



The impact of socio-economic background on career progression

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European Research

- Commissioned by CEDEFOP (2013-2014)
- Individual biographies of 100+ workers, aged 25-40, as they moved in and through the labour market
- Probes how learning can support workers' transitions on the labour market.
- Generating a deeper understanding of the multiple dimensions underlying individual career transitions and learning

Overall purpose of the study

To identify common themes, approaches and ways of representing how low-skilled workers can be supported in their learning activities, career development, employability and career transitions

European Research: 7 country study

Narrative approach:

- Focuses on the need to learn for labour market participation and progression,
- Examines what happens when individuals do not engage with learning
- Explores the role of careers guidance and counselling for supporting low skilled workers

Critical dimensions

Socio-economic
background

Educational
achievements

Low skilled

Skills profiles

Attitudes to
learning

Seven European Country Comparison

- Denmark
- England
- France
- Germany
- Italy
- Czech Republic
- Poland

Initial findings from 4 countries

Themes:

- Attitudes to adult learning
- Work activity & career progress
- Support structures

FRANCE

- 7 men, 8 women
- Aged: 26 – 42 years
- Mixture of single, divorced and married
- Mostly employed; 2 sick leave, 1 vocational leave
- Many left school with no or low level qualifications
- Highest current qualification is a Level 3
- 10 located in urban environments, 5 rural
- Some aspirations: qualifications and jobs

Attitudes to learning: barriers

- Family circumstances (handicapped mother; childcare; parents' divorce; spouse's career)
- Experiences learning as boring, sitting still
- Bad experience of a particular teacher
- Self image as a non-learner
- Early experiences of formal learning

Bad experience of a teacher:

'I was thrown into the pool to learn swimming. I was very afraid. I still remember the smell of the water.' FR 1, Antoine

'She destroyed me. She was on my case all the time. She threatened me all the time and I have no idea why. Even at the time I had no idea why – I certainly wasn't naughty. I kind of gave up.' FR 11, Mathilde

Redoublement – repeating a year

- More pupils repeat in France than in other EU
- About 50% of those who have successfully completed compulsory schooling repeated
- Entrenched in the French system but rate has dropped & stabilised under 20% (2000)
- Repeating a year is helpful at secondary but
- Unhelpful in early years (primary)

Experience of *redoublement*

Jean FR9

'I had the same teacher for French when I retook. It was the exact same set book and the exact same dictation at the same time. It was shameless; an out and out cut and paste job.'

Thérèse FR 14

Strategic choice to retake (3ème) so as to improve grades needed for her baccalaureate option.

Motivators to learn:

- Positive experience of learning from someone you like
- Realisation that a lack of qualifications is a barrier in the labour market
- Increasing social capital (to enhance sex appeal)

Learning from someone you like:

*'For 15 years I had a chef who was 'old school'
He was the one who taught me everything.
Thank goodness...he was the one who taught
me how to be a cook'* FR4, Dominique

*'My economics teacher had opened my eyes on
the world'* FR9, Jean (male)

What lacking qualifications means:

'In France nowadays to make hamburgers at McDonald's you need at least a BTS - if I don't have the Bac (A-Levels), I can't even wash the floor' FR3, Chai

'In the end, it's always the same: I'm doing cleaning.' FR6, Fabienne

Learning enhancing sex appeal

'I'd have been very happy to have a coffee with the girls who were around. But they weren't interested in a grease monkey like me. No, they were only interested if you wore a suit. Well, that's changed now! FR3, Chai (male)

'Imagine you want to give someone flowers and you don't know how to write the card!' FR5, Enrique (male)

Parental influence; directive, prophetic

- *'My father told me "if you don't work at school, you will do cleaning". And I do cleaning.'* FR6
- *'Mother said: "go to school and work" but she wasn't there to check our homework'. FR13*
- *'My parents were very, maybe a bit too, lax... there were no obligations, even getting the Bac wasn't obligatory in their eyes' FR4*

Little entrepreneurship (3 of 15)

2 dreamers: Organic smallholding or Tending goats

1 entrepreneur: personal wealth adviser FR6, Chai

Self-employed

Micro enterprise headcount of 4

Small enterprise headcount of 20

Partnership

Self employed

Only 2 sought challenging work : Chai

just by going to the factory day after day with my greasy hair and my depressing greasy overalls, I reckoned there must be something else I could do. It really had to be time for a change.'

'everyone else had a Brevet Technician Superieure and I had nothing. They really didn't want me, but I'd got the top mark so they had to take me on.' FR6, Chai

Mathilde FR 11 also sought challenges:

I loved it, they were my best years – I had a ball. I got the measure of it right away, I had initiative and I just imposed myself. My boss had complete confidence in me – we were co-conspirators. I was up for it, I was at the ready – always on the lookout for extra work, more responsibility. Always anticipating what was needed, always on the lookout.'

More challenge; disaster and legacy

I was able to develop everything, which was great personal and professional development. It went really well – in my first year sales more than doubled.'

'we both knew there were gaps but nothing serious – we agreed you can always learn, pick up what you need. But it was a disaster; a poisoned chalice'

'I really am operating at this high level.'

