes in employment status or as major changes in job content (p. 173). His definition has extended to include any move between jobs and any major alteration to the content of work duties and activities, including major work reorganizations that give new duties to an existing post (Nicholson & West, 1988, p. 48). According to Ashforth (2001), physical movements between jobs are not necessary in role tran-

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<sup>11</sup> Role is a part or character which one has to play. It refers to the behavior considered appropriate to the interaction demanded by a particular kind of work (OED). Work roles can be also defined as networks of goals and means-ends relationships involving both people and materials (Nicholson, 1984). Roles are fluid and non-fixed designations (Ashforth, 2001). The meaning given to any organizational position is negotiated within structural restrictions (Ibid.).

sition, because changes in psychological conditions of a job, occupation, appointment, or other position are enough to make a transition a real experience.

Role transitions are both voluntary and involuntary responses to growing professional opportunities and uncertainty of career trajectories (Nicholson & West, 1988). Involuntary transitions are likely to follow from technological and structural changes in an organization and its environment (p. 6). Voluntary changes follow personal desire to control one's own destiny (Ibid.). Nevertheless, reasons for job change are never simple and straightforward. Future-oriented motives to move forward in career and find something more challenging and fulfilling are interconnected with circumstantial changes, organizational restructuring, and attempts to avoid what people dislike in their jobs (p. 87).

Transition cycle (Nicholson, 1994; Nicholson & West, 1988) provides a starting point for thinking about challenges encountered in role transitions. First, there is a preparation period when people anticipate for the coming changes and wonder about new tasks and how to deal with them successfully. Second, there is a stressful period of encounter "shock" when people, during their first days and weeks, are surprised of dissimilarities between their old and new jobs. Third, there is a period of adjustment when people alternatively change their frame of reference, change the role requirements to match their needs, or both. Fourth, there is a period of stabilization when there are no longer new things to learn and everyday routines are established. However, as many organizations are in a constant state of renewal, stabilization never really occurs, and the fourth state is a time for new preparation. Different genders, age groups, and social classes experience transitions differently, and the experiences differ also if the move is vertical, horizontal, away from, or toward the organizational center (Nicholson & West, 1988).

Transition, a moment of discontinuity, can be a threatening experience for experts. Prior knowledge and skills may not be relevant in new settings, and people have to learn anew what the necessary conditions for success are. People who are not able to see the transition as a learning challenge and underestimate the newness of their job demands are at risk of "derailment" (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). They are relying on what had gotten them to where they are and see their new jobs just as other versions of what they have done before. In a way, they are "victimized" by past success and unable to make the transition to a different job and to a new way of behaving (Ibid.). Staying in one role and developing only one kind of expertise can limit the ability to move beyond that particular role (Candace & Defilippi, 1996).

Role learning (c.f., socialization or adjustment<sup>12</sup>) is a necessary condition for successful role transition. People who change to a new role must get information on, for example, how to complete tasks, what others expect from them, and how

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<sup>12</sup> Transitions and adjustment processes have been analyzed by a number of scholars under the heading of organizational socialization. However, earlier scholars treated transition as if it was "once-and-for-all" occurrence, like a radical mid-career shift, and not as a recurrent fact of working lives (Nicholson & West, 1988).

the organization is structured and how it functions. Role learning is not passive but proactive framing of what constitutes a field of work and what the problems one should act upon are. Nevertheless, role and its boundaries – what is included or excluded – are defined not only by the role occupant, but also by external norms imposed by the various roles that are linked to the role (Ashforth, 2001). People must create the institutional arrangements that legitimize their new role (Schön, 1983, p. 221). They frame their learning based on socially shared assumptions about situational requirements, expectations and standards for learning, and who or what they approach as a “teacher” at work.

People in transition acquire information from various sources, and formal induction is only one of the possible sources. Other sources of information are documentation, the internet, intranet, databases, supervisors, and experienced colleagues. Usually people learn directly role-related information first, and contextual information increases its usefulness with time (Ashforth, 2001). Role models are important in learning. Nevertheless, novel and ambiguous roles are hard to learn by following models. Information technology is a good example of a domain where many new kinds of jobs have been created. There are no ready models on how such novel roles are carried out. Instead, people need to invent their roles.

A process of negotiation characterizes role transition. Newcomers need to personalize the way they enact the new role – whether they adapt the role to fit themselves, or change personally to fit the role (see “role innovation” in Nicholson, 1984). Part of the adaptation process is to experiment with images about the kind of professional one might become (Ibarra, 1999). Construction of possible selves included both imitation of role models and being “true to yourself” strategies (Ibid.). People narrate how the ongoing transition fits into the overall career history, how they set learning goals, and how they choose methods, time perspective, and performance standards for this particular learning.

There are personal and situational differences in how the adjustment modes are activated in the role entry. Usually experienced people are highly motivated to frame the new role toward their preferences. When they are learning what the role is and balancing between adaptation of the role and personal change, they differ from non-experienced newcomers. Diverse experiences provide complex knowledge patterns for making sense of new settings. Besides, if the new situation appears similar to the prior one(s), people are likely to reflexively involve their familiar pattern (Ashforth, 2001, p. 202). The professional frame of reference that helped to make sense of the previous role(s), guides the interpretation of a new role and new settings as well.

Human resource development literature offers several examples on how to manage career transitions. The main trend, according to the new career concepts, is to start from self-reflection: What is my current situation? Who am I in professional terms? What is my potential in this business situation? What concrete alternatives are available to me? Widely used methods for successful transition include assessments of one’s strengths and weaknesses, future visioning and strategy planning, and analysis of available resources and possibilities (Kurtén, 2001). Similar advice and techniques are used in outplacement, employment training, as well as in career counseling.

In transition, different kinds of learning processes occur. People elaborate existing points of views and assumptions, learn new viewpoints, and alter existing viewpoints (Mezirow, 1991). Ultimately, people may transform their personal construction of expertise (c.f., transformative learning; see next chapter). That is the most challenging and even painful learning experience and does not happen if what is learnt fits comfortably into prior expertise. For this reason, so-called “low magnitude” role transitions are experienced with less difficulty than “high magnitude” ones<sup>13</sup> (Ashforth, 2001).

Role transition and role negotiation, in particular, review and validate prior understanding. People may only reflect existing declarative and procedural knowledge (“What is this and how does it work?”). It is also probable that they face dilemmas that cannot be understood by referring to their previous expertise and start asking for reasons and justifications: *Why* are things like they are? Why do we believe in these principles and values?

### *What is Problematic in a Career*

The number and variety of alternate employment relations have increased. Even if there continue to be long-term employment relations, a permanent contract with the employing organization is not an available choice for everyone. Many large organizations minimize the number of their own personnel, and instead, increase outsourcing and usage of temporary workers. Also a company’s own personnel has flexible working arrangements in terms of part-time, short-term, and distance (“telecommuting”) work. The question follows then, whether learning and acquisition of expertise really are that central to professional life in these conditions, as the prevailing career discourse assumes.

In the “new career lexicon” that evolved in the 1990s, novel meanings replaces previous terms, and old career premises become signs of obsolescent expertise (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996b). The new vocabulary is fully individualistic. According to the examples provided by Arthur & Rousseau (1996b), a *boundary*, which used to be a protection of one’s familiar site, is now something to be crossed. A *transition*, which used to refer to a movement between states, is now a perpetual cycle of change and adaptation. And *employment*, which used to mean a state of being employed, is now just the same as a temporary state and a manifestation of employability. Moreover, according to the new language, employment law that is based on a need to protect employees against more powerful corporations is now referred to as an obstacle to organizing a flexible work force, required by temporary project teams and networks.

According to the career discourse, the career patterns are formulated around emerging new skills and knowledge – not according to the time spent in any one organization or according to the spatial moves between employers or jobs. New

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<sup>13</sup> Magnitude refers to a number of changing features of identity and to the extent of changes (Ashforth, 2001, p. 89). Difficulty refers to an effort needed to become disengaged from one role and engaged in a new one (p. 29).



employment is a “skill enhancement deal” and learning at work increases “employability.” Nevertheless, training that most employers offer is strictly related to immediate job needs or clearly identified future needs within the employing organization (Lankard Brown, 1997). Learning needs to be a “just-in-time” kind of problem-solving and not a “just-in-case” kind of anticipation. Furthermore, even if employers are not ready to guarantee employment, they can require valued employees to sign a “training agreement” that includes a *payback clause*, requiring employees to remain in the company until they repay any remaining training expenses, or a *restriction* that employees cannot work for a direct competitor for a given period of time (Ibid.).

Even if the new career discourse defines everybody and having any succession of (paid or non-paid) jobs as having a career, this construct does not work equally to the benefit of everyone. Career rhetoric supports the ideologies of the society – it ties people to labor markets and employment in ways that are beneficial to work organizations and society (Collin & Young, 2000). Career can be used to motivate and persuade employees, to create effort and commitment, but also to restrict certain groups of people from certain occupational choices (“glass ceiling”). Career ideologies can imply elitist, sexist, and racist constructions too. Moreover, those who work in occupations without likelihood of promotions, and especially those who do not participate in paid labor, are anomalies to career construction (Ibid.).

Furthermore, the risk-taking that is involved in a “boundaryless” career may often lead down wrong paths – new jobs are not necessarily more interesting and challenging, and do not necessarily offer better rewards (Sennett, 1998). Nevertheless, individualization and beautiful slogans like “career of choice” (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996b) and “path with the heart” (Hall, 1996) make it impossible to criticize negative consequences of changing career assumptions without addressing personal failure and change resistance.

The employment flexibility is exactly what neo-liberalistic economy demands: “no more long-term” (Sennett, 1998). It means possibilities, but also corporate downsizing, restructuring, and lay-offs. Employment flexibility benefits profit-oriented organizations; it is acceptable to hire and transfer employees according to the short-term market needs. Employees’ investments in know-how and intra-firm relationships are no longer valued. Moreover, people cannot experience professional commitment. As a consequence, there are difficulties in narrating one’s own career moves in any consistent way, and thus, “new economy” is based on a personal experience of purposeless drifting from one place to another (p. 23).

The meaning of “expertise” is therefore either based on authentic experience (“I am good at this.”), nor on professional standards (“This is how the job is done well.”). It reflects the employment market’s requirements, like business situation, financial values, relevant skills and networks, in broad and complex ways. Self-directed “protean” careers are bound to their social and historical context, especially to economical cycles of growth and recession.

Furthermore, in a “boundaryless” career one is assumed to make free choices and to be fully mobile in executing such choices. Nevertheless, mobility and flexibility are often in conflict with personal demands to find time and stability for physical well being, family, and caring for friendships.

### 2.3. Expertise in HRD Literature

The concept of expertise has traveled across psychology, social sciences, and other fields of study. The usage of the concept – how and when expertise is referred to – has clearly expanded during the last decade. In the framework of human resource development, the meaning of expertise has extended from a plain information processing capacity to advanced knowledge structures. Further it has been understood as intuitive, contextual, and narrative understanding (see model 3). Life-long learning has replaced the rational conceptions. Learning and self-improvement has become a constituting part of expertise (Hytönen, 2002a, b). In other words, adaptability to changes has replaced the long lasting knowledge base and membership of a professional community as a defining character of expertise.



Model 3: Expertise in the Framework of Human Resource Development

Commonly accepted “truth” in the human resource development (HRD) literature is that formal professions have adopted a rational approach to professional knowledge and problem solving (Schön, 1983). Accordingly, expert professionals have knowledge structures that use principles, rules, or models. Therefore, they operate with fact-based reasoning and apply scientific theories and techniques to problems<sup>14</sup>. The creation of new knowledge and methods are distinguished from everyday practice, which is identified with an application of existing knowledge and methods. In this rational approach, then, people gain practical skills only after they have learned relevant theoretical knowledge structures.

Cognitive studies<sup>15</sup> of expertise have also emphasized a rational view. They have been interested in experts’ exceptional information processing capacity

<sup>14</sup> See J. Habermas (1984; 1987) and “instrumental knowledge”

<sup>15</sup> The early expertise studies in 1960s and 1970s were focusing on chess masters’ memory and field configurations of significantly arranged pieces. Chess masters were recognizing thousands of chessboard patterns that they have learned by playing the game and by reading the textbooks about chess. Nevertheless, functions of information processing did not explain pattern recognition, and in the 1980s, researchers concluded that expert



(if-then strategies, rules and processes) and knowledge structures. According to Schön (1983), such definitions are not sufficient to explain how experts deal with unique, uncertain, and complex situations that are not only technically complicated, but also include conflicting values and more than one way of framing the confusing variables of decision-making. The objectification and reduction of the complexity of expertise does not adequately capture the subjective experience of “being expert.”

In the prevailing HRD literature, rational view has been abandoned and replaced by learning from experience (see the corresponding propositions between “expertise” and “experiential learning” in Hytönen, 2002a, p. 57). The current HRD discourse emphasizes continuous surpassing of prior know-how. Reflective practices are part of the acquisition and development of expertise. Transformative learning is a demanding mode of expertise learning. It requires advanced reflection and alteration of personal life story. Ability to discuss one’s experiences and turn difficulties and setbacks into victories requires narrative competence.

Human resource development (HRD) has gained a special role in increasing expertise in organizations. Development practitioners are defined as *change agents* who advance reorganizations, the renewal of expertise, and adoption of new modes of working (Hytönen, 2002a). Their role is to make sure that change initiatives for creating high-performing teams, reducing cycle time for innovations, and adopting new technologies are defined and delivered in a timely manner (Ulrich, 1998, p. 130). Furthermore, HRD practitioners are being called upon to pay attention to not only individual, but also to organizational and collective learning, and to integrate learning into the overall business strategy of an organization (Slotte, Tynjälä & Hytönen, 2004). In the “beautiful story of development,” the HRD change agents are heroes, and professionals who try to defend their narrow territories against business changes are the “bad guys” (Filander, 2000, pp. 41–43). Expertise is an unquestionable goal of HRD, but it needs to be liberated from limiting boundaries of professions.

### *Expertise is Intuitive*

It is essential for HRD practice to understand and recognize what the expert thinking and performance is. Even if experts use consciously facts and research-based theories, they also use tacit recognition and judgments. They respond holistically to the requirements of a situation. Successful know-how does not consist, then, of rules or plans already in mind prior to action (Schön, 1983). Expert knowledge is not a matter of rules but of a collective effect of numerous special cases experienced in the

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knowledge is more than a “database” of facts and procedures. Experimental studies in areas like electronics, team sports, and music supported the conclusion that only significant patterns were recognized. However, schema theories were not sufficient to explain the selectivity in perceiving relevant information, and researchers defined in the 1990s that there are domain-specific constructs in long-term working-memory that could explain activities in complex tasks. (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Eteläpelto, 1998.)

past (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). Such intuitions are based on patterns that an expert has developed through long experience in similar situations. The subjectivity and personal meaning of such past experiences facilitate pattern recognition.

Often it is hard to describe accurately how experts perform. Knowledge is included in the patterns of action and in a “feel” for the situation. Experts acquire such know-how by building a repertoire of examples, images, understanding, and action based on previous experiences. Furthermore, skill acquisition<sup>16</sup> moves progressively from analytical behavior of a detached subject consciously decomposing his or her environment into recognizable elements and following abstract rules, to involved skilled behavior based on accumulation of concrete experiences and the unconscious recognition of new situations as similar to whole remembered ones (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 35).

Expertise involves observation and diagnosis of changing needs of work practice and subjective intentions (goals, values, etc.) that guide as criteria for how to deal with tasks at hand. Moreover, experts adjust their performance in a unique situation according to what is already present in their repertoire of experienced cases. That means that experts are fully involved with the situation at hand. They know things by heart and thus do not need to explicitly reflect upon them. In any case, development of expertise requires conscious thinking. Intuitive know-how is not acquired without preceding reflection. Intuition is not an innate ability, but learned via extensive practice. Intuitive and analytical information processing are not mutually exclusive cognitive styles (Löfström, 2005). This dilemma of non-reflectivity and reflection is in the heart of expertise. That is why rational explanations alone fail to capture the phenomenon. Experts interpret their expertise both as involved practitioners and as reflective practitioners.

High level expertise – also called wisdom – looks like a fluent process that inherits from paradigm cases (Remes, 1995, pp. 22–23; see also Kirjonen, Remes & Eteläpelto, 1997). It recognizes situational and contextual elements, enforces value-based knowing as part of intellectual decision-making, and sees value propositions from a situational viewpoint. Intellectual, affective, and conative components of skillful performance become integrated. So, in the process of “becoming an expert,” a person develops a professional frame of reference through which he or she interprets and coherently organizes multiple meaning patterns (both situational and context-free patterns).

Following from the interpretation of the skill acquisition progression model (appendix 1), expertise is usually understood as fluid and easy performance. Empirical studies based on novice-expert comparisons in 1980s and onwards have focused on knowledge-rich tasks, which require hundreds of hours of practical learning. Expertise studies in physics, algebra, medical diagnosis, and software programming, as well as in nursing (Benner, 1984; Benner, Tanner & Chesla, 1999) and teaching (Berliner, 1987, 2004), have further shed light on the intuitive, experience-based quality of expertise.

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<sup>16</sup> A well-known model of the progression of skill acquisition from novice to expertise (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986) is presented in the appendix 1.

Another perspective on expert thinking and performance may be gained by focusing on necessary domain-specific knowledge to complete tasks. The main question then is what kind of knowledge is needed in order to think and act like an expert. Many studies simply compare static differences between experienced and non-experienced professionals and emphasize the quality of domain knowledge, without advancing theoretical modeling of expert learning.

The main qualitative differences between novices' and experts' knowledge and reasoning, which strongly interact with each other, can be summarized as the following (Eteläpelto, 1998, pp. 37–38; see also Glaser & Chi, 1988):

- Experts can perceive large meaningful patterns in their domain.
- Experts focus on relevant cues in a task.
- Experts represent their domain problems at a deeper level than novices.
- Expert knowledge is organized in a way that is relevant for the problem solving.
- Experts use more time in problem analysis and construct a detailed mental representation of the problem before they enter into the solution.
- Experts' knowledge structures are hierarchically organized and depth in their conceptual levels.
- Experts categorize problems in their own domain accordingly to abstract, high-level principles and their knowledge structures are more coherent.
- Experts have good self-monitoring skills, and they spend more time on evaluation than novices.

Superiority of experts' problem solving depends on their rich knowledge base acquired through extensive experience (Eteläpelto, 1998). The comparison of experts (people with many years of experience) and novices (people with little experience on the domain) supports the conventional idea that expertise is a natural outcome of years of practicing. Adult education research, thus, often considers expertise to simply mean a long working experience in the domain. Nevertheless, experience does not explain expertise alone. Some professional experiences are simply more developmental than others, and some people are non-experts even after many years of experience.

Bereiter & Scardamalia (1993) criticize the expert-novice comparisons not only for emphasizing the length of experience naively, but also for giving an impression that experts perform quickly and easily without thinking (and that novices perform laboriously if at all). To present rational “knowing-that” and experience-based “knowing-how” as two opposites may help to clarify the special nature of expertise, but, certainly, expertise is not such a black and white phenomenon. Rule-based learning and conscious problem-solving takes place before actions become intuitive, and reflective ability that perceives intuition does not disappear, even if it does not dominate in pattern recognition.

Therefore, it is important to look at how a particular task requirement impacts expert performance. Different situations and tasks demand qualitatively different kind of expertise. Writing is an example of an ill-defined task that requires hard work and a lot of conscious thinking during task performance (Bereiter & Scar-

damalia, 1993). It is a qualitatively different task than one that can become a routine. Thus, in complex task performance, experts' domain knowledge and reasoning include both conscious problem solving and intuitive pattern recognition (i.e., knowing-that and knowing-how).

However, there is one area where experts clearly differ from novices. It is the ability to reframe situations in a way that makes skillful performance possible.<sup>17</sup> Intuition, again, plays a part in the process. The method of reframing is very exploratory. A unique situation comes to be understood through attempts to change it. Experienced practitioners bring past experience to bear on a reframing of a unique situation. They recognize things and place them within familiar categories of their thinking patterns (Schön, 1983). Seeing this situation as the one before may also cause one to act – without conscious articulation – similarly in those two situations (Ibid.).

According to Schön (1983), when practice becomes repetitive and expert know-how tacit and spontaneous, there is a risk of over-learning. Nevertheless, “reflective practitioners” can prevent routine, criticize intuitive, tacit understanding, and make sense in a new way (p. 61). Then, situations are not subsumed under a familiar category, but treated as unique entities for which uniquely appropriate descriptions must be invented (pp. 137–139). Experts reflect on similarities and differences to find out what is unique compared to earlier situations. Process includes intentional effort to acquire competence beyond present abilities (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993).

Intuition is therefore not an opposite of learning. The ability to make sense of professional settings does not happen automatically, but intuitive expertise depends on conscious choices to study, to learn on the job, to demonstrate needed competence, and to stay open for challenges (Remes, 1995, p. 37). It is typical for experts to continuously improve current understanding in their way of seeking information, building contact networks, and solving challenging problems. For example, according to Dubin (1990), technically competent engineers do the following:

- keep current with advanced technologies in their own and related fields
- seek and accept assignments that are tough and simulating
- use performance feedback effectively to improve proficiency

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<sup>17</sup> Schön (1983, pp. 130–132) gives examples of “reflection-in-action” by presenting discussions between a student (a novice) and a supervisor (an expert). In these cases the student tries to solve a problem but is unable to solve it. The supervisor helps him to restructure the problem and suggests a direction to reshape the situation. He asks the student to conduct an experiment to discover what consequences and implications can follow from it. They adapt the situation to the new frame with mental procedures and discover consequences, implications, appreciation, and further moves. Their attempts produce unintended changes that give new meanings to the situation.

- take critical and innovative approach to problem-solving and product development
- have active interaction with peers and associates who recognize them as experts

Intuition requires familiarity with significant implications arising from work, with the problems that other professionals in the field are working on, and with the approaches they are using (Dubin, 1990).

Obsolescence is an outcome of the failure to maintain intuitive sense of how things are going. According to Dubin (1990), obsolescent engineers are unable to apply their existing concepts to their areas of specialization, because they are not aware of the latest concepts, approaches, innovations, tools, and equipment. Nov do they comprehend the technical literature in the field and colleagues fail to consult them on technical matters. As a result, their input is no longer competitive, and respect and credibility among colleagues decreases. There is no more selection for key assignment and participation in decision-making diminishes.

To overcome professional obsolescence requires changes in habits, strong personal motivation, and supportive workplace conditions (Kautto-Koivula, 1993, p. 24). Individuals perceive the threat for obsolescence and sustain the match between their job requirements and existing competence in different ways. Pazy (1994) has developed a taxonomy of how technical professionals are coping with the perceived obsolescence (Cited in Tsai, Compeau, & Haggerty, 2004). She categorizes differences in the scope of the updating target (broad vs. narrow), the temporal period over which updating takes place (short-term vs. long-term), and the agent responsible for updating (individual vs. team).

To conclude, expert knowledge is something that provides patterns and categories to apprehend situations. It enables experts to see the world differently in elements that they know how to deal with (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993, p. 37). According to Bereiter & Scardamalia (1993), novices use abilities that are needed in challenging tasks and intuitive experts use intact procedures that are needed in familiar kinds of tasks, and that they have learned well through previous experiences. In other words, novice practitioners orient actively toward external sources of information to organize elements that constitute their task, but experts have internalized the meaningful knowledge patterns and categories, so that the source of the information to organize task-related elements is their own insight. Interpreted from that point of view, novice-expertise comparisons show only how people behave according to the knowledge at their disposal. Reflective practice is, then, a way for experts to move between rational, reflective, and experience-based, intuitive performance.

Furthermore, development of expertise is a particular kind of reframing where setting of problems is done in the higher edge of existing competence, which leads to a continuous growth of expertise (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). This, in turn, means continuous surpassing of previous levels of knowledge and competence, working on the limits of the existing know-how, tackling challenging tasks (not only routine tasks), and approaching tasks so that they maximize opportunities to grow. The quality of professional knowledge is deep (or weak), depending on which level problems are solved and whether learning is included or not.

### *Expertise is Contextual*

According to Mezirow (1991, p. 11), people have a fundamental human need to understand their life experiences. This is also true in professional settings and in a search for a purpose of work. Experts make sense of their work context according to the unique requirements that each situation places before them and within what kinds of patterns and categories it is understandable. Such sense-making involves knowledge and skills, but they cannot explain it alone.

Experts make sense with regards to their professional ways of looking at things, i.e., with regards to a particular perspective that organizes knowledge and skills. A “frame of reference<sup>18</sup>” interprets experiences and filters the way experts perceive the world, feel about it, and lead actions in it. In other words, it provides answers to a question *why*. An identity (“who I am as a person.”) gives an example of a frame of reference that preserves a coherent sense of self by integrating various roles throughout the life course. It shapes choices and expectations, resists disconfirmation, and thus constrains new experiences by the old ones, like a self-fulfilling template (Ashforth, 2001, pp. 35–36). However, it can be invalidated through repeated and dramatic disconfirmation or a voluntary break from the past to encounter new experiences.

According to Ashforth (2001), occupational roles (“who I am in this social context”) facilitate sense-making by providing localized frameworks to interpret organizational settings. Experts categorize themselves and others in order to understand their setting (p. 67). Role identification, the perception of belonging to a social category, locates experts within a context (Ibid.). Experts assume the perceived prototypical or exemplary characteristics of a role to themselves. They create a fit between a role and themselves. Experts may search for roles that appear to resonate with who they are (their identity), but actually the course of role learning crystallizes the actual and desired self-conceptions (p. 25). The construction of identity follows the direction set by job demands, and vice versa; people drift toward jobs that fit with their needs and self-conceptions (Nicholson & West, 1988).

Experts need to define their roles and relationships in an appropriate way according to a given context. A “situational relevance” of a given role, the degree to which a role is socially appropriate to a situation, is defined by external norms (Ashforth, 2001). An expert’s frame of reference is role-related, and that makes it less applicable in unfamiliar contexts. Generally, abstractly defined roles have high breadth and low depth of situational relevance; specifically defined roles have

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<sup>18</sup> The frame of reference is a construction through which a person clusters points of views, i.e., interrelated assumptions about social roles and activities, self, causal connections, values, and the like (Wiessner & Mezirow, 2000, p. 345). Assumptions are usually specific, particular, and operate on an unconscious level. The frame of reference is, then, more global, metaphoric, and it reflects a more inclusive worldview (Taylor, 2000, p. 297). However, the construction lacks a clear empirical foundation; thus, it is not clear how to put boundaries on it and to show changes in it in practice (Ibid.).



the opposite (p. 33). That implies that experts who have abstract roles can apply their know-how in a variety of situations, for example in different kinds of meetings where they negotiate business contracts. Experts who have specific roles can perform well in particular settings, like in a high-tech laboratory environment.

An expert's frame of reference includes cognitive, affective, and conative<sup>19</sup> elements (Mezirow 1997, 5). It includes knowledge of what is important in the situation. It guides the decisions on how to perform. It makes us feel good about things that are relevant in a particular professional context. Moreover, it provides us willingness to see situations as unique learning opportunities, rather than to reduce them into the "seen already" category. When frame of reference is in accordance with the situational requirements, it accurately adjusts performance, and experts can use their know-how in the best possible way. It enables experts to connect proper goals, tactics, behavior, and actions to the task performance. This is something different from applying a theory or script mechanically to interpret situations.

According to Ashforth (2001), expert performance requires strong identification (or socialization) to a "subjectively important role" that is central to one's identity and professional frame of reference. The more a person values a particular role, the more it defines his or her identity; thus, the more permanent, visible, and socially desirable the role is, the more subjectively valued it becomes (p. 39). A cultural way of signifying social categories is built into the subjectivity (Salling Olesen, 2001). Subjectivity is a result of interaction between an individual and his or her physical and social context (Ibid.). On one hand, experts internalize their subjective sense-making capability during years of studies and work, and thus do not question its relevance and truth-likeness. On the other hand, they continuously evaluate their ability to solve a problem, make a coherent artifact, or construct an understandable idea (Schön, 1983, p. 136). Experiences and reflections of an outsider are essentially different from those of an involved practitioner.

To be specific, experts need to first acquire thinking and action patterns of a professional and organizational context in order to recognize concrete work settings like they are supposed to do. Secondly, they need to start looking at their patterns critically in order to further develop practice. On one hand, they need to internalize contextual meanings – mediated via language and symbols – in order to understand what is going on. And on the other hand, they need to reflect upon their internalized practices each time work context changes for example due to transition from one job to another or due organizational changes.

When new experiences exceed prior understanding, the reflection task becomes more challenging: contextual changes require personal transformation. According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning is a process that has an inherent logic, ideal, and purpose. When people face a confusing situation or problem that cannot be resolved, based on their previous experience, they start reflecting and asking

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<sup>19</sup> To read more about cognitive, affective, and conative constructs, see Ruohotie (2000b) and Snow, Corno, & Jackson (1996).

critical questions about their own assumptions. Next, they see that others have gone through the same process of transformation and start validating prior beliefs in collaborative dialogue. They look for alternative roles and operative modes and that then leads to action planning that includes finding of new information, testing of new roles, agreeing on new relationships, and developing new competencies and self-confidence. Finally, they integrate their new transformed perspectives into their every-day practices.

A journey of transformation is very individualistic. Mezirow (2000) adds that personal change is like a spiral in nature – it includes variation of all the mentioned phases, but does not always follow the exact sequence as presented earlier. Completion of one stage is not necessary before starting another one, and phases are repeated during the transformation process. Long-term transformations are cumulative in nature, and exact phases are not adequate to explain that experience (Ibid.). Additionally, during the process, fixed mindsets became emotionally<sup>20</sup> able to change (Mezirow, 2003).

Transformation is not only characterized by rational thinking, but also by feeling of power, courage, and spirituality, as well as by social aspects, such as strong relationships and compassion for others (Mezirow, 2000). Conations play an important part, because energy, motivation, and volition to act are needed in order to change behavior (Mezirow, 1991, p. 188). Finally, it matters very little, in practice, whether transformation is a rational, practical, intuitive, or emotional experience<sup>21</sup> (Cranton, 1997). In any case, being in the world fundamentally changes, and people have a new sense of clarity.

Consequently, the questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions makes a subjective frame of reference more inclusive, distinguish, open, integrative, and reflective (Mezirow, 1991). Such an in-depth learning process leads to maturity and a capacity to create a norm-based map of possibilities with hypothetical thinking (Mezirow, 1991). Maturity includes the capacity to take the point of view of others and compare different views more objectively (pp. 167–168). When people have achieved and engaged to act based on more advanced and clear understanding they cannot regress back to the level of minor understanding (p. 169). An ad-

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<sup>20</sup> Studies of Robert Boyd (1991; Boyd & Myers, 1988; Scott, 1997) and John M. Dirkx (1997; 2003a, b) have deepened the understanding of emotional and spiritual dimensions of transformative learning. Their theory of transformative education is grounded in depth psychology (see Carl Jung) and into the lifelong process of individuation, of becoming who a person truly is. Their view seems to contradict Mezirow's view. However, the difference may be seen as a matter of emphasis (Imel, 1998). Mezirow emphasizes the rational, whereas Boyd and Dirkx rely most heavily on imagination and on the extra-rational. Both incorporate, nevertheless, rational processes and imagination as a part of a creative transformation process.

<sup>21</sup> Cranton (1994; 1996) has written more about how adult educators can use the theory of transformative learning in practice, and how to take different learners and learning situations into account.



vanced frame of reference is more likely to produce interpretations, opinions, and judgments that will prove to be truer or more justified than would those produced by other frames of beliefs (Mezirow, 2000).

Advancement of frame of reference requires feeling that one belongs to somewhere. According to Lave & Wenger (1991), mastery of knowledge and skills, as well as a particular expert perspective, demands full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community (see also Wenger, 1998). Experts' sense-making is a result of situational learning via participation to the activities of a working community, as discussed in the previous chapter. As less experienced, "peripheral participants" of a community of practice learn more about knowledgeable skills needed at their work and about the surrounding context, they actually move toward full participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). That is what expertise is all about. Transformative possibilities are opened up in evolvment of becoming a complex, full cultural-historical participant of a world of work (p. 32).

Therefore transformative learning and reflection are not limited to an individual's perspective. According to Launis & Engeström (1999), individually defined expertise is an artificial and meaningless construction in an environment where work is increasingly done within professional networks (see also Launis, 1997). Expert knowledge is, then, no longer a property of an individual but of a group (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993, p. 20). Fast-changing and complex problems at work require co-operation among people. Networks expand traditional organizational boundaries and include experts and non-experts from different domains (Launis & Engeström, 1999). Expertise is understood as a part of holistic work processes, and in terms of relationships, rather than individual activities. Hence, the expertise is the work activity itself (pp. 74–75). New ways to combine professional competence, divide work, share responsibility, and co-operate with customers and external partners horizontally expands the qualifications needed at work (Launis & Engeström, 1999). Additionally, planning and design responsibilities move from management level to lower levels of organizational hierarchy and vertically expand the requirements of work (Ibid.).

To develop expertise, thus, requires that instead of reflecting only individual points of views, the surrounding context – the activity systems – needs to be included as well. An advanced activity theory<sup>22</sup> reflects upon networks of interrelated elements such as subject and object of work, instruments (working methods and tools), communities, rules, and division of work (Engeström, 1987; Engeström, 1996). If individuals try to adapt to situational changes at work by only developing their own knowledge and skills, the task is overwhelming. Instead, according to Engeström (1996), a community should look together at how the tools and methods, division of work, and working rules have historically led to the situation and how to change them to better fit the new situation.

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<sup>22</sup> It is noteworthy that people may conceptualize expertise holistically and non-individualistically, even if they are not familiar with the theoretical vocabulary of an advanced activity theory.

### *Expertise is Narrative*

According to Valkeavaara (1999), expertise can be understood as a narrative construction, which is composed of experiences and of explaining the ongoing practices and social interactions. Experts make sense retrospectively by creating stories based on their experiences. They construct accounts for explaining things and for making temporal events meaningful in certain situations (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narrative explanations differ from paradigmatic, logo-scientific explanations (Bruner, 1986). Narrative thinking synthesizes separate entities into a holistic meaning structure, whereas the analytical mind cuts, compares, and categorizes entities. As people become active participants in their professional community, they start using narrative modes that are typical for that culture and start reflecting their own experiences according to the cultural storylines (p. 131).

When experts respond holistically to the requirements of a situation, their knowledge is comprised of experience-based cases of “what happened last time and what might happen next.” Such narrative understanding approaches situations from a certain viewpoint (similar to the overall frame of reference) and, thus, is interpretative. Bruner (1990, 1996) points out that people tell and re-tell past experiences to justify the present and the future in a way that makes their actions sound reasonable and moral (see also Tolska, 2002). Justifications are in accordance with what is appropriate for narratives of a particular community. Common stories create coherence among members of a particular culture (Bruner 1990, p. 96). Narrative models are not, however, adopted mechanically, but individuals select model frames and scripts that they feel are relevant to their experience.

Cultural narratives construct also how expertise is understood within a professional context (Cortazzi, 1993). Studies on narrative in organization have usually focused on shared and prevailing stories as a medium of collective sense-making. Studies in work settings have focused on how stories organize social life, make the unpredictable predictable, and convey taken-for-granted assumptions (Weick, 1995). Stories are resources that carry cues and frameworks to position oneself within work settings.

As Weick (1995) notes, narrative sense-making is about authoring and creation as much as it is about interpretation and discovery. Typically, the challenge is not the lack of information, but confusion and ambiguity of preferences. When experts give meaning to their experiences, they do more than just find a general law or model to explain what happened and why. They strive to organize their temporal experiences and fragments of information to a meaningful whole (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 161). Usually, past events are reconstructed as explanations in the present, not because they look the same, but because they *feel* the same (Weick, 1995, p. 49). For example, when experts change their role, narratives provide continuity between two different work contexts. Experts gather together all necessary events into one account that explains what happened and makes the ending reasonable and believable. Events become understandable, in relation to the whole context of what happened.

According to Polkinghorne (1988), a plot<sup>23</sup> can produce sensible statements when meaning of experiences can only be understood sequentially. A narrative plot consists of the significance of events, for the narrator, in relation to a particular theme (Polkinghorne, 1988). The list of events is transformed into a schematic whole by highlighting what is the meaning of certain events for the development and outcome of the story (p. 18). Stories, as representations of life, must leave space for multiple and sometimes competing plot lines (Mishler, 1999).

A career can be seen as an example of a narrative construction of expertise. In that sense, careers are fictions about the past that make us feel good about the future (Nicholson, 1988). They are stories about journeys and routes through and between scattered encampments on a wide terrain of organizational hills and valleys (p. 94). Most people evolve a strong personal sense (internal career) of where they are going in their career, as a contrast to formal stages and roles (external career) defined by organizational policies and societal expectations (Schein, 1996).

Stories, including the career stories, are usually generated when something unusual happens (Weick, 1995). For example, people are not aware of their organizing career theme before they face a sudden need to change and make sense of a promotion, a firing, or a transition to a new location or function (Schein, 1996). The task of stories is to explain interruption and reduce disruption (Weick, 1995). Stories connect what is known to what is happening and they relate absent things with present things (p. 129). However, stories are not the only things that generate meaning. Indeed some stories may undermine and destroy meaning (Gabriel, 2000).

Acquisition of expertise is dynamic and open narrative construction (Hytönen, 2002a). Mishler (1999) adds that there is variability in how expertise, as an identity construction, is narratively acquired and sustained. People have their own theories as to what held them back and what allowed them to move on in new directions (p. 81). Persistent narrative themes provide a degree of unity and coherence to discontinuities of life. For example, people can develop an overriding theme, a career anchor,<sup>24</sup> that holds together the internal career even as people experience transitions in their external career (Schein 1996, p. 80).

Technical-functional competence is one optional career anchor for professionals, but not necessarily the only one. It is a confusing narrative theme because, on one hand, knowledge and skills are increasingly valued, but on the other hand, technical know-how becomes rapidly obsolescent and needs constant updating

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<sup>23</sup> The construction of a plot is a kind of reasoning that C. S. Pierce called abduction (Polkinghorne, 1988). It is a production of a hypothesis of how things fit together, tested against the “facts” of what has actually happened (pp. 18–19). Post-decisional outcomes are used to reconstruct pre-decisional histories (Weick, 1995, p. 61).

<sup>24</sup> Career anchors reflect basic values, motives, and needs of a person and evolve around the following categories: (1) autonomy/independence, (2) security/stability, (3) technical-functional competence, (4) general managerial competence, and (5) entrepreneurial creativity (Schein, 1978), as well as (6) service or dedication to a cause, (7) pure challenge, and (8) life style (Schein, 1990).

(Ibid.). Narrative storylines need to be revised according to the changing expectations in a social context. People can, of course, resist and not revise their basic values and motives. In that case, the conflict between personal desire and external requirements can become a cohesive theme (Mishler, 1999).

Comparison with others can offer a solid narrative theme as well. People have their own theories as to which group they belong. They make identity claims by negotiating their social position, aligning and constructing themselves with others, and by marking boundaries of their relationships (Mishler, 1999, p. 112). One's claim for recognition may be justified by contrasting it with another's negative identity as a non-expert (p. 136).

Some new and unexpected experiences in professional life can exceed narratives by which people have storied their expertise. For instance, sudden role transitions can be such experiences that confuse prior sense-making and force people to find new storylines. In other words, transformative learning (discussed in the previous chapter) happens when people replace the limiting points of views and develop an alternative narrative that truly works and challenges the old one (Brooks & Clark, 2001).

New narratives enable understanding of new professional experiences and engagement with work in a new way. Moreover, transformation can disturb the power of public and social narratives that structure personal thoughts and actions (Brooks & Edwards, 1997). People can become aware of experiences that fall outside of dominant discourses and begin to narrate those experiences anew.

### ***What is Problematic in Reflection***

The human resource development literature reviewed in this chapter never questions naturalized practices of learning and development. What is taken-for-granted, then, is that everybody must continuously develop him or herself and feel happy about it. The discourse of HRD is in many ways intertwined with competence management and market-oriented career ideologies (e.g., Slotte, Palonen & Salminen, 2004; Slotte, Tynjälä & Hytönen, 2004). Nevertheless, it is not common to analyze how discourse of continuous learning justifies HRD practices that manipulate and regulate people through performance appraisal and grading (Fenwick, 2004), or practices that provide unequal opportunities to participate in knowledge creation.

The concept of *self-directedness* is closely placed to HRD discourse, especially to elements of transformation theory. Mezirow bases his definition of self-directedness on critical theory (especially on J. Habermas); thus, his understanding differs from traditional humanistic conceptions (Ahteenmäki-Pelkonen, 1997). According to Ahteenmäki-Pelkonen (1997), Mezirow emphasizes transformation as an individual growth experience, but criticizes humanistic interpretation of self-directedness as a free cultivation of an inner "self" that does not include reflection on external and internal oppression. In transformation theory, the goal of self-directedness is to transform personal frame of reference into a more authentic and integrated one through critical consciousness, participation in discourse, and reflective action (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, self-directedness reflects individualistic values. Mezirow continues to see the “self” as unified rather than fragmented and contested construction. He does not include in his theory how socio-cultural context shapes personal experiences and identity (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Individualistic “self,” which is a subject in the HRD literature, does not consider that each of us has multiple voices and various perspectives within ourselves, and that none of them is “freely” chosen and cut from the surrounding circumstances. Our changing position as a child, parent, student, spouse, employee, and team member is socially agreed upon and adds cultural meanings to the tones of “self.”

Furthermore, transformation theory emphasizes that people make an intentional movement to resolve contradictions and move to developmentally advanced conceptual structures by transforming meaning schemes and perspectives through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991, p. 147). Accordingly, people perceive their individual conflicts as structural in nature (p. 162), and they can relate perspectives that appear to be independent of one another (p. 155). Moreover, a self-directed mind makes a fresh sense of experience and overcomes established authority structures or other distorting assumptions (prejudices) that prevent learning and change (Habermas, 1984, 1987; Mezirow, 1991). A reflective mind defines an argument, justifies it, compares it with other justified arguments, and then decides which one is the most appropriate and justified argument.

Reflection is used as a way to take distance, stop and think, and find alternative solutions that make things work better. During a reflective timeout, people are supposed to leave beyond their social biases, role boundaries, and relational power issues, and simply follow rational argumentation. Free and full participation in discourse is seen as developmental achievement. Older, well-educated people are presumed to be better thinkers, because they receive higher scores in tests of reflective judgment (Mezirow, 2003). Nevertheless, educated people may also be simply adapted to the dominant system that sets standards for proper ways of thinking and talking, and therefore, among college graduates, it is relatively easy to end up with mutual agreement, as a result of critical reflection. That does not however prove that people with formal education have better capabilities to resolve tensions among fundamentally conflicting perspectives and values.

Transformation theory also assumes that meanings are always transformed toward developmentally more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated perspective (Mezirow, 1991, p. 155). Nevertheless, “maturity” is a socially constructed concept and therefore reflects values and interests of hegemonic culture (Clark & Wilson, 1991). It is just part of the development discourse that we start to believe that we progress and become personally and professionally better all the time. The HRD discourse validates reflective action without noticing that it is ultimately objectifying people as a resource, the performance of which needs to be enhanced, and who, therefore, need to continuously progress from incompleteness toward wholeness (Fenwick, 2004).

We do not have to assume that new meanings are something *better*, but that reflection simply provides a new perspective toward the same thing. When we learn a new “language” in reflection, we have a wider variety to express our thoughts. That does not make our views necessarily any richer or more insightful

compared to people who think differently about the same thing. Transformation means changes in the cultural standards for judging the legitimacy of proof (Clark & Wilson, 1991), for example changes in the terms and conditions of expertise.

Reflection is never value-free. It implies linguistically achieved perspective upon people who do reflection. The act of defining statements is not an integral and natural part of thinking, and the language of critical reflection is a “foreign language” compared to a living act of speech. Experience in prior language needs to be translated in order to make it recognized as a valid argument in reflection. In real life (outside of reflective exercises), we do not deal with relationships between judgments that have to be kept free from contradictions. Nor do we declare facts, arguments, demands, or the like when we have something to say (Gadamer, 1989). We seek and find words to make our point intelligible to others. But that does not mean that we make statements. A formal statement only refrains from disclosing what is said and conceals, by methodological exactness, the horizon of meaning (p. 469). Words in living speech action always refer to the whole sphere of meaning. Statement can capture only a little part of what one means. Therefore, statements should not subordinate a living language.

Dialogue always exists in a specific context. Rationality is a communal process. So, by definition, reflection is context dependent, historically situated, and value-oriented (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Still, transformation theory falsely separates discourse from the context that gives its meaning. How individuals understand themselves is shaped by language and culture, which serves the interest of those in power. Therefore by making contextual elements subsidiary to individual agency, Mezirow and the prevailing HRD literature fail to reflect critically on hegemonic (American) cultural values of individualism, rationality, and autonomy (p. 80).

Critical theory may relate reflection to a social agenda to increase equality, liberation, and emancipation of an oppressed group. Nevertheless, in professional context, reflection has more practical and problem-solving oriented aims. For example, reflection on professional competence is justified by saying that it defines valid criteria for expertise. It assesses what deserves to be called expertise or who deserves to be called an expert. Reflection takes a form of a “translation” where one language, which is currently the language of competence management, is used as a medium of understanding. The experience of having expertise is defined in terms of skills, for example by explaining what people are able to do when they have computer system expertise. In the competence language, expertise is then translated to a resource.

The concepts of “empowerment” and “critical reflection” are adapted from critical pedagogy to popular management literature for purposes of building human capital (Fenwick, 2004). The rhetoric of organizational transformation is subverted to explain organizational re-engineering efforts and old problems of inequity, and unbalanced power relations are reinforced by “democratic” practices (Ibid.). Empowerment, in the “beautiful story” of HRD, means freedom from tight corporate structures, professional boundaries, and specialization (Filander, 2000). However, it also means “freedom” from employment security and acquired rights (Ibid.).



The problem is that competence management is not a living “language,” inherited from a traditional discourse that professionals were using to make sense of their expertise. It is artificially developed and applied to explain the practices of “others.” Therefore, it objectifies the experience of expert professionals. The relevance of the know-how is not defined according to intrinsic lived experience, rather according to business needs. Argumentative reflection at work does not aim at mutual understanding, but to a dominance of a non-professional, economically driven discourse upon expertise. It reduces living speech of expertise to statements and standards of excellence. People who have to speak solely the “foreign language” of competence give away the power to define their expertise according to their own criteria. And people who do not have expertise, but who want to control it, name the modes of discourse. Reflective construction of meaning, with particular emphasis on critical reflection and dialogue, enables a colonial impulse (Fenwick, 2000). It individualizes notions of learning and privatizing, objectifying, ordering, and disciplining experience (Ibid.).

In the theory of transformative learning, discourse is understood narrowly as a dialogue involving assessment of beliefs, feelings, and values (Mezirow, 2003). Such a view does not involve the reflection of the surrounding cultural discourse of which the rational discourse is a component. Critical-dialectic discourse is seen as a real alternative to the appeal to tradition, an authority figure, or the use of force (p. 60). Nevertheless, “opposites” actually exist simultaneously. Each dialogue appeals to a certain traditional authority, even if there are no powerful people or direct use of force involved. Social relations of power are part of all knowledge construction (Fenwick, 2000). They are exercised through language and social practices even in reflective solitude. Those who exercise critics of core corporate values, and prescribed procedures of reflection, soon discover the tight leashes of control (p. 200).

To conclude, it is not possible to take a critical stance outside language. The experiences that we reflect upon are *pre-formed by language*. In reflection, we stay *in* a linguistic world. Languages make us learn conventions and social norms, in which there are always social and hegemonic interests (Gadamer, 1989). However, it is possible to take a critical stance against such interests (p. 547). It is possible to open up one’s own convictions by engaging in conversation with opposite thinkers and by encountering new experiences (p. 346). Ultimately, the ongoing “tradition” and reflective “speech of protest” exist simultaneously (Habermas, 1986). As Ricoeur (1986) aptly comments, critical thinking is also a tradition, and thus, non-separable from it. Language is a medium in which we both exist and reflect on our existence (Gadamer, 1986).

#### **2.4. A Glossary of Terms related to Expertise**

This glossary of terms summarizes the review on expertise literature. In the three discourses presented earlier in this chapter, similar vocabulary is used. The basic, core meaning of expertise terminology is carried from one discourse to another. Nevertheless, what kind of emphasis and meaning terms finally have depends on each framework and its particular perspective. Expertise, in every case, refers to a

superior competence or know-how on a particular topic or context. Moreover, expertise refers in each case to a combination of theoretical knowledge and skillful performance.

In the framework of competence management, expertise had connotations that made it a quantifiable and transferable asset of a company. Whereas, in the framework of career theories, expertise was an individual asset that one was responsible for maintaining, improving, and selling for the best price in the employment market, as well as for carrying through different transitions. Finally, in the framework of human resource development, expertise was associated with an individual's capability to make sense and interpret contextual meanings, and thus perform according to high personal and professional standards. In the latter case, transformative learning was enabling adaptation to contextual changes and interpretation of novel experiences.

The use of language in different contexts can also imply a certain political perspective. According to Haskell (1984) liberals tend to identify experts as people who, because they have special knowledge and skills, also acquire power and prestige. Moreover, people influenced by Marxian theories tend to identify experts as members of classes who, because they are favorably situated in society-wide systems of dominance and submission, also possess valuable knowledge and skills (p. xx).

The following glossary of terms compares similarities and differences between "expertise" in English and "asiantuntijuus" in Finnish. Production of this glossary of terms is not just a mechanical translation, but it is in itself part of the research analysis and interpretation. Comparative review on terminology is an important aspect of this study, first, because the research process has folded in two languages (see the following chapter on bilingual study), and second, because the phenomenon of expertise is constructed in and with language (see the hermeneutics and narrative analysis).

Such a glossary is not definitive, but open to changing meanings and further definitions. Table 1 directly explains the meaning of the term "expertise" and its Finnish equivalent "asiantuntijuus," as well as different modifications of these two terms. In appendix 2, there is another glossary of terms (table 2) that explains the meaning of related terms, like "skill" and "competence," in both languages. Comparison of the two languages reveals coherence and contradictions in the use of terms, and moreover reflects some cultural emphasis in the application of terminology. Such cultural and linguistic distinctiveness is present in the Anglo-American and Finnish competence management, career and HRD discourses as well.

In this study, I have been able to analyze the ways of discussing expertise in two languages, thereby expanding the understanding of the concept in both.



Table 1: Comparison of English “expertise” (OED) and Finnish “asiantuntijuus”

<p><b>Expert (adj.)</b> = (1) experienced (in) or having experience (of), trained by experience or practice; (2) skilled or skillful (at, in, of something); (3) has personal qualities or acquirements; (4) there is no connection to professional qualification requirements</p> <p><b>Expert (noun)</b> = (1) one who is expert or has gained skill from experience; (2) one whose special knowledge or skill causes him or her to be regarded as an authority; (3) specialist, having well-known reputation, trained to deal with special problems</p> <p>The English term refers to a skillful performer, whose cognitive processing is combined with experiential and kinesthetic know-how (Tynjälä, 2004).</p> <p>The noun form of the term is relatively new. It implies about the distinctiveness of the social role, its visibility across many activities and occupations, and the prospects of earning an income from it (Haskell, 1984). It has come to use in the middle of the nineteenth century, as it was only then that the rising levels of population density and income made it possible for considerable number of people to make a living by selling advice and specialized services (p. xii). Furthermore, the elaboration of the division of labor accelerated the evolution of specialized expert ranks.</p> <p><b>Expertise</b> = (1) expert opinion or knowledge, often obtained through the action of submitting a matter, and its considerations to other experts, experts’ appraisal, valuation or report; (2) The quality or condition of being expert; (3) skill or <i>expertness</i> in a particular branch of study or sport</p> <p>The definition of expertise can refer to an individual or to a group of people. It includes a connotation that it can be used as a comparative and competitive measure. Accordingly, an expert is one who has more, and superior, knowledge and skills than others. Therefore, there can be only few who have sufficient expertise. Expertise is task-related and contextual.</p>	<p><b>Asiantunteva</b> = (1) experienced, accomplished, practiced, proficient; (2) skilled, skillful, knowledgeable professional; (3) personal qualities are in accordance with task requirements; (4) qualified, competent, capable and able</p> <p><b>Asiantuntija</b> = (1) one who has gained special knowledge and skill through professional education and experience; (2) one regarded as authority or who has authority on something; (3) erikoisasiantuntija (experti, speasialisti); combination of <i>erikois-</i> (special) and <i>asiantuntija</i> creates a new term that refers to expertise in a narrow professional domain, Due to the Anglo-American influence, English terms are often used in a non-translated, “Finnish” form; (4) professional, related to professions and legal, medical, educational, etc. institutions and therefore authority is collective rather than personal</p> <p>Originally, the Finnish term <i>asiantuntija</i> was indicating that somebody knows how things are and has expertise on matters, topics, facts, issues and points. Emphasis was on the cognitive processing (Tynjälä, 2004). Later on, the Anglo-American meaning of skillful performer has influenced the interpretation.</p> <p><b>Asiantuntemus, Asiantuntijuus</b> = (1) expert opinion or knowledge, mainly refers to a theoretical or technical-functional knowledge</p> <p><b>Asiantuntijuus</b> = (2) expertness in a particular professional or academic branch, refers to professionalism and professional practice; (3) does <i>not</i> refer solely to skill in sport or other motor activity, or arts and crafts. The Finnish terms emphasize more the professional context than the English term. Indeed, they cannot refer to expert opinions that are not based on professional knowledge. Moreover, they are connected to cognitive performance rather than motor or artistic expertness. Terms are combinations of the following words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Asia = thing; matter, theme, topic, subject; fact; question, issue, point; case, etc.</li> <li>– Tuntemus<sup>25</sup> = expertise, knowledge, acquaintance or proficiency (of), familiarity (with)</li> </ul>
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<sup>25</sup> The noun *tuntemus* comes from the verb *tuntea* that means to know by senses, to perceive and apprehend, to recognize a thing or person as identical with one perceived before, to identify and to be able to distinguish one thing from another. It means to know in a

**Expertness** = the quality or condition of being expert; consists of experience, thorough knowledge, and/or skill derived from practice.

**Asiantuntijuus** = includes both the quality of and the result of being expert (c.f., above); consists of experience, knowledge and skills (not one or the other), holistic expertness

*Asiantuntijuus* is a new term and has almost replaced *asiantuntemus* term in the discourse during 1990's. Terminological change indicates that in an insecure and immature working life new kind of expertness has replaced professionalism (Heikkinen & al., 2001).

One of the biggest differences between Finnish and English terminology is that the term "*asiantuntijuus*" assumes a tight connection between expertness and professionalism. So, even if I have used the term "expertise" systematically throughout this study, the term "professional expertise" might explain better the Finnish connotations. Nevertheless, that could also be translated as "*ammattillinen osaaminen*," which again has slightly different associations (see appendix 2). So, in the Finnish cultural context, experts presumably have a high-level professional education, preferably an academic one. Another consequence of the Finnish connotations is the emphasis on theoretical knowledge that is not necessarily part of the English usage of the term "expertise." That is why the term "*asiantuntijuus*" is not usually utilized in the fields of art and athletics.

There is also cultural exchange, notably an Anglo-American influence on Finnish language, that modifies the meaning of words. English terms have been adopted into Finnish in ways that indicate changes in expertise discourses. "*Asiantuntijuus*" has also started to be used in non-professional contexts, indicating that non-professional actors can have expertise as well. For example, in the professional discourse of health care and social work, clients are now considered to be "the experts of their own lives."

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sense of having personal experience of something as affecting oneself, to feel or undergo and to understand with a feeling of clearness and certainty. This kind of knowledge is different from the knowing by mind, in Finnish *tietäminen*, of knowing certain facts about things, their existence, identity, nature, attributes, etc. In other words, expertise is not about knowing things, but about making sense.

### 3. Hermeneutics and Narrative Analysis

Since my aim is to understand how people narratively construct expertise, the methodological concern is to figure out how such understanding is possible. In human sciences, understanding refers to the comprehension of meaning and not to any type of comprehension (Polkinghorne, 1983). The question is not only methodical – how to choose appropriate tools and methods that can bring me that understanding – but also ontological.<sup>26</sup> Understanding is not only part of doing research, but also an essential part of being human. It is a kind of practical experience in and of the world that, in part, constitutes who we are (Schwandt, 2000). Hermeneutics contemplates issues of interpretation, and provides helpful resources to understand understanding. Though hermeneutics is mainly focused on historical texts that represent canonical tradition, the similar act of interpretation is present in encounters with people.

As a researcher, I intermediate between participants of the study and the audience of the study. In doing that, I cannot reconstruct original circumstances and experiences as they were. I rather “imitate” and allow what I know to exist in the interpretation. In other words, I affirm my own being in the process (Gadamer 1989, p. 113). My recognition takes hold of the essence of what I encounter. Understanding is necessarily relative to my standpoint and decision on what the relevant context for interpretation is (Wachterhauser, 1986).

However, I do not want to find from others’ experiences only something that is familiar to me. Recognizing something does not necessarily mean that I simply know something again in a trivial sense (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2002, p. 83). Rather, I want to find the joy in knowing more than I already knew. My understanding emerges from the entire contingent and variable circumstances that condition it (Gadamer, 1989, p. 114). What I know then is *known as something*. In practical terms, I discover and acknowledge professional narratives as representations of expertise. Moreover, such recognition is not only something that happens for me during the research interview or while reading different texts (my own journal, transcribed interviews, books and articles). It is also what happens to you, as a reader of this text.

In the following chapter, I will first explain with what kind of philosophical assumptions I engage in this study. The hermeneutic approach concentrates on the development and cumulative effects of the historical meaning of experience (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 203). Based on Gadamerian hermeneutics, I will emphasize the primacy of historically and contextually determinate “play” in comparison to subjective interpretations. Second, I will clarify how the “play” is realized in the practical research settings and continues in the research analysis process. The play we

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<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the most central ontological claim of hermeneutics is that human beings are their history. The concept of *historicity* means that we live our lives in time, and that what we are, is through participation in and interactable belonging to history (Wachterhauser, 1986, p.7). In other words, hermeneutics is a way to see things from the standpoint of a historically mediated set of concerns and pre-understandings.

are involved in, in this study, is the intent of understanding expertise in the changing working environments.

### 3.1. A Metaphor of Play

As Wachterhauser (1986, p. 5) says, human understanding is *never without words* and *never outside of time*. Language and history are always both conditions and limits of understanding. The metaphor of play<sup>27</sup> illustrates well what happens when we understand something in conversation with people or with texts. Moreover, it illustrates what happens when people tell about their life and organize events into a meaningful narrative whole. Life story can never tell everything that life contains, and therefore it is an interpretation and recognition of life known as something. Hence, to gain a sense of other person's subjective life is to share personal narratives in a playful interaction.

According to Gadamer (1989), a play has an essential characteristic of an act of understanding. A play is something that is absent of serious or harmful intent. I know that the play is only a play (not serious) and at the same time I am aware that it exists in the world determined by the seriousness of purposes of the play. Playing is dynamic movement without any particular, predetermined goals or suppositions; its purpose is self-renewal and finding of new meanings from new directions (Koski, 1995, p. 76).

The concept of play can be related to sports and games – advancing the ball in a game, turning cards, or moving pieces in a board game – or to a spontaneous activity of children. A play can also be a drama, the stage representation of a story, or a concert played with instruments. Moreover, the word has metaphoric meanings like “play of lights, play of the waves, play of parts in machinery, play of forces, and play of words (Gadamer, 1989, p. 103).”

The mode of play as such is not answered by looking for players' subjective reflections. Instead, the structure of playing absorbs the player into itself. Self is lost in a play, in a mode of being of a play that we try to understand. Stated by Gadamer (1989), to play is to play *something*. It requires a playing field (a defined sphere), roles for players (personal aims are transformed into tasks of a game), and an audience<sup>28</sup> that participates by watching. Play is not objectified but understood from within. Players can experience the meaningful whole in which they play a part.

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<sup>27</sup> Translation of this metaphor is challenging. The concept of “play” is translated from a German word *spielen* (to play) or *spelt* (playing). Therefore in the original meaning, in order to express the activity of playing, the noun (a play) must be repeated in the verb (Gadamer, 1989, p. 104). Moreover, I have interpreted the metaphor via my Finnish linguistic understanding. In Finnish there is no one word that is equivalent for playing. Instead there are several words to express particular kinds of plays, for example *leikkiä* (children are playing), *soittaa* (musicians are playing), *näytellä* (actors are playing), and *pelata* (players are playing a game). The essence of playing can be found in each of the Finnish variations of the concept of play.

<sup>28</sup> Audience does not have to be a concrete audience. It refers to the idea that a play represents holistic meaning that can be understood as if an audience would watch/listen it.

In a play, subjective players' prior perspectives merge into the background, and the subject matter moves anew to the forefront of a play. In other words, understanding is *a fusion of horizons* (Gadamer, 1989; 1986) where the present horizon of players fuses with a historical horizon of a play, with the horizon from which the play comes. On one hand, new understanding is related to the understanding of the past, and, on the other hand, everything in the past is seen from the standpoint of the present (Wachterhauser, 1986). Furthermore, my own particularity, and that of the other, is overcome in order to acquire a new horizon.

A miracle takes place – what first appears alien and strange becomes totally familiar and understandable (Gadamer 1989, p. 163). The content of what we read or listen becomes significant for us. Such a miracle of understanding happens in open conversation with ourselves, with other people and with other things, in a condition of willingness to let oneself be told something and allow the other to be right. The insight feels like a sudden lucidity, of simply being present for an occurrence, or as when the fog lifts and things fall into place (Alcoff, 2003).

According to Gadamer (1986), fusion means to see beyond the near, not in order to overlook it, but in order to see it better in a larger whole. Understanding rises to a higher level of generality (Jantzen, 2003). Proper understanding can be achieved only by entering, as fully as possible, into the worldview in which the particular historical horizon of a play was formed. However, we can enter the horizon of a play only from our own current historical and cultural situation that gives us a particular perspective (horizon). Fusion of horizons requires a capacity to take up a tradition into the present and ask it a set of valid questions (Alcoff, 2003, p. 253).

Bringing our prejudices to meet the perspective of a play is actually how learning in general takes place (Jantzen, 2003). Hermeneutic understanding leads to new learning processes that take as their point of departure the previous socialization. In the first place, there are a number of different interpretations. However, not all interpretations will be considered equally defensible on epistemic grounds (Alcoff, 2003). Valid interpretations will be those that represent comprehensively coherent fusion between the historical horizon of the interpreter and the horizon of the play (p. 246). Truth emerges when there is a coherent fusion of elements: a harmonious relation rather than a discrimination of intrinsic features.

### *Playing Field*

Understanding does not happen in the closed universe of a subjective mind. There is no such “inside” entity that perceives impressions from the surrounding “outside” world. We are always situated *in* the playing field of life and we learn to act, feel, and understand in a particular way. We enter the field first and only then can we start thinking about our being in it and our understanding of what a play is all about (Gadamer, 1989).

*[Entering] a human life, it is as if we walk to the stage into a play whose enactment is already in progress – a play whose somewhat open plot determines what parts we may play and toward what denouements we may be heading.*

*Others on stage already have a sense of what the play is about, enough of a sense to make negotiation with the newcomer possible.*  
(Bruner, 1990, pp. 33–34)

An essential statement that Gadamer (1989) makes is that our being-in-the-world is fundamentally verbal. The world, like a play, is manifested through language. Language is an open, inter-subjective network of meanings that makes understanding in the world possible. It is not a transparent medium but it always immediately names and interprets things as such and such. At different times and in different places, people interpret the world differently and create different names to refer to things. Historical context limits the perspectives from which a phenomenon can show itself (Wachterhauser, 1986). Different cultures and worldviews perceive the world from different standpoints and from different horizons.

That understanding is situational does not prevent shared understanding. Meanings are dynamic, not static entities (Koski, 1995, p. 76). When players enter a playing field, they start to learn the common way of playing. Their understanding emerges like the learning of a foreign language. It is presupposed that we master at least one language. That makes it possible to achieve understanding within the framework of one grammar and makes learning a foreign language possible (Habermas, 1986). The idea of translation makes us conscious of language as a medium of understanding (Gadamer, 1989).

Moreover, the focus is on understanding what the play is about. Players want to understand what is useful, how to act in this play, and how what is learned fits with what is already understood (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 225). Likewise, in all understanding we focus on the meaning of what is said, i.e., on the subject matter. Participants do not primarily orient to their subjectivity in the course of play or a conversation, but rather to the search for truth of the subject matter (Misgeld, 1977, p. 326).

Particular things in the field, equipment, instruments, and moves of players start to make sense in a hermeneutic circle. Interpretation moves back and forth, revisiting and re-revisiting, until both parts and the whole are understood in the maximally unified way (Alcoff, 2003). A part is understood in terms of a whole, and the whole is understood in terms of the parts. In terms of reading, we understand a text by understanding its context better, and indeed we understand a context better by understanding a particular text that belongs to it. Words are always part of sentences, and particular texts are part of a writer's literary production, which is part of a certain literature genre (Gadamer, 2004, p. 29).

Truth of interpretation is not absolute, but related to the social and cultural world of practice in a community. It is a kind of narratively formed practical-moral knowledge (Grondin, 2000). According to Vasterling (2002, p. 175), such hermeneutic truth unfolds in three stages. First, it is not produced but initially experienced and phenomenological. Second, it is argumentatively interpreted and tested. And third, it addresses an audience and becomes meaningful to others in pragmatic sense. Hence, understanding is not what we are doing, nor what we ought to be doing, but what *happens with us beyond our wanting and doing* (Gadamer, 1989, p. xiv).



## *Players*

When players enter a playing field, they become part of a group of players. The group exists not due to the individual aims, but due to the purposes of a play. Also, when we want to “come to an understanding” with another person, we engage into a dialogue in which each participant has agency (Alcoff 2002, p. 240). Moreover, participants surrender for the flow of moves, arguments, and suggestions, and not try to control the outcome of the play by focusing on rules (Misgeld 1977, p. 328). Playing is not law-based as in “language games.” Participants in a dialogue are players and not leaders of discourse. They are led by the discourse and do not know in advance what the conversation, in the end, will come to be.

However, players do not forget themselves in the sense that they become “whoever.” Responsiveness does not mean vanishing of self (Gadamer, 2004, p. 34). Personal prejudgments and significance of cultural location remind of a (moving) horizon from which the world is disclosed in its meaningfulness (Alcoff, 2003). Players have no independent position from outside to reflect upon a play (Ibid.). Our assumptions or prejudices are a necessary point of entry into the world to be interpreted. Assumptions might be challenged by a play and they might be wrong, but they cannot be avoided (Jantzen, 2003).

Hermeneutic reflection places before me assumptions that otherwise happens beyond my back (Gadamer, 1986). My assumptions or prejudgments that lead to my pre-understanding (c.f., frame of reference) are constantly at stake. As a result, my prior assumptions can surrender and transform, and thus form a new frame of reference. The critical reflection on assumptions makes room for assumptions that are justifiable and for new questions and answers. However, my pre-understanding is embedded in my being (and not only in my conscious thinking) and thus cannot be fully manifested.

The metaphor of a play assumes that on the field we have a group of equal players with equal rights and abilities to participate. In spite of addressing the historical and cultural horizon – the finitude of the interpreter – hermeneutics pays little attention to the formation of prejudices or prejudgments. As Jantzen (2003) states, our contextual being in the world is inseparable from our embodiment. Moreover, our bodies are constituted as being of a particular gender, race, cultural and linguistic background, size, age, structure of “dis/ability,” and so on (p. 295). So, can everybody enter the playing field under the same conditions? Does everybody have to play according to the same unspoken rules? Under which conditions does the playing field turn into a battlefield of differences?

## *Playing “Rules”*

In the metaphor of play, “rules” of a play are not explicit rules. We do not interpret texts according to grammatical rules, for example. However, cultural tradition<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Tradition mainly refers to those interpretations of human life that have stood the test of time and acquired authority over the course of time, like canonical texts and artifacts (Vasterling, 2003).

rules the play. The playing rules set limitations and do not allow the players to do what ever they want to; however, the play does not determinate exactly how one is supposed to play it (Koski, 1995, pp. 79–80). There are several ways to understand the rules and none of them is necessarily wrong – within the boundaries of a play, freedom of interpretation is limitless (Ibid.).

For example, in translation and acquiring a foreign language, there is always a correct meaning to be learned. Tradition will challenge and correct pre-understanding. If what I thought a particular word meant is challenged with my encounter with its actual use, I have to correct my understanding; not the other way round (Jantzen, 2003, p. 290). Growing up in the world means to assimilate the interpretations of a tradition, which becomes part of our frame of reference. Meanings are not, therefore, constructed in a sense of creation, but rather negotiated (Schwardt, 2000).

People naturally follow customs and think of themselves as having a history. Tradition is present in the anonymous practices of daily life and it is always part of us (Gadamer, 1989). People are absorbed in the process of understanding tradition in the same way they try to understand each other in a conversation: we often understand, simply, because we accept something as making sense without having been able to examine rational arguments that support that understanding (Misgeld 1977, p. 335). Our assumptions are always shaped by tradition.

Understanding, in a hermeneutic sense, presupposes a common tradition – a common playing field – something that all participants can relate to. Does that mean that a tradition is a unified unity and means same thing to everybody? Gadamer wrote his philosophy from the horizon of interpreting classical texts. He believed that tradition has preserved itself because it continues to speak the truth. However, his tradition is the canon of Western culture, and “we,” in his playing field, refers to those who have been educated according to traditional norms – probably white, Western, male and privileged (Jantzen, 2003, p. 292).

The question of power is related to the way canonical tradition is preserved as a common ground of understanding. Postmodern opponents of hermeneutics argue that traditions are preserved precisely because powerful conservative forces have formed us in such a way that we will only count as true, things that conform to classical dominant norms (Jantzen, 2003). Having a dialogue uncritically within a tradition tends to reiterate and reconfirm a dominant viewpoint. Alternative and conflicting viewpoints are disqualified in (rational) argumentation, because they diverge from the dominant “self-evident” standards (Vasterling, 2003). Occasionally, otherness that is not even recognized as worth having a dialogue is silenced all together (p. 175).

The critic against the ontology of tradition has emerged because of the fact that tradition is not a unified whole, and history includes voices of many kinds. Multicultural societies lack common tradition and conflicting encounters proliferate. Does “fusion of horizons” then mean that some assumptions are prevailed at the expense of others? Dialogical understanding presupposes a common world that can be understood in different ways. Therefore, translation enables us to understand other cultures and worldviews. However, such understanding does not have to imply that evaluative standards are shared and agreed upon (Vasterling, 2003). Agreement in understanding does not simply mean to think similarly and deny



plurality. It means that we understand differently and rehabilitate without divorcing from origins of meaning. Non-agreements and different viewpoints comprise, for example, the evolution of philosophical tradition.

### *Shall We Play?*

Despite of the conflicting powers that are present in a dialogue, I cannot understand what you mean without referring both to my prejudgments and to the tradition you are coming from. We are always within a play. Yet, a tradition in which we play does not oblige uncritical acceptance of “universal” truths. Instead, there are traditions (plural) that are dynamic. The course of events brings out new aspects in historical material. To understand within a tradition does not preclude us from creative movement and change (Alcoff, 2003). It is possible to challenge a tradition (or traditions) and bring about the change.

As Wachterhauser (1986) states, people can reflect themselves out of a given tradition and transcend the limitations of any one mode of speaking. Change in a perspective is possible. Nevertheless, the tradition becomes understandable from the new perspective only due to the critical questions and expectations of meaning that come from a given tradition (Grondin, 1994). Meanings can never become transparent in their totality by reflection (p. 132). At the same time as people are engaged with respect to any particular societal arrangement, they can be critical of it as well and see the alternatives for it (Misgeld, 1977). A critical conclusion is that change requires an appreciation of what it was that one wants to turn away from (p. 336). Without having lived the commitment, we would not know where to turn when we want to turn away from it (Ibid.). In other words, seeing things from within does not prevent the possibility of being critical. However, that requires recognition of what it is one participates in, and elaboration of tradition in an on-going interpretative work.

Hermeneutic tradition is of wider application and does not preclude non-hegemonic cultural traditions and interpreters (Jantzen, 2003, p. 292). Seeing from within the tradition can be applied to different contexts where different understanding occurs. Quite paradoxically, this non-objectivity does not lead us to a relativist standpoint either. Language does not cut us off from reality even if it presents only limited, never final, and exhaustive perspectives of it (Wachterhauser, 1986). Via translation, it is possible to understand other ways of speaking about things.

Even if we do not accept the possibility of absolute truth, or absolute rules and principles, we can still accept that truth exists (Grondin, 1994). People who strive for understanding are trying to find something true as an opposite to lie or falsehood. As Gadamer (1989) points out, everyone does understand differently every time and brings truth anew by *applying* it. Truth is embedded in a situation and in a conversation with oneself and others. Situational truth is not relativistic in a sense that “anything goes.” We do not accept everything as equally justified and equally valuable. Truth refers to something that makes sense and is in harmony with the things we experience (Grondin, 1994, p. 142). Truth accepts a multiplicity of perspectives.

### 3.2. Data Gathering about Expertise in the Work Context

In the present study, expertise is studied in an authentic work context in an organization where the traditional and static way of understanding expertise is called into question. The “play” here then is to understand what, in these circumstances, is interpreted as expertise. The “playing field” is the concrete research setting, namely, a coaching program that I planned and organized in the beginning of the study. Coaching was interwoven with the surrounding competence management, career, and human resource development discourses (see the previous chapter). It did not impose any distinctively new way of interpreting expertise into the design of the study.

The “players” were the researcher and nine experienced technology specialists from one international information technology organization. All nine participants, who voluntarily attended in the research process, had at least three years of experience in the company. They were all about to change their roles within the organization<sup>30</sup>. Otherwise, they had heterogeneous educational background, mostly business or technical college degrees, and diverse working experiences, and they differed in age, gender, and nationality.<sup>31</sup> They were moving from a variety of IT specialist roles to different technical specialization or service areas, to team leadership, or to project management.<sup>32</sup>

The circumstances and the roles of players set the “playing rules” for the research. Practical settings were inside work context and influenced by the organizational culture. In the beginning, during the first interviews, I was both a researcher and a human resource development (HRD) manager. As such, I represented the official HRD policies and practices of the company; hence, all the discussions during the data gathering were more or less developmentally oriented. I had a “double position,” and participants were aware of it. Nevertheless, the aim of our discussions was to construct research data. Therefore, I put effort in each interview and group session to create an atmosphere of confidentiality, and to emphasize that the discussions were not shared with any of my colleagues, or with the participants’ supervisors. I made it clear that the aim of the research was to

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<sup>30</sup> Before interviewing participants, I asked them to send me information about their job positions, resume, and why they needed coaching in role transition to make sure they were actually in a transition and not only planning it.

<sup>31</sup> I never directly asked the age of participants, because it was not essential for the purposes of this study; however, I estimated that half of the people were 35 years old or younger and others 36 to 55 years old. Respectively, those in the younger generation received their first degrees in the 1990s and the older participants in the 1980s or earlier. There were four women and five men; eight were Finns and one came to Finland for work.

<sup>32</sup> I considered team leadership and project management merely other ways of using professional expertise. I did not focus especially on how people learned the management and leadership skills, rather on how they continued to operate, based on their professional expertise. The foundational knowledge of first-time team leaders and project managers was based on information technology rather than on management theories.

contribute to the future of the HRD discipline, in general, and that it would have no direct influence on the current HRD policies of their organization.

By the end of the data gathering process, i.e., during the last interviews, I had moved fully to an academic researcher position and was no longer actively employed in the HRD role. Mutual trust had grown during the months of meetings and discussions about the aims of the research. Next, I will explain how the “play” was acted in the data gathering interviews and group discussions.

### *Practical Settings*

Research participants had gained “several years of experience [...and] certain expertise<sup>33</sup>” in the IT profession. At the time of my research, they were all “about to change their role in a significant way [...and] to gain new skills and confidence.” The overall purpose of coaching was to reflect on changing settings and provide support and encouragement in goal-setting and new learning. In practice, the coaching program was a possibility to meet with other specialists who were in the same situation and to discuss, in small groups, issues related to the role transition. The agenda came from participants; no one provided instructions or training for any specific assignment. As a group, everybody could act as a coach to another. The program did not apply any pre-defined model on how to go through role transitions. Its structure was open and participants could influence discussion topics. The role of a facilitator was to make sure that everybody had equal room for participation.

The primary purpose for organizing the coaching program was to gather research data about expertise in role transitions. The program was not implemented elsewhere in the organization for any non-research-related purposes. As an exchange for sharing their experiences for research purposes, participants gained immediate benefit by being able to talk about their on-going issues, reflect their experiences, and figure out together how to handle new work situations.

The data gathering started with discursive interviews about each participant’s background, current work situation, and evolvment of expertise (see the following chapter). Then, after couple of days, participants conducted a Learning Agility assessment<sup>34</sup> and got a 360° Feedback<sup>35</sup> from their colleagues and supervisors about their learning skills and tactics (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). Assessment gave

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<sup>33</sup> The quotations are from the electronic invitation letter that I sent to employees who had more than three years of experience in the company.

<sup>34</sup> The Learning Agility assessment is created in the Center for Creative Leadership (USA) based on prior studies and relevant literature. It consists of four factors: People Agility (knowing oneself and others, open for diversity); Result Agility (getting results and inspiring others); Mental Agility (solving problems, feeling confident in complexity, explaining things clearly); and Change Agility (curious, building new skills) (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000).

<sup>35</sup> The 360° Feedback is a multi-source feedback (see for example: [www.360-degreefeedback.com](http://www.360-degreefeedback.com)). Basically, it is a process in which people evaluate themselves, their

feedback on how people can improve as learners. “Agile ones” were defined as people who are superior in learning from experience, in other words willing and able to learn new competencies in order to perform in first-time, tough, or different situations (Ibid.). The results of assessments were not analyzed as research material, but participants referred to their learning tactics in the group discussions and used the “learning agility” vocabulary in their reflections on how the role transition was proceeding.

Group meetings of two groups (four and five members) followed the assessment. Participants met five times within a five-month period and discussed issues relevant to the ongoing transition. All the sessions were at working premises, during office hours, and participants had approval from their supervisors to attend. All the discussions were recorded for research purposes. Discussions provided data for analyzing the organizational discourses that are presented in chapter four.

During the group discussions, I asked participants to form statements about what was problematic at work, and, especially, in their ongoing role transition (see appendix 3). For example, one felt that he could not gain access to information that would have allowed him to solve problems. He wrote “Roles are too narrowly defined.” Another person felt that she did not understand how the decisions were made, and she wrote, “Decision-making is too complex.” Each member in the group then offered justified arguments why this statement was true or false, justified or non-justified. I also participated in the discussion as a member of the group. Later on, according to the themes that came up during these discussions, I formulated the cultural context of an information technology organization (see chapter 4).

Discussions were ideally based on statements and their rational justifications (Mezirow, 1991). We talked about common issues such as “Do you agree or disagree that each member of the team makes the difference?” or, “How do you give reason for limited or unlimited possibilities people have for moving in a career hierarchy?” However, as soon as somebody disclosed personal issues and talked about dilemmas in their role transition, the tone of the discussion changed and became more emotionally laden and controversial.

Individual interviews eight months after the first interviews concluded the data gathering process. I asked participants to narrate their role transition experiences and reflect back on their personal change experiences (see the following chapter).

### *Against Anti-linguistic Interviewing Theories*

This research formed a particular setting for telling about expertise. My presence as a co-participant was an unavoidable and essential part of the discourse (Mishler, 1986a, p. 105). I had expectations of what I wanted to hear. My interpretative starting point was that the participants shared a passion for having expertise. There-

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manager evaluates them, as do their peers, and subordinates (if there are any) on a set of criteria. They receive a gap analysis detailing how they perceive themselves versus how others perceive them.

fore, I assumed that the way they put pieces of their professional life together was informed by the way their expertise was gained and maintained. I also assumed that the meaning of role transition was related to expertise.

Participants had expectations from the interview and from the coaching program, too. They had identified with the invitation letter that referred to “specialists who have gained expertise” in a particular field. During our discussions, they were free to express what that meant for them. Moreover, they agreed (with the invitation letter) that they needed feedback and self-assessment about their strengths and development needs. They also agreed that they needed to develop, become better, and take responsibility for their own success. The participants were not identified as experts, via any external measures or criteria. It was through the narrative construction in our discussion, that their expertise was negotiated.

In the first interviews (in December 2001 four participants and in March 2002 five participants) I asked participants to describe their careers (see appendix 3). Additionally, I asked them to represent it visually with a pen and paper – to draw sequences, pictures, stories, or whatever that illustrated their career. Participants did not find it difficult to start describing their careers (see appendix 4). Some spoke more freely before the drawing exercise, and some found it easier to tell things based on their drawing. Participants elaborated their career stories and added explicit evaluation on it. Stories ended up by describing the ongoing role transition. I asked what had led them into this situation and what their objectives in this transition were. After the overall career was described, I continued to ask more specific questions about the most important thing at work, about insecurity and competence. I asked about the discontinuities in the career, why transitions happened, how they personally influenced changes, and what kind of alternatives they have had. I also asked how participants have developed their expertise during their career and how they wanted to develop their expertise in the new situation.

In the last interview sessions, eight months after the first ones (in July 2002 four participants and in December 2002 five participants), I asked participants to tell me what happened when they changed their roles at work (see appendix 3). I continued with other questions concerning the transition, personal change, and learning experiences. Many times we referred to discussions that we had had earlier in the group: “You told me... what happened later on?”

Participants (seven out of nine) kept notebooks and recorded events and reflections related to their transition, too. I read the notes before the last interviews, and referred to some particular events by asking, “Can you elaborate how that happened?” Participants also started to talk spontaneously about their own note-keeping, how they did it, how it differed from their note-keeping in their previous job, or why they did not use the notebook. Written notebooks were not otherwise analyzed during the research process.

The interviews that I conducted were not “narrative interviews” by any narrow definition. I did not only ask people questions about chronological relations of actual events that occurred during a specified period of time, such as, “tell me (a story of) what has happened” (Czarniawska, 1998). Instead, I asked participants to describe, tell, argue, evaluate, and compare their experiences. I asked them both to memorize their past retrospectively and to think reflectively about their current

and future situation. However, narratives were a recurrent part of respondents' accounts (Mishler, 1986b). When participants responded without interruption, they organized their replies into stories (Riessman, 1993). Nevertheless, the interviews were not wholly comprised of storytelling. There were also other kinds of talk - descriptions, theories, arguments, opinions, and reports (Gabriel, 2000).

The narrative approach preserved the storied quality of responses, and did not fracture individual expression (Mishler, 1986a; Riessman, 1993). The discursive theory about how meaning was expressed through interview influenced the following narrative analysis and interpretation. Such a discursive view was contrary to a traditional, anti-linguistic theory that treats interviews as simple stimulus-response interactions (Mishler, 1986a). However, it did not necessarily change my practice of interviewing, but focused my attention differently on features that may have been otherwise neglected. Linguistic awareness led to more accurate recording and representation of data.

According to the underlining narrative methodology, meaning is produced through interaction between researcher and participant(s). Both have two roles. An interviewee is respondent and narrator, and an interviewer is questioner and listener (Bell, 1988). The narrator wants to communicate so that the listener understands, and thus creatively finds a form that is compatible with the expectations of the listener. The researcher, in a role of a listener, allows an interviewee to continue without interruption, and to present himself or herself in a particular light (Mishler, 1986a). As a consequence, accounts are told differently to different listeners. In other words, the context of telling, including the audience and purpose of research, essentially impacts the narratives that are produced.

I encouraged participants to tell me about meaningful moments in their professional lives by providing a context of equality, togetherness, and openness. It was important to set power relations between the researcher and participants as openly as possible (Mishler, 1986a, pp. 118–121). Mutual trust was easier to establish when differences (e.g., education, age, genre, and race) did not create a privilege position for me, as a researcher. Studying equals was perhaps the best condition for a dialogical relationship (Czarniawska, 1998, pp. 47–48). People who were participating in the study were of status equal to or higher than me. Such symmetry successfully prevented me from objectifying the people I studied.

In an interview situation, responses (including stories) often take the form of discourse directed to someone outside the immediate peer group (Labov, 1972, p. 355). I fostered a mutual feeling of “sharing the same world” by connecting with interviewees, through similar kinds of experiences (“that happened to me too”), and through common experiences (“that happened to us”). In the first interviews, I shared with interviewees the similar kind of employment experiences from the company. In the last interviews, I also shared common experiences from the group sessions where we had spent time together and gotten to know each other.

I let participants control the flow of topics and extend their responses, by designing a relatively unstructured interview schedule (see appendix 3). Open-ended questions typically encouraged narration, but direct questions (“the answer is ‘yes’ or ‘no’”) triggered stories too. Actually, the question form was not a deter-



mining factor for how the meaning of a question was understood. Indeed, solidarity between the participants and me was established as we engaged together in the task of trying to understand important experiences (Mishler, 1986b, p. 245). We fit the questions and answers to each other and to the developing discourse. We asked each other to clarify meanings and resolve ambiguity through the discourse (Mishler, 1986a). As I reformulated my questions, interviewees reframed their answers. They learned from how I responded to their answers, and vice versa, in an unconscious mutual adaptation (Ibid.).

### *Thorough Transcriptions*

It was central to my study to tape interviews for the further interpretation of a joint construction of meaning. I transcribed all interviews and group discussions to be able to see the flow of discussion throughout the months of data gathering. It was essential to do the transcription work by myself. Transcribing made me familiar with the data (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). As Mishler (1991) has stated, transcribing combines close and repeated listening with methodic notification of details. As a result, one discovers features and patterns that were not evident without listening, for purposes of writing.

My data consisted of several written documents. By combining different data gathering methods, I got diverse and yet complementary data. I represented the interaction between participants (interviewee and interviewer) in-depth. I included both speech and non-lexical responses (like “mmm, a-haa”), including pauses (p). Both what I have asked and what the interviewees responded mattered in discourse. Interview schedule or researcher’s notes were not enough for knowing what was actually said (Mishler, 1986a). The question asked was a context for interpreting the response (p. 36, 44). I did not neglect my own impact, but recognized it as a central feature of meaning construction. My questions revealed both personal interest in my research participants and in my research project, and vice versa; interviewees had their own expectations for the evolving discourse.

The production of transcripts was full of conscious choices. Narrative approach provided me a way to think creatively about the sorts of data I collected. Any decision regarding editing of transcripts was taken with regard to the “narrative” that I eventually wanted to tell. Therefore, the form of transcripts evolved as I focused on certain stories in detail. I had to identify beginnings and ends of narrative sections, select the one represented in-depth in the study and notate them in a certain way (Riessman, 1993, p. 56). It was possible to produce alternative transcripts from the same piece of an account. What I included as a relevant feature of speech and how I arranged and displayed the text reflected my theoretical and methodological assumptions (Mishler, 1991). Representation is fundamental to what we report as findings and to how we generalize from those findings (p. 277).

Readers should be able to see the issue from both the research participants’ and from the researcher’s points of view. As Bell (1991) points out, transcribed materials are not perfectly transparent, but they, nevertheless, allow readers to access what participants have said apart from researcher’s perception and interpretation.

### 3.3. Interpreting Narrative Accounts

The purpose of narrative<sup>36</sup> analysis is to see how people in the flow of discourse impose order for their experiences and make sense of events and actions in their lives (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). Narrativity is not a method, or a school of thought, either. It is a vague framework that focuses on the narrative quality of materials used in research as well as deliveries produced by research (Heikkinen, 2002). Narrative approach has evolved fast and divided into several ontologically and epistemologically diverse groups. Eventually each researcher creates his or her own narrative method (Syrjälä, 2001). Narrative inquiry involves “political” concerns, about power, authority, and legitimacy, in choosing how a study is conducted, what its purposes are, and how narrative knowledge is validated (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). The inquiry trespasses a private domain of a researcher and of research participants, and becomes a highly personal endeavor (Ibid.)

Opinions vary regarding whether a narrative approach is an expansion of, or a critical alternative to, traditional qualitative research. Accordingly, there are disagreements about whether narrative data should be analyzed according to traditional methods of coding, classifying, and thematizing, or according to special methods that preserve storied qualities of data.<sup>37</sup> I developed methods to overcome the fragmenting practices of traditional qualitative methods. In a way, I analyzed the structure of experience alongside meaning and motives (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

The non-narrative data, such as interview and group dialogue that consisted of descriptions, arguments, opinions, and direct comments toward the ongoing interaction, provided a context to interpret narratives. Written materials, such as self-assessments, personal notes, and emails were analyzed only as they were brought up into the shared discussion. Next, I will explain why narratives were called for a special attention and illustrate how the storied data was analyzed and represented

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<sup>36</sup> “Narrative” can refer to a process of storytelling, to a scheme of a story, or to a resulting story itself (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narrative data can refer to a speech collected via interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations, or it can refer to a written text (biographies, diaries, notebooks, and other documentation). Additionally, it can refer to almost anything - pictures (still or moving), gestures, tattoos, buildings, landscapes, arrangements of things, etc.

<sup>37</sup> Paradigmatic analysis of narrative seeks to locate (deductively or inductively) common themes and general conceptual notions among stories collected. In a narrative analysis, the result is an emplotted narrative, such as a case analysis, historical account, or life story (Polkinghorne, 1995). In the latter, the researcher is synthesizing and configuring elements of an account into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data according to a certain purpose (p. 15). Narrative analysis can be combined with other forms of qualitative analysis and even with quantitative analysis. However, combining methods makes confrontation with philosophical issues necessary (Riessman, 2001). Usage of diverse methods means, by default, that results cannot be simply present from a singular and “natural” standpoint. The researcher must educate readers from epistemological choices used in a study (Ibid.).



in the study. In other words, I will explain how the “play” of understanding continued in the research analysis process.

### *Interest of Narratives*

Personal narratives express events as they first became known to the narrator and have the capacity to transfer the narrator’s experiences to the audience (Labov, 1997). Moreover, narrative analysis provides a way to think beyond the data, to examine how accounts and stories are culturally constructed, and to include cultural conventions and norms (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

My own interest in this study was in narratives that were participants’ first-person accounts of their experience on expertise and transition. Narratives were primarily oral before I turned them into a text. I was interested in personal narratives as a way to create knowledge and as a way to use cultural categories to interpret life and self. In other words, I was attracted to how narratives are used in identity construction and social interaction. Narrative approach provides different perspective on individual than what is possible with other kinds of qualitative methods (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). As Riessman (1993, p. 2) recommends, I tried to glean from the narratives:

- (1) How narratives are put together (structure and storyline)?
- (2) What kind of language their use?
- (3) What kind of cultural and contextual resources they draw on?
- (4) How they persuade listener of authenticity?

I used theoretical concepts like *expertise, career, and role transition* as analytical tools to read narratives. I wanted to know how those constructions had relevance concerning narratives of participants (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 75). I thus wanted to understand (1) human conduct, (2) the intentions that have driven the conduct, and (3) the context where those particular intentions made sense (Czarniawska, 1998, p. 4). Both the concrete settings (time, place, purpose, and organizational culture) and the theoretical framework of the study provided context for telling and interpreting narratives. Stories within this particular framework served a purpose of constructing expertise.<sup>38</sup>

I then expanded my analysis with life history approach (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). According to Cole (1995), life history interpretation goes beyond the personal and makes an attempt to understand how theoretical concepts work in indi-

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<sup>38</sup> Additionally, stories may serve other purposes, such as telling what one should do (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), entertaining, providing a moral evaluation, sharing news (Cortazzi, 1993). Stories also cast some individuals in an organization into relatively narrow roles, and turn allies into enemies, defeats into victories, and traumas into triumphs (Gabriel, 2000).

vidual cases (Cited in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). Accordingly, I did not focus only on the narrative themes and their relations, or on narrative strategies that a narrator uses to produce coherence and balance between what is said and how it is said (Mishler, 1986a, p. 87). I was also interested in which ways narratives represent cultural themes and values, and referred to general cultural knowledge that is not contained in text itself (Mishler, 1986b, pp. 243–244). Although each narrative uniquely integrated participants' life events, they also adopted basic themes from cultural repertoire (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 182). I was listening to how organizational and professional culture “spoke itself” through individual stories (Riessman, 1993, p. 5), and how historical set of practices were carried in narratives (Czarniawska, 1998).

I used a life history approach to add a new interpretative layer that involved a historical context for reading individual narratives (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 17). I developed stories of action within theories of social and political context (Goodson, 1997). Cultural discourse provided words, concepts, and forms of speech, which allowed participants to tell about their experiences. Simultaneously, it produced narrative *difficulties* (silences, gaps, disruptions, or contradictions) by constraining what kinds of experiences were appropriate to talk about (Chase, 1995). For example, the social positioning as employees limited what people were able and willing to say (Goodson, 1997, p. 56). Nevertheless, participants enlarged and varied cultural storylines creatively (Polkinghorne, 1988).

My analytical approach was contrary to the dominant paradigm of expertise studies. I did not ask about the content of the participants' jobs. Some were more specific about the content of their tasks and skills. Some did not talk about them (almost) at all. Moreover, I replaced all technical terms with general ones.

I had both practical and theoretical reasons for bypassing the substance of participants' jobs. First, most of the participants had very special work responsibilities, and it would have been easy to know “who is who” by representing details of their tasks. Second, specific content was not important for the purposes of my analysis. I did not analyze how experts made sense of their job. Instead, I analyzed how they made sense of themselves as experts. Participants and I, both engaged in the interview discourse, tried to make sense of expertise by applying the discursive space available.

### *Methodical Steps*

I built my analysis on the work produced by scholars interested in how the form and content of single stories that are told during the interviews shed light on the experiences of individuals (Mishler 1986a, b; Bell 1988; Riessman 1991, 1993). In the most basic form, stories were composed of three elements: an original state of affairs, an action or an event, and the consequent state of affairs (Czarniawska, 1998, p. 2). I focused on the analysis of how the logic of linked stories within an account revealed personal change. Sequences of stories provided insight into how people's interpretations of their experiences changed over time (Bell, 1988). Particularly, in this study, I analyzed how participants reconstructed their expertise in new settings.

I interpreted episodic stories that emerged during the course of interviews. People told, for example, stories about how the new role differed from the previous one, how emotional events related to transition, and how the new role was connected to the changing organizational mode of operation. My analytical question was directed at finding out what the person can relate only by using this particular form of expression. The stories chosen were central to understanding of how personal construction of expertise changed or remained the same in the shift from one role to another.

For me, interviews, rather than themselves being stories, merely contain stories. Therefore, my focus was on distinguishing stories from non-narrative forms (Mishler, 1986a, p. 107). I treated stories as discrete discursive modes within the data that are detachable from the surrounding speech with clear starting and ending (Riessman, 1993, p. 17). Stories intensify a common understanding and somehow encapsulate the meaning of the overall discussion (Saarenheimo, 1997, p. 129, 210). Stories are concrete examples that clarify, in detail, the point that is expressed in the discussion that surrounds stories (Mishler, 1986b, p. 238).

First I transcribed all the data (see the first step) and read the interview accounts several times.

**Max:** I mean in this case really a good one I would say (U: mmm) and it is really nice to work together. And, what else can I say? Of cause it has been more, aaa, communications role (U: mmm) compared to before, I mean I have to, I have to be also some kind of also a relationship person with business person, (U: mmm) and with the supplier and service manager, so it is very interesting to have so many different interfaces and I did not have this specially, I was, I am quite posit-positively suprised that business people consider us really as a partner and not as a, you know, as a supplier or (U: mmm). I have to admit that most difficult [event] I have been doing for [our own organization] actually (laugh) (U: right) and

**Ulpukka:** why was that?

**Max:** I don't know. Some, I mean thinks were (p), maybe they were expecting me to organize more than my role should be (U: mmm) and also in the countries the people, aaa, who are the local organizers, aaa, wanted also to be the technical persons. It was not as well organized as business persons, when it is business it is much more easier to make the, the division of the job (U: right), so we do the technical thing and they organize all the other things. And, yeah, when working with [people from our organization], I had the feeling to be like a supplier facing a customer. That was like...

**Ulpukka:** That's funny!

**Max:** It was quite funny, but. So, we did not maybe have especially good contact with the person I was dealing with. So, maybe it was (p)

**Ulpukka:** was it only like one time? (X: aaa) or with a particular person?

**Max:** aaa, one, okay, aaa, the two times were very difficult to organize. The first time I think it was purely organizational (U: right), but second time it was also because of our relationship with this person that was not so good (U: mmm). [...]

The First Step: Transcribing Oral Speech to Text

Then, I separated the episodic parts (stories) from the descriptive parts (explanations, theories, lists, etc.) and commentary parts (comments related to the interviewing itself) of the interview (see the second step). I used a special notification

to mark the beginnings (<beginning>) and the ends (<\end>) of different modes of talking within the overall discourse. The narrative part usually started when the interviewer asked the triggering question, and ended when the interviewee became silent or said, “That was it.” The narrative part continued as long as the interviewer and the interviewee discussed the same subject. In most cases, the interviewer changed the subject and asked a new question. In some cases, however, the interviewee continued to talk about the same subject, even if interviewer had already introduced a new one, or then changed the subject in the middle of the response, even if the interviewer wanted to have more details.

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<desc> M: I mean in this case really a good one I would say (U: mmm) and it is really nice to work
together. <\desc>

<comment> And, what else can I say? <\comment>

<desc> Of cause it has been more, aaa, communications role (U: mmm) compared to before, I mean I have
to, I have to be also some kind of also a relationship person with business person, (U: mmm) and with the
supplier and service manager, so it is very interesting to have so many different interfaces and I did not
have this specially. <\desc>

<story> I was, I am quite posit-positively surprised that business people consider us really as a partner and
not as a, youknow, as a supplier or (U: mmm). I have to admit that most difficult [event] I have been doing
for [our own organization] actually (laugh) (U: right) and U: why was that? M: I don't know. Some, I mean
things were (p), maybe they were expecting me to organize more than my role should be (U: mmm) and
also in the countries the people, aaa, who are the local organizers, aaa, wanted also to be the technical
persons. It was not as well organized as business persons, when it is business it is much more easier to
make the, the division of the job (U: right), so we do the technical thing and they organize all the other
things. And, yeah, when working with [people from our organization], I had the feeling to be like a supplier
facing a customer. That was like... U: That's funny! M: It was quite funny, but. So, we did not maybe have
especially good contact with the person I was dealing with. So, maybe it was (p). U: was it only like one
time? (X: aaa) or with a particular person? M: aaa, one, okay, aaa, the two times were very difficult to
organize. The first time I think it was purely organizational (U: right), but second time it was also because
of our relationship with this person that was not so good (U: mmm). [...] <\story>

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### The Second Step: Separating Episodic Parts from Descriptions and Commentaries

I asked myself in what ways the events of the past were put together in these stories to form coherence and to emphasize a particular evaluative point. I then reduced an overall story to a “core narrative” (Labov’s, 1972, pp. 363–370) by applying a structural method (see the third step). The reduction into a structure served an analytical aim to explore in detail how events became meaningful. Core narratives included all or some of the following elements (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967):

- Abstract: summarizing the whole story, what was the story about?
- Orientation: who, when, what, where?
- Complicating Action: then what happened?
- Evaluation: the point of a narrative, so what?
- Result or resolution: termination of the series of events, what finally happened?
- Coda: signals that everything is said, story is ended.



The focus on a form and structure – how a story is organized and how it develops – was a significant step in my narrative analysis (Riessman, 1990). I wanted to avoid simple content analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, pp. 57–58). I organized stories so that every meaningful sentence was in one line (in the final representation in 1–3 rows depending on a page width), and I numbered the lines. Then, I represented only lines that described what the actor had done, and I removed the rest of the text. I marked the missing lines with a bracket and dots [...]. I also used the brackets when I replaced a specific name with a generic term, or added explanatory words.

At the same time, I continued reading the longer versions aside. I kept in mind that everything in the interview discourse was relevant for interpretation, even if it did not have a place in a story. I did not reduce something away just because it did not fit coherently. I made sure that what was said elsewhere in the interview was in accordance with the reduced plot. I asked myself what the obstacles were – things to fight against – on the way to expertise. I started to find patterns in a way narratives were organized, and in the way expertise and transition were related.

**Abstract:**  
01 I am quite posit-positively surprised that businesspeople consider us really as a partner and not as, aaa, you know, as a supplier or (U: mmm)

**Orientation:**  
03 Most difficult [task] I have been doing for [our own organization] actually (laugh) (U: right)

**Action:**  
06 Maybe they were expecting me to organize more than my role should be (U: mmm).  
07 And also in the countries the people, aaa, who are the local organizers, aaa,  
08 wanted also to be the technical persons.

**Evaluation:**  
09 It was not as well organized as businesspersons,  
10 when it is business it is much easier to make the- the division of the job (U: right).  
11 So, we do the technical thing and they organize all the other things.

**Resolution:**  
12 And, yeah, when working with persons [from our own organization], I had the feeling to be like a supplier facing a customer, [...]

**Abstract:**  
24 Usually, there have been some, some problems [with businesspeople], and so on,  
25 but (p) we never, I never got a feeling that I was mistreated or (U: mmm)

**Orientation:**  
37 I have, I had to deal with, with communications people so,  
39 mainly communication managers and so on  
40 and this service is very special service in a way, But, aaa,

**Action:**  
41 I, I met different kind of people,  
42 some people who are really scared about it (U: mmm)  
43 and needed to be comforted (U: mmm) and so on,  
44 and some others who took it more lightly and (U: mmm)  
45 say "okay, but you know what you are doing so I let you (U: mmm) do your thing"

**Resolution:**  
46 and they were not so worried (U: mmm).

### The Third Step: Reducing Story into the Core Structure

I then focused on the evaluation that was embedded into stories to define why the events were reportable. I was mostly interested in direct evaluations, resolutions of action, descriptions of main characters, and “drama” of the story, for example how people used others’ voices.

There is a difference between evaluation that expresses a common narrative tradition, what is considered a good style of storytelling, and evaluation that expresses personal opinions or feelings (Siikala, 1990). Of course some evaluative features serve several purposes (p. 34). For evaluative purposes, Labov (1972, pp. 366–373) has differentiated the following actions:

- Narrator stops the story, turns to the listener and tells what the point of the story is.
- He or she introduces a third person to evaluate actions.
- He or she tells what people do rather than what they say.
- Evaluative points can also be found in departures from the basic linguistic syntax.

Even if structure was a good starting point, story categories did not map to all narratives with perfect regularity. However, comparing the story structure and the actual form of a narrative made it easier to see the unique forms of narrative. Different narrative genres<sup>39</sup> persuaded differently the personal differences in experiences (Riessman, 1988, p. 152). Linguistic choices (use of active and passive modes of telling, repetitions, and shift from personal to general mode) were well suited to what people wanted to say about their experiences (p. 170).

Participants also organized dialogic and polyphonic explanations that made more sense of professional and organizational settings than chronological storylines. They used polarities, like inner and outer, general and specific, individual and social, fiction and fact, to make sense of their work contexts and their own place in it. Such “key rhetoric” manufactured coherence, continuity, and connections into conflicting themes (Komulainen, 1998, p. 74). Moreover, others’ expressions (the voice of a supervisor, a colleague, or a friend) become part of the material that they used to provide alternative interpretations for situations.

I then interpreted single stories in relation to the other stories in an account. As a result, I reviewed whether participants’ thinking changed (Bell, 1988, pp. 100–101). I compared especially the orientation (who were the actors), resolution and evaluation of the stories to reveal the logic of inter-linked stories. Interpretations differed depending on how the narrator connected several parts to provide a coherent account (Mishler, 1986a). Moreover, I analyzed what elements were particular to each individual story and what were found in other, similar stories.

Collecting several stories allowed me to compare and contrast them to each other. However, my categorization did not produce explanation in the same manner as in natural science. Typologies in narrative analysis are considered as statements of similar events that are shared by various stories, not as descriptions of “species of stories” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 167). Typologies did not provide the

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<sup>39</sup> Examples of different narrative genres are *episodic*, thematically developing narratives, and *habitual*, temporally ordered narratives that repeat certain events as if they occur again and again (Riessman, 1990, pp. 152, 170).

essential meaning of stories. They were useful only to invent some abstract themes and concepts.

In the final representation I gave pseudonyms to all participants. I used exact sentences from participants' stories. I wanted to reserve their authentic "voices." In practice, I however wrote a new, reduced and selective narrative out of participants' accounts (Hänninen, 1999). I reconstructed the told from the telling (Mishler, 1995). I focused on how participants created coherence and on their main storylines. I also included direct quotations to illustrate the richness and multi-leveledness of participants' stories. In a way, I combined participants' voices with mine. I could not ignore my interpretative power as an author of the research text. Nevertheless, I tried to use it so that I did not speak only for myself, but allowed alternative interpretations as well. Importantly, I wanted to make every step of the analysis as visible as possible and represent data transparently. My aim was to restore control for participants over what they meant by what they said. For example, I sent story transcripts and reconstructed narratives to participants for a review during the analysis process.

### *Bilingualism and Translation*

Both English and Finnish were used as working languages in the organization where the study was conducted. Finnish-speaking people were using Finnish in mutual communication, but started to speak English effortlessly every time a non-Finnish-speaking colleague entered the discussion. English was commonly used in all written communication; especially in official presentations, announcements, and instructions. Furthermore, the professional language of information technology is strongly influenced by English. Even in the Finnish discussion, internet, software, coding, data, and servers were semi-translated to "internetti, softa, koodi, data, serverit," and so forth.

In research it is essential to use the authentic language of the particular research context whenever possible. Particularly, narrative inquiry that is interested in the use of language (vocabulary, grammatical tenses, and sentence structures) as a meaning-making device is concerned with whether people use their mother tongue or a foreign language in their accounts. The choice of language-in-use does not prevent narrativity, but it limits how the nuances, variety, and richness of language resources are used in narratives, for example the use of metaphors, synonyms, and proverbs. The usage of a foreign language in research interviewing is justified, nevertheless, if it is the same language that is used in the everyday professional conversations. I conducted two interviews and half of the group sessions in English, even if it was nobody's mother tongue. The rest of the conversations were conducted in Finnish. In that way, participants expressed their thoughts in (one or two) language(s) they mostly used at work.

Research analysis was then primarily done in Finnish, which is the mother tongue of the researcher. Thus, when I listened to and read Finnish accounts I naturally started thinking of what was said in Finnish. Also, when I listened and read English accounts, I contemplated in Finnish. Yet, occasionally, it was easier to make sense of English narrative expressions by thinking simultaneously in Eng-



lish. When I started to write down the analysis in English, I needed to translate pages of analytical sketches. Furthermore, it was necessary to translate citations from participants' accounts. I translated only those parts that I intended to use in the final report.

I decided to do the translations myself. The alternative would have been to use the services of professional translators. In this case, I had an advantage of being familiar with the organizational and professional language used in the participants' accounts. I understood slangy expressions, specific abbreviations, and references non-explicated during the discussion. A colleague, fluent in both languages, helped to translate the troubling cases. It is a recommended practice to crosscheck whether the meanings are correctly translated. Correctness, in this case, means that the point made in the citation is carried from one language to another. Transition narratives (chapter five) were also sent to participants for a review after translation.

Translation is never a neutral and mechanical activity. Even if I intended to translate participants' stories word for word, they used expressions that were language-dependent, contextual, and therefore non-translatable in simple terms. I needed to find expressions that were similar enough to carry the intended meaning from Finnish to English. Furthermore, in the process of translation, fluent oral speech was translated to written, more or less formal language. Spending five months in the United States during the translation activity helped me to get a sense of the differences between oral and written English. However, translations were far from authentic oral expressions. Something from the unique appearance of oral stories was lost in translation. Nevertheless, the essential meaning of what was said in narratives traversed linguistic barriers.

During the translation process I became much more aware of the importance of the language context. I understood concretely that languages provide perspectives to approach things. Certain words were associated with different things in different languages (c.f., the glossary of "expertise" terms). I started to question the purpose of using English in cases where English terms were used but not translated in the Finnish discussions or in the non-native English-speaking discussions. I started to wonder whether global perspectives were imposed onto local working contexts via unified (Anglo-American) language practices.

On the other hand, by using several languages in the analysis, I was able to use a variety of perspectives. I could see the essence of terms and concepts that were similar across languages. I could compare differences, too. Furthermore, I learned that speaking the "same language" means much more than speaking the same native language.

## 4. Context: Expertise in the Information Technology Organization

As Czarniawska (1997) states, the narrative approach is a relevant way of producing knowledge in and about organizations. Accordingly, the main source of knowledge about organizational practices is a discussion. The emphasis is then on a collective character of organizational life. After all, nobody has ever seen an “organization,” but organizations are formed and performed by endless chains of conversations and actions among people (p. 44).

According to Czarniawska (1997, 1998), there are three forms of how narratives can enter organizational studies:

- (1) Organizational studies are written in a narrative form.
- (2) Organizational researchers collect stories from the field.
- (3) Research conceptualizes organizational life as story-making and organizational theory as story-reading.

In this study, I will apply the last, interpretive approach to organizations. The aim is then to come up with alternative stories and to engage in a dialogue with the field of practice (Czarniawska, 1997, p. 28). Stories elucidate important and otherwise hidden aspects of organizational life and, thus, play an important role in the drama of organizational power and resistance (p. 42). Furthermore, stories open access to the emotional aspects of organizations (Ibid; see also Gabriel, 2000).

Expertise in the information technology (IT) organization is not a network of abstract definitions, but deeply grounded in language and discursive, social practices of technology. Meaning is embedded into the daily work and produced in discussions near work. The construction of IT expertise, however, cannot be understood only locally. Expertise discourse is more than combination of individual voices, in a particular organizational culture, in a particular country. To consider discussions about IT expertise in the settings of this study – in Helsinki, in 2002, in the meeting room of an employing organization – is to consider powerful global interacting networks (e.g., technology interest groups, user groups, market) and institutions that produce particular ways of reasoning. The imported cultural practices bring universal categories into specific, observable settings (Lindblad & Popkevitz, 2003). Such categories no longer seem alien across different national and local contexts. Therefore, the interpretation of such global notions requires that the “context” of expertise is not only about the particular events and discussions, but also about discourses that circulate subjective narratives (p. 11).

Furthermore, IT expertise discourse is partly detached from professional contexts and practices. It has evolved into a public discourse. Information technology professionals are used as examples of generic future expertise and economical competitiveness. Discourse about particularities of IT expertise influences other professional domains, educational institutions, and HRD literature as a model of *dynamic* expertise. Self-educated, entrepreneurial computing virtues in flexible and mobile careers with their “I did it myself” attitudes, are promoted in management literature, commercials, movies, and lifestyle magazines (Flecker & Hof-

bauer, 1998). Information technology experts are like the “model workers” (Ibid.) of the new Millennium.

Next, I will demonstrate some generic trends in the field of information technology at the turn of the century. Then, I will show what the “models” themselves were thinking about the existing expertise discourse in the organizational context of this study. Thematic organization of this chapter is based on the topics that we discussed with the research participants during our group sessions (see the previous chapter).

#### **4.1. In-house IT Expertise at the turn of the Century**

The field of information technology (IT) covers all aspects of managing and processing information. Information technology became particularly important in the Finnish “information society” project in the second half of the 1990s (Vehviläinen, 2002). The state invested a lot into the development of the IT industry. For example, over 25% of Finland’s entire export was IT products in 2000 (World Bank, 2002). The Finnish survey on work conditions 2003, made by Statistics Finland, showed that the number of IT professionals (both men and women) doubled in five years and continued to grow in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; the number of new students and graduates of IT related majors also nearly doubled between 1996 and 2001 (Lehto, 2003). The number of women represented 28% of the entire IT workforce in year 2002.

Information technology professionals design, develop, support, and manage computer software, hardware, networks, systems, and services. In large corporations, they do not invent new systems, as research and development engineers do, but adapt systems to the business needs of the organization. They focus on user requirements (relative to available standard options), vendor negotiations, and integration of new software and systems with other bought-in systems (Beirne, Ransay & Panteli, 1998).

Information technology professionals lack unified educational programs and degrees in higher educational institutes, as well as professional guild systems. They, however, share cultural narratives that provide particular exemplars for social identification. Typically, IT expertise is defined in relation to something that it is not. For example, it is associated with non-generic, specialized, technical know-how (industry standards and certifications), non-hierarchical organization of work (flexible job roles), non-traditional careers (constant transitions), non-female practices (masculine domain), and non-traditional attitudes (innovation, youthfulness, and future orientation). Categorization expresses stereotypical and idealistic understanding of IT expertise. Professionals working in the field prefer to project positive characters on themselves and negative characters on others, such as technology users and management.

According to Claman (1998), IT functions inside large corporations used to be service functions, much like any other staff function. They competed for resources, shifted as business priorities shifted, and were managed according to cost/benefit calculations. By the end of 1990s, IT units were largely centralized, and became more independent and respected partners within large corporations. No

longer were they only responsible for management information, but created and operated all kinds of business infrastructures, like financial, marketing, manufacturing, and purchasing systems and applications. The job of IT professionals was to serve and influence important customers inside corporations; thus, understanding of organizational processes and business drivers became essential. That was a clear transformation in the work identities of technical specialists. Technological interest, as a core of a professional identity, was replaced by broader skill profiles and flexible working attitudes (Loogma, Umarik & Vilu, 2004).

Furthermore, old mainframe systems delegated to special processing tasks were replaced by open architecture, distributed systems, and the internet; a firm's legacy systems were replaced by enterprise resource planning (ERP) packages and systems like SAP and Oracle; and expertise culture shifted to marketing culture (Claman, 1998). As a consequence, expectation for IT expertise changed dramatically: (a) internal IT units did not buy technically most advanced devices, but selected best open architecture components from the market; (b) distributed systems on desktop computers raised IT skills of users enormously and their requests for IT support became more complicated;<sup>40</sup> (c) consumer demands increased and technical people needed to learn marketing and business to be successful (Ibid.). All these changes of IT work imposed tighter bureaucratic controls driven by practicality, adequacy, and efficiency (Beirne, Ransay & Panteli, 1998).

Previously, people could transfer to in-house IT organizations internally from the systems operation and user side, and almost none had college degrees and engineering backgrounds (Claman, 1998). The key to career security was to know a company's systems well, and to have an overall understanding of different function (Ibid.). In 1990s the old way to IT careers closed and technical specialization became essential. According to Claman (1998), benchmarking one's own skills and a firm's systems against industry and competitors was more important than having company-specific knowledge. College degrees became common, as well as the need to update skills continuously, even in personal, spare time. Moreover, IT professionals needed to gain project assignments that increased their competence.

I entered an in-house IT organization in the year 2000. It was a hectic time: a lot of investments were made and work done to update corporate software, networks, and personal computers for year 2000 transition. E-business capabilities (applications, back-end systems, and know-how) were built up. The organization's operational mode was restructured to fit the global challenges. As a consequence, a lot of important projects were going on simultaneously and the organization was growing. During the following two years, the number of key projects multiplied and the number of in-house employees tripled. Major reorganizations happened about twice a year. Change initiatives boosted internal job offers and increased rotation, but there were also unintentional and undesirable effects on jobs and careers (Nicholson, 1996).

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<sup>40</sup> For example, many user-interface jobs disappeared and basic application support tasks were moved to user organizations, leaving only the advanced technical problems for the IT unit (Claman, 1998).

Simultaneously, the need for IT expertise outside of the organization increased. People with the right kind of expertise could choose from many different employment options within traditional companies and also many start-up companies<sup>41</sup> were established on the basis of the internet, e-business, and on-line service expertise. Technology start-ups created both new entrepreneurial culture and institutional practices that attracted experts, who accumulated industry-specific, rather than employer-specific, long-term careers. Naturally, all these changes led to both voluntary and involuntary career transitions in the organization where this study was conducted.

## 4.2. Challenging Traditional Working Attitudes?

The legendary computer experts who developed the personal computer (PC), the internet, and many pioneering software applications are described as enthusiastic individuals who just started to realize their ideas with other like-minded individuals (Himanen, 2001). It is commonly thought that they were free from traditional employment rules, because they knew computers, software, and the internet better than organizational management. Hence, according to Himanen (2001), they developed a passionate relationship to work and challenged the old working attitude. In a way, money was not the main motivational force for them, but they were driven by something intrinsically interesting, enticing, and joyful. Pioneers abandoned the work versus leisure-time duality and defined their work ethics based on creativity and passion (Ibid.). As a consequence, they worked night and day, if they felt like it, but changed jobs as soon as it became boring and repetitive.

Even if many computer specialists are not free from organizational boundaries in the same way as the pioneering “gurus,” they identify with similar working ideals. According to Beirne, Ransay and Panteli (1998), the most effective IT professionals are often considered to be those who have informal networks with users and who claim organizational and commercial knowledge, as well as technical expertise. Their work is often done through networking in the internet (c.f., cyber culture).

My thoughts, while working in the field, reflected the dominant ideals of IT expertise. I shared an emphasis on continuous learning, innovative problem-solving, and entrepreneurial mind-set, as the following note from my field diary shows:

*Virtues of expertise include that they are current with advance concepts, approaches and technologies in their field and familiar with latest tools and methods, their input is competitive and appreciated with their colleagues, managers, and associates, they are open, can deal with ambiguity, and solve demanding problems. Moreover, they are continuously ready to surpass themselves, able to do multiple tasks simultaneously and participate in several activity groups.*

*(Personal notes, 26 Feb 2001)*

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<sup>41</sup> An extreme example, referred in Finland too, was the California high tech community, Silicon Valley.

The virtue of dynamic, reflective, self-directed, life-long learning was an implicit criteria of IT expertise in the IT organization's HRD discourse. It was present also in the discussions that I had with the research participants. I asked participants to fill self-assessments about their own learning tactics and skills (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000), as well as their self-regulations skills (Ruohotie, 2000b). Those assessments guided our conversations.

Moreover, I asked participants to observe their work and keep reflective personal memos on what they thought and how they felt about ongoing events. In doing that, we never questioned the relevance of self-regulation – the ability to reflect on, motivate, and direct one's own learning. At group discussions we never discussed critically about what we were doing or questioned the validity of reflection. Nevertheless, once, in the middle of our group conversation about self-regulative learning, Niko told the following story:

*Abstract:*

*Occurred to my mind [when we discussed about self-regulation], you know, a things that has crystallized as a memory from [my previous job].*

*Orientation:*

*There were people from very different business units, for example from marketing. And how they approached [IT] support function, when they wanted those people to do something for them (U: yes). So, there were very skillful people.*

*Action:*

*[They] got support people to do [whatever], to stand on their heads.*

*Evaluation:*

*So, it was cool, [impressive].*

*So, they can get into other's [mind], like in between the ears (U: mmm, mmm).*

*[They can get] inside, and they can control (U: mmm) other person.*

*Resolution:*

*So, some slipped a bit outside the standards:*

*Some did something that we do not usually do [in IT support] (U: mmm).*

*So, we had to think that "Well, maybe next time we are not, nevertheless, doing it like that" (U: yes).*

*Evaluation:*

*It is just funny, (p) interesting to see that you can find people who are very skillful in regulating others."*

In his telling Niko obviously drew a parallel between the external manipulation and self-regulation that we had been discussing in the group. That quite disturbed the implicit agenda for reflection and I responded to Niko: "Yes, that was a good example, and, and that kind of [a case] that you can think about... And now and here, we are thinking about how we could become as skillful in manipulating ourselves (laughs)." I understood his comparison, and yet that was something that was not an approved part of the discourse on the renewal of expertise, from the HRD viewpoint. My laughter turned my response into a joke, even though it was



true and adequate. Somehow, that reaction marked a borderline on how far we could reflect. Manipulation, power, and control of actions were not authorized topics in our discursive settings.

So, in the context of the IT organizations, work regulation is intrinsic. Work in an IT organization is arranged into projects that have unified ways to manage resources. According to Haapakorpi (2003), project members (including the project manager) carry their own responsibilities independently. Productivity and efficiency are ensured through predictable use of resources, deadlines, and customer requirements. Strict timelines and goal-orientation create pressure to rationalize design and management of technology. Moreover, training and tutoring support such a coherent way of working (Ibid.).

The rationalization of computing expertise is done through standardizing technologies, technology development methodologies, and tools. The operational mode requires application of global working policies. In other words, a shift from specific in-house systems and processes toward generic applications and systems means “industrialization” of IT production (Beirne, Ransay & Panteli, 1998). Quality assurance, metrics, monitoring tools (e.g., log sheets and status reports), resource planning, and project scheduling increase managerial pressures. Furthermore, market demands, enhanced efficiency, and cost cuts impose self-discipline on IT professionals (p. 149).

In the following citation, Kati expresses her feelings about the standardization efforts that were realized in her organization:

*All the responses from HR [human resources] are pointedly about this:  
“We have a certain general policy and, you know, you are not an excep[tion],  
you can’t have any special needs!”  
There’s no any special reason for anything because we have some kind of a  
global policy. [... In every case, they] refer to general princi[ples], to glo-  
bal policies, and because of that there’s no individual solutions offered.  
(Kati, Group discussion)*

Kati had not experienced, in the IT organization, the computing expertise virtues – such as the intrinsic pleasure of working with technology and the freedom to create software and configure systems without organizational pressures – that Himanen (2001) mentions. These ideals were in opposition to project work regulations and customer demands. Employees could work “freely” because control was embedded into the systematic project management methods and standardized operating procedures. They adapted their individual work activities to serve the overall business goals through self-governance (Rose, 1999).<sup>42</sup> As a consequence, expertise also started to look homogeneous (Haapakorpi, 2003, p. 8).

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<sup>42</sup> Refers to Michael Foucault’s theory of “governmentality”



### 4.3. Increasing Competitive Value?

When I was working in the IT organization, one of my tasks was to identify and develop competencies needed in emerging IT projects. Many projects developed original IT application and service concepts and the expertise they required did not yet exist in the organization. New competence was acquired, both through recruitment and through internal training. I used international and national IT skill standards for defining applied skill requirements for the corporation. The recruitment team used my definitions to write job advertisements, and the training team used them to design appropriate development activities.

The information technology industry has designed international assessments for certifying expertise in the field. Certifications<sup>43</sup> focus on specific areas of expertise. Some of these areas are: qualified use and support of IT systems, product implementation, database administration, application development, and technology architecture design. Certifications acknowledge know-how on certain products and technologies. Therefore, standardized skills that can be measured and assessed signify IT expertise. From the individual's point of view, certification ensures employer, client, and peer recognition, as well as technical leadership with the ability to successfully implement IT solutions (c.f., promotion of Microsoft Certifications). With a combination of transferable and highly valued skills, people can potentially do a wide variety of jobs in the IT field (Loogma, Umarik & Vilu, 2004).

From the organization's point of view, certification ensures that businesses are able to identify experts from non-experts and that people from Australia, Japan, Germany, India, United States, Brazil, Finland, and so on are able to do the same things with the same technology. Therefore, certified IT professionals are a potentially global and mobile work force. However, there is a dilemma in that employers' require the right kind of skills, but are not able to predict what kinds of skills are necessary for the future, to provide a long-term HRD plans (Loogma, Umarik, & Vilu, 2004). Thus, learning-while-working is the only option for increasing "employability." Learning is an inseparable part of IT specialists' occupational role.

Even though not all the necessary skills in the organization are bound to a particular technology or product and, thus, cannot be certified officially, the same approach is applied to the rest of the skills, too. For example, competencies like planning, organizing, and time management are defined for measurable ends (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1998). Organizations define their own set of core skills and design jobs accordingly. Standard competence definitions are part of corporate reward systems and, thus, define what skills and knowledge are worth compensating. It does not seem to be a problem that certifications do *not* measure abilities to do any particular job in any local work site (Schield, Carter, Preston, & Howell, 1998).

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<sup>43</sup> Technology providers offer certifications (training, study materials, and exams) and, in a way, bind expertise to their specific applications, systems, or networks. So, professionals have to use their products and services in order to have competence.

The idea of standardization also includes the idea of specialization. Experts have their own area of a special technology, and in that area they need to be recognized according to industry standards. Accordingly, an employer is not supposed to offer standard learning solutions, like mass training. Instead, learning needs are individually specified and the purpose of training is to increase personal value at work and in the employment market.

Niko comments on these trends in the following way:

*[I] agree with [this opinion presented in the group] that a kind of “tailoring” [of training according to individual needs] would be good to have. But on the other hand, I would build the system in a way that the training package would include already everything. And that active people could change, if they want, certain modules. That is to say, it would be a total package (kokonaisuus), but then certain things could be modified, if a person is active and has some special needs.*

*(Niko, Group discussion)*

Niko and other participants in the group recognized that there was a risk of not “keeping up.” Individualized training policies privileged those who were active and knew what they wanted. Their organization did not offer a “total package” to ensure that everybody had the needed skills and knowledge. Thus part of the expertise was to be able to “tailor” training that suited personal and market needs, and guarantee a successful career.

Even though competence was commonly defined so that it could be credibly observed, measured, and predicted, and it was therefore taken as an objective capacity to perform productively, participants in the discussion felt that different individuals fitted differently to the competence standards. Certain qualities were over-evaluated, compared to others, and certain jobs were deemed more valuable than others.

For example, those who had competence on the company’s internal systems and processes could not increase their market value via industry certifications. It was harder to get credit from tacit “touch and feel” knowledge than from certifiable technical skills. So, skills that were not easy to define were easy to forget. Among the research participants, there was a critical awareness of constraints that hindered the individuals’ possibilities and limited the definitions of expertise. In the group discussions, idealistic discourse and critical interpretations were negotiating for the legitimate space as the following example shows:

*Max: It’s basically up to each of us to decide if we want to...  
I mean not everybody want to [go up in] a hierarchy.  
But if you really want to, everybody has a possibility to do it.  
You just need to find the right path to go to where you want to go.  
So, maybe [in] some companies [it is] only by working hard [...].  
In some other company you need to have the right contacts [...].*

*Rami: If the hiring manager is thinking who their want to [recruit], and.  
They have some kind of qualification [criteria].*

*Is he agreeing?*

*Or does [he] not agree?*

*[Decisions] are related to human relationships [...].*

*Henry: But is it so that you can really, if you really want to get to a certain position and you really work very hard for that [...].*

*Max: Two things are, [what] you need to have are:*

*The right competencies,*

*but you also need to express [them] quite loudly.*

*(Group discussion)*

An ongoing discourse made IT expertise seem like an individual-level issue. Everything seemed to be up to an individual actor to be decided and acted upon. Historical perspective and societal critics were not included into the discussion.

#### **4.4. Preserving a Territory for Young, Independent and Bold Guys?**

The field of IT publicly demands more diversity to the work force. Equality is a commonly agreed value. Inclusive practices are stated in recruitment, promotion, and compensation policies. The official discourse emphasizes gender-neutrality: “People are people and there is no difference between men and women in technical jobs.” However, seen from a gender perspective, IT is culturally defined as a male territory (Margolis & Fisher, 2001). The development of technology implicates privileges and segregation. Social, political, and economical interests shape the culture of information technology toward masculine practices. According to Vehviläinen (1997; 2002), IT has evolved from male-centered standpoints and reflects men’s spheres of life.

Female and male IT professionals see the future of technology similarly, and they also approach users of technology in the same way (Tiainen, 2002). Both are talking in a gender neutral manner, but nevertheless reflect a masculine world. In her study, Tiainen (2002) noticed that women were mentioned only when the discussion topic of IT professionals was about non-professional users’ difficulties, or absence from work, due to motherhood. In both cases, women were represented as being problems to the development of technology.

As a matter of fact, qualities of IT expertise (activeness, goal-orientation and confidence) are commonly associated to men in the HRD discourse in IT organizations (Brunila, 2002). Despite of the goals of equality in the competence standardization efforts, male professionals are preferred in job selection over females in certain areas of IT expertise (Vehviläinen, 1997). Thus, it is not easy to find a legitimate position at work as a female professional as the following quotation shows:

*Just some realities of life (p), in our team we have only one man*

*[... and others including team leader are female].*

*So well, (p) we are automatically like (laughs) at the bottom of a pile (pohjasakkaa)!*

*(Kati, Interview)*

In general, female contributions to the IT field have not been acknowledged and their achievements are not reflected in their level of participation (Perry & Greber, 1996). Women are easily offered jobs where they need to take others into account and carry responsibility for a group. Women's employment is concentrated in technical areas considered less advanced (Ibid.), low status "specialties" (Beirne, Ramsay & Panteli, 1998) or in non-technical areas. Women are thought of being as good at facilitating teamwork and empathizing with the client (Loogma, Umarik & Vilu, 2004). In an extreme case, women are seen only as bringing "beauty" and a comfortable atmosphere to workplaces, rather than having (technical) expertise (Brunila, 2002). Women in the IT organization of this study also had experienced difficulties in establishing a status of expertise, and being recognized and rewarded, as Sara states in the following anecdote:

*[In this organization] people can have some kind of a "specialist" title even if they are doing senior project manager's tasks, and they do the tasks with specialists' salary. [... In the market] your salary would be "fii-u!" [Makes a sound] several pay grades higher! [...But is it so that] these two individual girls just did not understand to ask for a pay increase? (Laughs) (Sara, Group discussion)*

In the context of this study, gender neutrality in relation to standard skills was indeed "similarity" dominated by male norms. Expertise that was defined either through "objectively" proofed certification exams or was explicated and defined by modeling "the best practices" of technology development and maintenance, enforced the notion of a masculine gender of technology. Good-manners and kindness were not suitable qualifications in the IT career. On one hand, women participants were aware of their female "inappropriateness" as the following reflections illustrate.

*Maybe, I'm not strong enough, that kind of (laughs), in my character. I'm a little bit too nice [for leadership position]. (Anne, interview)*

*That [job] selection made me very scared, that how, in a way, looks bypasses professional competence [in this organization]. (Sari, Interview)*

On the other hand, women did not accept inequalities and were longing for the status of expertise. The meaning of gender was negotiated in everyday work practices that divide and arrange the organization and professional groups (Kinnunen & Korvajärvi, 1996). Also men negotiated with the masculine stereotypes of IT expertise. Even if they had the "right" gender, they needed to fit the privileged group as the following example shows:

*I went to [a job] interview and I went to aptitude tests (p). I was not selected to that job [...].*

*I gave them too nice impression.  
[...They] thought that I'm too nice then.  
(Rami, Interview)*

The gender issue was not the only thing that maintained inequality in the “bold and beautiful” IT expertise. Personal relationships and family dependences were hindering the possibilities of recognition and career progress for both women and men. Furthermore, skill standards required that the constituting elements of know-how were distinguished and verbally expressed. Certified practitioners and others who had had a relatively short time from their professional training could remember and repeat what they knew and how they had learned to do things. On the contrary, practitioners who had mainly learned their skills from the field and who thus operated with experience-based understanding had difficulties explicating what they actually knew. Technology was evolving fast, and older generations of employees, with knowledge of outdated applications and systems, became “outcasts” as Henry did in the following discussion:

*Henry: How to get a good start when you have to start, start everything from the scratch, when you have a career (Max: mmm) somehow beyond you...*

*Max: Because you don't really fit to the usual career path?*

*Henry: I don't actually fit to anything (Max: mmm) [...].*

*Max: So, you are “outcast-ed”!*

*Henry: (Laughs)*

*[I've been] so many times “outcasted” that [I] don't remember!*

*[Tells an anecdote how the CIO of the company always chooses younger colleagues that himself...]*

*It is a tricky situation when [...] your supervisor is 10–15 or 20 years younger than you are.*

*He doesn't – for sure – he doesn't choose you.*

*Or you are the last one to be chosen in that case [...].*

*Max: You can insist on your, not only experience that you might not have on this specific technical part, but your overall experience [...].*

*The fact that you know the company and you've worked many years [...].*

*Henry: I think that's also, that's a good point... (Max: yeah) kind of a seniority [...]. You know something that can't be actually expressed so clearly.*

*You have a company background [and] you can be confident in that company in any situation.*

*(Group discussion)*

#### **4.5. Crossing Career Boundaries?**

Network organizations and short-term employment has increased across the information technology domain. The new career ideology (see chapter 2) has been adopted to explain employment relation changes in the technology industry (c.f., the case of telecom workers in Europe, Dif, 2004). People are not employed to a

particular (and permanent) job, but rather to an occupational role or a project that defines what they are supposed to do. People work in multi-professional teams where users, external consultants, and technical staff across organizational boundaries are included (Claman, 1998). Thus, what is included (or excluded) in the job is not described very specifically, nor are the rules for promotions (or denouncement) very clearly agreed upon (Sennett, 1998).

Those who have technical skills but not high education benefit from the fact that IT organizations are not looking for a certain diploma,<sup>44</sup> but for a certain talent. Isler (2003) found, in his study, that, for some people, a computer hobby had sparked an interest in starting to work in the IT field, and, furthermore, an initial consulting work (often first for friends or family) had catalyzed as an “accidental trajectory” for them to get more involved with IT. Based on the growing skills and self-confidence, they found out that they could earn living by doing what they most liked to do.

Others who benefit from the changing employment concepts and relatively easy entry to the IT career are those who have come to a regression point in their prior career and want to quit their unsatisfying job. They have an opportunity to start a new career in IT domain with relatively low investment in re-training. The entry into an IT career is relatively easy because not much emphasis is put to the person’s past education or experience. What matters most are skills here and now: “Prove that you are good and we give you a challenging project!”

The growing need for IT expertise also impacted the intra-organizational job rotation in the organization of this study. Organization put a lot of resourcing activities to attract new and specialized competencies, through recruitment, and to prevent unwanted resignations. As a consequence, new IT related positions become attractive because of better benefits, flexible job descriptions, training possibilities, and, above all, interesting projects. Long-term employees started to apply the rules of a “boundaryless” career. The opportunity, being in the right place at the right time with the right people, was a key to success rather than planning, tenacity, completed diploma, or long-term business project experience. The opportunity approach meant that personal expectations, desires, or callings were not guiding the career progression. Successful people took flexibly what was offered and what was available for them and made the best of it.

Nevertheless, these changes did not benefit everybody in the organization. Those who had gained experience and were expecting to be rewarded from it had to be disappointed. Also, those who had high education, and expected to have a linear and hierarchical career within the company, were not satisfied. Education alone could not prove a successful career, and the importance of professional identification (related to a certain kind of education) decreased, as it did in Henry’s case. He talked about his re-education project in the following way:

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<sup>44</sup> However, some companies continued to require a formal diploma as a request to sign permanent contracts. As a result, a lot of IT skilled employees without diplomas were signed only to one project at a time, on a fixed contract basis.



Henry: *I don't have an exact picture what engineers actually do [...].*  
*[Part-time studies do not support] free discussions and thinking [about] who you are and what you want to become (Max: mmm).*  
*More or less you have to process it with, aaa, yourself and [by observing] what your colleagues are doing.*  
*But that's not actually enough to get the big picture of what engineers [do...].*

Max: *Yeah but, it's also sometimes the case that what you study [doesn't matter]. You'll never use it again!*  
*(Common laugh)*

Henry: *One good point, yes. I've heard about that.*  
*And somebody else also told me that very same thing, with the very same words...*

Max: *The most important thing is...*

Henry: *.....(simultaneously) but I have not known that.*

Max: *.....that you have done it.*  
*(Group discussion)*

In an IT organization, success in one project may lead to success in other project, but not according to any predictable rules. Transition could also lead to a failure. People were asked to start from a scratch each time, again, and again. Experience and seniority were not automatically celebrated. The job security of “employment for life” no longer existed. So, even intra-organizational careers consisted of “lay-offs,” as people were requested to find new jobs internally or externally. There was a kind of agreement that this is just how things are, as the following examples show:

*When that moment [of firing] happens, it is actually too late to do anything.*  
*[Things] should be done already before.*  
*And not wait for that moment [to happen...].*  
*It is good to always keep in mind that every job is someday not anymore necessary.*  
*(Rami, Group discussion)*

*Nowadays jobs change very radically and very dramatically in a short period.*  
*You can't actually say what you're doing in, let's say, in half a year.*  
*Have to keep this idea all the time in mind...*  
*(Henry, Group discussion)*

Nevertheless, participants accepted the changing career principles in different degrees. Some adopted an attitude of “alertness,” even if they had considerable amount of expertise and a good job. Some considered that transition was the only option, because staying in one and the same job was not possible in a changing organization. Part of the game was to take risks and move from one position to another,



even if you could not be sure whether the new position would be better or worse. As Sennett (1998) notes, risk taking often leads to wrong paths – a new job is not necessarily more interesting and challenging, nor does it necessarily have better rewards. Naturally, those who benefited from this were those who had less to lose: those who did not have long experience and binding relations to the organization.

Participants of the study did not buy the changing employment relation without noticing the pitfalls. They kept demanding employer responsibility in providing career opportunities, as the following discussion shows:

*Kati: Well, at least it does not impact career development, career development in any positive way (laughs), you know, if supervisor does not even bother to discuss with you [...].*

*Anne: [One should have a contact with supervisor] because it is difficult to know whether you have a right direction and guidelines in what you are doing. Even if you know very well [in practice] what you are doing, is it the right thing to do right now?*

*How can you know that it's right what you do?*

*Or just that it's the thing you should be doing? [...]*

*Sara: Time to time, one should check [with supervisor] that*

*“Hi, I've been doing things like this and that. Is it in line, in line with other projects and with other tasks, and with the overall goal?”*

*And then (sighs) [...] an employee must be more pro-active if supervisor does not contact him or her.*

*[...]*

*Kati: [When] supervisor has a good understanding about, both extensive and positive conception about a subordinate, it's much more probable that the subordinate is remembered when supervisor has (p), when supervisor is in a situation where an interesting project demands more resources [...].*

*Currently my supervisor has not the faintest idea about what I want to do [and what I'm interested in...].*

*The only information he has [about me] is a certain title and a job description.*

*So, he won't, you know, he'll leave me, you know (laughs) (U: mmm) to that one and the same (U: mmm), same (U: mmm) job profile.*

*Until one day it's discovered that this kind of a person is not needed, or you know, this kind of job description doesn't exist anymore.*

*And as a result, you can leave to the “factory of unemployment” (kilometritehtaalle).*

*(Group discussion)*

Participants' careers did not progress according to age and life stages (Hall, 1996). They rarely moved from one organizational ladder to another. There was an option to progress either on a management track, or on an expert track. Moreover, consulting (working as an external contractor) was an option to be considered (Claman, 1998). As a consequence, the linearity of a career (defined by hierarchical

job grades and promotions) was replaced by unpredictable patterns of cyclic and horizontal career structures. In the new employment conditions, the length of tenure with a single employer was by no means a sign of competence. Rapid job rotation cycle was a confusing matter in the IT organization, as the laugh in the end of the following dialogue indicates:

*Paula: Well, I've worked for [this organization] less than six months.*

*So, I'll think, I'll stay. I'll stay here for a while.*

*Max: That's already senior in [this organization]!*

*(Common laugh)*

*(Group discussion)*

In the IT organization, projects were usually about half a year long, and in that time one gained more task-related experience than anybody else had. In fact, rapid movement between firms or between organizational units signaled to potential employers that a person was willing and able to adapt quickly and easily to changing corporate cultures and technological advances (Isler, 2003). Six month old "seniors" were ready to move on to new assignments. Continuous pursuit of new occupational know-how happened by learning at work *during* projects. Project teams formed natural "communities of practice" (Wenger & Lave, 1991; Defillippi & Arthur, 1994), in which shared learning occurred regardless of formal organizational positions.

Moreover, the trend in project recruitment of the organization emphasized the need for the right person for the right task. Needs were defined in terms of technical skills, and only for one project at the time. New employees were expected to be productive right after a short induction period. There was still a contradiction between having the right competence and learning new competence. Rami reflects on that dilemma in the following example:

*Developing yourself (p), like [learning] some new skills?*

*You are not a real professional [when] you have just started something.*

*If you think that you would like to do that job [well],*

*it might be difficult (aaa).*

*You know, in normal [recruitment] environment, you are (p)*

*How could I say that?*

*Your manager might expect that you are doing [your job...] well (U: mmm).*

*(Rami, Group discussion)*

Typically, IT experts' interest was in finding employment settings where their potentiality could be recognized, and which could provide them good career opportunities. Possibilities for finding such favorable settings extended across organizational, occupational, and industry communities during the technology boom in the end of 1990s and in the beginning of the Millennium. The time was right to create an overabundant market for job seekers. Competitors, partners, and clients offered possibilities for career advancement, because they used the same technologies as the current employer. Furthermore, standard IT know-how was easily transferable

from one employment setting to another. That led Max, for example, to believe in limitless possibilities in his career:

*[Limited possibilities to move in a company hierarchy? No,] I don't agree. Because I think (p), who wants something, can. So, I mean. Maybe it [is going to] be difficult. Maybe you [are going to] have a lot of hurdles. Maybe you can't achieve it through normal channels or let's say normal ways. But if you really want to do it, it's possible. [... You have] to start and then to prove your capacity to do it, I think. (Max, Group discussion)*

Seeing oneself as having options – the “rhetoric of agency” – was a way to resist against prevailing career discourse (Sennett, 1998). Even if people could not alter the causes of events and impact workplace changes, they took the responsibility for effects and represented themselves as involved actors (p. 26). People emphasized a character of a person who wanted to be responsible for things. They wanted to resist demands of flexibility and work settings that denied long-term commitment (Ibid.).

For example, I asked participants what kind of influence they have had on events in their career, and what has been the main reason – the “causing reason” – behind different career transitions. People used the “self-as-actor” voice to organize their responses as the following examples show. They said they had influence and voluntarily sought their career transition.<sup>45</sup> People preferred to describe themselves as self-motivated, even if they have done no more than respond positively to opportunities over which they had no control (Nicholson & West, 1988).

*Niko: I had a very strong influence: 70 to 80 percent was depending on me – if not even more.*

*Sara: Quite strong, all these [transitions] have been such that I personally sought my way to them.*

*Anne: All of them started from my initiation, nobody told me that “you should do this.”*

*Rami: I've always actively sought for a change myself.*

*Henry: I've had clearly influence on things.*

*Kati: I personally sort of sought for the change.*

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<sup>45</sup> The Finnish expression was: “olen itse hakeutunut muutokseen [tai] olen itse hakenut sen muutoksen.”

Max: *Me, boredom [caused the changes...].*

Laura: *You can always express desires [regarding your job] and have an influence.*

Timo: *[In the current company] I've been able to influence on my job description relatively well [even if previously I wasn't].*  
(Interviews)

Another way to resist “floating” was to emphasize the active reaction to environmental changes. Even if things were more powerful than individual will, there were possibilities to decide how to respond to changes (c.f., positive thinking rhetoric).

*The work environment changed so much that I've to do something.  
I tried to be in that [transition] at the right time (sighs)  
or even to anticipate the forthcoming change a little.  
And it was not only a reaction to the external world,  
but rather I was also internally gladly involved in these changes.*  
(Henry, Interview)

#### 4.6. How the Organization Looks

To conclude, projects, rather than organization-free peer networks or traditional job posts, became the center of the activity. Even though projects borrowed non-traditional working attitudes from the computing pioneers, they were also highly competitive and selective working environments. Position in a project hierarchy and status in the employment market was dependent of whether you had *project-relevant* skills or not. Certifications were relatively fast ways to update competence, but they did not provide any long-term advantages. Project mode kept everybody in a constant move within and in between organizational boundaries.

The organization was present in the vocabulary and modes of talking during the research project. For instance, participants often referred to the names of organizational units, titles, and products that would make no sense outside of the organizational context. The IT organization was also concretely present in the interviews and group sessions. The everyday business was going on at the same time we were discussing it in the meeting rooms. Our meetings (the location varied in different sessions) were only one wall away from the corridors and offices. Often the wall between the office space and the meeting room had a huge window, covered with closed Venetian blinds. This reinforced the impression that we were in the organization, not outside of it.

One can argue that the choice to describe the IT organization only by referring to the discussions of a small group of people provides a very limited perspective on the organization. Readers of the study can only access information that the nine participants, plus the researcher, decided to reveal in their discussions. How can one get an overall picture of the organization, its structure, functions, and operational processes?

First, the “overall picture” is also a representation of a particular perspective. Usually the view point is the taken-for-granted perspective – the official corporate image and the core narrative that each employee must internalize. Second, via such definitions, the organization becomes a collective entity that has an identity of one. According to Czarniawska (1997), the organization becomes, then, an actor that is above particular individuals. It is stronger, wiser and more powerful than anybody, and thus has the right to decide objectives, provide answers, and define actions for others.

In this study, I have purposefully avoided such an “overall” approach, which retells the management’s strategy presentations, company promotions materials, official newsletters, and other textual presentations. The IT organization does not exist separately from its people and from the discussions that create and maintain its existence. It is not defined from the top-down approach, but from the bottom-up perspective. The participants in this study have the priority to define what the IT organization means to them.

## 5. Transition Narratives – Success and Struggle Experiences

Participants of this study shared their transition experiences by telling episodes about their lives. Often episodes were narrated for the first time. So, participants were not storytellers in a sense of engaging my attention with fascinating elaboration of entertaining, amusing, and emotionally rewarding details (Labov, 1997). Nevertheless, stories were not simple monologues either. They were fragmented in structure and carried argumentative points. In addition to telling about what happened, participants reported how they felt during and after the events had occurred. By communicating their moral attitude, participants convinced the listener that they are good people and that they did the best that could be expected under the circumstances (Riessman, 1994).

Similarly to autobiography, personal narrative is a “serious genre” that opposes the postmodern play of identities (Vilkko, 1997). Narrators refer outside of “self” to events that have already happened and say things as they believe things must be said (Ibid.). Stories about personal experience are essentially about *the most reportable events* (Labov, 1997). That is, they are organized around the most unusual event. Other events in a story are structured as if they were causing the major event to occur (Ibid.). Reportability depends on people involved in storytelling, that is, on the immediate social context of telling. Same event can be interesting and worth telling in one context, but non-reportable in another. The relative reportability of events adds coherence to narratives; the moral judgments on how things are, or how they ought to be, comment on what kind of a person the narrator claims to be (Linde, 1993, p. 81).

Even if participants were honest in their telling, their stories that represented lived experiences were far from socially and politically neutral (Goodson, 1995). Stories are always a result of prioritizing. Furthermore, they are connected to storylines that are derived from surrounding society that privileges particular ways of telling stories and silences others (p. 94). People adapt their stories to forms that are received as culturally coherent, in order to add social appropriateness into their narratives and into their social self-representation (Linde, 1993).

Also how I edited narratives, selected, and represented stories, is informed by the cultural understanding of *what is reportable*. Therefore, I kept asking, throughout the narrative inquiry, the following questions: who benefits if I keep these narratives in the level of personal experience, and whose interests are served if individual stories are analyzed as carriers of dominant discourse (Goodson, 1995)? Personal narratives are a starting point for coming to understand the presence of power and the “struggle for renewal” within professional context.

The following nine narratives will show how participants experienced their role transitions within the context of an information technology organization. Analysis will also demonstrate how they applied and negotiated prevailing expertise discourse. Stories will contradict some stereotypes while supporting others. A new understanding of the nature of expertise will emerge, also.

We will start with Max, one of the youngest participants. His narrative represents the generation that entered the IT field during the tech boom in the second

half of 1990s. Max's career expectations are very optimistic and his narrative is a positively-laden "transformation" experience. Sara's and Anne's narratives, which follow, are also about transformation. Their role transitions did not happen as expected, but nevertheless led to a changing perspective toward work and their own expertise. In all three beginning narratives, work is presented as a background setting that provides space for personal growth.

The next three narratives, Rami's, Timo's and Niko's, share similar experiences, including engineering education. These three men are rather satisfied with their new jobs and career progression. Nevertheless, they voice criticism toward the changing work circumstances. Each of them recognizes different boundaries that limit, in one way or another, their activities and personal growth. Laura's narrative, which comes next, summarizes well the expectations of the current working life. Laura is personally well adapted into her new situation and does not question the prevailing values.

The last two narratives underline the struggle theme most explicitly. Henry's and Kati's transition experiences have not been particularly positive. They both express deeply how difficult it is to adjust to existing expectations. Things that they thought were the foundations of professional practice seem not to hold anymore. Added to the turbulent situation, nobody seems to know clearly what the "new" is that has replaced the "old." The renewal of expertise is expected, but no one is sure what the transition has actually wrought.

### **5.1. Earning Respect**

Max was one of the youngest participants in the study. He was highly motivated to move in the career and believed that by developing professionally and personally he could do so. Therefore, he was happy with regular transitions. New job was a way to learn new things, have new contacts, and progress as an expert on the field. During the study Max changed from application development to project management. He transformed his perspective toward leadership and gained new confidence. He also earned the respect of colleagues and customers. Nine months later he faced a new transition, this time to delivery management.

Max's expertise was tightly bound to the field of work in a particular company (see appendix 4). He earned his business degree in the end of 1990s and came to the company right after. The business know-how did not qualify him for the technical tasks, and he "really started from zero" in the field of information technology. Nevertheless, his managers and colleagues gave him a chance to learn new professional skills and "break through the technical aspects." He gained expertise "by learning from people and by learning from trainings and [by] learning from the work itself, and [moreover, by doing] some self-study." Max had quite a few contacts with other experts and learned a lot via these contacts. In the beginning of the study, Max had the knowledge he needed to do "sometimes [even] the dirty details."

At every time that Max had been a "little bit bored with [his job, and] could not see any possibility to grow in the team," he had changed his job. Also, his new project management job was "like an opportunity [that] came for [him]. He had



not “looked actively” for a new job, but had said to his manager that he could try something new within the team. “She was really comprehensive and [said] ‘Yes, I know what you want’, but nothing happened.” Then, Max accidentally met his very first boss, and they talked about an open position in project management. Max did not “want to miss this chance” to learn new things, and a couple of months later he became a member of a global project management organization.

Transition was “quite smooth.” There was continuity between the new project management role and previous specialist roles. Max had “had little bit more than an application specialist role and [he’d done] sometimes some coordination work” as well. Max was interested in learning all the aspects of project management, and coaching of project members. He was also interested in the technical application that was developed and deployed in the project. However, “sometimes, as a project manager, it is better to not be too good with the technical aspects. Otherwise, you would get lost with the details.” Max wanted to achieve good results in the project, because “then, [he could manage] other projects later on with more confidence”. So, he “learned some new techniques [and] how to be a project manager and to act so,” and developed a project plan by following the formal project management methodology.

In practice, Max worked between service delivery and project management; he was responsible for an internet service that was not yet mature and needed to be developed further. Service delivery around the world was organized in “mini-projects” that Max managed. Max expressed his project management expertise by telling about people he dealt with. Contacts at work were important because they defined who he was. Conflict, on the contrary, was a threat to expertise because it put Max’s know-how and authority into question. Max did not want anybody to deny that he knew “what the right thing to do was,” when he was delivering services to the customers (see the following story).

*Abstract:*

*01 I am quite posit-positively surprised that businesspeople [customers] consider us really as a partner and not as a, you know, as a supplier or (U: mmm)*

*Orientation:*

*03 The most difficult [task] I have been doing for [our own organization] actually (laughs) (U: right).*

*Action:*

*06 Maybe they were expecting me to organize more than my role should [have been] (U: mmm).*

*07 And also in the countries the people, aa, who are the local organizers, aa, 08 wanted also to be the technical persons.*

*Evaluation:*

*09 It was not as well organized [event as with] businesspersons.*

*10 When it’s business it’s much easier to make the division of the job (U: right).*

*11 So, we do the technical thing and they organize all the other things.*

*Resolution:*

*12 And, yeah, when working with persons [from our own organization], I had the feeling to be like a supplier facing a customer. [...]*

*Abstract:*

24 *Usually, there've been some, some problems [with customers], and so on,*  
25 *but (p) we never... I never got a feeling that I was mistreated or [something]*

*(U: mmm).*

26 *Because I hear, I hear sometimes from [my colleagues] that*

27 *they are not well treated (U: mmm) or respected by businesspersons.*

*Orientation:*

37 *I have, I had to deal with, with communications people.*

39 *So, mainly communication managers and so on.*

40 *And this service is very special service, in a way.*

*Action:*

41 *But, aaa, I, I met different kind of people.*

42 *Some people who are really scared about it (U: mmm)*

43 *and needed to be comforted (U: mmm) and so on.*

44 *And some others who took it more lightly and (U: mmm)*

45 *say "okay, but you know what you are doing so I let you (U: mmm) do your thing."*

*Resolution:*

46 *And they were not so worried (U: mmm).*

The point of this story is recognition. The first episode concludes (resolution) that people from Max's own organization did not recognize his expertise and wanted to do the job on his behalf. Then, the second episode concludes that people from the customer organization trusted him and respected his know-how and experience.

Max considered coordination and technical development as equally meaningful parts of his work; and therefore, having good personal contacts was important for him. He was aware that he did not meet the standard of a "real technical expert." He wanted to find particular tasks that would fit to him. He "had a feeling also that in [this company] it works a lot like this: if you know somebody who knows you, and it's not really because he's a friend, but because he knows how you can work and you would fit to the team." Max's expertise was growing by being a member, by earning respect of others, and by being able to contribute.

Max did not have any particular future goal. He did not have intentions about what he wanted to learn or who he wanted to become. He was open for opportunities and definitively wanted to progress and achieve higher and higher goals, but he let the working environment guide his learning decisions. The major thing for Max was to have explicit goals. "So, if somebody tells me 'Okay, you have to organize this for next week,' then I will be very willing to learn everything that is needed. [...] It's easier to [learn if I] have some clear goals [what for I] need some special competencies."

In the middle of the study, Max had a "revelation" while participating in the leadership course: Max changed his prejudices regarding leadership and resolved a dilemma between his new management position and his discomfort toward managing others. Such an eye-opening experience increased his confidence and made him more proactive.

*Abstract:*

01 *U: Have you have this kind of a moment when [...] you have find something that you were looking for and you have [had] a kind of feeling like “ooh, that’s it”?*

03 *Max: I had this feeling about this [kind of] leadership and how to deal with people,*

*Orientation:*

05 *It really opened my eyes.*

*Action:*

06 *And (U: mmm) [I learned] how to, as a kind of leader, to, how to deal with people.*

07 *And [I learned] that you need to adapt your [behavior].*

08 *That you’re here to, you’re here to help people to do they work in a proper way.*

09 *And to, to ... that you have different types of people.*

10 *Who are in the different stage of development (U: mmm) in their work (U: mmm).*

11 *And that you need to, to really observe them and react accordingly (U: mmm).*

*Evaluation:*

12 *That was kind of discovery for me.*

14 *U: You haven’t [thought] it like [that before]? Max: No.*

17 *Of course some people are more ready than others [to be leaders].*

18 *But [I learned that] you need also some training.*

19 *And (U: mmm) to be a leader doesn’t mean to be a dictator that everybody will just follow.*

20 *But you are just, I mean, a team member like the others.*

22 *And [you are just guiding and] helping when needed (U: mmm).*

*Resolution:*

24 *I think it kind of (p), aaa, It-it made me feel more confident that I could be a leader (U: mmm).*

*Evaluation:*

25 *Because (p) that’s something that’s quite difficult for me to be, you know, a tough*

26 *and, you know, to (U: mmm) tell people what to do and [so on].*

27 *But it gave me a picture that actually it’s not [like that], it’s not.*

29 *So, it made the leader more human (smiles) (U: mmm),*

30 *more (U: ...more something...) normal.*

31 *U: ...that you could be? Max: mmm (U: mmm).*

*Orientation:*

33 *I was really like [“Aah!”] in the first hours.*

34 *Even when I read the training material, I was really like “Aah!” (U: right).*

35 *So, it was really like a revelation (U: yeah).*

Action:

36 [The trainer] was saying something like: “You hold the precious life of (laughing) team members in your hands and you have to preserve it” (U: yeah) and something like that.

38 I was almost crying. U: Ooh! (Both are laughing).

Evaluation:

45 [Sighs and says silently] It-it was very good (U: yeah).

Max had thought about people management in very traditional and authoritarian terms: leaders are born, dictatorial, tough, and they tell people what to do. During the training he realized that such a perspective was too narrow. He learned that leaders must consider team members as individuals with unique needs. Leaders must therefore guide and help team members according to their special needs (lines 8, 22, 36). That insight led Max to feel more comfortable in his new position and to observe more clearly how he acted in interaction with others. The training was an eye-opening and mind-changing discovery (lines 05, 12, 14) – it was like a revelation (line 35).

The contrast included in the training episode defined the perspective transformation. First, Max talked about what he learned in the course (action) and what he thought about leadership, as a result (lines 07–08, 11). His prior frame of reference was presumably the opposite. Second, Max explicitly compared his prior and new perspectives and evaluated his learning action (lines 17–22). Third, Max contrasted what is difficult for him (lines 25–26; being tough), personally, with what is natural and identifiable for him (lines 29–31).

- *Leaders adapt their behavior – Leaders are directive (non-adaptive)*
- *Leaders help people to do their work – Leaders tell people what to do (non-helpful)*
- *Leaders react according to others’ needs – Leaders are non-responsive*
- *Leaders need training – Leaders are natural born*
- *Leaders are team member like others – Leaders are dictators*

Max realized that there existed a dichotomy in leadership (see above). He also discovered that one could choose how to behave as a leader. Such discovery “empowered” Max to think about control in a new way. Being in charge of things did not require “leaders to tell what to do,” but to be aware of others’ needs and to behave accordingly. As a resolution, authority was achieved by reflecting and regulating one’s own behavior, and by learning how to behave differently. It was attained by the same means whether you were a leader or just a “team member like the others.”

Max also actively reflected on his actions. “I mean, you see yourself behaving in a way instead just behaving and [instead] not really thinking what you are doing with the others.” He gained “more confidence [to think] that you can achieve some things very well and that you can become a leader if you want to. Nobody is a natural leader, but everybody needs some training and needs to learn to behave differently in order to become a good leader.”

Nevertheless, Max admitted that he did not “have fully the time to experience the whole new role [of project management], because [he] changed again.” The service he developed in his project moved to a delivery mode. Max had the “possibility to choose whether to stay in the same team [and] handle other projects [or] to move with [the service] to the delivery organization.” Max decided to “move [again] to a new role.” Transition was a logical continuation from the point of view of the service. The service moved from a design mode to a delivery mode and Max followed the service to a new team.

The transition from project management to delivery management was, nevertheless, problematic. “It was not my own step to change, but my superior asked me if I wanted to do that.” It was not easy to decide. “I would have liked to know [more], to deepen my project management skills, but also this [service] is very interesting and my [delivery management] role has also some, probably very challenging parts.” Project management would have included “deployment projects and some, quite a lot of traveling and so on.” Max had above all family reasons to choose “the comfortable side, [... even if] the project management would have been maybe better for [the] career, I don’t know.” Nevertheless, Max was satisfied.

*I have the feeling [that] my role is-is more valued (U: mmm) than before, because, of course, aaa, if there're thousands of people doing the same job as you do (U: mmm) then it-it's harder, in a way, to-to be pointed out (U: mmm). If-if you... if there're only hundreds of people, then it's, (p) you feel that you are doing something special in a way (U: mmm, mmm).*

Expertise that can be interpreted from this narrative is not only technical competence, but it is something that others around reflect back to a person. It is about recognition, achievement of things, and about making things happen. Expertise is thus defined in relation to other people. Expertise can be learned through training and practice. It is not about static relationships between natural-born leaders and others with less authority.

The role transition was a growth experience. Advanced perspective on leadership made it possible for Max to identify with the leader’s role and to understand influence and authority anew. Max became more proactive and did not only take responsibility for tasks given to him, but also for the tasks that he thought needed to be done. He started carrying the decision-making responsibilities in a more independent way.

## **5.2. Getting your Voice Heard**

Sara had a variety of work experiences from several different companies and jobs. She defined herself as an “interpreter” between software designers and users; she helped users to learn better the applications they used. During the study, Sara experienced transition from a user support role to project management. Transition

was, at the same time, an involuntary “must” and a promotion toward higher responsibilities. So, Sara hesitated and resisted the whole idea at first. Nevertheless, when she finally started in a new job, the negative approach changed totally. Transition was a very empowering experience and renewed Sara’s expertise.

Sara had long and rich work experiences from several different companies and jobs (see appendix 4). In her career, every move has been purposeful. She knew at a young age that she wanted to work in the information technology (IT) domain. She initially gave the impression that her career was very straightforward; she gained experience from different tasks and naturally moved to the role she wanted. However, later, she revealed that the path was not as easy as she had expressed at first. Sara did not get into the upper secondary school (lukio), but she did some vocational studies with computers. She did not continue her schooling further because she got married and had two kids at a young age. Nevertheless, she took some IT courses, while taking care of her children at home, and she got her first IT related job in early 1980s.

Later Sara worked three years in a secretarial job. She emphasized that she did it because she wanted to learn all the clerical skills. She made it clear that she considered it a departure from her mainly technical career. She even added, later in the interview, that IT was not totally absent in her clerical work either. She had, for example, “installed computer systems for one fish company [and] concretely built all the content and software, added the entry data and so on.” After she had learned what she wanted to learn, she moved back to an IT job. She then worked in the same technical company until the company went bankrupt in the beginning of 1990s. She became unemployed, attended technical further education, and got a few short-term jobs. Her job in the current company was an extension of the preceding, similar IT support jobs.

With experience, Sara became more and more conscious of her own interests and goals, and was able to tailor her job descriptions accordingly. It was “(p) because in those all-kinds-of IT-support tasks [she] realized that actually [she] liked that kind of a job.” Sara emphasized that she had always done multiple tasks with several different titles. Later in the interview, Sara stated that she “accomplished upper secondary school and business college” while working and being home with kids. At the moment of telling Sara was a “certified professional,” had gained several years of experience from her organization, and knew very well what she was doing. When she “reads books written by professors, [they] point out the same things that [she] had learned in practice long time ago!” She knew the big picture, the technical and organizational “environment,” and she could “locate new details into their own compartments.” Thus, she “did not need to learn so much anymore.” She was simply “enjoying her competence.”

Sara had been moving forward, escalating, and accumulating toward a goal. Her narrative was about gaining expertise via studies and work experiences little by little. Sara did not regret her choices, nor did she blame external circumstances. She responded to each obstacle in a way that actually reinforced her expertise. She studied professional courses, selected jobs with learning opportunities, and found tasks that fulfilled her desire. Her narrative revealed a person who had a nature to overcome all the difficulties. Sara was a life-long learner, and had a very positive



attitude toward learning. Learning was a non-separate part of her career. She had “studied all the time,” during her professional “journey.” Studying had always been a way to prove that she was capable. She always wanted to know everything, to manage every detail, before she was confident and satisfied. Nowadays she tries to take things easier, but still she would “never stop studying!” because “hunger grows while eating (Finnish proverb).”

Circumstances at work changed and forced Sara into a struggle. The specific job that she had liked to do was outsourced to another company. Sara had to change her role if she wanted to stay in her team. A project management position, she thought, would not develop her expertise in her own area of specialization, and, therefore, Sara never really wanted to become a project manager. She had a “negative attitude toward” it even if she understood that project management could be seen as a “natural progression” for the job that she had done. However, she would have liked to have been a “real specialist and more - the senior specialist, the real expert of experts” rather than project manager.

The technical part of the project management was not a problem. Sara had plans to learn the project management methodology and “learn in depth especially the accounting side.” The challenge for her was in how to motivate and manage others in the project. Sara felt “very unsure” about leadership and that is why she “never wanted to even think about” a project management job. “All the rest goes - no problems!” However, when the transition finally happened, Sara learned a lot of unexpected things.

*On the top of my mind, and what I think is the most important thing, is that now I have [a voice].*

*Now people listen to me differently [...].*

*Now they invite me to participate in meetings (U: yes).*

*And now my opinion is asked more than before (U: mmm).*

*So, only now I've been able to demonstrate my expertise (U: right) in this organization (U: yes, yes).*

*And I think, it is funny that people are so surprised when they've seen my plans and results of my job-job.*

*I have received systematically surprising comments like:*

*“Wow! [That's] professional!”*

Role transition helped Sara to see things that she had not seen before, or that she had ignored. Now that she had an official role of a project manager, she upgraded her contact network within and outside the organization. She was amazed and astonished “how much finally the official position in the organization impacts on things.” Before she thought that it is more important *what* gets done than *who* gets things done. Sara became more aware of inequalities. For example, even though Sara had had professional competence, she had not been selected to assignments, rather, “younger and more beautiful” females had been; she had not been able to present results of her work in public, because her boss (in a higher position) had represented her; and her requests for information had not been taken seriously, because she did not have enough authority.



Previously only perfectionist follow-up of rules and guidelines made Sara confident. She could only be sure about what she had done, herself, and what she knew how to do. The dilemma she experienced in her new project management role was related to the fact that there were no readily-applicable guidelines and not enough support available. There was no absolutely right way of doing things, and Sara had to learn to do things as well as she could (but not perfectly). She learned to stretch the rules and to be flexible.

*Abstract:*

01 U: *What happened to this case (Sara: you mean?) that there were not enough [project management] support available?*

*Orientation:*

03 Sara: *In a way, I've forgotten that dilemma.*

04 *I've learned the fact that, ok, this kind of [guidelines] exist,*

05 *but in practice it's yourself who have to apply them (laughs), perforce,*

06 *and to do it as well as you're able and competent to do (U: yes).*

*Action:*

12 *My [good friend] came last spring to work for [this company] (U: yes)*

15 *And when he had to, as a newcomer, to learn all these processes of ours,*

16 *[... and] face all the same problems*

17 *and yet, he doesn't complain and cry due to them in any ways (U: mmm).*

18 *Sometimes he agonizes about "How terrible, how terrible! This is difficult this information seeking and how am I supposed to do this, and how can I know, and I'm supposed to do all this fast above all" (U: yes).*

*Resolution:*

19 *So, you know, Maybe I've learned then at the same time that, yes, we have to adapt the [rules] by enforce.*

20 *That, in spite of all, same regulations don't fit all projects anyway (U: mmm).*

23 *I've started to be flexible.*

*Orientation:*

28 *[Previously] I had the guidelines always next to me.*

29 *I always went slavishly according to them.*

*Action:*

32 *[But this time] I looked: "Well, there's a new project plan template.*

34 *[But] I'll do according to this [old] draft.*

38 *surely I can once again adapt it to fit the new situation (U: yes, yes).*

*Resolution:*

39 *So, now I've gained that confidence (U: yes).*

40 *So, now I can, in a way, to be flexible in my doings (U: yes, yes).*

43 *In other words, I've learned a little, you know, to take a short cut.*

Her renewed confidence was based on an alternative definition of responsibility and decision making. Understanding of a big picture was more important than accuracy and faultlessness. "Well, I can now adapt according to a situation." Sara did not rely only on ready-made guidelines anymore, but invented successful prac-

tices based on her experience. Still, she asserted that the following of rules is not always a sign of uncertainty, or something that slows down the process. Common guidelines also help in collaboration, and though Sara's attitude had changed, she still continued to work "in a rather perfect way."

*Now I've actually understood while doing this [new] job [...] how, in a way, my own attitude is (p) so different. And, you know, the work feels easier now when I'm a project manager (U: mmm). [...] This time the overall goal is self-evident, you know (U: yes). And [I'm] trusting that, that yes, we'll manage this job all along. And, and even if the goal is already clear now, I know that it can change along the way (U: mmm), but that doesn't disturb me! [Compared to] when I was earlier working as a member of a project (U: yes), [and] I was feeling much more unconfident in doing my job (U: right, yes, yes) [... and] if the direction started to change, [...I] started to feel like I've done work for nothing [...]. [Now, I've] such a feeling of confidence and security. [I think that] all we do here is working for the best of and for the benefit of the [project's] overall goals.*

Sara understood her expertise from a new perspective and defined what constituted her expertise in a new and different way. Guidelines were good tools, but not omnipotent. Her expertise was not only about doing things skillfully herself, but about understanding how things were related to the overall goals. It was about being able to orchestrate things to move in the right direction. The most meaningful thing in the transition was to learn to "manage the big picture." Sara's "perspective on things at her work advanced [and she had] larger contact network and competence network" than before. She "fitted more firmly now into her own role [and had] solid understanding about [her] own position in relation to her organization's mission." Moreover, she was confident now that her own expertise was really valuable in her organization.

*In a way, that's what I've always wanted. And that's why I'm a little bit like a person who's "changing a jacket" [changing her mind, takinkääntäjä, a Finnish saying]. It's nicer to work when you know the big picture and your place in the picture. [...This transition gave me eventually] more than I expected.*

### **5.3. Bringing Things Forward**

Anne had two decades of professional experience. She had moved to the information technology domain mid-career and specialized in advance application system maintenance. During the study, she had the possibility to take team leadership

responsibilities. The role transition did not proceed as expected; nevertheless the situation made Anne reflect on her way of working. After the fact, her story revealed a woman who has transformed a frame of reference, with regards to her professional settings. As a consequence, her expertise – understood in relation to others – was renewed. Anne gained confidence that she can bring things forward and lead others toward a common goal.

Anne's professional career had lasted more than twenty years and was divided into two main periods (see appendix 4). Anne graduated from a commercial school in the 1970s and had a long-term employment relationship in one company's accounting office. Then, she had a turning point in her career and transferred to information technology (IT) domain in the beginning of 1990s. The second period had lasted only one third as long as the first one. Nevertheless, it was far more important, with regards to her current expertise, and set the pattern of telling about her professional career.

Anne's narrative did not start with her education. The degree was not integral to her storyline and was not even mentioned before I asked about it. There were also some other phases that were not important for the story and were thus omitted. Anne did not want to emphasize that her career partly included routine work. Only later, as a response to my questions about when she began working, did she add her education. She "started working directly after vocational business school [... and her] first employment relation lasted about twelve years." She also added that during that time she made a family and had two kids. Her work just went forward on its own time. She did not have a lot of interest in career development. Steady employment "fitted that life situation well."

Anne always progressed in her jobs until she was able to do even the most demanding tasks, and thus managed the overall field of work. The beginning in her first job was a "big challenge" and then [she] discovered that she is competent and capable. She took bigger and bigger responsibilities and did "accounting and beyond." Her job was equivalent to a comptroller's job, even though she did not occupy that title.

In any case, she "had attended courses, but learning at work had been the main thing." Anne did not have a clear preference on what she wanted to do or what kind of a job best fitted her. "What you do daily, is the best competence area or a learning area." What ever she needed to do, she learned it, sometimes even "through the heels" (through the hard way, *kantapään kautta*, a Finnish proverb). "By doing the job little by little, by doing the tasks, you understand what you need to do."

Anne got introduced to computers in her accounting job in the 1980s. "Information technology related tasks were introduced then [to companies], and I already needed to do them a bit in that job. But because I did not understand anything about the tasks, my interest [to learn more was] aroused." Anne decided to change her occupation completely, and attended training in a technical school for one year. After she got her technical certification, the economy was in a depression and she could not find work in the IT domain. So, she did some short-term accounting jobs, and then attended another IT training program for six months. Finally, she got a job from her current employer.

Technology itself motivated Anne to work in the IT domain, but even more important for her was to be able to be useful via her technical expertise. When she attended further training, she felt that the IT support “fitted” her well. She enjoyed her job because she “liked to work with people and to be able to help others.” Anne reflected on her expertise in relational terms. Education did not yet make her an expert; the key was to be included in, to be “accepted as a member” of an expert team. When she started in her new job, “acceptance was very good.” It was surprising how well she was “taken into the team even if [she] had not done an IT support job before [... and] she came almost directly from the school.”

Later, Anne specialized in one application. It was “demanding [to manage] many different techniques”, and to continuously learn more because “things were changing in fast rhythm.” At the moment she “knew the product or the application” so well that she could advise “whether it is worthwhile to do things like this or like that.” However, she was unsure whether she had enough energy to cope with the pace of changing technology in the future.

During the study, an unexpected transition happened as Anne was offered a team leader position in her current team. She had not considered moving from the role of application specialist to team leadership, but when her boss suggested such a “possibility” she decided to try it. “Even if it was just a proposal [and not an exigency], it was better than to continue the same [job, and] to follow the same line.” It was a possibility to learn something new.

In practice, the transition process was pending and pending. Anne’s organization was restructured, her manager changed, and the number of her team members diminished. She “started [negotiations] from zero [... and] waited for nothing.” Finally, she was never officially appointed to team leader’s role. First, she was disappointed, but then evaluated that finally it was a “good solution, [...] maybe team leadership was not what [she] actually wanted.”

*Even if there was never an official decision, I had to, perforce, take such a role.*

*The manager of our team doesn’t do any coding tasks by definition.*

*He’s only a kind of, aaa, a re-resource manager.*

*That means, (U: mmm) he provides resources to certain projects and other events [and so on...].*

*He didn’t have a proper experience about the actual job we did.*

*Then, since I was the oldest and I’d done these things for the longest period of time,*

*it was automatically (laughs) (U: mmm) my role to advice new people.*

*And in a way, I did a leader’s job there.*

So, Anne occupied the role of team leader, even though she was not officially appointed. Transition happened on the quiet, as if she never had to make the final decision about whether she wanted to change her role or not. That is to say, she never chose anything that she needed to back off or explain away. Role transition was simply a consequence of the fact that she wanted to do something new (no matter what), and that the team leader’s position was the first possible (and only)

concrete proposal. The role of leader fell on her “automatically” and “perforce,” because in the team there were no others who could fill the requirements. Hence, transition was a passive and non-considered choice, and reflection on the situation started afterwards.

Anne was actually, at all times hesitant about whether she wanted to move to a team leader’s role or not. At that time she thought that her old responsibilities would follow her into her new role and that she would not have enough time to do everything. Paradoxically, she was able to resolve her tension when she knew that she would *not* officially become a team leader; she took the role of a leader more seriously and started to delegate her old tasks to junior colleagues.

*Abstract:*

- 00 *[You asked once in a group] if one wants to change [a job], is it worthwhile to continue as a team leader [in one’s own team...].*
- 02 *Well, I was afraid that I can’t get old stuff out of my job responsibilities [...].*
- 24 *And then I thought: ”Well, if I become [a team leader], I have to “play it cool” (kylmän rauhallisesti) and to say that I can’t do all the stuff.*
- 25 *And that we must then, you know (U: mmm), find somebody who can do it [instead] (U: mmm).*

*Orientation:*

- 33 *And, and then what helped in that was the fact that our people, they were no longer totally “green” [inexperienced].*

*Action:*

- 34 *I was able to [delegate tasks] for them.*
- 36 *[I had] no need to start explaining every time everything, you know, from the very beginning (U: mmm).*
- 37 *So, when we were able to distribute [tasks in] our area [of responsibility],*

*Evaluation:*

- 39 *[I] could then do [my job] in a more controllable manner.*

*Orientation:*

- 43 *While, in the beginning the analyzing phase was always difficult.*

*Action:*

- 44 *Because the others, they did not have, you know a sort of a [big] picture about how the overall service was built.*
- 45 *So, I had to always first go through the [service architecture] (U: yes).*
- 46 *And then... then when they started [coding] they had many [unclear] things they always came to ask [from me].*
- 47 *And then [I] had to look at [their cases] and figure out [answers].*
- 48 *Well, then when you jump suddenly from something you were doing [to help someone else],*
- 49 *you have to, sort of, start from the beginning, [to figure out] how does it go (U: yes).*
- 50 *And to look at it through yourself, you know.*
- 51 *And only after that you can say to the other [how it goes].*

52 *So, then they came sometimes so [often] that when you got rid of one the other came in.*

53 *And then entire half a day was gone by you showing somebody [how to do] something.*

54 *And then your own tasks, of course, were postponed (U: yes, yes).*

*Resolution:*

58 *And then also one more thing is that I dared to give away (raaskin luopua) my old tasks (laughs) (U: yes).*

*Evaluation:*

59 *It's also many times up to you, thinking of, you know, that I can't give [my tasks] away (U: yes).*

67 *[We just] act as if we want, you know, to keep them as such (laughs) (U: yes, yes, aaa).*

68 *[Old job is] familiar and safe (tuttua ja turvallista)!*

In this story a major transformation from a “victim” attitude (things happen to me) to a “leader” attitude (I make things happen) takes place. Change in work responsibilities boosted Anne’s self confidence. Her story starts with a situation after the crucial turning point, and then compares it with the situation before the change. The second episode underlines that Anne experienced her job as a series of uncontrollable lines of demands – things “come and go,” people need her experience and expertise, and her advisory role makes her delay her own tasks (lines 45, 47, 49–52, 54). Anne could not control her own use of time. By comparing the first and the second episodes, Anne contrasts experience with inexperience and self-initiative with dependence on others’ guidance.

The story is a continuation of another story that illustrated Anne’s emotional response to role transition (see appendix 5). In her story, Anne first states that she changed her way of working because there was an external constraint (lines 24, 25; *I cannot* do it, we *must* find someone else). Then, she continues that she *could* change her behavior, because there were external enablers (lines 33, 34, 36); team members gained more skills and were able to take independent responsibility on certain tasks. After the distribution of work, Anne could take more control on her own job. Eventually, in the resolution, Anne provides an alternative interpretation; it is also a *personal choice* to give away “safe and familiar” tasks to others. The perspective is very different compared to the “scared woman” she was at the beginning of the story (appendix 5).

Anne used to react on external conditions (I must, I have to; *pakko, täytyy, pitää*) and to be afraid of uncontrollability of such conditions (have no time, cannot get rid of, cannot get away, cannot work). Now she was an actor who was in control of her own environment and could even laugh about her former reactions (lines 67–68). Her perspective changed in relation to her possible transition to team leader’s position, but independent from its actual realization. Participation in reflective group discussions and writing reflections on a notebook helped Anne to “take distance and observe activities from an external point of view and think about how things could possibly be [... She] started to think about what [her] own perspective is [and therefore she] saw things slightly differently.” So, though ex-



ternal circumstances did not change and Anne stayed on the same team, her role as an expert definitively changed. Anne referred to her renewal several times during the last interview and told episodes in “before – after” form.

*The process has improved [... and] activities are not “panic-like” reactions [...].*

*Now [I] dare to say that “I’m sorry, but we can’t do this thing for tomorrow.*

*We have this and this kind of things to be done, you know,*

*before we can take care of this case” [...].*

*I have personally calmed down, in a way that,*

*I do take the time to think about the case a bit longer*

*and start acting only after that (laughs) [...].*

*I have adopted a rule or regularity (U: yes) into my way of working.*

Anne’s transformed perspective reflected a new sense of confidence. She did not blindly follow orders anymore, but was able to estimate, suggest, and negotiate task priorities and schedules. Moreover she was able to share her responsibilities. Before Anne had an “illusion that [she] could do things faster by herself, rather than advising somebody about how to do the things”. After she changed her assumptions regarding her own expertise, she could first “think about who could do the thing and in which schedule” and she was more open to others’ opinions and expertise. She had clearly understood that “not everything that comes is for her to do alone (laughs), but that [she] can give them to someone else as well”. She was also doing things together with her team members and figured out best solutions cooperatively.

Role transition (even without an official promotion) was an empowering experience. The most meaningful thing for Anne was that the new role brought “confidence or a kind of (p) courage.” She knew now that she could “bring things forward like she wanted or according to her sort of perspective,” and that she could motivate people to do things “as planned.” Moreover, Anne had wider perspective on things. Her expertise was no longer dependent on her specialized system knowledge, but on her understanding of a (customer’s) problem and ability to come up with the best resolution.

Anne’s new manager recognized her leadership potential and offered her another role. Instead of team leadership, she was asked to take a release manager’s role and start coordinating between different instances. In the future, Anne would look after and collect development requirements for the overall application system. She would make sure that all stakeholders would be involved in the process if some updates to the system would be implemented. In that role Anne could use competence and confidence gained during her transformation to leadership.

#### **5.4. Autonomy within Organizational Limits**

Rami had moved, step by step, from mechanic, to technician, to engineer, and from system maintenance to software development. He had gained expertise in databases and application configuration from higher education, which he attained as an adult,



as well as from active self-study. During the study, he transferred from technical customer support engineering to application development. His inner motivation was to gain autonomy via expertise; however, he admitted that though he was satisfied with his own progress, each job constrained the authority of expertise.

Rami had had numerous prior transition experiences before he moved to application development projects (see appendix 4). First, he received a vocational degree in 1980s, working summers as a mechanic. Then he graduated from a vocational school and worked couple of years as a hardware technician, after which he moved to his current company, and continued working as a technician. At the same time, he was motivated by the study possibilities the new employer offered.

When installing hardware as a technician, Rami “did not know much or did not get much information about the ‘soul’ (*sielunelämä*) of systems.” So, he wanted to “work in a place where systems were produced.” He argued clearly that his “professional competence grew when he got closer to the real place where systems were done.” He “wanted to study more [... and was] actively looking for [study opportunities] all the time.” After a few years in a new job, he started engineering studies, and completed, in the mid 1990s, a Bachelor’s degree in four years, while employed full-time.

During his continuing professional education Rami specialized in programming and clearly “wanted to apply to such a job where [he] could develop software for something.” So, he changed his job and started to design software tools for the job he knew from a user’s point of view. Further education led to transitions, but not in any straightforward way (not in a sequence of graduation, job seeking, and employment). His new employment happened prior to graduation and actually impacted the course of studies. Formal education and learning on-the-job were always interconnected.

Furthermore, Rami moved to technical customer support, attended training related to his new role, and worked in several countries in Asia and Europe. In technical customer support, Rami was responsible for system maintenance. He represented the company to the customer. So, he always had to find the solution to system malfunctions, even if he did not know everything about the systems. Sometimes he felt like saying “This’s not my business; I don’t know anything about this.” Moreover, Rami always had to “follow guidelines [and] to read from a paper [and then] press the button.” It was stressful to be in a position where he was expected to have expertise, but at the same time could not develop know-how beyond a certain point. He was limited by what guidelines allowed him to do.

Moving to technical customer support and working abroad was meaningful, in many ways, but the job did not satisfy Rami’s desire to specialize thoroughly on databases and programming. Rami decided to go back to programming. “Maybe if you know in what you are better, then you prefer to apply to such a job.” In an application development job, Rami could easily say to his colleagues that “maybe [they] should talk to someone else, because [he did] not know.” In programming, he could freely “experiment and [he did] not need any guidelines about what to do. [...He could] apply [his] own know-how and if something [went] a little bit wrong, it [was] not so dangerous. [He could] always try again to see if there [was] another way of doing things.”

*In [technical support] I did more of an administrative work (U: mmm), you know.*

*Others had done the programs – or whatever they were – and I put them inside the machine (U: mmm) and watched that they were working (U: mmm) [...].*

*And now I've been allowed to do programming to this same database system.*

Rami articulated that he had clear motivations to move ahead in the career. He wanted to learn how things worked in-depth, and to move toward a more complex, abstract, and advanced level of understanding. Rami had always “sought his way to jobs where his professional competence could grow.” The most important things in his career had been “possibilities, that there are some challenges, and such challenges that one can develop professionally and personally.” Additionally, Rami believed that if he increased his know-how, he could get more money and progress further in his career.

In the last interview, I asked Rami “what happened when you changed your role?” He answered that “nothing special, nothing but applying for a new job and being selected to it.” He continued, after a brief pause, to say that his transition was actually like a “return.” He had previous “experience from programming,” so the new role was “not completely new.” Since the beginning of his new job, Rami was involved with one demanding project. He smiled and said that the project has taken all his time; he “didn’t have to think about what to do during work days.” There was always something to do.

*It's a little bit boring to narrate, because, because, well (U: mmm), because it's about going to work on a day time, doing your job, and then leaving home (U: yes).*

*And nothing very special happens there (U: mmm, mmm).*

*[... A lot of things] happen inside your head, kind of [...].*

*Things happen to you in one place when you're doing some [programming].*

Transition had both intrinsic and instrumental value for Rami. He wanted to ensure *employability* and to have “something to sell,” “certain capital” in any case. However, he was not sure “how to combine career progress and [professional development in] programming, for example.” He wondered if only focusing on career progression would eventually “lean to a point where [he] could not do anything, really anything [professionally relevant] anymore or that [he] could not do anything that somebody is ready to pay for.”

Moreover, Rami reflected on ownership and about “being sure about things that are done in [his] own area of responsibility” (see appendix 5). He talked about the organizational “[pig] pens” (*karsina*) that limited the individual activities. The division of work relied in co-operation between actors who belong to different pens or boxes. Rami knew that, even if he would be technically competent and willing to modify software code in another technical environment than in his own development environment, he was not allowed to do that. He had to ask someone else who works in the right organizational unit to do required modifications.

*I was just saying that [we're] in a pen, in a sense that we have a certain way of doing that (p) development work (U: mmm).*

*We have a certain [technical development] environment where we can [...] romp about (temmeltää) rather freely.*

*And do, you know, changes [into software].*

*U: Inside the "pen"?*

*Right. If you do not go outside of it.*

Rami reflected critically on some basic assumptions, regarding communication and distribution of work. He tried to find some alternative interpretations. He wondered whether responsibilities and communication networks had to be so narrowly defined, and whether they had to be so tightly connected to organizational boundaries. People should have power to decide into which areas they want to develop their expertise, and organizational roles should not limit that possibility. Organization limited freedom to learn certain things, by dedicating people to a certain technical environment. People could not freely decide how projects were managed and how software was developed. Organizational position and location defined how they could act, what tools and methods they could use, and to which technical environments they had access. Therefore, people who had expertise were in a power struggle with organizational administration and management.

Rami moved to his new role because he believed that his possibilities of having an influence would increase. In technical customer service, his opportunities to gain and renew expertise were limited. There was no possibility of developing such know-how, that could be used in independent decision-making, regarding one's work. Software development work, however, also had its own organizational limitations that defined what he could do, and in which ways it was possible to gain more expertise. Transition from one "pen" to another helped him to see things from a new perspective, but it did not resolve the dilemma of authority and expertise. Role transition triggered critical questions, and Rami could see what was problematic in the organizational dynamics, regarding expertise. Nevertheless, he could not figure out any alternatives for organizing expert work.

## **5.5. The Best Guess or Something**

After gaining an engineering degree, Timo had worked in three different fields: quality systems, logistics, and advanced IT-system support. His cycle of job transfers had been relatively fast. During the study, he first intended to move to global application development projects, but then had an opportunity to take a team leader position in his own team. Transition was a pleasant experience. However, Timo longed for the accuracy and certainty of his previous job. In his new role, clear procedures and guidelines were commonly replaced by guesswork and intuition.

Timo started his career narrative (see appendix 4) by reflecting back to difficulties in the very beginning. Despite his good education and positive employment expectations, he had had a hard time finding work from the rural area from which he came. He did not really choose his first jobs, but took them because there

were no alternatives. “[In that municipal job] and in that small electronics company I did not have any possibilities to influence. There was only one thing offered: take it or leave it!”

Timo did good work and got good results. However, employers offered him only short-term contracts and did not pay a decent salary. After two different experiences, Timo gave up, moved away from his hometown, and left his friends behind. He moved to the capital area and immediately got a challenging job. The job was related to manufacturing logistics. Timo did not know much about it beforehand and “could not imagine exactly what kind of a job it would be. [... So, it] was a surprise: [...] That’s how it is?!” Timo was in the beginning like a “typical engineer [...]; a bit too monotonous, [...] did not stand out positively or negatively, [...] and] did not have any special knowledge in any area [or] in any particular field.”

Then, Timo got involved with information technology (IT), and interested in logistics’ information management systems. He changed his responsibilities first within a manufacturing logistics unit, and then applied for a new job and moved to the IT organization. Timo learned one applied technology, one specific system in detail. His own responsibility area included “questions related to reporting.” Such specialization satisfied his desire, and, moreover, made him a respected expert on the domain. There were not “many guys in the company and in the country who knew the reporting as well” as he did.

Timo officially became a certified system specialist after receiving further training. It was really a big jump toward becoming a “real expert.” Timo started to understand the “soul of the gigantic system, [...] and] what happens beyond the screen. [...]He gained a] big professional difference, compared to basic users and self-educated system specialists.” Timo maintained his IT systems know-how by self-directed learning at work. He read books, borrowed course materials from his colleagues, and attended information sharing sessions. He felt that he could never learn enough about the data system. He wanted to get more and more profound competence in managing the system.

*[My career] went significantly up [when moving to this company].*

*And then, ööö, it started to slowly “clot and clot.”*

*And then we [my boss and I] have redefined the job description couple of times.*

*And then it has risen in between, and then there has been a little bit of this kind of [career] advancement.*

*But as a main rule, it has gone downwardly.*

Timo felt that his expertise decreased if he stayed in the same job too long. So, I interpreted that to mean that for Timo, transition was a way to prevent routine and gain new competence. Even if that were true, it was not the main reason for him to look for a change. “My current competence must be enough there [in a new role], but then the job description is just different. So, as such, I do not need to prepare myself a lot.” Timo could have continued in the system support. However, he wanted to find a job from global IT systems’ configuration projects. The reason

he wanted to transfer his role was that some people and services had been outsourced from his organization, and he was scared that it could happen to his job too.

*Relatively close to me, there were these outsourcing cases [...]  
(Breathes deep).*

*So, so, then I started to think about the stability of my own job.*

*(p) That brought me a sort of very disgusting, disgusting (ikävä) feeling.  
How long will I be here still?*

Timo knew that the company was restructuring and all alternatives were explored. By telling about the beginning of his career, he made it clear that he knew how it felt to not be able to choose your own employer and your own job. Timo would rather keep “in his own hands the right to choose who his employer was.” He wanted to work in a “kind of core tasks” and in projects that were related to core business. To that end, he was ready to learn project work and the system configuration skills needed in projects. Nevertheless, Timo’s plans to move to system configuration projects did not work out. He applied for a job, but “the road was blocked (*tie oli pystyssä*) [... and the project organization] was not ready to welcome [him] with the existing [employment] conditions (grading and compensation).”

*Orientation:*

*There was one manager, with who- whose projects I wanted to be involved.*

*Action:*

*Then (U: mmm) he had very hostile attitude.*

*Like when we ha-had interviews, he for example threaten me in there [and] said that “you can come for a test period to work here for us” and that if any problems occur, he will kick me away [...].*

*Evaluation:*

*Two other [managers from the same organization] were really disappointed because they could not get me in there [...].*

*Resolution:*

*Then in the end [of the conversation] he was like... ready to offer a job: “well, come to work here then, here we have one project for you, do you want to be involved with this?” [...]*

*Evaluation:*

*[He had] stress maybe, and partly cultural differences. [In his country, people] think in terms of hierarchy much more heavily (U: yes) than [we do].*

Timo’s transition failed because of the work stress, cultural differences, and “chemistry” between him and his recruiting manager, not because of his lack of competence. Two other managers supported and approved his recruitment. Timo compared his interview with how managers normally behave in the interview situations (they do not threaten applicants but rather try to sell the job). Later Timo also told me about a colleague of his, who had had a similar experience and had left the company, as a result. Stories were told from the perspective of an applying employee.

Soon after the interview, things changed suddenly. Timo transferred to a team leader position. He had not considered a team leadership job, but when his manager offered him the job, he accepted it. He was aware that “in these days, there is a risk to jump to IT consultancy world outside of this company.” Team leadership seemed like a rational choice. Timo started to lead the same team in which he had been working as a senior specialist. Timo “caught” new responsibilities quickly, “started really to speed up, and [... had] a rough time (a cold ride, *kylmä kyytiä*, a Finnish saying).” It was challenging to earn the respect and trust of prior colleagues, to learn a new communication style, and to know how to handle confidential information. But the new role fitted Timo well and he did “not regret any minute.”

As a team leader, Timo was able to re-tell his previous story about the unsuccessful recruitment. He offered a broader and more advanced explanation to what happened. The problem in transition was not only between him and the recruiting manager, but it was related to the overall life cycle of the IT-systems. “We have a ‘trinity’ here.” The recruiting manager was responsible for system development that involves “very technical code ‘twisting,’ and each little change to a system takes a long time.” However, projects had employed people who did not have technical backgrounds, and who were interested in switching to deployment projects that took place, for example, in South America. The key problem was how to recruit the right kind of people to the right kinds of jobs, and how to motivate people to do “non-sexy” jobs.

Timo’s new perspective reflected his new position and new relationships in the organization. He and the manager who did not recruit him to his projects were now colleagues, and started resolving recruiting problems together. Timo had a “totally different job description [...that offered him] a new kind of prominent position (*näköalapaikka*).” Such a position made him understand that things that he complained about earlier were not “necessarily easy to resolve.” He understood the “complexity” of things. Moreover, Timo had now more “value in the employment market.” He was a “more ‘multi-professional’ expert now than when [he was] only in one branch of a tree.”

Despite of the new managerial perspective that Timo gained in his new role, his view on expertise remained the same. The definition of expertise was not based on a common division between professionals and management. “Team leader is still a kind of a person that should participate, to be involved with things. It is a sort of, if I use the military terminology, a kind of corporal. He goes there with the crew, and does not stay in any ‘command dugout’ (*komentokorsu*).” The advanced system support knowledge provided a basis for the team leadership as well.

*Abstract:*

01 *It’s good if a team leader understands the technical side as well.*

*Orientation:*

02 *My, I had few years ago a team leader*

03 *who had come from the [business unit]*

04 *he had participated in some [system] projects*

05 *but, in practice, he did not understand anything about [the system].*



*Action:*

- 06 *And then we go through some very technical stuff some times*  
07 *and I could see that*  
08 *when we started to talk about these things*  
09 *immediately the connection was cut off.*  
10 *We could not understand each other's any longer.*  
11 *So, it was useless to explain these things to him*  
12 *because he did not understand them.*

*Resolution:*

- 13 *Maybe he wanted,*  
14 *but then he did not have time, of course,*  
15 *to go into those things closely in order to gain understanding.*

In this story, Timo is talking about his ex-boss, who had no expertise of the technical subject matter. The evaluation of the story shows that Timo clearly prefers the combination of leadership and the substance expertise. Timo identifies himself with a technically competent leader and constructs expertise around subject matter (technology) know-how: understanding things in practice (line 05), understanding by being in connection with others who have expertise (lines 09, 10), and understanding by familiarizing oneself with things in detail (line 15).

Nevertheless, there was a conflict between the perspectives of management and specialists; the former is concerned, primarily, with getting things done, the latter is more focused on understanding subject matter in practice, in mutual agreement, and in detail. Emotional conflict was especially visible in cost management tasks (see appendix 5). Timo had to act without having enough relevant knowledge, and he felt that he had no power to influence. He made it clear that the way of working that he was used to in his prior job, and which he preferred, was not possible in the new job.

However, the narrative reveals a person who has accepted the reality and resolved the underlining dilemma between his ideal and what he was doing. Timo has gotten used to (lines 15, 24, 38 in appendix 5), and accepted that he just had to adapt to what his new job required. He guessed and hoped for the best. To accept his own “misbehavior” according to his professional standards, he emphasized that this *is* a guideline. He could not do better, and, anyway, it was not his fault (lines 26–28 in appendix 5). It seemed that nobody really expected him to follow the rules anyway (lines 16, 44 in appendix 5). Even though Timo changed his behavior, he did not fully approve of it. He would still rather have known exactly what he was doing. He made that clear with some rhetoric. He used evaluative language, “if I say rudely” (line 26 in appendix 5), and other people’s anonymous voices (lines 25, 28 in appendix 5).

## **5.6. Flexibility without Fairness**

Niko graduated in the beginning of the 1990s. He worked in different information system support jobs and entered the current company three years later. During the study, Niko moved from technical system coordination to technical management.



Transition was a surprise. A well-functioning team was rearranged and Niko's coordination job ended. Nevertheless, it fit fine to Niko's career aspirations and he was ready to adopt the change. Despite Niko's flexibility and readiness to carry new responsibilities, transition did not proceed according to a planned schedule. Nomination was postponed again and again over a period of more than nine months. Niko had always played fair game, but this time the rules made no sense what-so-ever.

Niko started his narrative conventionally; his career was presented as a timeline from education to work (see appendix 4). He "illustrated how people specialize more and more; the [schools] are common [for everyone], but even there is a possibility to make choices and select a particular track<sup>46</sup>." Formal education and an engineering degree ensured an entry to work; it was a "good basis for all kinds of stuff," but not a foundation to any particular job. From Niko's former fellow students "maybe one out of three was in the profession that they had actually studied. [...Simply,] school did not teach at that time these things that [people later] needed at work."

After graduation Niko worked short-term in the municipal maintenance department. Then he became unemployed for a while and thought carefully about what he wanted from his career. After listing certain criteria, he was convinced that the information technology (IT) domain was the right one for him. He estimated the "growth and future prospects [... and wanted] to work in an international firm." Even though the decision was not self-evident and Niko considered some alternatives, like "house manager" or "restaurant manager" training programs, IT still attracted him the most.

Niko worked in two different technology consultant firms for a short time, but could not get a permanent contract. He then moved to his current company and continued exploring several job roles and "diverse tasks." Niko gained IT expertise via gradual explorations of different tasks; he accumulated know-how by "doing the job [and] by learning from colleagues." Each job shift made him learn more, and, as a consequence, he looked at things from a different angle. Typically, his new competence was built on the previous one. "In each phase there has been something familiar [and] something new: [This] has been a good formula."

Niko's career was like a growing spiral. There were no significant ups and downs, nor was there a progression toward any particular goal. "Creativity is a good word for my [ever-changing] competence." Expertise was not defined as an ability of a person to have the right kind of knowledge and skills. Instead, it was an ability to solve problems and find answers by using a network of resources (for example colleagues, databases, and Internet). Niko never got "stuck with problems [... and always] found another trick. [... It was] not a problem to admit that you don't know something," because the work environment is so "full of [new] information and changes."

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<sup>46</sup> In the first interview, Niko drew his school buildings and explained that he "was in a music class". That was a "distinction" from most other students. Otherwise, until high school his "education was very general, and then in the senior high school it started to be emphasized in math."

*Abstract:*

*01 Maybe one thing why I become a senior specialist was that*

*Orientation:*

*02 I had [several thousand] end users.*

*04 I maintained system register.*

*05 And I took care of, I was a support person for the tool [we used].*

*06 And I was also in the development team for that tool.*

*Action:*

*07 Some of my colleagues said that*

*08 if nobody else knows they come to ask from me.*

*09 And I kept a record that*

*10 for a half a year there were no any problem that I did not solve.*

*13 That always solutions were found, [because]*

*15 in support work, the same problems start to repeat.*

*19 I was also a tutor for newcomers.*

*21 I teach them [this] tool.*

*22 And I told them "the operative mode of the house."*

*23 And I helped them if they had anything to ask.*

*29 I could ask [from newcomers] something like "how do you see this?"*

*34 In this [company], we have got used to do things in a certain way.*

*35 So, it is good to get new ideas time to time.*

*Resolution:*

*37 We had some good discussions then.*

*38 And we got some things changed.*

The motive to gain expertise was to manage one's field better and better, and to be able to participate more on decision making. Niko wanted to impact things and ascertain that the right things have happened. In this story, Niko's definition of his expertise in a senior specialist's role included three components:

- Experts know how to resolve problems and they often know it better than others (lines 8, 10, 13). Expertise is gained by resolving a large amount of problems in a rather stable environment.
- Experts look for new perspectives and are ready to question routines (lines 26, 29, 35).
- Experts change and improve things (line 38). The story enables an interpretation that expertise (including know-how and continuous development) is nothing without power to influence.

Niko's "main driver" for learning was the presence of particular problems in the field; "work required certain knowledge and then [he] figured it out." Courses and self-study at home supported learning at work. For example, Niko had met with his senior colleague, worked together couple of days, and learned by doing the task with a model. Learning and work were not separate things. Niko was continuously sharing information and finding out what was going on in different domains. Additionally, Niko would have liked to participate more in training, but in

practice, participation was limited to a couple of hours or a maximum of a couple of days, because of a heavy workload. If Niko had been away from work longer, pending tasks would have fallen down on him.

All in all, Niko defined his career as “flexible and evolving.” He had been “adaptable in different situations,” gained “diverse” experiences, and his “responsibilities have changed in convenient rhythm.” For the time being, new jobs had been “offered or designated” to him without him looking for or applying for a new job. Just before the study started, Niko had moved to a newly formed team and received a management responsibility of a new service concept. [He] was offered the job, because he had coordinated similar kinds of tasks in his previous role. He took part in writing the “diversified” job description.

The transition to a new job happened suddenly and in a fast schedule: “Nominations have not been done, but work has started already.” When I asked Niko what led him to this situation he answered first that he was promoted; however, he continued by adding that, actually, their team leader’s “task ended [and] he moved to another job.” As a consequence the team was “closed down,” Niko’s job ended and he had to find a new job. Niko could have continued in another kind of coordination work, but he “chose” the management position. So, though the transition was involuntary in the first place, Niko reframed it as an opportunity.

Transition was part of a natural continuity and fit well with Niko’s personal “goal to become a good manager.” Niko had a “good work history for his new role;” He already knew the technology and services and was motivated to work with them. The new role offered “interesting tasks [... and] a wider range of responsibilities. [... Management] perspective is demanding, [but Niko got] since the beginning good feedback and evidence of success.” So, Niko had nothing problematic in his transition as such. He adopted the new perspective and identified with the strategic goals. “The operational model is really good [... and] it has been cleverly thought.” Niko liked to be one of the first ones to implement new processes and operations. He cooperated with the project organization locally and globally. “This new service has been implemented in a project mode, and that is exactly the right way of doing it.”

In his new role Niko remembered “general agreements”, “rules of the game” and, in general, whatever was agreed upon. In his new role, Niko wanted to influence plans and participate in decision making.

*Previously I’ve looked on how people didn’t always make satisfactory decisions (U: yes), and I’ve usually been in, well usually... I’ve really been, in assignments, the one who corrects the bad decisions.*

*It happens sometimes in our work place that the next org-organizational change comes fast, and those people who’ve done the bad decision (U: yes) are no longer there (U: yes). Other fellows come in and fix the things.*

*I would rather be part of the first group who makes good decisions and then carries the responsibility of them (sights).*

Niko criticized his prior job for being unfair. He had carried the responsibility of fixing decisions he could not impact himself. Role transition was a way to gain

control of what is decided and how decisions are implemented. In his management position Niko had a wider perspective on what was going on in the organization and could “make decisions and [at least] put forward things, and then to be responsible on them.”

*Abstract:*

01 *U: What happened then... when you changed your role?*

02 *Yes, there's a little problem. To tell you the truth, it hasn't changed yet (U: mmm).*

03 *I mean, aaa, because employer's actions have not been taken yet.*

*Action:*

10 *For example, last spring this [nomination request] was already (coughs), you know, proceeding.*

11 *But then it was returned back with a reason that I didn't have enough working experience.*

12 *And then in the fall, when we came back to [talk about] it after the summer, we discovered [or] my supervisor stated that the reasoning was not correct.*

13 *That "yes, you do have enough working experience." (U: yes?)*

*Evaluation:*

14 *So that, there's no reason why this [nomination] is not done. And still it doesn't happen.*

*Action:*

18 *Well, I've certainly conducted, I've occupied the new role.*

19 *And [I've] learned new tasks.*

20 *And (U: yes) done it.*

*Evaluation:*

22 *[But] it surely has an effect to not have the [nomination done].*

25 *It's... I come across it, you know, in many occasions, (U: mmm) you know.*

30 *(p) Of course I'm, you know, I understand on one hand that some things are delayed and that things like that [happen]*

31 *but then [on the other hand] when schedule is agreed several times, one should stick to it.*

*Orientation:*

32 *You know, in other [regional units...]*

*Action:*

33 *they have nominated people to these [new management] jobs already during the last reorganization*

34 *[Our region] is the only exception, you know (U: mmm).*

35 *[Even if] we have advanced furthest in these things*

36 *and we have worked hardest of all.*

*Evaluation:*

37 *So, in this case, you know, there's no really a formula that can match my engineering logic (insinöörin päähän ei mikään kaava stemmaa); why this [nomination] does not happen?!*

*Coda: Nonetheless, the starting point is that I was interviewed for the new position and transferred [to it] via internal recruitment. [I was] promised a certain date [and a certain] management title. That is, you know, all agreed in negotiations and then written down. And then, well, it sud[denly], well it was postponed. OK. Then it was postponed more. [...] It's unfair I think.*

Niko expected role transition to give him influence, but instead he was stuck in a situation where he could not do anything to improve his own status. He felt cheated by the nomination process. (The extended story about the illogical nomination practices is in appendix 5). So, first (in abstract) Niko summarized the basic theme; the role transition has been problematic and he was not officially nominated to his new job. Niko had tried to fix the problem with line management and human resources (HR), but not progressed in eight months. Relationships were still good and Niko expected things to get settled down.

In the beginning, Niko also introduced the key contrast that organized his telling. He received good service from HR, but nothing happened. Everything was nice and comfortable, but, at the same time, things were not ok. Niko occupied his new role as if everything was alright and, yet, his nomination was pending. The situation was illogical, and it was hard to make sense of it. In several small episodes, Niko presented different variations of the problem. He repeated his evaluation time after time without providing any resolution. His feeling of anticipation, waiting, disappointment and the sense that he had been wronged, were apparent. What was agreed upon had not been implemented, and reasons for this were unconvincing.

The first episode oriented the listener to the fact that the situation had lasted a long time. Things had proceeded well, but for some reason had been postponed (lines 10–11). Explanations were conflicting (lines 11, 13). Incoherently, Niko was first told that he did not have enough experience, and, subsequently, that he indeed had sufficient experience for a management job. Moreover, in the second episode things became even more complicated: regardless of the official opinion about his experience, he had done the management job during the eight-month period. Yet, lack of formal recognition hindered a full transition and made his situation difficult. In the evaluation, Niko contrasted things that are postponed (once) with the agreements that are broken (repeatedly).

In the third episode, by using a plural mode, Niko emphasized that he had not only done his job, but he had done it successfully. Niko's organization had implemented the new service concept the furthest and had worked the hardest. Still, other organizations had nominated people to equivalent jobs and Niko's case was the "only exception." Niko felt that "there's no formula that can match. [...] Situation was unfair." Again, there is an unfair contradiction between less experienced colleagues in other units, who have been promoted, and Niko who had expertise. Niko also said that his wage offer was not much higher than that of those who were promoted, so that could not explain the delay either.

Nevertheless, Niko wanted to continue the negotiations and get things settled (see appendix 5). "I believe (p), I have still, you know, tried to keep... and we do have good connection to continue these negotiations. [...] I don't want to start

arguing, [because] it is not the right solution.” Niko just wanted to get the official promotion and that would resolve the tension between his moral viewpoint and the unfair situation at work. The job itself was fine and manageable with existing rules.

Several years of experience provided Niko with deep understanding of the underlining themes and connections, and grounded his expertise in that field of work. Niko respected commonly agreed operational practices, but he also knew that rules were man-made. Reasonable exceptions and applications of new rules were possible. The unfair nomination process causes one to question the foundation of such expertise, i.e., the logic, decision making, and compliance with rules and agreements. However, Niko presented the dilemma in a way that it did not trigger further reflection. He interpreted events from his just and socially accepted frame of reference. Contradictions did not cause him to question his moral prejudices. As a consequence, the situation did not elicit a new kind of understanding even if it highlighted some questions. The problem was not named from an alternative framework.

### **5.7. Kicking the Right Ankles**

Laura had a long career before she moved to the IT organization at the beginning of the study. Previously, she worked with financial systems’ technical support in an accounting organization, and therefore knew much about the use of different applications. The role transition was her initiation. She wanted to move closer to information technology professionals. In her new job, she wanted to learn about concept design and system development. However, she never started working in data modeling as she has anticipated, but became a project manager in a system redesign project. Project management taught her to be strong, assertive, demanding, and closely use the available resources.

Laura started her narrative from the point that she entered the current company (see appendix 4). She wanted to emphasize only what was relevant to her expertise in the IT field. The only thing she had to say about the past fifteen years was that she had had some tasks related to IT. She had graduated from a vocational business school in early 1980s and attended computer training in late 1980s. Then she had worked for more than a decade for one employer in financial business, and specialized in technical system support and training there. Laura’s narrative was relatively short and did not include her entire career. She mainly reported the events and did not evaluate them much. The parts that did not add to her core narrative (e.g., office clerk job in 1980s) were omitted and mentioned only briefly, when I explicitly asked about them.

The evolution of Laura’s responsibilities in the current company supported her desire to move closer and closer to IT world. Moreover, she needed to gain higher education and started studying. She completed a Bachelor’s degree in Business two months after the first interview. A diploma was a way to have credibility and formal requirements. Business education was not directly linked to her job, and she did not connect learning from formal education to informal learning at work. The new diploma did not impact her role transition either. Laura was appointed to her new job because she had gained relevant know-how in her prior job.



Laura had clear motivation to increase her IT expertise. For her, the transition to her new job was a “stroke of luck (*onnen päivä*).” She wanted to build technical expertise upon her existing finance know-how, and “utilize her business knowledge” and experience of financial processes in a system development job. She would “never become a programmer or something like that,” but she wanted to learn about “concept design and modeling,” and all the things that were “related to the beginning phase” of an IT-project. However, Laura was not so explicit about her career objectives. She changed her job because she wanted to do something else, to see “a little bit more, and to be able to learn new things.” Since the beginning, Laura knew that her manager would expect her to know how to manage projects. Still, it was a surprise that she did not move to a data-modeling job, but started to work as a full-time project manager.

*It was not clear that what [I] started working on in the future (U: mmm).  
And, and in the middle, [...] at some point, it became clear  
or we knew already that we are going to have one project.  
And then (U: mmm) they were looking for a project manager,  
[somebody] who can manage it, and (U: yes), and,  
and then I promised to do it (laughs).*

Laura made her decision based on what the organization needed. She had some experience as a project member and she “knew something about the topic.” She was not “totally green [inexperienced].” The new position was a challenge and Laura knew that project management is “hard work” and “not necessarily an easy” thing to do. The starting of a project was typical. “Everything was pretty open [and undefined]” and it was unsure whether the project was “starting or not, [and] when and in which format.”

*Orientation:*

- 01 All dead lines were so tight,*
- 02 that if you think about real project orientation and things like that.*
- 03 So, (U: mmm) mostly all those things were done in a wrong order  
(U: mmm).*

*Action:*

- 04 So, we started from where we had to start doing things, you know  
(U: right).*
- 05 Additionally we did, and afterwards we did then something else, so  
(U: mmm, mmm), so.*
- 06 Project had been already started before the project plan was ready and all  
this kind of [administrative] stuff [were done], you know (U: right).*
- 07 We just thought some main deadlines, that what is the goal we have to  
reach, you know (U: yes, yes) [...].*

*Evaluation:*

- 09 I think it is actually very, very common (U: mmm), in this organization,*
- 10 that maybe things are not, you know, done in a proper order (U: yes).*



- 11 *People neither follow [the official project management methodology...].*  
 13 *People fix those things afterwards (U: mmm), they do the kind of fundamental tasks (U: mmm) [later].*

The starting of the project was not unsuccessful, even though everything had been done in the wrong order. That was just the way it went in the company. Laura knew how she should have operated, according to the project management methodology, but it was not a real problem if she did not follow the guidelines. Action and concrete results were more important than “other stuff” that referred to project documentation and formal operational proceedings. Laura is using a passive “we” in her narrative and, thus, emphasizing collective work rather than her personal role in the project.

Laura explained that her technical competence was minimal and that was why she felt natural to be in a project management role. She participated in data modeling too, and could help “boys” with her business understanding. Mainly, her project management job was to “ensure that there is always a resource to do every task and that [nobody] forgot anything.” Project management was a kind of coordination job and “management of things rather than people.” Laura was satisfied with her new job. That transition made her surer of what she wanted. As a result she could “express more clearly what [she] desired [... and she] made it clear what [she] expected from others.” Even one of the senior members in her project was jesting and calling her a “lieutenant.”

Project management was a challenging job and Laura had to work hard to find resources, keep the project in time, meet dead lines, and co-operate with different parts of the organization. She had to “fight,” “battle,” and “tear things up.” She had people close to her who helped in problem solving. One man had expertise in “bothering” and “annoying” source system specialists to get the data transfers completed. The other man had “authority” and a certain “position” in the hierarchy, and he knew how to “kick right people on ankles” to get things done. Expertise was defined not only as having know-how and as being able to apply knowledge, but also as being able to get things done.

By the end of the second interview, I offered Laura a summarizing comment of my impressions so far: “Transition to this kind of a role has been natural for you?” However, for Laura, the transition is not a question of “character” and of finding a place that fits the “self” or “feels like your own” as I suggested. As a response, she rephrased the comment “the job feels natural (*tuntuu luonnolliselta*)” to “the job turns out well (*luonnistuu*, a verb form).” She evaluated her personal success with outcomes, with “things that get done.” Moreover, she commented that “a lot depends of the [project] group, that how well it goes.”

*Orientation:*

- 01 *With part [of the group, I] have previous [co-operation].*  
 02 *[I] have represented the [customer].*  
 04 *So, the situation has not changed much indeed.*

*Action:*

- 05 *U: Yes. So, then you were giving [orders] as well (Laughs) L: Yes, that's it.*

06 That "Now I want a thing like that (U: yes), that this kind of thing should be done" (U: yes).

Evaluation:

07 So, it hasn't (U: yes), from their point of view it hasn't changed so much

Resolution:

08 [The difference is that] now I'm in the same organization (U: mmm).

Orientation:

12 [There were] some people that I haven't rub elbows with much (U: mmm).

13 That with some I've been [involved with] very many times previously (U: mmm)

Action:

16 U: [There was] that one guy you had difficulties to communicate with [The action itself was not told; the real action was to do nothing.]

Action that did not take place (Evaluation):

18 I don't like personally to go directly with sort of list and say that "do these and do it like this" (U: mmm, mmm).

19 You know, it feels difficult.

20 But clearly this, for this person I should have done it like that (U: yes).

21 To get the things done (U: mmm, mmm).

22 On the other hand, it feels... maybe underestimation is a wrong word, but however, you know [it would feel like that] (U: mmm).

25 I haven't tried either (U: Laughs).

Evaluation:

29 Maybe it is more, you know, the fact that he has just finished school.

31 That [he] is so young and hasn't got a lot of work experience, etc.

32 So, [he] more often takes a passive stand and waits, rather than

33 knows by himself how (U: yes) to do something proactively (U: exactly).

Resolution that did not take place (Evaluation):

34 U: Anyway, here [in this organization] it is expected quite a lot that people just start to do something?

35 L: Yes, and I have also, in a way, got used to it, that somebody just, you know, throws me some task and then I just have to start to move forward (U: mmm, mmm).

36 Yet, [everybody here] must, you know, think alone a little bit

37 and look at how it goes,

38 how to manage the job in a way that it is (U: mmm) as painless as possible for everybody (U: exactly).

With her current project group, co-operation went fine. Only one new member of the project did not have enough experience with customer-supplier relations, and expected guidance from the project manager. In other words, Laura gave him an order, but he did not deliver it. He did not only want to know what to do, but also how to do it. When Laura evaluated the actions (the fact that she did not offer a special guidance for the newcomer), she explained that she should have handled it differently (the action that did not happen). However, to adopt her project management role to fit the needs of a newcomer felt difficult, and, despite the unfruit-

fulness of the situation, she did not change her ways. Moreover, Laura continues her evaluation and notes that the new person did not have enough work experience and competence to do things pro-actively. Still, hand-to-hand guidance felt like underestimation of newcomers' talent. It was also against the common, tacit principles of expertise in the organization: One should go ahead and solve the problems as they arise and not wait for direct guidelines on how to do things (resolution).

It would be easy to interpret the point of Laura's story to be her self-criticism. She continuously repeated *should*: "I should have done [...], I should have talked with my own supervisor about what to do [...] I should have went and say." However, the evaluation included two perspectives; what the newcomer might have felt and what Laura felt herself. Finally Laura's own emotional response has a stronger argumentative point in the story. Accordingly, everybody has a responsibility to think about "how to get things done." Ignorance is regarded as laziness. People should not wait for ready answers from others, and for others to do the thinking and information-seeking work for them. Things are working if people are pro-active (lines 33–35), take the bull by the horns, and accomplish their tasks (line 21). Independent reflection and speculation of possibilities (lines 36–37), as well as the ability to take others into account (line 38), are qualities of such action-oriented expertise as well.

Laura's story, once again, showed how well she adopted the project management culture of her organization. Getting by all different stressors of time pressure, cost management, and personal relations required toughness. Giving guidance and cutting tasks into small steps for somebody who did not have needed experience and competence, was simply conflicting with project work requirements. Therefore, everyday life in projects was poorly suited for workplace learning.

There was a dilemma between professional development discourse and project resourcing. If a newcomer was not ready to be very active and to do a lot of work to fill the know-how gap, the project suffered due to a lacking resource. Mentoring and guidance was not a real option, because then project was lacking two full-time resources. Her prior understanding was in accordance with common assumptions in the social context of project management. There was no need, space, or time, for reflection. More important than reflective learning, was to get good people into the project, gain authority, and lead the project in a straightforward manner.

## **5.8. Doubting one's own Capabilities**

Henry had worked for almost 20 years in different jobs based on his non-technical education (however within technical industry). Accordingly, he referred to a "first career" when talking about his non-technical jobs and to a "new career" when talking about a future engineering job. Nevertheless, during the study Henry was "in-between-careers." Due to organizational restructuring, his prior work was outsourced to another company, and he moved to a technical coordinator's job. He started part-time engineering studies and, later on, gained project management

responsibilities. These role transitions were consequences of changing circumstances rather than Henry's career aspirations. Henry felt he was in the wrong place with the wrong skills.

Henry graduated from the university (humanities degree) in 1980s, started to look for a job, found a job within a month, and smoothly transferred to his first job, which corresponded with his education (see appendix 4). After working several years in the same industry he lost his enthusiasm and decided to change his career. He attended further education and graduated after a year as a qualified subject teacher. He started to look for a job, but did not find one. He also felt that what he had expected from the teacher occupation did not match the reality. Therefore, he transferred back to his "first career" and, after a short period of unemployment, got a good job that corresponded with his first professional degree. He worked again for several years in the industry – both in Finland and in a foreign country.

Henry admitted that the "first career" lasted 20 years but did not guarantee the employment he wanted. "Work environment changed so much that I had to do something." Expertise based on a non-technical degree became obsolescent due to industry changes in the 1990s and forced him to gain a new kind of competence. He needed technical skills to master the changing work requirements. As a result, he applied to engineering studies and planned to graduate in four years, while working full-time in his old job. Thereafter, Henry faced a sudden need to change his job *prior to* graduation, contrary to his own anticipation. The company stopped the business in which Henry had been involved, and his duties were moved elsewhere (outsourcing). Henry had to apply to another job inside the company or he would lose his job. He found a new job as a technical coordinator in the information technology organization. A "career" without education-based expertise started.

The main theme of Henry's career was his own area of specialization. He defined expertise as a mastery of a specific knowledge gained from formal education. "I consider myself an expert, whose competence is based on my professional education. [...] I have either had the know-how of my own area or I have tried to [get it. I continuously] try to get it: either *have the competence* or then *get the competence*." So, the transition to a technical coordinator's role was a temporal solution for Henry. He struggled between the current role (working without formal qualification) and the ideal role (educational qualifications and a corresponding job).

As a conclusion, there was not "necessarily any perspective" in the current situation. Things could improve only if they "would be in a bundle" and Henry could combine the "digital world" that he studied, with his job. Engineering studies were the main focus of learning. "I think for example what subjects I should choose or how I should specialize as an engineer and to which domain or to what kind of tasks [I could specialize]." Hopefully, he thought, the workplace would become "educational" when he would transfer to an engineering job.

*I think I'm good in absorbing information.  
I'm a good learner.  
These technical things are not something that flow naturally.  
[I've never taken an alarm clock in pieces at home or had a motorbike; it  
hasn't interested me in that way. I'm not a natural-born engineer.]  
But I like these studies.  
[...] or I do not like it, but I'm in this constraining position.  
This is a rather good choice for me.  
And now when I'm in this, there's no problem for me.  
I enjoy my stay.  
But I really have to work hard to get along with other [student's] speed  
(on ponnisteltava, että pärjää porukan mukana).*

Contradiction was evident in Henry's talk:

*I am a good learner – does not flow naturally  
I like these studies – I do not like  
A constraining position – a good choice  
No problem, enjoy – have to work hard to get along*

During the study, Henry transferred again his role within his current organization. He moved from plain coordination responsibilities to project management. The reason was that in his organization “all coordination tasks, in practice, have been already outsourced.” The new operational mode required that “everybody must be involved with projects in some role or another. [...] Routine tasks will disappear.” So, when Henry's boss asked him to lead a project, he had no reason to say no. He “(p) was actually the only free resource to act as a project manager [and] caught in [to a new role] all of a sudden.”

However, when I started the last interview by asking a basic “what has happened?” question, Henry answered that “actually, at work, (p) nothing has happened for me, (p) not much.” So, he did not start with a narrative, but with an evaluative comment and without referring to any particular event. It was meaningful that he did not tell me what had happened, even though I asked for it. In other words, he wanted to highlight that the thing that he wanted to happen had not happened. His personal expectations and desires had not been fulfilled. Henry had wanted to connect his job and his engineering studies, but he had not had any “concrete ‘Aha!’ experiences” to do so.

The answer, “Nothing happened,” can also be interpreted as meaning that Henry was aware of what my question implied, but did not want to tell a typical transition narrative, because his own experiences did not fit its norms. Transition to a project management role was not exactly what Henry had in mind when he planned part-time studies in order to gain technical qualifications. He wanted to move to a corresponding technical job (*koulutusta vastaaviin hommiin*). His expectations and external reality were in such conflict, that it was not possible to find a storyline to express it. Nevertheless, I continued with my initial agenda and repeated my question:

*U: So, what has happened there (laughs)?*

*Henry: Well, of course this [organization] has thereby like...*

*and we move forward and live in a project mode (U: mmm).*

*And of course, I've done my own software purchasing project during this whole period of time (U: mmm).*

*And, and it's actually the achievement that I've had at work during this time.*

*So, I've started and completed a project.*

Henry had managed a subproject that was part of a bigger project. The project had been carried out within the target schedule: however, Henry was not satisfied with his output. "We manage to reach the formal goals just within the limits (*juuri ja juuri rimaa hipoen*), but there were no great shakes for the quality (*ei laadussa kehumista*)."<sup>1</sup> Despite his dissatisfaction, he thought afterwards that the experience was good, and he was happy that he had done it. I could clearly hear the dilemma within Henry's telling and I asked him, "have you had such a moment when you were thinking that it was not worth of changing to project manager's role, that it will not work out?" The following narrative articulated why the new job included a doubt that it would be a success.

*Orientation:*

*01 U: Sounded like (laughs) the whole duration of the project [was a moment like that]?*

*02 Henry: Well, not really the whole duration of the project*

*Action:*

*04 On one hand, the dead lines we had, they became tighter for reasons that were independent from what I was doing (U: yes).*

*05 And on the other hand, I continued doing the job at my own pace, (p) in one sense, without becoming aware of the fact.*

*Evaluation:*

*06 That... that wasn't the right approach (U: right).*

*07 I should have kept, you know, much more contact with the overall project [that my project was part of] (U: yes).*

*Action:*

*10 Project schedule become tighter and, and I was badly informed about it.*

*12 I'm not used to work super fast (U: mmm),*

*13 on the contrary, you know, I like to collect data and, and make decisions after (U: yes).*

*14 So, you know, this became a sort of a conflict.*

*Evaluation:*

*15 That was during a couple of months, let's say [during two months] (U: yes) fairly unbearable.*

*Resolution:*

*17 U: As it were, you changed your way of behaving in some way?*

*18 Henry: Well, actually I have to say th-that I was forced, forced to (pakon edessä).*



- 19 *[I] had to come to a fast decision in a very short time, in time.*  
 20 *[Decision], which I did not do my self*  
 21 *but this project, you know, was paid attention to*  
 22 *and this aid came, in a way, quite naturally (U: mmm) from elsewhere*  
*(U: mmm, mmm), or... or from this wider [project] context, you know*

*Evaluation:*

- 24 *I don't think this is any... any... such an extraordinary situation (U: mmm),*  
 26 *things like that happen all the time actually.*  
 27 *But in a principle, project management shouldn't be such a fire extinguish-*  
*ing (palokuntameininkiä) like this project was.*  
 29 *Instead, it should go systematically and, and con[siderately] for the most*  
*part:*  
 30 *In a way that there are considerate decisions [and] well informed parties*  
*[and] things like that (U: aaa).*  
 31 *It should go precisely according to the formula 'A1'*

The interview question introduced into the theme of the story: there was a doubt that it would be worthwhile to move to a new role and that it would lead to desirable results. Transition was involuntary. There were “no any other alternatives,” and therefore a shadow of doubt followed the process. Henry did not tell what had made him unsure about his capabilities for success. He simply stated that he had survived because he knew that “the situation had only a given duration.”

The storyline opens up slowly through little episodes. In the first and second episodes (action), Henry told how things arrived in conflict. He had started to lead the project and worked at his own pace without communicating enough with customers' of the project (the main project to which Henry's project belonged). Customers' schedule became tighter, but Henry was not aware of the change, and therefore there were inconsistent expectations. In the third episode (resolution), Henry told how the conflict was solved. The project gained external support and Henry was forced to change his way of working.

In the first episode, Henry evaluated action from the project management point of view – his own action was wrong (lines 6–7). In the second episode, he evaluated action based on his personal perspective and feelings (line 15) – situation was unbearable. In the third episode he provided first neutralizing evaluation (line 26), but continued with a moral one (line 27). The evaluation included an ideal story about how things should go in a good project (lines 28–31), and such an ideal was in contrast with how things actually went in Henry's project. Henry kept working individually and within a project even though he should have kept in touch with the network of actors, especially with the customers. His action was evaluated as a “faulty” one. Right after the story, Henry provided another perspective: He estimated that with his “slow-paced decision making and data collection” he provided some “realism” to the overall project. Therefore, his style of working had some positive contributions as well. Thanks to him, “project costs stayed remarkably low [and] no big [and unnecessary] commitments were done for years ahead.”

So, the point of the narrative was not (only) to criticize his own achievements. Instead, the narrative set against each other Henry's way of working and the project's



way of working: his own pace against tight schedules; slow consideration against speed; independence against intensive communication; and decision-making after data collection against judgment-on-the-fly. Despite of the tension and conflict, Henry evaluates his own operational mode as the correct one in ideal conditions. If projects went as they should (systematically, considerably, and according to a scheme), Henry could work as he prefers (taking systematic, considered and well-informed steps). The narrative is organized according to a contrast between controllable and uncontrollable, sure and unsure, successful and unsuccessful.

Henry resolves the conflict by withdrawing emotionally from the situation. He is acting in a way that the project expects him to act, even though he does not like it. He refuses to “draw conclusions at a moment.” He does not do anything to remove or solve the conflict. Instead, he does not think about the conflict at all. He “separates work from leisure time,” and focuses on part-time studies, leisure, and all the other things. “Summer vacation comes soon, and this cannot continue forever (laughs).” “The endeavor to actively forget” the case is supported by saying, finally, that the contradiction was only inside his head; “It was about bad feelings that were not necessarily unsatisfactory facts.” After all, the project did reach its goals in time and satisfied its formal criteria for success. Nevertheless, the dilemma between prior expertise (to know for sure, to be able to make deliberate decisions) and expertise needed in project management (to act fast, to make things happen) does not disappear, and it bothers Henry even though he does not want to think about it.

*Maybe I shouldn't think like that, [that I failed].*

*Maybe my thinking is bounded to that old [model] where one is doing one thing and another is doing another (U: yes).*

*Maybe it's just right to think that project is done... done in a team (U: yes).*

*And that there can be moments when one is lacking behind and others do help that person (U: mmm).*

*And that can be a very natural part of that project.*

So, in his reflections Henry made the real dilemma of role transition explicit: “I am, in this emphasizing of expertise, maybe too closely engaged with my own old [expert role...]. Such expertise [...] cannot work as it used to work.” Henry knew that his future job must be related to projects in one way or another. He explained that he is actually “thinking all the time that maybe [his] illusions are actually wrong. There may not be such clear expertise tasks, or some technical [expertise], that would not be connected to some project.” Even though Henry had started to doubt his own point of view, he was still in between. He had learned to interpret things from several perspectives, but he hesitated (“maybe”) and was not ready to transform completely his own perspective. After all, it had been very meaningful for Henry that, instead of being just a “passive implementer,” he had been an “actor [and] had carried the responsibility” to complete project tasks and deliver specified results on schedule.

## 5.9. Surviving in Confusion

Kati had received a Master of Science degree at the end of 1990s. She had worked with mathematical modeling, system reliability, usability and statistics. She was good at searching for information and had a desire to work with so called knowledge management. She wanted to analyze digital data, but each promising job she had had, had not allowed her to really do that. During the study her role changed involuntarily, due to organizational restructuring, and toward concept design instead of data analyzing. Therefore, transition made no sense to her. Moreover, her targets kept shifting, she had no guidance and support, and nobody seemed to know what her new role was supposed to be. Her daily working mode turned to “survival” rather than expertise.

After her graduation, Kati started to seek for a job (see appendix 4). She soon realized that even though she had intellectual know-how, transition to work did not happen easily. She looked for “specific kinds of open vacancies,” mostly analyst jobs. She stayed at the university lab until she found a “dream job” at the current company, six months after her graduation. She started working, but her job did not meet her expectations. She could not do the analyzing job she wanted. Instead she did application design and programming. Nevertheless, those kinds of tasks were not relevant for her personal ambition and she started to look for a new job. She again found an “absolutely wonderful job.” After working for a while she was disappointed again for the same reason. Once again the “original job description was more about analyzing data than the real job was.”

Kati’s career was driven by the desire to do the right kind of a job. She wanted to find work that would fit her personal competence. Furthermore, she emphasized the importance of career progression, from the beginning of her narrative. She did it first by saying that her career “is not a glorious career *yet*.” She stressed it again when she justified why she did not want to stay in the university research lab.

*For me it was important that I could see a sort of career path [ahead of me], you know, longer than two years.*

*In other words, in the [university] lab there’s a very clear development path: So, you work there as a researcher and then you do a licentiate thesis and then you do a doctorate thesis.*

*Nevertheless, it wasn’t clear for me that what the added value of that process is, if that’s the end point.*

When I asked Kati to illustrate her career she drew a puzzle consisting of pieces of competence. She wanted to have a “set of tools” that she could use flexibly in different situations. “Then it is essential that my competencies are this kind of pieces that I can combine, and that I have plenty of them.” Kati repeated that she wanted progress, “different future options, [...] path of possibilities, [...] and] no any wall in front of [her].” Moreover, she highlighted that her expertise was a tool

enabling such progress. Kati wanted always to have “certain pieces of competence to combine [and apply] to new challenges.” She tried to build competence that would flexibly adapt to the changing work environment.

*[At work the most important thing] is that I can show my competencies.  
[And] that other people appreciate me.  
[I want to...] find a work that I'm able to do (U: mmm).  
And that I can feel that I'm succeeding (U: yes).  
And [I want] that it all happens so that other people can see it,  
and as a consequence, hopefully respects me.*

Expertise was a very important – even the most important – source of work motivation for Kati. That is why she was actively seeking a job where she could perform as an expert. She wanted to have a position where she could have the possibility to be good. Such a position would provide both the intrinsic feeling of “being successful” and external “respect [and] appreciation.” So, when I asked “what is the thing you want to keep despite of all other changes?” her answer was “professional competence.” It would be “catastrophic [and] the most difficult situation” to work without competence. “Aah! It would be really unbearable situation if I would be in a job where I could not utilize any of my competence areas or where the job demands would be too high for me.” So, learning was something Kati preferred to do before starting a new job, because she did not want to be in a position that she could not manage. Formal education and reading documents and websites were the most evident sources of learning.

Kati’s narrative evolved in an up-and-down pattern. Such a form illustrated a battlefield between her personal expectations and external reality. She studied, graduated, tried to find a fulfilling job, failed and started to look for a job again. She tried to match her competence and the work requirements. The conflict between expectations and reality was enforced by linguistic device; when things went alright Kati used an active mode of narrating and presented herself as an actor. But when things went wrong, she used a more passive mode of narrating (see appendix 4). According to Kati’s storyline pattern, role transition was a way to find a better match or to restore a lost balance between her competence and her job.

A year before the study started, she tried once again to apply for a new job, but something unexpected happened. The job application process failed, and instead, her whole team was moved to a new organization. After the team was moved, management announced that everybody in the team had to find a new position or they would lose their jobs.

*We had a sort of mourning or anger period during two months.  
Bloody hell, we wanted to analyze data (U: yes)  
and [this new organization] is not a place to analyze data!  
And “are you [in the management] really thinking that we have only done  
these application development projects?!”*

Kati moved, at the beginning of the study, to a new position that she presented in a contradictory way. The job was at once the job she wanted and the job that she was forced to take. She was still interested to do the job she was asked in doing even though she criticized the way the transition happened.

*[After the reorganization] a position that I'd applied for last fall was, [...] reopened (U: yes). And then my boss started to negotiate with the supervisor of this new place whether we could be moved there.*

*That whether there could be some convenient jobs for us (U: mmm).*

*And those convenient – convenient in parenthesis – jobs were found (laughs).*

Kati got a bigger responsibility area, which included some of her old tasks and some new tasks. She felt that she did not have the competence needed. Therefore, transition did not improve the match between what she knew and what she was supposed to know. As a result, the role transition suddenly represented the opposite of what Kati had tried to do in her career. She had tried to find a place where she could demonstrate her expertise, but she was now – without a choice – in a place where she did not know what was expected from her, she did not have a proper theory to apply, or enough knowledge to guide her actions. Moreover, she had a feeling that nobody in the new team knew what they were supposed to do. To express her experiences she used a metaphor of “building a house without knowing the fundamentals of construction engineering.”

*We're building simultaneously the roof and the foundations of the building. There you came (laughs) to the construction site.*

*And you see that something in the house is very wrong.*

*And the question is not that there wouldn't be enough work to do.*

*But if you don't manage the theory of construction design, then you don't know what the most valuable thing to do is at the moment.*

As a consequence, she had to gain new competence to manage growing responsibilities. She had a “lot of things that came now as new ones, so [she] had to - in one way or the other - to learn them.” Moreover, she needed to get the big picture and understand how to apply her skills in the new situation. “I have competence of the small pieces, and now it is surprisingly difficult to combine them into one big entity.” So, Kati wanted to learn her new role, but alternatively she was thinking of changing her job again. The experienced “mismatch” and anger for the non-voluntary transition impacted her motivation to learn. She constantly reminded herself that she “must not stay in this situation [...] if something very unpleasant happens. [There's] always, always freedom to leave the job.”

After being eight months in her new job, Kati still had the feeling that she had “not done any special concept design, just being part of projects.” Because work “roles were not very clear”, it was hard to “understand (sights) whether [she] had done concept modeling or just work in general.” Yet, Kati could not tell with certainty in what she was supposed to excel. Her job was just “strange stumbling around” and she did not particularly like it. Kati started the last interview by say-

ing that “what was confusing then [in the beginning of the study], was even more chaotic today.”

*Orientation:*

02 *For example, last week we had a meeting where*

*Action:*

03 *another team [from our organization] presented us that:*

04 *“You can’t make progress in your project.”*

05 *I mean, me and my colleague from the same project,*

06 *“You can’t move to the next milestone before you have a kind of information model ready.”*

07 *We are both like: “We don’t know how to do such a thing.*

08 *We have no training to do it.”*

*Resolution:*

15 *Then I’m coming out of there.*

16 *I’m like: “Well, once again we need to learn that kind of [a new] stuff.*

17 *Well, that’s nice.”*

*Evaluation:*

18 *I had nothing against it,*

19 *if somebody would have given me a good information package*

20 *and would have come and helped a little.*

21 *Like [telling us]: “Go to that direction!”*

*Orientation:*

22 *But, no. Then the next morning I discuss[ed] again with [another colleague].*

*Action:*

24 *So, she was like: “No, no, no, that has never been the purpose...*

27 *technical concepts come from elsewhere (U: mmm).”*

*Resolution:*

28 *I was just like: “Well, I’ve never seen anyone making only technical concepts in any project (U: yes).”*

*Coda:*

33 *[So, if ] I’ve had some idea [in the beginning of this transition] of what I need to learn*

34 *in order to survive in this job (laughs).*

35 *So, now I don’t know so much anymore.*

This story describes a situation where the person is expected to do something about which she has no prior experience. She does not have the competence needed, but she is ready to learn (line 18). However, competence development seems impossible, due to the missing knowledge, support, and direction (lines 19–21). The second episode emphasizes the point of the first one – in the end it is not even certain whether there is a need to learn new modeling competence (lines 24, 27). However, it is very probable, because in the organization there is no such competence and customers expect concept design to include technical concepts (line 28).

Kati emphasized that the problem was “not that people were [totally] incompetent.” During the reorganization “people [in her team] were allocated to concept designer’s roles that had something to do with their previous expertise,” but nobody showed examples of how they were supposed to apply such expertise in concept design. So, Kati and her colleagues started their new jobs, but they found out half a year later that their models “should have had this and should have had that, and you should have thought this, and you should have done this like this and that like that.” Kati had a job she could not manage and had not a clue what she was supposed to do in order to learn to manage it.

Kati talked about three projects that she had been involved with. The first project followed her from her previous job. She used to be a second project manager in that project, but then, because she got the concept design responsibility, she could not continue in that role. The other project manager was inexperienced, and, even though he tried his best, the project was badly delayed. The second project was in Kati’s new area of responsibility; therefore, she should have steered it, but could not. The summer trainee, who was the only person working on the project, asked Kati’s advice at the very beginning of the project, but then presented the completed project to the customer without her review. Implemented features did not comply with the official concept design, but Kati could do nothing about it. The third project did not get an official project status (no independent budget), though Kati worked on it full-time and would have liked it to be a real project. In conclusion, Kati had responsibilities, but no rights to make decisions. Things either happened without her permission or without a procedure that she preferred. Moreover, she could not trust her manager and could not plan her future tasks (see appendix 5).

Throughout the narrative, Kati talked about the divergence between what she thinks is right and the way things are done in her work. Kati’s definition of expertise is to know how things should be done and act according to commonly agreed procedures. That is, people should gain the needed knowledge and then to apply it to practice. Such expertise requires that there is knowledge available and that people follow the common guidelines in applying it. Nevertheless, Kati’s role transition was an example of how such expertise was impossible to gain. In an unstable environment, people become cynical; nobody cares or carries responsibility anymore. In such a situation, expertise development is impossible, because there is no agreed way of doing things and any training or study-material (any knowledge) available.

*Orientation:*

*In that meeting last Thursday [refers to the previous story], you know,*

*Action:*

*I indeed said something like:*

*“we are going to have a wild training rumba [a lot of people need training].”*

*And then the one simply stated that:*

*“No, wait a minute. Others like to read materials by themselves and some, you know, like it like that.”*



*Evaluation:*

*But [I say] what if there's no material [available]!*

Kati could not find a solution to her dilemma. Due to continuous instability and negative emotions that had no place to be expressed, Kati was not yet ready to reflect on her thoughts and feelings. She had no people to discuss her concerns with and no way to negotiate her role and position. The situation kept her in a survival mode, and prohibited further learning. She could not develop a wider and more advanced frame of reference to base her expertise on. To be sure, she knew that if she would have “moved from one role to another in a static environment [... and if] people around her would have had more experience,” her experience would have been very different. She understood that she “could not know how to do things, because common agreement about how to do things did not exist.”

*People around you change.*

*[Their] roles transform.*

*[And as a consequence,] if you cannot identify your role (laughs)*

*and your role changes,*

*nobody cares anymore.*

### **5.10. Why it is Important to Hear these Narratives?**

Changing circumstances did not trigger learning in any easy and simple way. Participants nevertheless used similar simplistic ways of talking about their learning at work. The narrative examples show that when expertise was interpreted anew in changing work conditions, participants actually adopted a new language to talk about themselves as “life-long learners” and “dynamic” experts. Moreover, they conceded that they needed to develop, become better, and carry the responsibility for their own progress. Participants were using the developmental HRD vocabulary to match their experiences with prevalent organizational and managerial discourse. They translated their own professional history into terms of acquisition and development of expertise. Participants wanted good job opportunities and career success, or at least to keep their jobs, and they got along with prevailing discourse.

But were these stories only about limitless growth, professional advancement, finding of creative solutions, and catching of opportunities? On one hand, Max, Kati and Henry mentioned that even after less than one year in a job their manager had offered them new roles. On the other hand, Sara, Anne and Niko were talking about postponed assignments to their new positions, and about unpleasant waiting time, including feelings of powerlessness. Sara had finally started in her new responsibilities in the beginning of the study, but Anne was never officially appointed to a new job. Rami had started in a new assignment, but his official promotion, upgrading of salary and job title, were held back without logical explanation. Others also mentioned that their salary and benefits were not updated even if they were given larger areas of responsibility and more work, due to role transitions.

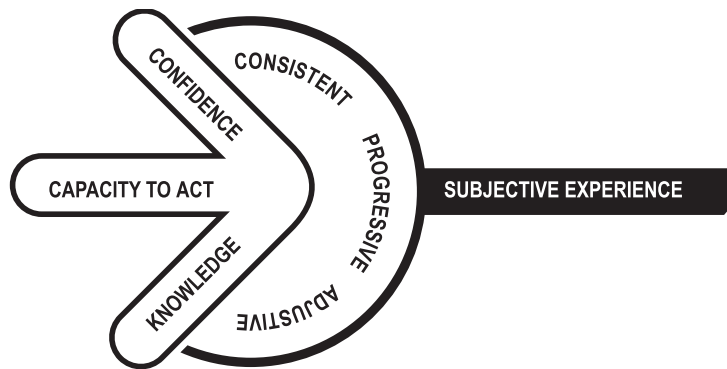
Henry and Sara had clearly had situations where their prior responsibilities were outsourced and they were forced to find new jobs. Timo also talked about people close to him who were outsourced and, therefore, he wanted to change his job before he was moved against his will. The definition of standard competence facilitated the aim to segregate one type of IT jobs and to move that technology or service to another company. But, on second thought, those who stayed within the in-house IT organization told in their narratives, how professional boundaries were crossed and how they had difficulties to define clear limits for their own job responsibilities. “Learning the big picture” was more important than being a member of any specific professional community.

Moreover, anxiety about learning new things, increasing time pressures, and result expectations were recurring themes in narratives. Fast changing collegial and customer relations were problematic. Nonetheless, organizational restructuring and decreasing job security caused stress. Working long hours and a lack of sleep was kind of a normal condition. Half of the participants had sick-leaves during the transition (which they did not necessarily relate to the job changes). Turbulence was constantly present and participants had to live with it.



## 6. Integrating Transition into the Scripts of Expertise

I have demonstrated by nine individual narratives how transition was experienced, whilst showing how scripts and patterns of expertise operated in renewal. Scripts of expertise were organizing narratives about having and displaying special know-how, derived from training and experience. In other words, participants told things as prepared by cultural models and storylines. They narrated things that were appropriate for acquisition of expertise. They applied the rhetoric of learning and development, adjusted to contextual requirements, and in a way, made personal experiences consistent with the dominant expertise discourses (see model 4).



Model 4: Subjective Experience of Having Expertise

In some cases, transition interrupted and challenged prior expertise scripts. Passage from one job to another included feelings of uncertainty and moments of not knowing what to do. Those feelings were contrary to experiences of having expertise. Moreover, transitions were difficult to comprehend if they were not meaningful in relation to one's past and compatible with one's expected future (Christensen & Johnston, 2003). The value of transition was evaluated by the extent to which it contributed (positively or negatively) to the career narrative (p. 153). The challenge was to interpret transitions in a way that they became a meaningful part of the expertise acquisition.

Participants used different integrative patterns to give meaning to their changing occupational roles. Recognition of such integrative patterns was a key for understanding how learning settings were constructed in transition. In short, transition experiences were positive and joyful for those participants who were able to explain transition to a new occupational role as enhancing their expertise. On the contrary, the experiences were negative and difficult if the role transition was interpreted as an interruption and a threat to one's expertise.

In-depth narrative analysis also showed that participants negotiated with the dominant HRD discourse and provided alternative interpretations for learning at work. Some of them even stated that maybe the biggest thing they learned was "not to trust anybody" or that "I'm change-resistant."

## 6.1. Expertise is Progressive

All participants applied the “rhetoric of learning and development.” They talked about transitions in an accepted manner. Continuous change was not expressed as a negative thing. It provided possibilities to grow, to go forward, and to get something better. In other words, transition itself was not criticized. Only the transitions that did not provide opportunities for learning (for example due to unclear transition schedules, non-defined responsibilities, and lack of induction) were criticized.

Nevertheless, transition was an interruption, in one way or the other, to the previous expertise. All transitions were triggered by the situation where being an expert was no longer possible without a change. Work demanded new skills (risk of professional obsolescence) or, on the contrary, offered only routine tasks without any learning possibilities (risk of non-expertise). For example, Rami and Timo expressed that they did not want to be in a situation where nobody needed them anymore. Transition was seen as a necessity, because the value of their jobs diminished (even if they had competence) and did not provide expert status anymore, in the professional network. Rami recounted the following episode from his early career, to illustrate the point.

*Orientation:*

*When at the time,*

*I was there as [a mechanic] trainee.*

*There were these very good professionals who were really good with these (p) systems.*

*Action:*

*But then, all of a sudden, nobody needed them anymore (U: yes, yes).*

*Evaluation:*

*Well, I don't want to be part of that track.*

*(Rami, Interview)*

Even if participants accepted transitions, they brought continuity into their settings by referring to their previous jobs' substance, mode of operation, or their personal abilities. According to social expectations, it was important to find something that provided coherence and carried over the thread of losing expertise in transition. Without the sense of continuity, role transition narratives were hindered by feelings of loss, uncertainty, and stress. For example, Henry had difficulty narrating his transition experiences, and therefore stated first that “nothing happened.”

Learning in role transition required not only acquisition of new skills and knowledge, but also readjustment of narrative storylines. Narratives that included professional past, present and future in a meaningful whole had a key function in transition. The goal was to find a meaningful connection between the prior role and the new one. The new role was not starting from scratch, but continued, expanded, and developed prior expertise. Successful transition was plotted in a way that the person changing a job role overcame situational hurdles and increased

expertise. However, not all transitions fit to the pre-modeled scripts and patterns. Conflicting dilemmas arose and demanded more than just fitting personal experiences to a culturally available frame. A conflict between the ideal (script of expertise) and the current situation may have prevented learning altogether, or triggered questioning of taken-for-granted scripts, for understanding expertise.

Cultural metaphors<sup>47</sup> helped in narrative re-adjustment. Conventional metaphors connected the personal and unique to common cultural experience, and evaluated life representations in narratives. Accordingly, life experiences were structured as cyclic (morning and evening, spring and fall), temporal continuity (beginning and end, journey), or a collage of distinct events (patchwork, weaving) (Vilkkö, 1997). Metaphors in transition narratives were not necessarily literal expressions, but embedded into narrative patterns. Personal experiences were organized to confirm professional and organizational scripts of expertise. Metaphoric patterns created coherence by explaining current transition as part of having and gaining expertise.

### *A Wavy Pattern (aaltoileva kaava)*

Kati and Henry used a wavy pattern to integrate transition with expertise in their narrative storylines. They focused a lot on the process of looking for a job, getting a job, maturing in the job, and finally looking for another job. They did not talk much about how it was to work in any particular job. Instead, they emphasized the importance of earning a professional or academic diploma prior to work, as they have done. Education was an investment that was paid back in terms of a good job. Expertise was primarily gained through education. Job selection was done according to pre-defined criteria of what the person was educated for and, therefore, eager to work for.

According to the wavy pattern, role transition was a way to find a better match between personal abilities and job requirements. The crest of a wave in a career narrative was when education, personal competence, and job requirements were in balance. The trough of a wave was when a person and his or her job were “mismatched.” Both Kati and Henry had experienced changes in their working environment, and, as a result, their personal know-how was not recognized anymore. In other words, they did not have the “core competence” needed in the new business environment. In that case, transition was a way to move to a more satisfying job and re-balance the situation.

In practice, Kati’s and Henry’s new jobs did not really match with their education and expectations. New jobs, rather, set alternative qualification requirements compared to what they had. According to the wavy pattern, both interpreted such “surprises” negatively – the jobs were not what they should have been. The natural conclusion was, then, to look for another, better-matching job. Alternatively, a

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<sup>47</sup> Metaphors of “life cycle, life course, and life events” are theoretical constructions of life in social science, but they are also commonly used in life stories (Vilkkö, 1997).



less obvious conclusion would have been to update competence to match the “non-matching” job. Instead of just gaining new skills, Kati and Henry were in need of changing their narrative patterns and scripts to make sense of expertise in a new way.

### *A Cumulative Pattern (karttuva kaava)*

Sara and Rami used a cumulative pattern to integrate transition with expertise in their narratives. They talked much about the character of their work (“I did this and it was like that”) and elaborated stories with rich details. They did not separate their experiences sharply, based on different employers or jobs (c.f., the wavy pattern). Instead, they grouped together similar kinds of tasks in different places. Job seeking was not a major theme in their narratives; rather, they simply moved to their new jobs. Furthermore, they articulated that reasons for transition were not in the external environment, but more in their continuous will to gain new knowledge and skills. Even if they did change jobs, due to family reasons or fear of unemployment, they expressed transitions as their own choice to get better learning opportunities. Both Sara and Rami had rich working experiences and they have gained professional degrees alongside full-time or part-time employment.

According to the cumulative pattern, role transition was a way to learn more and gain personally motivating expertise. The direction was toward in-depth understanding. A new job was not meaningful, per se; the transition was recognized only if it included new learning. Moving to the same kind of a job in another company or organization was not a real “transition” because it was not a cumulative new layer in their expertise. In that way, this pattern framed transitional moves differently than other narrative patterns.

Sara and Rami were both very goal-oriented. However, new jobs did not always allow personal and professional development. They rather had to operate based on fixed rules and regulations and to apply standard tools and methods. According to the cumulative pattern, Sara and Rami interpreted such limitations negatively, because routine jobs did not allow professional learning according to personal interests. The natural conclusion was to re-negotiate job descriptions and expand their own responsibility area. Another, less-obvious alternative was to alter personal interests to match knowledge and skills that were required in a new job. That required updates in the narrative storyline and scripts of expertise.

### *A Spiral Pattern (kierteinen kaava)*

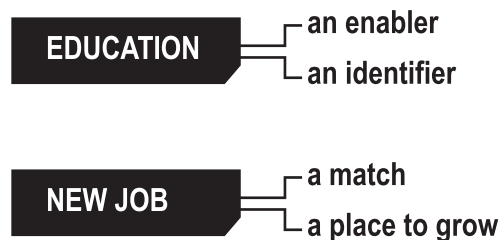
Laura, Anne, Timo, Niko and Max used a spiral pattern to integrate transition with expertise. They defined the work itself as their most important “teacher.” Education – though each of them had a professional degree – was not the main source of the professional skills they used in their current jobs. They have learned their field of work by exploring and by doing different, interrelated tasks. Their careers have not evolved according to any pre-determined plans; rather, they have had good opportunities offered to them. Moreover, all of them used a relational way to define their expertise. Networks, contacts, and a way to “fit the team” were important for them. They often used plural “we” instead of “I” when talking about their work.

According to the spiral pattern, a role transition was a way to gain better understanding, learn more about the field of work, and get wider perspective. Transitions happened by negotiating and re-defining the role within the field of work. Promotions were possible, but they were not defined in linear and hierarchical terms, such as “uphill” or “new layer.” Transition meant, above all, a new position in professional networks.

Nevertheless, new jobs did not necessarily improve the position and, in some cases, new roles were not officially recognized in the organization. According to the spiral pattern, Laura, Anne, Timo, Niko and Max negatively interpreted such conflicting expectations about their status. They simply could not do their jobs! Without formal recognition of their expertise, other people could not trust them, invite them to negotiations or follow their recommendations and requirements. The natural conclusion was to learn more about the external expectations, follow role models, and make agreements with counterparts on what the role should be.

Another, less-obvious alternative was to reflect upon the new role and think out-of-the-box. The challenge was to do things differently in order to gain respect and better response from others. That required not fitting to the ways people have always been used to doing things, but pro-active influencing of relationships and actions. Again, this latter choice required updates in the narrative storyline and in the way expertise was understood.

To conclude, the sources of expertise had different meanings, depending on which storyline patterns they were embedded in (see model 5). Education provided an opportunity to identify with professional expertise or an opportunity to enter a field of work. A new job was defined as a proper match between personal competence and work requirements, or as a place to grow and gain competence.

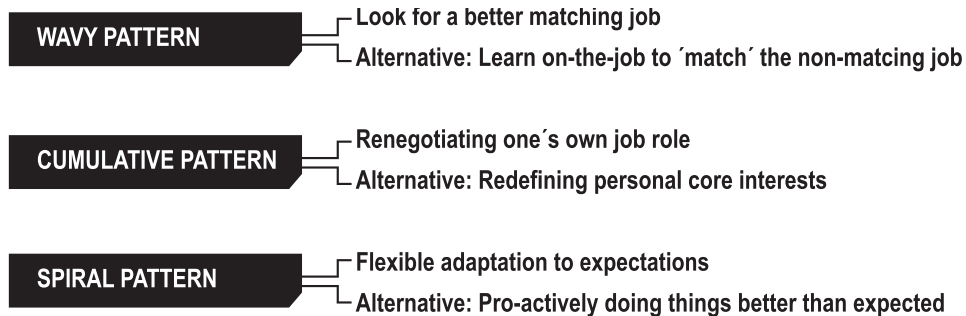


Model 5: Meaning of Different Sources of Expertise.

Narrative patterns provided ways to integrate transitions into the script of continuously expanding and progressive expertise (see model 6). According to different narrative patterns, participants expected that transitions would bring them one or two of the following:

- better match between work and competence (the wavy pattern)
- advancement toward personal goals (the cumulative pattern)
- a new and enlarged perspective (the spiral pattern)

If personal experiences corresponded with the expectations, contradictions during the role transition were experienced as temporary, external, and as “somebody else’s fault.” A much bigger learning challenge was to alter personal expectations and fit one’s own narrative to the changing circumstances.



Model 6: Narrative Patterns and Different Expectations in Transition

It is possible to speculate that the wavy pattern best fits narratives within stable, traditional organizations; the spiral pattern within perpetually changing organizations; and the cumulative pattern within inter-organizational settings. However, *the compatibility of the external circumstances in role transition, with personal expectations (the narrative pattern), is essential for understanding transition experiences.*

## 6.2. Expertise is Adjustive

Participants could name a lot of things that were new and that they needed to learn, even if they changed their jobs within the organization. Learning goals were practice-oriented and defined with everyday language of work. The company provided templates and guidelines to do explicit and written development plans. The official HRD practice expected employees to form specific development goals, select strategies for achieving them, and define criteria to measure outcomes (Davies, 2003). However, most participants did not make any references to written developmental plans (if they had any). None of the participants denied the importance of keeping up-to-date, but they rarely made their learning goals explicit. Information technology professionals constantly have to learn skills that “expire” quickly and, therefore, often learn as they encounter problems that demand new skills (Tsai, Compeau, & Haggerty, 2004).

Learning goals were partly related to technical know-how (e.g., software languages, modeling tools, reporting tools, and system configuration), but more than that, they were related to process know-how. New ways of operating were needed in the new role, even if the substance of work remained the same. The process-oriented skills that were most often mentioned were pro-active planning, target orientation, requirement specification, and documentation. According to Winter

(1988), professionals produce knowledge almost entirely for practical purposes – new ideas are created because some problems in the delivery of services need attention, not because ideas themselves are “interesting.”

In addition to technical and process skills, personal qualities, or “soft skills,” were also defined as learning targets. New roles required assertiveness, getting along with demanding people, persuasiveness, and coaching skills. Consequently, the prevailing expertise discourses enforced a certain mind-set. The only acceptable “voice” was cheerful, positive, and supportive. Similar to the findings of Howell, Carter & Schied (2002), I found that those who did not express these attitudes were seen as deficient, not team players, uncooperative, and unwilling to accept decision-making responsibilities.

Construction of learning goals was related to a familiarity of upcoming tasks. When, for example, Niko and Sara already knew something about their new jobs, specific learning goals were defined and expressed in a “how-I-learn-to-do” format. In general, participants could define targets for their own learning if they knew role models who (had) occupied similar jobs, or if they had had discussions with their new boss and participated in defining their new roles. Additionally, Max expressed that when his job provided exciting and clearly-defined goals for learning, (e.g., “organize this for the next week”), his learning motivation was higher, and learning was easier.

On the other hand, when Henry did not have enough information and pre-understanding about his new role, his learning targets were less accurate. He constructed learning targets around his personality rather than the actual work. Goals were expressed in terms of “who I will become,” rather than, “how I will learn the job.” Learning the new role was not only framed as a technical or methodical challenge, but also as a personal challenge. So, the more distant the new role was from previous experiences and know-how, the more the experience of adjusting to the new role shaped the identity. As Weick (1995) points out, sense-making of ongoing happenings includes the question of what implications these events have for who I will become.

Training was mentioned as a good first step. However, it was not thought as sufficient for learning a new role. There was (1) no time to participate in training due to a workload and tight schedules, (2) no course that could teach the specific technical environment that needs to be learned and/or (3) no motivation to participate in courses whose usefulness was not guaranteed. The value of courses was approached similarly whether they were computer-based or face-to-face courses. Certification or a professional diploma was deemed a requirement for successful role transition, in cases where role transition was part of a long-term career perspective.

Otherwise, the learning settings were constructed inside the actual work place. The main way of learning was to do the actual job and find out what was needed, and how the things were working (trial and error), or to work together with senior colleagues (tutoring or mentoring) and advance things in conjunctions with others (co-development). Action-oriented learning was combined with reflection and modeling; to build a big picture out of small pieces, apply common sense in new settings, and find out if somebody had already created a solution that worked.

Participants, despite their personal preferences, learned both alone and in communities. Self-study included reading of books, surfing in the internet, and borrowing course handouts from colleagues who had participated in interesting courses. Team learning included organizing briefings where somebody from the team (or from outside) presented actual topics and solving problems or figuring out what is going on in different domains together. Self-study often continued after working hours. Male participants, in particular, mentioned that their hobby was to play with the computer, learn programming, and read professional magazines at home.

Learning a new role was not, of course, only about assimilating what others “teach” or to respond to what others expect. Nor was it about following a step-by-step learning process. Instead, learning was more about creating new status and relationships and, in many cases, a new institutional position that did not exist previously in the organization (or in any organization). Furthermore, even if learning settings included similar “what” and “how” elements, some participants had a positive learning experience and others, on the contrary, went through a painful experience.

The most important resources for learning were time and stability of working settings. Paradoxically, they were also the resources most lacking. Learning a new role took time, even if it was similar to a prior job. Kati expressed that her new role would have been easier to learn if the organization had established clear responsibilities and defined of what kind of tasks her role was comprised. Moreover, transition would have been a more enjoyable experience if those who worked in relation to that particular new role (supervisor and team members) had had experience and had provided managerial and collegial support.

Despite the fact that participants moved to different kinds of jobs, they emphasized similar process skills and personal qualities as their learning goals. For example, moving toward project mode, and having a flexible job description, growing personal responsibilities, and a need to consider economical aspects of technical development were mentioned in most cases. Therefore, construction of learning settings in transition was not only about setting goals for learning particular tasks, but also for learning the right way of displaying know-how. Process skills also provided continuity and a sense of progress in the transition.

Learning goals reflect changes in the overall organizational culture. As Davies (2003) says in his criticism of New Managerialism, employees are asked to conduct multiple forms of self-surveillance and correction. In a way, the value of expertise is tied to the capacity to do that as well as to the relevance of professional knowledge and skills. Learning goals, therefore, are not individually set goals, but the goals of the institution and government (p. 97). The renewal of expertise is driven by organizational performance needs, and, therefore, human learning is subjugated to organizational productivity (Fenwick, 2004). Part of learning new skills is to become the right kind of a worker – to be flexible, docile and adjustable (Howell, Carter & Schied, 2002).

As Schied, Carter, Preston, & Howell (1998) criticize, learning at changing working environments is more about adaptability than skills, and new attitudes toward jobs are just concealed in the language of skills. As part of development goal-setting, nobody questions the assumption that employees’ personal objec-

tives, visions, and viewpoints must be aligned with management strategy. As Howell, Carter, & Schied (2002) note, nobody seems to doubt the ethicality of defining learning goals for purposes of organizational efficiency, productivity and maximization of profit.

### **6.3. Expertise is Consistent with Dominant Discourse**

Specific expertise is defined case-by-case depending on different jobs, different technical application or other technical specialization areas, and different customers. However, the meta-narrative of how expertise is gained via professional education and experience is ultimately used to justify the position of expertise (Haapakoski, 2002). The dominant discourses of professions, vocational institutions, and human resource development (HRD) define what expertise is and how it is gained and maintained through extensive periods of formal education and through experiencing demanding assignments at work. Such discourse was also present as an organizing principle in career and transition narratives in this study, even if participants used diverse and creative ways to fit their unique experiences to the discursive frame.<sup>48</sup>

Dominant expertise discourse is adopted in the process of acquiring professional expertise and learning new roles in a professional work context. Employees do not only adopt a language to perceive the world according to their profession, but also a language to represent expertise in their field of specialization. Moreover, they learn to position themselves as experts by using such language. Social categorization – like expertise versus non-expertise – is constructed in discourse and thus it can only be viewed as discourse (Pälli, 2003). Therefore, self-categorization in a professional context is produced and molded in expertise discourse.

The participants in this study also narratively constructed categories of difference and interpreted their own positions as socially appropriate. They told stories about conflicts between themselves and others, and how they struggled against external forces. They persuaded listeners with narrative devices like mood, perspective, or “fake” events (events that did not occur in real life, but could or should have happened). According to Labov (1997), they assigned praise and blame by polarizing people who conformed to social norms and people who violated them (often between themselves and others). Such assignment of praise and blame reflected the narrator’s overall frame of reference within which events were viewed.

The dominant discourse on expertise functioned as an evaluative device in narratives. First of all, much depended on whether the role transition was voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary role transition set up a model story. Consequently, a job role transition was usually narrated as a resolution to the tensions in the previous job. The learning setting was usually framed so that new skills could be built on

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<sup>48</sup> By saying that, I do not claim that there is only one way to be an expert. Even if the general discourse influences the storyline, people have multiple reasons why and how they want to be experts.



the previous expertise. Difficulties in a new role were only a normal part of the process, and usually not the fault of a person. Role transition was experienced as an easy and positive experience. It generated new viewpoints and competence. In such a case, personal experiences fit the dominant narrative on expert career, and thus did not question socially constructed framework.

The dominant discourse was so powerful and convenient that, for example in Sara's and Niko's cases, it was applied to resolve tensions in transition narratives, by turning the involuntary transition back to the socially appreciated framework ("actually I wanted to change"). However, not every involuntary role transition made sense within the dominant frame. The new role may provide new challenges (and even promotion) and could, in some way, have fit the dominant discourse; nevertheless, there was something that jeopardized the constructed expertise. Then learning settings were framed so that new skills could not be built on the previous expertise.

Further learning was triggered by the contradictions embedded in narratives rather than by organizing culturally persuasive storylines. Ambiguity and multiple meanings of experience required critical reflection on expertise and transition. For example, Kati and Henry were not able to use the dominant expert discourse to interpret their experiences and they constructed a non-expert narrative to express their situation. Such a conflict (between the dominant discourse that emplotted their previous expertise and experiences of current role transition) could prevent learning altogether. Things happened at work, but somehow they turned back to zero each time. Nothing seemed to make sense. Such "non-expertise" was often expressed in the form of a hypothetical narrative (Riessman, 1991), which depicted events that did not happen, but should have happened (in reference to the expertise discourse).

Conflict alternatively triggered transformation in the personal construction of expertise in Sara's, Anne's and Max's case. The process itself was not only rational and reflective, but also emotional and social. It was a very empowering experience. Those cases of transformation toward a new interpretative frame of reference shared few things in common. First, the job responsibility was defined from a new perspective. Second, their own activities were defined more pro-actively. Third, confidence was based on understanding the big picture instead of getting the details right. The constituting elements of expertise were justified and demonstrated differently. Moreover, the change was explicitly narrated (e.g., before and after structure).

However, transformation happened mostly on personal construction and did not question the overall discourse on expertise. The resolution of the conflicting dilemma was found within the dominant and powerful definitions of expertise. Both old and new perspectives reflected the same cultural scripts and categories of expertise.

#### **6.4. Questioning the Gender of Technical Expertise**

In general, participants of the study used gender-neutral language as imposed by the expertise discourse of the IT organization (see chapter 4). However, close examination uncovered hierarchical dichotomies (e.g., binary oppositions, Luce Irigaray) that were related to masculine and feminine, like active-passive, nice-tough,



independent-dependent, and rationality-sensibility. Gender was present in personal narratives even if it was not explicitly spoken about.

Female participants used cultural categories and reproduced expectations of femininity (niceness, invisibility, and sentimentality) as they talked about themselves. However, they also narrated episodes that broke down stereotypical dichotomies about gender (Isopahkala & Brunila, 2004). Niceness that Sara recognized in herself was expressed in a story that told about how she got mad, shouted, and made others scared. Caring that Anne exhibited in her team was combined with a story about her independent style of working. Femininity, as a “natural” character of women, was questioned and returned to a culturally acceptable and determined women’s position. As a matter of fact, women did not position themselves straightforwardly into any narrow female pose. They negotiated for their own space within and against masculine practices.

All female participants clearly expressed their authentic interest in technology and in developing themselves as technical specialists. However, Kati and Sara shared experiences of not being selected to assignments even though they had superior experience. Laura’s and Sara’s career ambitions as technical experts were compromised, because they were only offered “less technical” jobs. Female participants had to negotiate between their technical interests and positions “eligible” for women in the field of information technology. For example, even if Anne had technically higher system know-how than her male colleagues, she was transferring her knowledge to newcomers and taking care of the team, instead of being celebrated as a senior expert. Similarly, Laura had an enormous amount of experience with system usage, but instead of using that knowledge in modeling and design, she was coordinating her male colleagues’ tasks.

Women recognized the supportive role addressed to them and discussed the “organizational mother” role more or less directly. Sara referred to herself as being an aunt-like figure, to whom others feel confident to approach for advice, and from whom they are not afraid to ask for help. Laura mentioned that she does not have enough technical expertise and is therefore just “helping boys” in a project. In so doing, women related themselves to technical men. They defined themselves as having user understanding and business know-how that men, the technical experts, needed in their work.

It is difficult to talk about oneself simultaneously as a supporter of men and as an IT expert. It is even more difficult to talk about expertise and about being the object of men’s watchful eye. It is very scary to become aware of the narrow positions that do not leave space for recognition of technical specialization, or any other competence. Acknowledging that one’s own expertise is nullified is a bitter and shameful experience. Women preferred to stay silent and not talk about how much looks matter. Even in the interview settings, there was a tone that this should not be said in public.

*[My ex-boss] did not even actually... he always pass me by without noticing.  
And all the younger and more beautiful (laughs) and like that,  
he surely noticed them.  
And I’ve become aware of this elsewhere in this organization as well.*

*That-that you can easily, you know, it's easier to get forward [in career...].  
The professional competence does not even matter necessarily [...].  
The looks bypass expertise.  
(Interview)*

Female participants tried to negotiate themselves out of this narrowly defined position. One way was to adapt oneself to the dominant masculine culture. Women started behaving and talking as “good guys” (*hyvä jätkä*). Kati said she became more aggressive. Laura mentioned that she is more persistent and thickheaded. Anne felt that she had attained courage to direct others to do things as she wanted. Exhibiting strength and masculinity was a way for women to belong to the crew, or simply to respond to the demands of the job. Nevertheless, the situation fostered contradictory feelings. For example, Kati expressed that she had aggression toward herself, after being too dominant, and she seriously considered leaving the whole IT domain. It was not easy to be a woman who breaks the cultural norms of what a woman is.

On the other hand, female participants in the study were proud to shake up gender dichotomies. Questioning, challenging, and aggressiveness were means to acquire space for creating and maintaining technology as women, without comparison to a male norm. Sara expressed that, as a result of her own hierarchical status increase, she was more aware of inequalities in her organization. After gaining more power through her new job position, she felt more self-assured and satisfied with her job.

The gender of technical expertise is not a simple dichotomy. Men in this study were not automatically interpreted as having expertise in the field. For example, Kati was talking about an “unqualified guy” who she, in her stories, compared with her own competence. Laura and Anne were talking about young men who did not have the experience and understanding they had. In these cases, women constituted expertise by comparing men to women (and not the other way round, as is the culturally dominant way of doing). Incompetence was defined in terms of non-performance and failure to deliver the expected results. Lack of competence was related to the operational and technological environment, rather than to any particular technical skill.

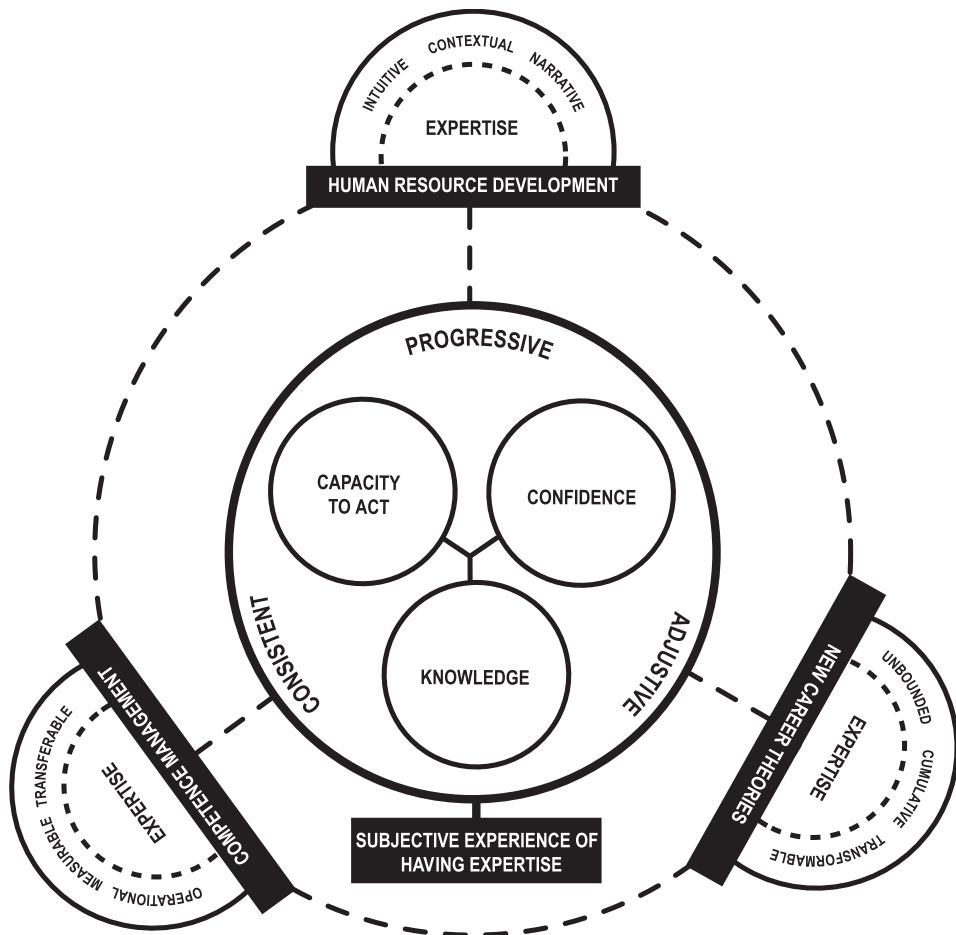
Male participants were also open about their technical inadequacy. Henry said he started studying, because he did not have enough technical competence. He and Max both insisted that they were not “natural born engineers” or “real software specialists.” Furthermore, issues in previous studies that were commonly related to technical women and their boundaries in a technical career were expressed by male participants as often as by female participants, in this study. For example, Max and Rami admitted that the reasons behind their career decisions included interpersonal issues. They had both selected jobs with less traveling (and less compensation) due to family dependencies. There was no characteristically female or male pattern of telling about technical career and expertise.

The complexity of gender was not explored in depth in this study and further investigations are needed to understand the ways in which gender, in technical expertise, is socially constructed in work practices. Further studies are also needed

to find out how gender in information technology is negotiated and how it is in flux. Furthermore, gender in technical expertise is interwoven with class, race, educational level, hierarchical position, and abilities, all of which would need to be considered, in such a study.

### 6.5. Integrating Diverse Frameworks of Expertise

I have focused attention on the individual struggle for interpreting expertise anew. However, the renewal of expertise is not only an individual learning process that each of us tackles in our unique ways. We make sense of renewal in similar, socially defined ways. Changing notions of what it means to have expertise are culturally constructed. Conflicts that are present in personal narratives do not only illustrate difficulties in the learning of new knowledge and skills, but they also represent dilemmas in the way self and expertise are culturally represented. In renewal of expertise a fusion of horizons (i.e., the underlining frameworks) occurs (see model 7).



Model 7: Renewal of Expertise – Fusion of Underlining Frameworks

In renewal, people simply learn to see things from a different perspective and might reflect upon that experience afterwards. Expertise becomes renewed by listening for changing circumstances and by letting oneself be told something in the “foreign language” of new work settings. People approach the new language, in which they need to translate and renew expertise, as having some relevance that adds to their experience (Gadamer, 1989). They get into the (historical) horizon from within which the new language talks to them. They use prior expertise as a first language to enter the worldview of a foreign language. They cannot simply forget and leave a prior frame of assumptions behind, but they approach the new language from within it. Moreover, the subjective experience and the language to construct one’s own expertise are intertwined with the surrounding contextual discourses.

According to Filander (1999), the changing work context has forced professionals to move to the middle ground between “languages.” In the same conversation, they can switch from one speech mode to another and position themselves simultaneously in several competing modes of representing expertise. In a way, they can balance between changing contextual meaning structures and make their expertise appear in a different light at a different moment, by using several, even conflicting, definitions (p. 172).

The struggle for renewal is a discursive battle. It is a battle between professional and managerial languages. However, it is not a battle between people who are working in specialists’ jobs and people who are working in managerial jobs. As Fenwick (2004) states, it is inadequate to conceptualize singular groups in the workplace wielding domination intentionally. There are no clear binaries and fixed positions between managers and employees. The dilemma between the two discourses is within each and every person who has expertise and who, therefore, needs to carry responsibilities, control time, justify actions, and use relevant knowledge to influence others.

Yet, we can ask who benefits from the integration of diverse frameworks. As Weick (1995) points out, sense-making is more adaptive if there is access to multiple vocabularies and varied images. The fact that employees can shift from one perspective to another, naturally makes a more adaptable workforce.

Next, I will pull together different elements that relate to the renewal of expertise. I will reflect on what is written on work life changes, in previous research literature, and refer to participants’ narratives and discussions. Thus, both theoretical insights and empirical examples will be used to make the social renewal visible and understandable.

### ***The Renewal of Job Responsibilities and Working Time***

The changing work context renews expertise in two senses. On one hand, work responsibilities of skilled clerical workers are increasing, and they are asked to complete duties that were previously done by professional staff. According to findings of Howell, Carter, & Schield (2002), instead of completing clearly defined tasks, clerical workers are defining, sequencing, completing, and integrating their work into larger organizational responsibilities. Their workload is amplified

without benefit or pay increase, a reduction of other duties, or even management's acknowledgement of the new responsibilities (p. 120).

On the other hand, highly educated professionals are responsible for many computerized secretarial tasks that they did not have to previously worry about. For example, the participants of this study had to divide their time between their core tasks and multiple simultaneous "secretarial" tasks. They arranged meetings, answered inquiries and maintained information on web sites and databases.

New working philosophies blur the old division of experts and others (c.f., categories of professionals vs. lay people, experts vs. non-experts, and experts vs. novices). Expertise is distributed and shared, and tight borders between occupations and competence areas are crossed or pulled down (Launis, 1997; Launis & Engeström, 1999). In the IT organization of this study, work was done in multi-professional teams and networks where people with different educational background and specialization areas were dependent on each other's contribution. Expertise was, therefore, not seen anymore only as a quality of employees in higher positions in an organizational hierarchy, but everybody needed expertise in their jobs. Many jobs combined routine work, customer service, and symbolic knowledge work (Tynjälä, 2003).

As Nicholson & West (1988) specify, when boundaries spanning the number of possible roles increase, new tasks emerge, and old tasks are combined in new ways. For example, employees who move to management responsibilities still need technical specialist knowledge. Conversely, those who stay in specialist roles have to learn how to manage themselves and others. In the context of this study, IT professionals were demanded to occupy multiple and hybrid work profiles and undertake variety of tasks.

As Loogma, Umarik & Vilu (2004) notice, IT professionals have to work simultaneously in a number of different roles, and new professional actors emerge to serve business needs. According to Haapakoski (2002), a new kind of expertise knowledge is built into interaction between the field of technical application and with customers. As a consequence, the relation between educational qualifications and expertise becomes vague. Participants of the study expressed that they were responsible for knowing the right answers in their area of expertise and how to do tasks that required their special know-how. However, they had to also deliver results and take responsibility for successful customer relationships (whether with internal or external customers). Therefore, the customer's viewpoint became superior to the substance area know-how, and could invalidate opinions based on expert knowledge.

Furthermore, a totally new kind of responsibility emerges from the "employability" discourse. Employees need to balance career uncertainty by keeping up with the pace of accelerated work demands, leveraging one's reputation, and, particularly, choosing projects from the industry core rather than periphery to enhance future employment opportunities (Candale & DeFilippi, 1996). According to Candale & DeFilippi (1996), a "boundaryless" career often requires great sacrifices in personal and family life. Such a career requires that employees finalize projects, enhance skills, and maintain contacts and reputations in their free time. Furthermore, it is not only personal time but also personal relationships that are

sacrificed for business. As it has become a necessity to know people who can provide opportunities and resources, there is a risk to treat all social interactions strategically as a means of gaining personal career goals (Ibid.)

The renewed construction of working time is extremely flexible and includes the experience of hurry and tightening schedules, as Henry reflects in the following citation:

*The notion of time is maybe the biggest change [...].  
Schedules are totally, aaa, different.  
And people can influence them, and therefore they are made considerably tight.  
[...Earlier] timeline could be several years in a particular thing that now lasts for us here like four to five months.  
(Henry, Interview)*

Technological changes, shortening deadlines, higher work volumes, the tendency of work to accumulate at the last minute, increases the “tempo” of IT work (Loogma, Umarik, & Vilu, 2004). Still, even when the participants of the study mentioned increased workload and pressures, they never openly questioned the purpose of organizational restructuring and how it made them “renew” their expertise. The problem was only officially recognized as a time management challenge, or something similar, that could be fixed after the next completed deadline. In fact, as Howell, Carter & Schied (2002) point out, working life makes employees face multiple competing demands and pressures to produce more in less time. Nobody complains about this, because they do not want to be construed as change-resistant, a troublemaker, and out of step with the times (p. 119). Such qualifications are clearly at odds with expertise.

In the IT organization, part of expertise was to be up to the task and ahead of time. The need to adapt to a new “project mode” was mentioned in each individual narrative, and as discussed earlier, projects were managed by schedules and deadlines. Thus, control of time was not direct and external, but tasks were “self-regulated.” However, even if participants said that “nobody tells me what I need to do,” they had no way to determine the needed time for completion of a task, nor could they limit the number of assignments nominated to their area of responsibility as the following examples show:

*Active people are rewarded with more work. [... Our team] has a heavy demand [...] workload is high.  
(Niko, Interview)*

*[I was afraid that I] have no time to do anything.  
(Anne, Interview)*

*[In projects you] should give much more time and energy than what you can do from 8 a.m. to 4 or 5 p.m.  
(Henry, Interview)*



*[My boss] would give me so much stuff that I have to hold him back and say that “please, don’t. I can no longer do that one either.”*  
(Timo, Interview)

A changing notion of time manifested itself in the frequent lack of time, hurry, and delays. Participants recounted several episodes about project schedules that were in conflict with the time needed to complete a task. However, they reacted differently to the lack of sufficient time to do the job. Kati referred to her delay experiences as failures: “Customers think we are incompetent.” Laura thought of them as normal: “That’s the way projects always go.” Rami even viewed delays as lucky situations: “Thankfully they let us continue programming even if we could not reach our deadlines.”

The external pressure to do things faster was well internalized in the IT organization. The problem was an inability to plan projects accurately; therefore, the solution was stricter follow-up of project management standards. Within the project framework, project members could plan flexible schedules and decide what they wanted to do and when. However, they had internalized the principle that “time to market” was the key. Moreover, the overall workload was expansive and made everybody focus on short-term priorities: “What is the most urgent task I have to do next?” The “freedom” to decide one’s own schedule did not enable time for reflection, long-term planning, or professional development even if everybody in this study expressed a willingness to do so.

In addition to the anonymous pressure to do more with less time, there were also nameless defects that slowed down processes. Despite the fast pace of work, projects were delayed. Reasons for that were often beyond one’s own control. On one hand, the IT organization was complex and it was difficult to find people who could make the needed decisions. On the other hand, guidelines were not clear and some tasks were not completed correctly, due to a lack of information or because of the changing environment. A lot of work needed to be re-done several times.

### ***The Renewed Notions of Justified Action and Personal Influence***

What followed from the new sense of working time was a dilemma in a notion of justified action, as the previous examples illustrate. Earlier, expert decisions in the IT organization were made after collecting information and comparing alternatives. Decisions about what the right action was were based on facts. Increased time pressure did not permit such a long process. Action was not justified in such a manner. Instead, action started simultaneously with thinking and decision-making, and then was corrected on the fly, based on feedback.

*I’m amazed how fast some decisions are made sometimes.  
Around some meeting table, people are wondering about how things are going,  
and then somebody says that “let’s do like this.”  
And then people don’t necessarily concern reasons and consequences that the decision may will have [...], they just operate a bit based on what “feels*



*like a good direction. Let's see what happens."*  
*[...Usually people] are so damn busy.*  
*They don't feel able to reflect things in depth.*  
*(Timo, Interview)*

*One difficulty in this new situation is that I'd like to act in a way that I've always used to [...]. I'd like to collect data, and, and knowledge and, and act [only] after that.*  
*But instead this new situation doesn't actually permit that.*  
*I have to act based on incomplete information and, and in a way, at the same time as I'm already doing things,*  
*I have to choose my approach.*  
*And I have to keep in contact with others much more carefully.*  
*I have to keep my eye on other's doings and,*  
*and to work as a team.*  
*(Henry, Interview)*

Decision-making and justification were distributed. No one could know, prior to action, what would happen, and several individual contributors were needed in the process, to direct and correct action. Teamwork was the key to a new notion of justified action, and that fundamentally changed the experience of having expertise. No one could be sure (alone) what the right action was, and how their own actions impacted the overall processes. In such conditions, as Norris (1991) states, competent practice cannot be defined in advance since it is always situational, specific, and partly dependent on the audience judging it; therefore, additional skills to choose the right accounts for the right audience are needed.

Nevertheless, the notion of expertise still depended on having know-how and on being able to do the right things. Participants expressed that they wanted to take responsibility for their own actions and, thus, to be sure of what they were doing. They tried to find positions that enabled them to be knowledgeable. For example, Rami changed his job role for that reason, as he clarifies in the following:

*It doesn't fit my character to just right away go and call to somebody to ask for help,*  
*that you don't know how to do anything independently (laughs).*  
*But in [some jobs] you can do well like that (U: right),*  
*that even if you don't know how to do things yourself,*  
*you can call to somebody who knows better.*  
*[...In software programming] we expect that the one who does programming knows how to (U: knows how to write programs!), yes,*  
*and doesn't ask others to do it instead.*  
*(Rami, Interview)*

The changing notion of time hindered the necessary historical perspective; hence, justification and action could not be based on prior knowledge. Sometimes the immediacy of action made it impossible to create collective sense based on com-

mon history. Team work became paradoxical: people were dependent on each other's actions, but they did not have time to build the trust necessary to impact things together. Therefore, people lost a sense of how to impact things, in general, as the following comments point out:

*Part of the general pain in this job is, now, that we have so many interfaces due to our organizational model and the complexity of our projects (U: mmm). That well... my, my possibilities to, my influential possibilities (sights) are, they seem to be very little.*  
(Kati, Interview)

*[It's] difficult to work in this kind of environment, because your project is dependent (riippuu ja roikkuu) on so many other projects.*  
(Sara, Interview)

When time constraints led to a changing notion of justified action, it simultaneously changed the notion of personal influence. Complexity of distributed expertise and decision-making made it difficult to feel that one can make a difference. A personal sense of expertise was jeopardized, as there was no feeling of influence, regarding one's work. Despite the desire to be proactive and up to the task, the situation forced the participants into passive reactions on external expectations and demands. Nowadays, opportunistic adaptation to the changing work environment feels like the only initiative left (Siltala, 2004). When employees feel they cannot influence their external environment, they put all their effort into influencing their personal change (p. 363).

The desire to have influence was related to the desire to do moral good – to provide correct solutions, do the right things, and take responsibility for decisions. Moral responsibility that was deeply personal conflicted with the changing notion of personal influence. Although much work was organized in teams, independence at work was valued, both by employers and employees (Loogma, Umarik & Vilu, 2004). To rely on someone else's job made Rami and Kati, for example, feel very uncomfortable. They could not be sure of what had been done and how it had been done, i.e., whether the quality was good enough. Professionals who had high standards for their own work were also very concerned about the quality of others' work, as the following stories show:

*Sometimes, before, I was thinking that should I trust.  
How the other person can handle these tasks and everything?  
But, then, I was thinking that this is a wrong attitude.  
Of course I have to trust (U: mmm).  
I'm giving this responsibility;  
We are giving this responsibility, explicitly,  
in this project, about this particular task, to this person.  
I must trust on that.*  
(Sara, Interview)

*[I like that] if you do something, you surely do it yourself.  
That (U: mmm) you are not dependent on others so much (U: mmm).  
The result of what, what you do [...]  
you can impact the quality better yourself.  
[... If] you have to ask someone else to do something  
[... and] they don't want or  
they can't do what they should do (U: mmm).  
And the quality can be bad (U: yes).  
And you can't influence really.  
(Rami, Interview)*

Employees in the IT organization moved toward a notion of “influencing through others,” thus, influence became collective. The renewed feeling of confidence and success come from knowing that things were fine, even if one has not done everything himself or herself. So, the feeling of “personal” influence was achieved by identifying with a team of individuals, or by knowing that without one’s impact others would not have been able to get things done. Participants of the study interpreted their responsibility in a new way, too. They did not give their personal responsibility away by sharing a task, but carried the overall responsibility collectively for their part and for what the others were supposed to do.

In the organizational restructuring processes of the IT organization, employees were assigned individual responsibility and could possess indirect influence, via preparing improvement initiatives, presenting papers to committees and steering groups, and monitoring projects. Still, they could not make independent decisions, like modifying work processes, allocating money, or signing contracts. Getting things through the decision-making process was very complex, and nobody seemed to have direct control of things. Individualization of responsibility was in contradiction to a collectivization of decision-making. As a result, work load increased, but personal influence decreased. As Schield, Carter, Preston, & Howell (1998) comments, after restructuring new job positions often include more responsibility, but no more power.

Niko also expressed the other side of the coin, in the following citation. An emphasis on teams’ importance did not recognize individual efforts in the team. There was a risk that employees just become replaceable resources.

*People talk that “our team is doing things like this”  
and it's true that the team is doing things.  
But if we don't ultimately notice [and recognize] individuals properly,  
then the individuals aren't so strong  
and therefore the overall team isn't that strong either.  
(Niko, Group Discussion)*

Commitment to managerial discourse that was evident in a narrative first person plural (“we in our team or in our organization do this and that”) increased the credibility of one’s story and his or her status of expertise. However, such discourse made people unreflectively agree on structures that diminished their influ-

ence. Collective team talk merged the individual and organizational goals and hindered the contradictory views and power struggles. Yet, the participants of the study were not able (or willing) to acknowledge that difficulties to improve their personal goals of fair (in terms of pay and benefits) employment status were a direct result of accomplishing managerial goals of “creating flexible workforce.” In IT organizations, unfair treatment is experienced and rationalized as individual career hurdles, not as collective employment market conflicts (Siltala, 2004, p. 371). Thus, by adopting the positively laden discourse of “renewed expertise,” employees unintentionally support modes of operation that decreased their autonomous agency and employment status.

### *The Renewal of Relevance and Authority*

According to Norris (1991), the question of relevance is mainly about knowledge for what purpose things at work are done. In the IT organization, relevance was mainly defined in terms of accurate (customer) needs. Situational expectations, customer demands, and short-term goals determined what needed to be done “here and now” and, therefore, what needed to be known. A dilemma arose when the notion of “relevant now” was conflicted with personal commitment to “really meaningful” knowledge and actions, as in Kati’s comments below:

*Well... (p) So... (laughs) how much, how much there's room to modify your role,  
[to include competence that matter to you],  
when you essentially have to charge each hour (U: mmm)  
and when each of my working hour is charged from some project.  
I'm doing [simply] what they need me to do in that project.  
(Kati, Interview)*

As the project goals and everyday tasks were defined in terms of emerging (customer) needs, relevant knowledge was what that led to a workable solution. Occasionally, relevant knowledge led to new initiatives or innovations. That was relevant enough for business, and that was what they required from experts. However, relevance was not easy to explicate. Often times it was not clear whose knowledge was relevant in a particular situation. Who could say that things were right or that things were wrong, relevant, or irrelevant?

Often, participants of the study defined relevant knowledge in relation to “service for others.” As Max expressed it, “you are here to help people to do their work in a proper way.” Service had personal meaningfulness and it was understood as an impact of personal know-how on others work. Well-being of colleagues in the professional context was important. Nevertheless, care was not necessarily emotionally expressed. It was about following high quality standards in one’s job and about making sure that nobody was disappointed with results delivered (“fact-based care”).

Still, none of the participants preach any particular service mission. For example, they did not have convictions about building a better society or a better future.

Nobody mentioned that information technology expertise was a personal calling. Moral exemplars in the IT organization were those employees who helped their colleagues or customers in everyday situations. The purpose of having relevant expertise was to help those who did not have the knowledge and skills they needed at work.

As Winter (1988, p. 13) states, the notion of service in professions is different from and opposite to the rationalizing techniques of market and profit orientation of business. A dilemma occurs when service for others is confused with the services that are created in projects due to business demands and delivered to business (not to people who are personally known). Occasionally, the participants talked in a contradictory way about customer service. As Niko expressed it, "The main idea is that we're here because of the business, for the business, and for supporting business." Motivation to do moral good was confused and mixed up with interests to do good business. Actions were not driven by personally relevant goals that were related to personal life history and life plans, but for goals for "making the IT services better." As Heikkinen and others (2001) summarize, the customer is the one for whom the job is done and for what expertise exists, yields, and adjusts itself in a new economy.

Nevertheless, doing only what business demands is not enough to justify professionally relevant knowledge. Moral relevance provides an alternative explanation to what the right thing to know is. In IT business, moral principles are not always clear enough to offer a guideline for practice. The question of who has the authority to decide what relevance means needs to be asked. According to a professional discourse, expertise provides capabilities to make sense of situations in a way that would not be possible without advanced know-how. People who have expertise can therefore take responsibility for demanding operations and aid others to understand better what is going on. Meanings that experts define become part of a common use of a language, and shape the way other people make sense of their own lives.

At the same time, expertise gives authority to a group of people to define a "true" knowledge over and against some other interpretations. According to Gadamer (1989), authority is earned by having relevant knowledge, and, moreover, it is legitimate only if it is freely recognized. In other words, such authority is justified by saying that people who have gained specialized knowledge about the subject matter earn the right to define how things should be understood, because others recognize that they have better judgment and insight. One who has earned legitimized authority by a group of people wants to act in a sympathetic way toward that group. He or she carries a moral responsibility of his or her words, actions, and decisions, and wants to be sure that advice given is right. The sense of responsibility results from acknowledgment that others do not have the knowledge they need and that one can provide it for them.

As Gadamer (1989) continues, to earn respect and recognition, a person who has expertise must remain humble and self-critical. A person with genuine authority is able to recognize the limits of one's own knowledge and stay open to an alternative understanding of others'. Experts have the capability to ask appropriate questions, because of their prior knowledge, and yet, by asking questions, they

leave space for others to express more genuine knowledge. The experience of having expertise is embedded with the acknowledgement of ignorance. Such consciousness prevents experts from misusing their authority. Moreover, expertise is never an essential character of a person or an institution. It is situational and questionable.

Professionals often resist organizational authority and define it as the opposite of expert authority. However, as Winter (1988) notes, the most efficient means of offering professional services often require economic and technological developments, and the bureaucratic organization that arises to regulate them. In other words, professionals working in complex, highly structured organizations experience more freedom and opportunities to exercise professional expertise in their work than solo practitioners (p. 14). Freedom of an individual's expertise is situated in an organizational context and limited by relations with colleagues, generally accepted moral principles, and shared standards. People are not absolutely free to use knowledge as they wish. They must compromise between personal freedom and social responsibility (p. 27).

Nevertheless, in the IT organization, authority was not only established in an ethical dialogue between people who have expertise and people who recognize their authority. There were also people who tempted to misuse authority. Colleagues, powerful customers, and management tried to challenge the authority of expertise even if they did not have superior knowledge, ability, or insight. The right to define the "truth" in an organizational context was often based on the discursive power of one professional group, or business management, to dominate how the subject matter was to be understood. In some cases, participants expressed that even if they had had relevant knowledge, they were excluded from decision-making in order to prevent one-sided "truth."

The renewal of expertise is ultimately about changing terms of expertise. The voice of a new discourse takes the place of a narrator in the story of others (c.f., transition from a welfare-oriented, professional discourse to market-oriented, managerial discourse, Filander, 2000, pp. 28–29). One of the most difficult experiences, which some of the participants expressed, was to be excluded from the negotiations of meaning. If a person in a position of (political) power did not want a certain expertise to be heard, he or she could simply ignore the person having that expertise and prevent him or her from participating in decision-making. A question then arose: How to carry a responsibility and preserve the respect earned among people who recognize a person's expertise, whilst that person is powerless in front of the "non-professional" authorities, unable to get relevant information and make sense of the situation, and, furthermore, incapable of impacting the course of action? The situation provoked feelings of uncertainty and anxiety.

That neglect is one example of how legitimate authority of expertise is ignored within an existing discourse. Moreover, non-stability increases the acknowledgement of ignorance and keeps people self-critical about their own expertise. Transition from one position to another causes a temporal loss of legitimate authority, because it takes time to learn the language of a new place, situate oneself within organizational discussions, and earn the respect of new managers, colleagues, and customers. In extremely turbulent circumstances, there is never time to build ex-

expertise and relationships of legitimate authority. Authority is then based on blind conformity rather than on knowledge.

Another way to deny the legitimate authority of expertise is to establish a new dominant discourse (whether professional or managerial) and use it in negotiations. It redefines who is in a position of authority, and thus people who once had relevant knowledge are no longer recognized as experts. A new kind of knowledge is valued and rewarded. The new discourse establishes what kinds of justifications are heard and acted upon. It determines new roles, and it limits what can be known and what can be said. Moreover, it limits the possibilities to gain new and relevant knowledge that exceeds the discursive boundaries.



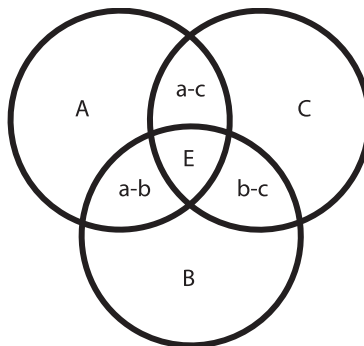
## 7. Conclusions

This study has provided understanding about the renewal of expertise as both individual and social phenomena. A combination of philosophical hermeneutics and narrative analysis has been a useful theoretical framework in which to study how people interpret their own situation and self. Moreover, such an approach has provided a way to recognize culturally meaningful themes, patterns, and scripts in personal narratives. Even though issues of power, social conflict, and struggle for recognition have not traditionally been part of hermeneutic inquiry, they are essential in meaning-making and are therefore included in this analysis as well.

As a result of my study, I have decided not to represent the renewal of expertise as a linear development process to overcome external and internal hurdles. Such a cultural representation of a process that moves from obsolescence to renewed expertise already exists in HRD and adult education literature, and is used as an organizing storyline in personal narratives. Alternatively, I have represented renewal as an ongoing work to integrate elements of expertise into a personally meaningful wholeness, despite contradictions in diverse frameworks of expertise. There is no one ideal solution and no clear guidelines for how to succeed in such integration. Next, I will summarize the findings of the study and demonstrate the renewal of expertise as “integration-in-progress.”

### 7.1. Experience of Having Expertise

The experience of having expertise includes three elements: relevant knowledge, confidence, and a capacity to act (see model 8). Relevant knowledge is a cornerstone for having confidence and a capacity to act, but knowledge alone does not constitute expertise. If people do not have confidence on their knowledge, they have no capability to act (see appendix 5). If they lack the ability to act on and influence things, their knowledge soon has no relevance. Social recognition, therefore, is important for an experience of having expertise.



Model 8: Elements of Expertise and their Relationships

### ***Knowledge (A)***

The elements of expertise in prior studies have been predominantly cognitive<sup>49</sup>. The experiences in this study confirmed that expertise is not possible without having relevant knowledge.

### ***Capacity to Act (B)***

Moreover, nobody in this study considered him or herself an expert without having a capacity to act. Such capacity is situational and requires experience. Findings of this study are connected to prior studies on contextual expertise, communities of practice and situated activities. Capacity to act requires having relevant knowledge, being part of a community, and having a position in the network of actors (e.g., power and authority).

### ***Confidence (C)***

The emotional aspect of expertise has not been essential in prior studies of expertise<sup>50</sup>. However, the assurance arising from reliance on one's familiarity with circumstances is a common experience for people who have expertise. People want to feel sure of issues they are dealing with and are making decisions about (see appendix 5). A feeling of certainty is a vital element in expertise, because a feeling of order, clarity, and rationality are important for making sense (Weick, 1995). However, in an ever-changing environment, people cannot ever feel sure that they know all the facts and can perform all operations with 100% accuracy.

### ***Knowledge and Capacity to Act (a-b)***

Subjective experiences in this study matched with the prior theories of expertise. Without knowledge there is no way to act in a professional context. However, the relationship between knowledge and capacity to act is not one-way. People need knowledge prior to action, but they also gain knowledge by having a capacity to act. As Tynjälä (2004) states, theoretical knowledge is transformed to practical actions, and intuitive know-how is explicated and coded into conceptual knowledge.

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<sup>49</sup> Tynjälä (2004) has summarized the cognitive components of expertise into formal/theoretical, practical/experimental and self-regulative knowledge or, alternatively, into factual, procedural, conceptual, intuitive, and metacognitive/reflective knowledge.

<sup>50</sup> In expertise studies, the concept of self-regulation connects emotions and action. Emotions have an important role especially when people volitionally motivate themselves to do things correctly. Self-regulation and self-monitoring can increase confidence on self and performance of a given (physical) task (Behncke, 2002). However, in self-regulation, emotions are in duty of self-disciplinary action, achievement, and goal orientation. Therefore, emotions are denied if they distract fine performance.

### ***Knowledge and Confidence (a-c)***

Having knowledge on how things are and what needs to be done gives confidence. There is no experience of having expertise without confidence in one's own know-how (see appendix 5). Such an emotional component is critical, and people use a lot of effort to reassure that they know what they are doing, and that what they have done is correct. Confidence comes from making sense of not only particular issues, but also of one's own place in a professional context. So, a feeling of confidence is related to knowing why things are done (c.f., purpose and relevance). On one hand, relevant knowledge prevents confidence based on insufficient or improper grounds, and on the other hand, confidence provides further access to relevant knowledge. For example, confident people are not afraid to contact other experts and ask for information and advice.

### ***Capacity to Act and Confidence (b-c)***

Knowledge is a prerequisite for capacity to act, but it is not sufficient without the feeling of certainty. With confidence in one's own know-how, experts are willing to express their opinions and take actions. As was found in this study, confidence about purposes of work strengthens the capacity to act. Thus, confidence increases when people understand their place in the organization, and when they have a place of an actor, i.e., they have authority and are able to contribute on decisions and actions.

### ***Expertise ( $E = a-b-c$ )***

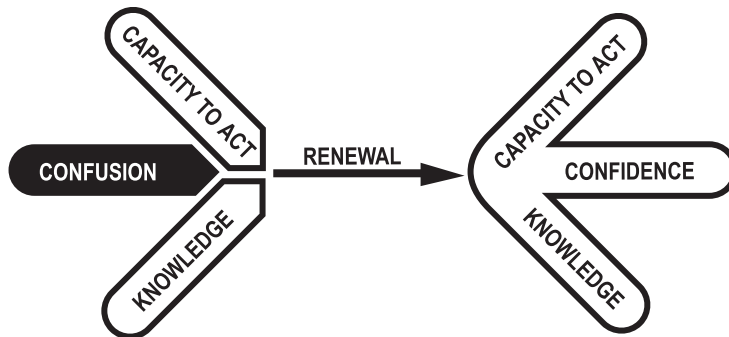
Prior studies have considered the need to integrate the elements of expertise, but they have mainly considered how to connect theoretical knowledge with practical skills in order to enforce the capacity to act. As Hakkarainen and others (2002) mention self-regulation and reflection have been the key tools for integration. However, in this study the integration is more than an intellectual and individualistic exercise. People need to convince themselves and others that what they know and what they are able to do is worth considering as expertise. Integration of knowledge, capacity to act, and confidence includes a "performative" act. People need to find a narrative storyline that organizes their prior experiences and current situational expectations in a manner that justifies their authority for expertise.

## **7.2. Experience of Personal Renewal**

In many cases, transition was experienced as confusion and as a threat to prior expertise. Some participants in this study could not trust that things were working as they used to. Their old knowledge was partially insufficient in new circumstances and did not provide a capacity to act effectively. However, nobody learned a totally new knowledge base and skill arsenal, but everybody creatively adopted their existing competence and experience to new circumstances. Reflection was one part of the renewal, but neither to the extent that I was expecting beforehand, nor to the extent that Mezirow's transformation theory might suggest.

Renewal was gained by integrating diverse frameworks of expertise. In other words, a subjective experience of expertise was impacted by the discourses of competence management, new career theories, and human resource development. The renewal of expertise in job role transition was not a self-evident task due to changing work requirements. Credentials like educational degrees, certificates, and past successes did not translate directly to expertise, in a changing work context. Without adaptation to a new “language of expertise” that suited the organizational and professional context, one could not represent himself or herself as having expertise. Renewed expertise was therefore adjustive to the organizational needs, progressive (the focal point was a continuous learning), and consistent with dominant expertise discourses (see model 4).

The most significant resultant of personal renewal was *a renewed confidence* (see model 8). It was rebuilt by understanding how things related to each other in a new situation, and by constructing the big picture anew. Moreover, confidence was a result of gaining respect and trust, getting one’s voice heard and by moving things forward. As a result, a new kind of confidence was not necessarily based on what the person knew, in principle, or a skillful capacity to do certain tasks. It was a combination of know-how and persuasion; people needed to convince others that their prior experience, combined with situational learning, provided them certainty, and that other people could rely on such expert authority.



Model 8: Personal Renewal of Expertise – from Confusion to Confidence

### 7.3. Social and Political Renewal

Based on the experiences and theoretical insights gained from this study, the overall renewal of expertise is not individual, but also social and political. Renewal means that the language used to talk about and define expertise is changing. The boundaries of professional occupations are breaking, new jobs and roles are being created, new career modes and employment relations are being introduced, and, therefore, renewed definitions of expertise are emerging. There are, simultaneously, alterations toward standardized practices, shared responsibilities, and collective autonomy. The meaning of expertise moves from primarily individual quali-

ties and achievements toward collective, network-based, hybrid team-expertise. Such a situation increases confusion and triggers the need for personal renewal of expertise and adaptation to changes. Renewed notions of expertise relate to a skillful and flexible workforce that is highly productive and, at the same time, highly committed to continuous improvement and learning.

The term “expert” has not lost its distinguished meaning, even if competing terms like, qualified, competent, continuous learner, and “good guy” (*hyvä tyyppi*) are used interchangeably. However, the conditions of being an expert have shifted priorities. Previously, superior cognition and a skillful capacity to act and produce expert opinions were the two main criteria of expertise. Facts and results proved one’s expertise. Skills to convince others were not considered essential for expertise. The social and political aspects of the renewal of expertise, nevertheless, redefine the capacity to convince and persuade (i.e., to influence and make things happen) as key criteria for expertise. The capacity to know and to be able to do something correctly is secondary to a capacity to gain information fast, to make the right connections, and to gain (business) results.

In one way, expertise has extended in scope. More non-academic people from all levels of organizational hierarchy are considered as having expertise. On the other hand, new boundaries are created. Those boundaries are – once again – defining who are qualified as experts and who are not. They provide relatively narrow positions for utilizing one’s expertise. The feeling of “not fitting” is not only a symptom of poor adjustment to a new role, but also an attempt to restore qualities of expertise that have been devalued in the social renewal.

In the prevailing expertise discourse in the IT organizations, diversity among people is officially welcomed. Yet, differences are subjugated to homogenizing project practices, skill certifications, and performance reviews. A caricature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century IT expertise starts to look like this: Experts are those that are able to define problems that are not necessarily fundamental, but visible and irritating. They know that the most important thing is to find negotiation partners and at the same time make sure that there are not any other important negotiations going on without their participation. The point is to find solutions to problems fast (even if they do not really know what is going on), and present the solutions with confidence. Experts take voluntary leadership to implement solutions to practice. They create a network of people and get connected to many information sources in order to gain constant feedback. The aim is to correct the solution based on the feedback, if necessary. Depending on how many other “resources” they have around them, they can do all the work by themselves or make others do all the work for them. In any case, whether they do the implementation of the solution or not, it does not make a difference in their status of expertise. The main learning during the process is to get to know who the people are to work with in the future – who you can trust, who does not make any trouble and who works fast. Learning how to implement the solution does not really matter, because the next problem will be different and will need new solutions. Finally, experts are the best at satisfying the customer and for making sure that they will be asked for advice next time any problems arise.

## 7.4. Implications to HRD Policy and Further Studies

Implications of a socially interpreted approach to expertise are both practical and theoretical. They are significant both for individuals in organizations as well as for the society. As a consequence of this study, I would suggest HRD policy and research agenda that (1) takes narrative construction of expertise as a starting point and (2) investigates multiple marginalities that exist in the interpretation of expertise. Part of the agenda would be a critical consideration of “competence” in a cultural and historical context and the question whether competence management and development advance equal practices or whether standards are hiding unspoken power struggles. Particularly, HRD policy and research should strive toward inclusive expert practices that welcome diversity in planning, design, and maintenance of information technology.

***Narrate expertise.*** The understanding of a narrative construction of expertise opens up new possibilities for HRD practices in career counseling. Professional counselors can help people in transition to tell better career narratives. They can aid people in noticing incoherence and missing script in their stories, provide information about realistic alternatives, and aid in adoption of alternative storylines (Christensen & Johnston, 2003). Co-construction of sound career narrative changes the role of HRD. A counselor can ask what meaning a certain future narrative has for a person, instead of just offering “progressive, realistic and fruitful” career choices (p. 156). Furthermore, if a person seems “unfit” in his or her job, a career counselor can ask why that person is unable to act in the new role, instead of just offering a training plan for gaining the needed skills. Narrative patterns (waves, layers, spirals, etc.) guide expectations in career transitions regarding the acquisition of expertise, and serve as a guideline in counseling.

***Bring confidence.*** Feeling certain about what you know and about what your abilities to learn are is an essential part of expertise. Therefore, part of the HRD work is to enable people to find clarity and confidence in changing circumstances. Furthermore, if we understand uncertainty and narrative difficulties as conflicts in diverse frameworks of expertise far-reaching implications to HRD policy and further research open up. Human resource development’s role becomes to aid people in balancing conflicting frameworks that define who they are as experts. The task is not straightforward and requires that HRD professionals themselves are able to move in between multiple discourses and facilitate negotiations between groups of people (Filander, 2000; 2002; Hytönen, 2002). The task requires also that HRD, as a function, becomes self-critical of its position in organizational power struggles. A critical question to ask is, for example, in favor of whom we define and maintain categories of expertise.

***Find meaningful purpose.*** There is also a demand of defining relevance of expertise in a new way. Professional orientation, the technological motivation has been replaced by market orientation. However, it does not serve well as a personal calling or as a need to be useful and make good in a society. Already, some individuals and organizations are looking at ways to define the purpose of expertise in terms of social responsibility and community development instead of profitability and profit.

**Break down stereotypes.** Those who fit well to the dominant expertise discourse, have better chances to be recognized as experts. Current demands for information technology (IT) professionals are suited often only for stereotypical “young and independent” people who can work long hours and travel extensively (Loogma, Umarik & Vilu, 2004). IT people express concerns about how to deal with high learning demands and aging and how to balance work demands with time needed for family or friends (p. 345). At the same time, demands for flexibility and mobility increase the risk of burn-out for young, especially female, IT professionals (Kivistö & Kalimo, 2002a, b). Participants in this study have experienced stress, lack of sleep and demands for working over time. Well-being and work-life balance activities of HRD are meaningless if at the same time young, hard-working single is the prototype of a successful IT expert. Furthermore, there is a need to not only welcome women to technical “male territory,” but also to question and alter the masculine practices of technology. Diversity approach does not focus only on women issues, but makes space also for men who do not fit the masculine stereotypes of technical expertise. There is a clear need to enlarge and alter the stereotypical representations of (IT) expertise.

**Reconsider educational qualifications.** Social and political renewal of expertise is questioning the role of higher educational institutions in qualifying expertise. The “qualification market” is changing and there are new players, like partnerships between higher education and corporate universities, private educational institutes and training companies. At the same time the number of educational options increases. Information technology domain includes people with multiple educational backgrounds. In some cases, industry certificates and self-study can be enough to “qualify” computer specialists. However, it is not clear what role the education (e.g., the level of degree and the college major) plays in the positioning of experts. Furthermore, similar educational background – combined with different age, gender, race, and nationality – can provide unequal opportunities for career success. Therefore, the importance of education has not diminished, but relation of education and expertise has become more complex.

**Divide and rule?** The clear divisions between workers and professionals or professionals and managers have blurred in the rhetoric of teamwork and expert networks. However, there are new ways of creating difference and unequal positions. The renewal of expertise as part of the organizational restructuring creates splits between people. For example, businesses define “core competencies” and as a result justify outsourcing of less strategic functions and people. At the same time, they create segregation between internal and external, permanent and temporary, less-skilled and advanced high-tech jobs. A balancing act is needed if HRD policies do not want to enforce bipolarized definitions of IT expertise.

**Global politics versus local conditions.** The notions of expertise are dependent of social and political conditions. Therefore it is relevant to ask what the role of welfare society in the production of expertise is (Tynjälä, 2003). Is there a possibility to create a “Finnish model” of expertise acquisition and development that is taking into account the social welfare structures; public compulsory education, free higher education, day care system that supports employment of both parents, right for study leave, and financial aid for continuous professional education? Or



has national and regional boundaries become useless in the definition of expertise? Information technology production and use is in many sense global, but does it make expertise nevertheless universal?

Relocation of IT services and application development from Western countries (Europe, USA) to Asia (extensively to India and China) provides a cross-cultural setting for the inquiry of the renewal of expertise. The meaning of expertise becomes even more complex when global expertise discourse is interpreted in varying social, historical and cultural contexts. New kinds of questions come up: Do the representations of expertise reproduce themselves from country to country? How diversity questions are interpreted in IT companies in developing countries? What meanings do gender, age and educational background get as identifiers of expertise in these diverse settings? How the relocation is related to segregation between less skilled, low paid and advance, highly paid expertise?

There is currently encouragement for “being critical” among the discipline of HRD<sup>51</sup>. The following four dimensions are proposed to define critical HRD (Fenwick, 2004, p. 198):

### *1. Purpose*

A critical HRD works toward reform of organizations and development practices aligned with purposes of justice, equity and participation, for example through naming mechanisms of cultural power, fostering resistance, and supporting collective action.

### *2. Epistemology*

A critical HRD conceptualizes workplaces as contested terrains. It critiques illusionary homogeneous identities, alignment between employee-employer interests, and false naturalization of globalization, competition and performativity. It examines diversity of social and organizational positions.

### *3. Inquiry*

A critical HRD studies development discourses as historically constituted sociopolitical processes that have come to appear in certain organizational structures like in performance measurement.

### *4. Methodology*

A critical HRD challenges prevailing economic ideologies and power structures constituting organizational inequities. Whose interests are served by development? How knowledge is constituted? What knowledge counts, and who influences its assessment? Reflexivity is central for exposing the controlling HRD technologies without falling into the trap of imposing “emancipatory” efforts to so-called oppressed.

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<sup>51</sup> The first explicitly critical sessions were held in the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) conference in year 2002, in United States, and in the Critical Management Studies (CMS) conference in the human resource stream in year 2003, in United Kingdom (Fenwick, 2004).

In large organizations, there are potentially physical and temporal spaces for non-performativity and critical discussion. Nevertheless, things are named according to a certain (dominant) perspective and people have no language to think out of a box. Critical reflection often simply enforces existing categories of knowledge and neutralizes unequal practices. Therefore, HRD practitioners and researchers need to work together to overcome the obstacles for just, equal and participatory policy. Case studies and action research projects that not only interpret existing meanings, but also deconstruct and create alternative meanings are desired.

### **7.5. Contributions to Hermeneutic-Narrative Methodology**

There are several contributions that this study has made to the further development of the hermeneutical-narrative methodology. First, it has shown the relevance of context-sensitive narrative analysis to a critical adult education and human resource development study. Narrative analysis used earlier in the discipline of HRD has, in many cases, forgotten the crucial focus on “stories in context” (Goodson, 1997). In other words, analysis of the social and historical aspects has been ignored. Also, the language used has been taken for granted. In this study, the following methodological reinforcements to narrative inquiry have been made.

*Systematic structural analysis as a starting point:* In this study, rigor and in-depth focus on the language and narrative qualities of the research data has been a leading force. Without word for word transcriptions; line-by-line division of descriptive, narrative, and commentary aspects of data; and without analysis of forms of narratives, alongside the content analysis; the results of the study would have been different. Organization of the narrative data into meaningful research structures has been a time-consuming, but useful, exercise. It is a recommended first step in all kinds of narrative inquiries, even if later in the study the analysis would focus only on evolving themes and evaluative clauses of larger thematic entities. The narrative approach brings the quality of interview data into the focus of interest. The analytical question is not only about “what people say,” but also “what kind of discussion is gathered.”

*Extended fieldwork and context inquiry:* In the emphasis on individual experiences and personal construction of meaning, narrative analysis oftentimes forgets that people are part of, and a result of, their social contexts. Extended time in the field where people live or work enables analysis of personal stories within a social and political context. The fact that the information technology context and context-related developmental discourses were familiar for the researcher resulted in a different kind of analysis than what an outsider would have been able to produce. Furthermore, auto-ethnographic writing made possible both intrinsically valuable and critical analysis of the research settings.

When data gathering was done in several sessions, it was possible to find persistent and repetitive themes in the analysis. Narratives from one single interview or one group discussion reflect much on the actual interaction situation, emotions, and physical conditions of participants and on the ongoing issues of the moment. At work places, there are always things happening before and after the research interaction, and the ongoing issues, like the prior meeting with a supervisor, can

be over emphasized in the research data. A longer data collection period is therefore recommended.

*Bilingual perspective:* In this study, there was the possibility to use more than one linguistic perspective. Comparison and reflection on two sets of vocabulary were embedded in the analysis of narratives. As a result, a glossary of terms was produced (see chapter 2 and appendix 2).

*Representation.* Research text as a medium of representation was acknowledged. Careful considerations were made to include participants' "voices" in the final version of manuscript. Also the way the researcher is using first person or active, present tense in her writing impacts how "truth" appears. In future studies, I would like research to not only continue with discursive interviews and oral stories, but also to include visual and kinesthetic representations (photos, drawings, video performances) of expertise into the discussion. That would further enlarge research participants' possibilities for diverse and multifaceted self-representation.

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## **Appendix 1: The Process of Becoming Expert**

According to Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986), progression from “analytical knowing what to do” to “involved know-how” requires passing through five sequential phases. Each phase is a combination of different kind of information perceiving and decision-making. Such a sequential progression of “becoming expert” can be applied to every kind of skill acquisition, from riding a bike to flying a plane. Any kind of professional skill acquisition follows the same process.

### **The first phase: a novice**

The information processing that is characteristic for computer systems is typical only for human beginners’ thinking. It means that novices recognize context-free facts relevant to the skill from the information they perceive. Then, they acquire predefined rules (“if this happens, then do that”) for determining actions. They apply the learned rules, no matter what else is happening in the situational context. Thus, there is no independent decision-making.

### **The second phase: an advanced beginner**

After certain time, beginners learn to feel what the right thing to do in certain situations is. They learn to recognize meaningful situational elements from the perceived information. Decision-making is still bound to pre-defined rules and procedures.

### **The third phase: a competent practitioner**

With time, amount of recognizable rules and situational elements overwhelms information-perceiving capacity. To overcome the limits of human information processing, people learn to use hierarchical decision-making procedures. Conscious problem solving makes it possible to choose from several alternatives, and to make a plan or strategy that organizes the situation. To improve performance, competent practitioner sees the situation as a set of facts that has an importance, i.e., a priority status related to the overall goal. Plans are necessary for progression, because they make intentional decision-making possible.

Plans and strategies affect performance differently than concrete situational elements, because they are non-objective and “theoretical” conceptions. Such a theoretical understanding is created in order to organize multiple context-free or situational elements to a meaningful whole. Then, the more work experience in concrete situations people gain, the bigger repertoire of organizing patterns they can create. Competent professionals modify the existing patterns and create new ones for adjusting to the needs of work practice.

### **The fourth phase: a proficient practitioner**

With more time in the same domain, professionals reflect less upon all possible alternatives in their decision-making and start recognizing similarities with previous experiences. The organizing thinking patterns that they have created consciously



in a previous problem solving phase, now, comes to their mind automatically when they perceive information. They, then, organize and understand their tasks intuitively (what constitutes the problem). Nevertheless, they continue to make decisions analytically (what to do with the problem).

### **The fifth phase: an expert**

Experts are so totally engaged with their skillful performance that, when they perceive information concerning their tasks, they automatically know what to do – based on mature and practiced intuitive understanding. They do not have to consciously solve problems or make decisions; they just do what normally works. Right tactics and actions come to their mind without conscious thinking. Such experts understand new situations as similar to prior ones. They automatically associate decision, tactic, and action to a perceived situational need and, thus, can perform very fast and fluently. In other words, they are expecting that the similar perspective and goals are sufficient in variety of situations.

## Appendix 2: Terms that Impact Understanding of “Expertise”

**Competence/Competency** = (1) the condition of being competent; (2) adequacy of a work; (3) rivalry in dignity or relative position (c.f. *compete*); (4) sufficiency or qualification, capacity to deal adequately with a subject; (5) the position of being legally competent. Conceptual differences between the *competence* (UK) and *competency* (US) has sometimes been made. Accordingly, competence would refer to potential capabilities of a person to perform in a particular context (as a result of education) and competency would be a narrower and refer only to a capability to perform a specific task (Eraut, 1994). However, there is no fixed and confirmed distinction (Delamare Le Deist & Winterton, 2005); terms are mostly used interchangeably.

**Competencies, Skills** = the plural usage is related to management language (1970 onwards) and vocational education and training, e.g. “skills analysis, skills training, key competencies.” Commoditization of competence (indeclinable) into certifiable competencies (plural form) has turned a somewhat flexible concept into a rigid sorting mechanism (Jeris & Johnson, 2004).

**Competent** = (1) suitable, adequate, or sufficient, in amount or extent; (2) adequate or sufficient in quality or degree; (3) suitable to a person’s position; (4) possessing the requisite qualifications for or to, properly qualified; (5) has authority

**Professional** = (1) competent in the manner of a professional; (2) belongs to or is engaged in one of the learned professions; reaching a standard or having the quality expected of a professional person or his/her work. Professionals are often contrasted with amateurs. Professionalization process itself is exclusivist and elitist in nature. At the same time as it defends occupational interests and

**Osaaminen, Ammattiosaaminen, Kyky, Taidot, Ammattitaito** = (1, 2) The combination of or totality of possessed skills, the professional competence; (3) does not refer to competition or comparison;

**Pätevyys** = (4, 5) qualified knowledge and skills, professional qualification. There is no fixed translation and usage of *competence/y* in Finnish. Traditionally Finnish connotations have seen competence as situational, holistic, and systemic activity.

**“Kompetenssit, Skillit”** (ammattitaito, ammattiosaaminen, pätevyys) = In a plural sense, English terms are often used without translation in a Finnish form. That emphasizes the import of the Anglo-American competence-approach into the Finnish language context.

**Asiantunteva; Ammattitaitoinen, Osaava, Taitava, Kykenevä, Kyvykäs, Pystyvä** = (1, 2) expert, skillful, has acquired needed skills (to be a real professional) **“Kompetentti,” Kelpaava, Kelvollinen, Pätevä** = (3) suitable, adequate, sufficient and able to do whatever is required from one’s position; (4) properly qualified according to the professional (or legal) standards;

**Päätösvaltainen, Toimivaltainen, Täysivaltainen** = (5) has rights to participate in decision making, has power to influence, invested with full powers, fully authorized; a superior, has authority over others

**Ammatillinen, Ammattimainen** = (1) can refer to formal occupations, crafts, arts and sports (c.f. *asiantuntija* does not refer to craft artists or athletics)

**Ammattilainen** = (2) educated, skillful and qualified.

The Anglo-American usage has established into the Finnish academic language and *professio* without further translation refers to

protects professional field of work, it attempts to exclude allegedly “unqualified” others from the rewards of practice (Winter, 1988). Term *profession* has certain connotations that vary by culture. In Anglo-American usage, profession usually excludes the kind of craft labor and highly skilled working class occupations and refers only to certain middle-class occupations, but in French and German the term may designate any full-time occupation, pursued for career (Winter, 1988).

**Skillful** = an obsolescence meaning is to be rational, following reason and doing moral acts; Currently means to (1) have practical ability, possessing skill and being expert

**Skill** = an ancient and now obsolescent meaning is to have sense of what is right or fitting, to know what is reasonable, proper, right or just. Current meanings are (1) a wise or sensible act; (2) capability to accomplish something with precision and certainty; (3) practical knowledge in combination with ability; (4) cleverness, expertness

academically educated professional groups (Filander, 2000, p. 28). However, when the term is translated into Finnish every-day language (= ammatti), its usage is closer to French and German and it refers to vocational occupations. Furthermore, on the contrary to English term, the term *ammattilainen* (ammattitaitoinen) is used in reference to professional people in non-academic occupations and *asiantuntija* (*asiantunteva*) is used to refer to academic professionals.

**Taitava, Taidokas** = (1) **Ammattitaitoinen** = (2) refers to a skilled worker, skillfulness in a profession. Professional context includes a moral aspect of doing the right things (c.f. the obsolete meaning in English)

**Taito** = (2) proficiency; (3) personal ability or know-how acquired through practice; e.g. *lukutaito* (ability to read, literacy); (5) knack or technique; (6) field of art or craft, e.g. *kuvaamataito* (drawing), *taitoluistelu* (figure skating); (7) **ammattitaito**, combined with a word profession (ammatti), professional competence or craftsmanship

## Appendix 3: Interviews' and Group Sessions' Schedules

### FIRST INTERVIEWS

1. Tell me about your career?
  - How would you describe your career?
  - Can you somehow illustrate your career and draw it on a paper? You can choose your own way – tell a story, put things in a time schedule or anything.
  - In this career picture that you have illustrated, which are the moments that you would describe as periods of change or discontinuity?
  - What were the reasons for these changes?
  - How did you anticipate to or what did you do in these change situations?
  - What kind of alternatives you had in these periods?
  - Are you satisfied with your career so far? What makes you say that?
  - What could be a metaphor for your career?
2. Tell me about your current role transition.
  - How have you prepared for the change?
  - Have you made an action plan or development plan already?
3. Uncertainty
  - How do you see uncertainty in different periods of your career?
  - How do you act in a moment of uncertainty?
4. What is the most important thing?
  - What is the most important thing for you in a career?
  - Is that something that you would like to carry on even if you would make some alternate choices and change your career?
5. Competence
  - How would you describe your competence?
  - How your professional expertise has changed and grown during your career?
  - In which ways you have developed your competencies throughout your career?
  - How would you like to develop you professional expertise now?

### COACHING PROGRAM SESSIONS

1. The first group session
  - What do you want to learn and achieve in your new role? Please, share with the group one of your main objectives. (Presentation of objectives. The group is asking clarifying questions.)
  - Think about your professional experiences, you may find out that there were some things that really made you think hard like “what’s going on? Why this is happening?” Write down in a form of a closed question or a statement these disorienting dilemmas, confusing issues and unanswered questions. Choose something that is important for you and that you want to discuss in a group. (Written dilemmas are distributed, each one is presenting one and arguing for or against it, and then the rest of a group is presenting their opinions.)

<b>Themes of the group 1</b>	<b>Themes of the group 2</b>
Do you always have to prove your professionalism or skills?	It is easier to accept new ideas from external consultants than from company's own employees?
What to do when your job will be terminated and you don't know what to do?	Company values, like respect for each employee, do not come true anymore? (People management policies and practices treat people unequally?)
You are the key person when thinking about your team's atmosphere?	Line manager does not have to communicate with his or her employee more than twice a year for target setting and evaluation?
Most of us have limited possibilities to move in a company's hierarchy?	Similar training program possibilities should be offered to everyone in every level of the organization?
Is it possible to grow professionally by staying in the same team?	Does team leader have to complete a task if team member refuses to do it?

## 2. The second group session

- Focus this time on the current role transition and write down in a form of a closed question or a statement a disorienting dilemma similarly to last sessions' exercise. (Written dilemmas are distributed, each one is presenting one and arguing for or against it, and then the rest of a group is presenting their opinions.)

<b>Themes of the group 1</b>	<b>Themes of the group 2</b>
How to manage the situation when you have once had a manager's position and now will be a technical trainee?	Ready-made process descriptions are meaningless in practice. There's not enough support available for project management.
Organization's structure does not support decision making (in my job).	Own working premises (shared office) are mall adapted to the new job role.
How to handle conflict in a non-emotional way?	Employee should start worrying if the new supervisor does not contact him or her.
Our job responsibilities are divided into too small pieces!	When you want to change your job should you continue as a team leader in a team where you once worked as a specialist?

3. The third group session
  - What was common between all these dilemmas discussed last time?
  - What is common between your disorienting dilemma, personal targets, and development plans?
  - Assessment of personal self-regulation skills (individual task)
  - Discussion on learning tactics
4. The fourth group session
  - Please, write on a paper a short description of a current learning situation at work where your natural (i.e., routine, habit) learning tactic was insufficient. Tell what you did/tried to do to solve the situation. (Another person reads the case and provides some reflections and suggestions. Rest of the group is commenting and providing opinions and ideas.)
  - Assessment of personal self-regulation skills
5. The fifth group session
  - Please, share with the group what you have done between the last group session and today's meeting; in which case you have tried to apply an alternative learning tactic compared to your initial first choice?
  - Where are you now in your role transition process?
  - Any further reflections on the dilemmas we discussed in the first two sessions?
  - Assessment of personal self-regulation skills

## LAST INTERVIEWS

1. What happened when you changed your role at work?
  - What happened then? What did you do then?
  - Personal questions (2) for each participant, tailored based on the experiences shared in group sessions or in personal notes. For example: Sara, you told me earlier that you have made choices in your career based on what kind of a job you want to do, and now you moved to a project management role that you did not look for initially – what happened? Henry, you told me that you rely on formal education as a basis of your expertise, now you have been working in a role without corresponding education – what happened?
  - How have you personally changed since you changed your job role?
2. Transformation of thinking
  - Have you had a moment when you were thinking that you should not have moved to this new role; that it will not work out? (What happened?)
  - How have you dealt with difficulties in your transition?
  - What happened to that dilemma that you presented in our second group meeting?

- Have you had a moment during this transition when you have realized that something you thought was some sort of a thing is something very different? Like your eyes have opened?
- Have you had a moment when you have sort of found a piece that you had been looking for?

### 3. Learning

- One of your targets was to [the objective presented in the first group session]. Has this role transition helped you to reach that objective?
- What have you learned during this transition?
- What has been the most difficult learning challenge? (Why? What did you do about it?)
- Have you aimed at improving those development areas that you identified during the coaching program?

### 4. The final question

- What has been the most significant for you in this role transition and why?



## Appendix 4: Career Stories – The Acquisition of Expertise

These career stories started the first interviews. They were told in the first personal meeting between the researcher and the participants. Therefore, the participants represented their careers as told to a “trusted outsider” who is interested about their expertise (Labov, 1972). The beginning of an interview reminded a job interview situation, but was not, however, a “selling” event. Thus, even if participants first told their past in a very positive light, they also elaborated obstacles and difficulties in their careers.

A career story is a narrative about working life experiences (see chapter 2). It is an account of how the person came to be what he or she currently is, and, furthermore, what the future is expected to be (Christensen & Johnson, 2003). Career stories connect past to the present and to the future that the narrator is approaching. It includes description of all significant achievements (c.f., curriculum vitae), and, moreover, it offers interpretation of how and why a person entered different jobs and how one job led to another (p. 151).

### Rami:

- 01 U: How would you describe this career<sup>52</sup>?
- 04 R: Well, yes, I’ve actually started in this domain in a way that I went after high school to a [technical] vocational school.
- 05 And in summer times I’ve been a trainee in a company, in the field.
- 06 And then it has continued so that I went to a technical school [in one city].
- 07 And in those summers I worked also in [a company, in that city].
- 08 And then after the technical school, I went to [another company] and worked as a [kind of] a technician.
- 09 I was working there two and a half years.
- 10 In the end of year -90, I applied to [this company].
- 11 And it started by hardware specifications to a [big system’s] deliveries.
- 16 And then I was seeking my way to sort of college program, from technician to engineer, [I studied] along with a daytime employment.
- 20 Well, I actually changed my job then in between.
- 24 We did software tools (U: yes) to this job that I did previously.
- 25 I was there until the end of [1990’s].
- 26 Then I sought my way to Customer Service.
- 36 I studied [further training offered by the technical customer service unit].
- 38 Well, after that I moved to [Asia].
- 43 In that case, it happened so that I had a contract for [more than a year].
- 44 [But plan changed and I had to leave.] Finally, the realization was [half a year less].
- 49 And I went to [Europe].
- 51 Yes, and I was there in equivalent job for half a year.

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<sup>52</sup> This same question preceded all the following career stories too even if I have not included it into the beginning of the other stories.

- 54 And well I came from there [Europe] back to Finland [to a return job that included a lot of traveling].  
61 And I didn't actually like [to be away from family].  
67 And I started to do the same job in [domestic] customer service.

**Sara:**

- 07 I was actually quite good in math at school (U: yes).  
09 [But] I didn't get to the senior high school right after the elementary school then.  
10 And I had to start thinking that what do I do then.  
13 There was a kind of folk high school that emphasized the automatic information processing, and I went there (U: mmm).  
17 [Then, I got a family] and then when I was home and raised children.  
18 Besides, I attended all kinds of computing courses.  
20 And on that account, I moved to that data recording job.  
23 I was there [in a same company] five years.  
24 And I did data recording  
27 and there I was [also] supervisor for the data recording.  
29 [Then I divorced] and during the last year in [that company] I met my new husband.  
31 And I moved to here, I moved from [this city] to [the capital area].  
32 And there, at the same time, I started to plan systematically a career for me.  
33 And I was then, well... I chose then this small firm.  
34 Where I learned all these clerical jobs.  
37 And then there I actually learned all the accounts payable and receivable, storage bookkeeping, debt collection, and everything like that.  
40 I was there three years.  
41 And then I felt that I've learned all that I wanted to learn.  
42 And I moved back to this IT domain.  
48 [I moved to a company] and I was, in a way, in [IT job] there.  
49 So, I did, in a way, task lists to operators and all this kinds of things.  
56 [However, after some years the company bankrupted and I got unemployed and had couple of short-term jobs. So,) I went to [further] training.  
57 There I learned all these hardware stuff, building of computers and all possible things.  
59 And after that, I've been in these [kinds of customer service] jobs all the time.  
61 I've been in different companies, [but] actually in tasks related to this [particular technical service all the time].

**Timo:**

- 02 Well, I could start from the moment when I completed these last studies.  
04 Or maybe I could tell as background information that I'm coming from a [small city].  
06 And I wanted to stay there for working.  
13 And couple of months I looked for a job.

14 And I had registered to unemployment office and everything.  
19 And then I did a kind of generic IT support job for [that city].  
20 For example I taught fire station employees to use computers.  
21 And all kinds of small projects.  
23 And I had time to be there about four months.  
24 And then I saw an advertisement that one small electronics firm was looking for a quality engineer [for a short-term job].  
29 And, and that project started.  
30 And we did that quality system and got it well started.  
31 And then the eight month period expired.  
34 They wanted the [quality system] to be ready.  
35 But they were not ready to pay a normal salary.  
43 So, I decided to look for a job from the capital area in that summer [in the end of 1990's].  
44 And immediately I got into [this company].  
46 I was responsible of logistics of one factory.  
48 And then there I realized that IT systems interested me much more than logistics and stuff like that.  
49 So, I applied to [IT organization].  
50 And I'm still on that way: I've done this [advanced system support] since that.

**Niko:**

05 I graduated in [early 1990's] from one engineering college.  
06 And after that I have been, you know, half a year [employed by the] city.  
08 [I was] partly in a design job, partly supervising, and partly doing other things.  
09 Then, well, it lasted one and a half years.  
11 Then [came a turning point in a career and] I transferred to IT domain, you know.  
12 I've been in two [IT] consultancy firms.  
15 And you know, in the [well known firm] I did customer databases. I maintained customer database and contracts, and did reporting, and organized events, and all such kinds of diversified tasks.  
16 And after that I tried to decasualize my employment contract.  
17 And, and I offered them a certain deal.  
18 And I didn't get it.  
19 So, I concluded that I must look for a job elsewhere.  
20 And in [mid 1990's] I then arrived to [this company].  
22 And [here] I've always been in IT [support and consultancy] jobs and my jobs have had much variety.

**Laura:**

02 I came [to this company] in [the mid 1990's] to technical customer support.  
03 I was there as a [technical support person].  
04 So, I provided technical support related to business contracts.

06 [My job changed] and I started to participate more to financial tasks, bud-  
geting and so on.  
07 [My job was] a lot to follow up that customers' billing was correct.  
08 And that what has been promised in the technical contracts was delivered.  
11 Then in [the end of 1990's], I changed to a global finance unit.  
12 There I've been [since the last transition].  
17 And I did also some technical support tasks there.  
21 U: What's about before your [current company]?  
22 L: Well, I've graduated in [early 1980's] from vocational business school.  
23 So, I've done quite a lot of things.  
24 I've been in different clerical jobs.  
25 Then I was in one [particular business], I've been in [one particular] company.  
26 Wait a minute, I thing almost 10 years I was there.  
27 [I worked] very a lot with [system] user support and training.  
28 and I was involved with installations and tasks like that.  
[...] Before and after this [long employment relation], I had a few short, couple  
of moths long, computing courses.  
U: And now you have started these part-time studies in the business col-  
lege? L: Yes.

**Anne:**

04 I've had one very long employment relation.  
05 And then here, before coming to [this company], I've had couple of short-  
term employments and stuff like that.  
07 I was first fully focused on sort of financial tasks.  
08 And, and I did accounting and beyond.  
11 I did closing of the accounts for the company and stuff like that.  
12 [But] then I simply got bored with the "wheeling" of numbers.  
13 Because I felt that there was nothing new anymore [to learn].  
17 And then I sought my way to this [IT] domain.  
18 And then I acquired that training, like [technical further] training.  
21 [I couldn't find IT job right after graduation due to the economical depres-  
sion of early 1990's] and then I was again few years in sort of temporary  
accounting jobs.  
22 And then I acquired additional [advanced technical] training, a kind of net-  
work or IT network stuff.  
23 And then I got in to [this company] for a work.  
26 In the very beginning, I was only in [user support] jobs.  
27 And then I turned toward the [system support] side.  
28 And I specialized to these [applications].

**Max:**

02 Basically my career is a [career of the company]  
06 So, first I was working as so-called [technical] specialist.  
10 So, I was dealing with data flow quality in [business] systems.  
11 So, [I was] dealing with business unit coordinators,

12 who were responsible for data flow quality  
13 and also with national organizations.  
14 It was both a technical job because I was involved with database queries  
and so on  
15 and also coordination work with business units, Finance unit, and national  
organizations.  
16 [I had] quite a lot of contacts with many different people.  
18 I stayed there one and a half years or something.  
19 After that I moved to e-business [development], still in [this current organ-  
ization].  
20 And I've been working as a specialist in [application] development for a  
product called [like this],  
21 which is used in this [technical framework for internet applications].  
22 So, I've been doing still some integration work, some configuration work,  
23 not too much really real development, because I'm not, let's say, a real pro-  
grammer.  
24 I have business [education] background.  
26 So, that was during one year and a half also, around, little bit more,  
27 because now I started three and a half years ago (U: All right).

**Henry:**

20 When I transferred to work life [from university].  
21 I graduated [in early 1980's]. And after that I started to ask for a job.  
23 In other words, I just called to such companies that I thought I could apply  
to.  
24 I didn't really have an idea about my job profile [or] what I would be.  
26 Then, I came to F-letter, and there was a company [whose name started with  
F-letter].  
27 I called and asked that can I get a job that corresponds with my education.  
29 And yes [they had and] I came.  
33 It was in these [construction] projects.  
34 I was the whole 1980s [there].  
61 I changed [in 89-90] or I made the first decision that I stay in my own  
domain, but I change a little  
62 I attended such a [further education].  
65 I thought that I would graduate to a new profession during a year.  
66 And yes, I did graduate.  
69 [But] hopefully, I did not find a job, because I realized [that the new job did  
not met my expectations].  
74 And I started to move back slowly to the same domain that I have got fed up  
here [before the further training].  
82 At that moment, I was more than half a year unemployed.  
84 I looked full-time for a job.  
87 So, I was working hard, but I was not in a paid job.  
89 Then in the beginning of [1990's] I got into [this company]. I got the same  
kind of a job [that I had in 1980's].

90 I was employed by a condition that I would leave to a [foreign] country as a  
company representative.  
95 And I enjoyed being there.  
100 I had a good lift to the responsibilities of [this company].  
106 [Seven years later,] I returned from that [country].  
108 I came back to Finland where this environment, this company had changed  
enormously.  
113 I started to feel quite bad.  
114 And the fact was that my responsibilities changed to such that they started  
to demand technical education.  
115 So, at that time [...] I transferred to a kind of a job where I coordinated [kind  
of] projects to the area where I had been as an expatriate.  
117 Of course I knew the language and the countries.  
120 [But] I needed to know technology as well.  
141 So, at the same time I attended [college].  
150 And I entered these [particular, part-time] engineering studies [in year 2000].

**Kati:**

02 Well, it's not a very glorious career yet.  
03 I have graduated [in the end of 1990's] as a Master in engineering.  
04 I did my thesis in the [technology] laboratory [at the university].  
05 And I stayed there because I couldn't get the job immediately.  
06 I tried to apply for a job from outside the lab right after graduation.  
08 So, I stayed there for six months and researched things.  
09 But I recognized that it wasn't the right place for me.  
23 And then I managed, all by my self, to get a job outside the university.  
24 So, I moved to the [research unit of the current company].  
29 And I was like: "Yeah! Now I've found the job of my life!"  
30 And an interesting project was about to start.  
37 [It wasn't what I have supposed, but] then I stayed there [and did other  
jobs].  
53 [However, projects were pointless] and then I thought that "let's move then  
to the [business unit]."  
54 And, well, I started to look for a job.  
55 And then I founded again "oh, super lovely job!" that, you know, matched  
with all my needs.  
60 So, then I indeed moved [to another unit] to develop [one internet service].  
62 And there I then, you know, started to fix their statistics.  
63 And again I imagined that I'd have been allowed to do analysis job that I  
wanted.  
64 This time I knew that there was data.  
65 There was, was, you know, an analysis tool and well...  
76 [However, I got other tasks instead, but still] I was relatively satisfied.  
77 I guess, I thought last autumn that I'll start figuring out something new and  
wonderful (*uutta ja ihmeellistä*).  
79 Actually, I applied for a job internally [but I didn't get it].

## Appendix 5: Examples of In-depth Story Analysis

The following stories clarify the interpretative points made in the transition narratives (chapter 5). These examples are selected because they express emotions felt during the transition process. They also do convey what an important role *confidence* – the feeling of certainty – plays in expertise. In a role transition, things usually do not happen as expected, prior expertise can be socially questioned, and a person may feel unconfident and vulnerable.

In popularistic “self help” literature, as well as in some HRD publications and employee training, confidence is understood as deriving from good self-esteem. Confidence is commonly related to letting oneself being less fearful, spontaneous, and natural. Confident person is feeling powerful and comfortable. In the following stories, nevertheless, confidence is not understood in individualistic terms. It is context-related and social phenomenon. The sources of confidence are in professional knowledge, predictability of procedural guidelines and working rules, as well as in recognition of one’s expertise.

Therefore, power is present in these stories. Episodes are negotiations between different actors of who has the right to say how things should be understood. Rami defends rigor software version management practices; Niko looks after commonly agreed and fair nomination practices; Timo would like to maintain clear rule-based procedures in cost management; Kati is longing for visibility in short-term planning, and Anne is wishing for better ways to handle extensive work-load and allocate one’s old tasks to new employees in role transition. All of the mentioned practices enable and extend possibilities for expertise. Violations to such practices increase confusion and non-confidence.

### Rami – Shared responsibility and messy coding

This story is about distributed software development and co-operation between Rami (permanent employee) and external consultants (contractors) in a development project.

*Abstract:*

- 02 *When you have done something.*
- 03 *And then it’s still a little bit incomplete (U: yes).*
- 04 *And you’d like to continue with it.*
- 05 *And then, however, you can’t continue with it yourself.*
- 06 *You have to, you know, hand it over in an incomplete state to somebody.*
- 07 *[You have to] let him or her to do something for it.*
- 08 *You have a little bit, you know, (p) it’s not so easy.*
- 09 *U: A little bit like “don’t touch on my work?” R: Right!*  
*(Both are laughing.)*

*Orientation:*

- 12 *We have also those-those (U: mmm) tools in where you can put the [code].*
- 14 *And edit [with it] and put the new version in it (U: yes).*
- 15 *You can track the [changes].*



Action:

16 *You know, it happened to us that they hadn't (sighs), they hadn't follow slavishly that [version management].*

Orientation:

18 *[They] were just these external (U: right) "masters."*

Action:

19 *So, (U: yes) [they] hadn't follow the guidelines.*

Evaluation:

21 *On the other hand, they've been doing these tasks longer than me.*

22 *So, they should have known. (U: Laughs).*

25 *[Collaboration in programming] requires rigidity (U: yes).*

26 *One can't start solo-performance there.*

Action:

27 *U: So what happened in tha-that case?*

28 *R: Well, they'd done the [upgrading] directly from our code, I mean, inside the database (U: mmm), [not] inside that configuration tool (p).*

29 *[They had] done the changes directly into [the database].*

30 *And [they] left me [the task] to bring the [changed code] back into the configuration tool.*

Evaluation:

32 *When you take a code from somewhere, where whoever has had a possibility to modify it*

33 *you can't be exactly 100% sure that it's then [well done].*

Resolution:

36 *I've then, you know, [verified] that there [in the updated code], nobody had hit some marks in between [versions] by accident.*

Evaluation:

39 *[It bothers me...] when people should do things in a certain way, but they don't really feel like (U: yes).*

40 *[And usually...] nobody has gone fiddling around with [the code] (U: mmm).*

41 *But it's not, anyhow, completely sure (U: yes, yes).*

44 *Anyway, everything is possible (U: mmm).*

Software development required paradoxically communication and co-operation, as well as 100% certainty on results and control over one's own doings. By sharing the responsibilities Rami ran the risk of losing control over the results of his own job. To balance the feeling of uncertainty, Rami returned to his independent way of doing. He verified and double-checked afterwards what the others had done.

In the story Rami had been absent and could not finish the programming of his own code. External designers completed his job by themselves, without his guidance or surveillance. Such collaboration was not a natural choice for Rami. Negative feelings were echoed in the introduction (lines 05-08; can't, had to, not easy). Moreover, telling was in a passive "you" mode and emphasized that everybody would like to complement what they have started. "Wouldn't you?" Listener was asked to identify with the narrator.

In the story, Rami presented two alternative solutions to complete a job accurately. That is, you do the job yourself or you do the job collaboratively by using version management tools. Such a professional and slick way of doing did not happen. Code was upgraded in a way that Rami could not be certain of its accuracy. The perspective in the story was clearly in the correct and faultless way of working. Evaluation of events enforced the point (lines 08, 33). Contrast between confidence and non-confidence was built by comparing what actually happened and what should have happened. Moreover, contrast was personified to differences between the narrator and the external programmers.

*“Later on, such funny things happened again.*

*You know, [we needed to make changes] to the next version, [but] couple of earlier versions had suddenly disappeared [from the tool] (U: mmm).*

*That was again related to something, some-some gaff in the use of a tool [...].*

*[I] had to do, in here, a little detective work, that you know (U: mmm), I could find the right version.*

*[I had] to go backwards and compare [different versions] (U: yes).*

*“From where on earth, from where the [changes] come,” you know.*

To emphasize the point Rami added yet another story. In the evaluation, he made the same point clear than in the earlier story: One must be strict and double-check. Otherwise one can never be sure that everything is ok. By doing detective work, Rami could restore the feeling of certainty that he had lost by letting others touch on his code.

### **Niko – Not the only one who thinks that the treatment was unfair**

The following three episodes are a continuation of the nomination story presented in a chapter five. In the first episode events are evaluated with the voice of a human resource consultant. In the second one they are evaluated with the voice of a shop steward, and in the third one with the voice of an experienced colleague. In the first two encounters the other person is an outsider. Combination thus highlights the contradiction between Niko’s organization where things are not taken care and other two organizations where things are managed well. In the third episode, Niko’s own supervisor is compared with his senior colleague who was formerly a supervisor himself.

*Orientation:*

*48 In our organization too somebody should take care of these human resource (HR) issues (U: mmm).*

*49 It was a fanny case when I personally called to HR once.*

*Action:*

*50 And then my own HR person was absent, and*

*51 they transferred my call to another HR person who worked in another unit.*

52 *And she was amazed that how things can be managed like that [in our company] (U: mmm, mmm).*

53 *That, that if it's really [done] as an internal transfer, after the recruitment interview (sighs), starting date and a detailed job agreed,*

54 *then employer is bound by it.*

55 *And my new supervisor represents employer in that case.*

*Evaluation*

56 *So, strictly speaking [he is] offending the [national] law!*

*Resolution:*

57 *But I've tried to keep, and I think we do have good relationships to continue these negotiations [...].*

*Orientation:*

80 *And indeed when you asked whether I've done something else*

81 *I did ask this, this month from my HR contact person, aaa, from [her], to give the name of our shop steward (luottamusmies) [...].*

*Action:*

84 *And I called him.*

85 *He was [traveling], but we were just swapping opinions with each other's (U: mmm) a little.*

*Evaluation:*

86 *And he-he told also that, I understood, that this is a quite strange case.*

*Resolution:*

87 *And I said so too that my intention is not to start fighting in this case.*

88 *That I believe it's not the right solution.*

89 *And he said also that it's not.*

90 *And usually people consult him when they already have real problems.*

*Orientation:*

110 *In our team there's also one "veteran" who had been for a long time a supervisor himself and so forth.*

*Action:*

111 *So I asked his advice in this case as well.*

114 *So, he just gave me an advice that (coughs) I must keep this thing on a table.*

115 *That, you know, I shouldn't [let it go], I just have to (U: mmm) remind about it. (U: That's it.)*

*Evaluation:*

116 *(Laughs) so, you know (U: yes, yes), yes [what can I say] (p).*

The core narrative that was presented in the chapter five continued with these short episodes. These "performative" acts evaluated why Niko had reacted to his delayed nomination process in a way he had. Nomination was "agreed in official negotiations" and therefore employer was bound to it and the broken promise "offended the law." In that case, Niko did not want to start fighting, but he had not given up either and kept reminding about the situation regularly.

In these episodes, Niko is still in the middle of an unsolved dilemma. He cannot understand and find any explanation that would cohere with his interpretative

framework. The only thing that would make sense to him is the official appointment to his new role as soon as possible. In such an unfair situation, one could expect Niko to demand his rights more aggressively. However, he controls his feelings and avoids an open fight. In his story (including the beginning of the story in chapter five), he never talks directly about his emotions. That enforces an interpretation that rational and logical way of doing is the first priority for Niko. He just wants to end the case with the right solution. In the meanwhile, he contains himself.

The point of the story is that the role transition has been not only emotionally but also rationally unfair. Accordingly, the right way of doing would be the following.

- Nominations in different units are done according to the same principles.
- Experienced, expert and hard-working people are appointed before less experienced ones.
- Nominations become official right away when a person has started in a new role.
- Good relationships lead to actions and agreed commitments are kept – even with a little delay.

### **Timo – Cost management and a feeling of uncertainty**

This story is about Timo's new budgeting responsibilities and about differences between cost management and technical database management. New responsibilities lack clear guidelines and immediate feedback. Timo is wondering how he can know whether he has done the right things.

*Abstract:*

01 *U: [What was problematic in your role transition?]*

02 *(p) Of course, then something like that, (p) when I got [...] cost responsibilities.*

03 *Then (U: yes), you know, I've never been too punctual with my personal money business.*

04 *But, you know, (p) somehow it surprised me that (p) I couldn't, you know (laughs)...*

05 *[The cost estimates] were just splashed, like "Well, these are our estimated costs for the next month and for the next three months."*

06 *And (U: mmm) then when those estimations come true in different ways at different times...*

07 *Then, I feel that stuff to-do so damn obscure.*

*Orientation:*

09 *Then sometimes I was thinking, that... well... somehow, this budget making is a little bit like...*

*Action:*

10 *It's done like, as what makes you feel good (silleen ku hyvältä tuntuu).*

11 *There are no very clear guiding rules*

12 *about how these things are estimated, these costs, and how they come true and (U: yes) things like that.*

*Evaluation:*

13 *So, it feels so obscure this thing to-do.*

14 *So, in the beginning it made me a little bit terrified, because I was responsible for these [costs].*

*Resolution:*

15 *But, yes... in half a year I've got used to already,*

16 *that nobody comes to really (pahemmin) ask about these (laughs) (U: laughs).*

*Evaluation:*

23 *It was little bit terrifying first, because (U: yes, yes) there were no really clear guidelines about how to (kuinkas), well, how to do these things (U: yes, yes).*

*Resolution:*

24 *Well, well, then, you know, if I say rudely, [I] got used to...*

25 *That "well, if something is just thrown in there, the best guess or something like that."*

26 *So, it's in a way like "whatever" (hällä-väliä) (U: yes).*

27 *U: Yes, That is in a way your guideline? T: yes, yeah. U: the instruction? T: yes, yeah, yeah, just like that (U: yes).*

28 *"Put these there and if it doesn't come true, then there's nothing to do. And if it ends up being a bigger [cost], then it's not your fault anyway. Then those things are just more expensive than what we originally thought of" (Laughs) (U: yes, yes).*

*Orientation:*

30 *And then when there were some of those [system] servers coming. So, so... how those costs were allocated and things like that...*

*Action:*

31 *So, surprisingly... there can come some strange, strange big extra cost to your cost [account].*

32 *And (U: yes) then your manager just informs you that "Yes, we decided to push it to your cost [account] because there weren't so many other costs. We split those [costs] a bit in there."*

33 *So, then [I'm] looking that "my estimations are all wrong, they're off 100 per cent"*

34 *But (U: yes) what can you do when they put it there..."*

*Evaluation:*

37 *U: So, even if you are responsible for that [cost center], it's not totally your own? T: well, no, no it [is] not. Yes [you're right].*

*Orientation:*

40 *The target like this came... that plus-minus [certain percentage] should be the estimation (U: mmm) versus end result (U: mmm) accuracy.*

42 *If it's not inside that window, then (U: mmm) you have to give explanations that what's the reason for that [deviation].*

Action:

- 43 *So, I've had couple of times that... [we] have not been in that window.*  
44 *But nobody has ever asked that what-what for was that*  
45 *and never has anybody figured it out that to whom we have to report these [deviations].*

Evaluation:

- 46 *Just [an example of] this sort of obscurity with these costs.*  
47 *So, [...] well... it has felt a little bit weird... that (U: mmm).*  
48 *[I] was used to that everything goes exactly [according to rules or plans].*

When we analyze the content and form of the story, we can see that Timo repeats a certain structure that supports the point of the story. In abstract Timo summarizes the core plot, and same pattern is repeated in each episode (orientation, action, evaluation, resolution). Person has responsibility for the costs. But he has only vague guidelines that do not allow him to follow any specific rule. As a consequence, estimations come true in different ways at different times. In abstract Timo also presents the key contrast that organizes the story. First concrete contrast is between how Timo takes care of his own money (line 03) and how the company money is handled (lines 05, 06).

First episode is told in a habitual narrative genre. Action does not point to any special time or place, but events happen on a regular basis (Riessman, 1990). It describes a common situation of not having clear operational rules, and only very vague guidelines (lines 10–12). Second episode tells about a special case. Part of the system servers' purchasing costs was allocated to Timo's cost account, even if it was not initially planned in the budget. As a result, Timo's budget plans were wrong. Even if this was an episode about one particular case, it is told in present tense. It, thus, refers to a common nature of this event and convinces listeners that this was just an example of the habitual situation of cost management in Timo's organization. Third episode is also about a particular case like the one before. This time it is told in the past tense. Case, as it is told, is strong enough to convince listeners that it is impossible to follow any rules in the cost management. Even if rules exist (lines 40, 42), it is impossible to follow the rules (lines 44, 45).

Timo evaluates each episode in a similar way and he uses emotional expressions to emphasize his interpretations. The whole thing to-do feels scared, obscure, unclear, and strange (*hirvittää, tuntuu epämääräiselle ja oudolle*). In the last episode, Timo says explicitly that unpleasant emotions result from the conflict between how he was used to do things (line 48) and how things are done in his new job. Timo was used to be sure of what he is doing in his previous job. Confidence comes from the knowledge that you know that you do right things and that you do them correctly. Now, Timo lacks that control, he have to trust on the best guess (line 25), and that makes him feel bad.

The point of the story is that things only happen without that anybody takes control and responsibility. Nobody is particularly in charge or doing things and making things happen. Timo emphasized his point by using a passive mode of telling (passive tense, generalizing present tense, and habitual narrative genre). Also the structure of the narrative, same pattern is repeated several times, emphasizes the point.

## Kati – What is the logic?

This story is a follow-up of a series of project stories, in which Kati told what she has done in concrete terms. This story complements the evaluative point of the project stories and tells how it felt to work in the new concept design role.

*Abstract:*

00 *I can't trust my, my current line manager. She's a nice person, [but ...] for example, the planning [for the next half a year], you know, for the beginning of the next year (U: mmm), we... us, her subordinates, we don't have any visibility on what she has decided [in the plan for us...].*

*Orientation:*

01 *I had few interesting discussions (laughs) indeed last week.*

03 *Because my responsibility area is sort of [business internet applications] (coughs) (U: mmm).*

04 *I realized suddenly that "Hello! Uups! (hupsis-keikkaa) there's nothing [in the departmental short-term plan] for [these applications].*

05 *There's not much [planned for them] for fall either.*

06 *So, I wonder what [my supervisor] imagines for me to do [next year]!" (U: yes)*

*Action:*

07 *Well, then I first moaned about it for couple of people and I wondered about it.*

08 *[And then I asked] if anybody knows what's written in our short term plan*

09 *Nobody knew.*

*Evaluation:*

10 *Yes, I knew it already since the beginning that nobody knows (laughs).*

*Action:*

11 *Then we counted with my close col-colleague*

14 *that how much we know we have [planned working hours] (U: yes), you know, for the first half a year.*

15 *We counted that "Ahaa! There's about seventy days for both of us together."*

*Evaluation:*

(15) (p) *"Ahaa!" [That's not enough] (U: yes).*

*Action:*

16 *Well, then, in a less constructive state of mind, I went to ask my [supervisor]:*

17 *"What an earth you think I'm going to do during the first half- half a year period"*

18 *And then she started to list everything like a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and a little bit of this and a little bit of that... (ripu tätä, ripu tätä, ripu tätä, ripu tätä, ripu tätä, ripu tätä).*

*Evaluation:*

19 *And that's exactly what has annoyed me...*

20 *that I've had originally three [internet applications in my responsibility area] and then I had to include the forth one (U: mmm),*



- 21 *because one of our incompetent employee [had to change his job].*  
24 *and as a result his job had to be split into smaller tasks and those tasks were given to the rest of us.*  
26 *And I was like “Wait a minute! What, what, what!”*

Action:

- 27 *And, and she... then [my supervisor] was: “Oh well. But you left in the middle of our discussion when we were discussing about the one [open] position [of a concept management].”*  
28 *“hmm?!”*  
32 *She said just sud-suddenly that “yes!” she offered that [position to a new colleague]*  
33 *(p) and I was just like “ahaa, nice.” (U: mmm).*

Evaluation:

- 43 *[This colleague] came, you know, [three months earlier] to our company (U: yes).*  
35 *And, you know, frankly, this sort of a promotion was offered to this [new] employee instead of me!*  
36 *After that, of course, I got very upset (otin hirveet pultit).*  
37 *And, well, aaa, then I just made a remark that [this colleague] was not terribly interested about this technology since the beginning.*  
38 *That maybe, maybe in a way (U: mmm) she wasn't the best possible [choice to this new position].*

Action:

- 39 *And, and then [my supervisor] was that: “Oh! Would you have been interested in this?”*  
40 *I said that: “Yes, I would have” (laughs).*

Evaluation:

- 42 *[However,] then I started stammering that naturally somebody has to take care of these [business applications] too.*

Resolution:

- 44 *And finally, well then I... we continued this, this discussion last Thursday.*  
45 *And then [my supervisor said]: “Ok. Well, you can... Yes, of course you can get this new position if you want it!” [She imitates a voice of a simple woman.]*  
46 *“Ahaa! Yes, ok. I do want it.” [She imitates non-enthusiastic voice.]*  
47 *“Oh good! Yes, I will discuss with the [department head]” [Voice of a simple woman]*  
48 *“All right, great.” [Non-enthusiastic voice]*

Coda:

*[...] So, to conclude, I've been offered a new job, you know, last week. Except that then we noticed that (U: mmm), that, you know, this [customer], [customer's] strategic change makes us review the concept management responsibilities in this, this case (U: mmm). [...]*  
*I slightly suppose that there won't be any position [like that] [...].*  
*So, it's this kind of strange mess and (p) I don't like... (U: mmm).*

This story reveals a person who is in the middle of a conflict between how things are done and how they should be done. A new role transition is presented as a resolution to such obscure and stressful situation – but is that possible either?

Before the story actually starts, Kati refers to the basic theme of the story; she “can’t trust” on her supervisor and she has “no visibility” on her forthcoming tasks. She has not seen the half a year plans even if that should have been the base for her own work and working time planning. Then, the action plot can be summarized as the following: First, Kati was wondering by herself about what she should do in her responsibility area next spring, and then she asked her colleagues if they knew what should be done. Then she went through existing plans with her colleagues, and finally she went to ask her supervisor. Each unsatisfactory answer led to a new attempt. Then, she found out that there has been an open job that has not been offered to her even if she would have been interested. By the end of a series of conversations with her supervisor, the job was offered to her, but she was not convinced that it would work out.

When we focus on the structure of the story, we can see that Kati is bringing the plot forward by small, distinct episodes that follow each other’s in time. Each of them has its own action sequence followed by evaluation, in which the narrator interprets the meaning of an action. Moreover, episodes repeat a similar pattern (orientation, action, evaluation). Kati tries to figure out her own role and situation (lines 07–08, 11, 16, and 26; trying to figure out, asking colleagues, counting working hours, asking supervisor, wondering why only list of small tasks [ripuja]). Each time, however, her intentions end up without satisfactory information and she cannot clarify her role (lines 10, 15, 18, 28; nobody knew, not enough planned hours, only list of small tasks, did not know about an open job).

First episodes lacked an end solution. The fifth episode is evaluative in nature. It is in between the prior action and the final conclusion, and sets a doubtful tone just before the listener hears the final episode. The discussion about the new job is put off when Kati mentioned her concern about her current responsibility area. Then, finally in a resolution Kati’s supervisor offers a possibility to move to another role and Kati saw it as a way to get rid of current role confusion. However, she is skeptical for the offer and makes again the same point she made in the beginning. Her supervisor is untrustworthy and her promises are unreliable (stress of voice and coda; there won’t be such position).

The contrast between the situation where future is unclear and the situation where Kati could feel confident and could use her expertise is clear. By interpreting the evaluative comments and by comparing them to a contrary, we can figure out what Kati expects from her work environment.

- Visibility to short term planning
- Colleagues who know what the team goals are
- Enough working hours allocated to each person
- One main responsibility area (instead of pile of small tasks)
- Promotion policies that benefit people who have experience and genuine interest on technology
- Assertiveness and credibility from management

If the following principles would come true, Kati could plan her job ahead. She could carry responsibility on developing her own expertise and progress in her career.

### **Anne – Emotional transformation**

This story is about Anne's perspective change and especially how she emotionally experienced her transformation. Her feelings altered from fearfulness to calmness.

*Abstract:*

00 *You put this dilemma in a way that, that... if one wants to change [a job] is it worthwhile to continue as a team leader [in one's own team]? [...]*

*Orientation:*

01 *I can't remember whether that was before or after when I started to feel hopeless [that there will be no team leader's position available for me]*

02 *Well, I was afraid that I can't get rid of old stuff in my job responsibilities [...].*

04 *That then I won't have enough time.*

05 *Somehow I started to feel afraid that... that there's too much then.*

07 *Well, it was probably just before the [role transition] started to look like it won't turn out well (smiles).*

*Evaluation:*

10 *I remember... I have such impressions that... (U: yes), that I felt like there's no way I can get away from my old businesses.*

11 *That still, all the time, I have to be entangled with them.*

*Orientation:*

12 *Then (U: yes), I had once such a colleague.*

*Action:*

14 *She became a team leader then, you know.*

16 *And then she told me all kinds of stories about development discussions, which she had done (laughs) first time [with her team members].*

*Evaluation:*

17 *So, I got terrified, like "Oh, my God!"*

19 *That (U: yes) how can I find time,*

20 *if I had to get them done on a terrible schedule, and then yet to do my old tasks aside?*

21 *That (U: yes, yes) it won't work out.*

*Orientation:*

23 *Well, then, then it started to look like the moving to the team leader's position won't turn out well...*

*Resolution:*

24 *And then I thought: "Well, if I become [a team leader], I have to play it cool (kylmän rauhallisesti) and say that I can't do such stuff,*

25 *and that we must then, you know (U: mmm), find somebody who can do it [instead]." (U: mmm)*

In this story the same pattern repeats itself four times (orientation – evaluation). The only action is a short dialogue between Anne and her former colleague, and even that encountering occurred “once” in a non-specified time, place and with a non-identified person. It had rather symbolic function in a story. Only in the end (in the final resolution) Anne involved in action. She cut down her work load. The point of this narrative is therefore to evaluate transition through emotional reaction rather than to recall concrete events.

The storytelling is not bound to a specific time, though Anne talks about time in her orientations (lines 01, 07, 23). Such orientations make it clear, above all, that the story is related to the role transition. In the interview situation, I thought that Anne wanted to specify the concrete point in time, and I asked was it in the beginning of the year. Therefore, Anne repeats the same orientation (line 07) and makes it clear that the point of time itself does not matter, but that the point is that is was a time when she thought that she would become a team leader.

The lack of action on Anne’s behalf emphasizes that she was first very passive regarding her possible role transition. She reacted emotionally and described her fearful feelings both outspokenly (lines 02, 05, 17; feeling afraid, being terrified) and metaphorically (lines 02, 10–11; can’t get rid of, can’t get away, being entangled with). The metaphors repeated her non-active state and her feeling of being trapped in a tight corner. Anne interpreted team leadership in terms of increasing workload and hurry (lines 04, 19-20; no time, terrible schedule) and of being coughed up involuntarily with her old tasks.

In a third orientation, Anne’s position turns up side down. Transition to team leader’s role became very unlikely and Anne’s emotional response changed from being scared to calmness. Indeed, Anne did not evaluate transition anymore just with warm emotions, but rather uses cool, rational reflection (line 24). The following resolution is a natural consequence of the situation. In the follow-up story (see the chapter 5) Anne told more about the events related to her role transition.



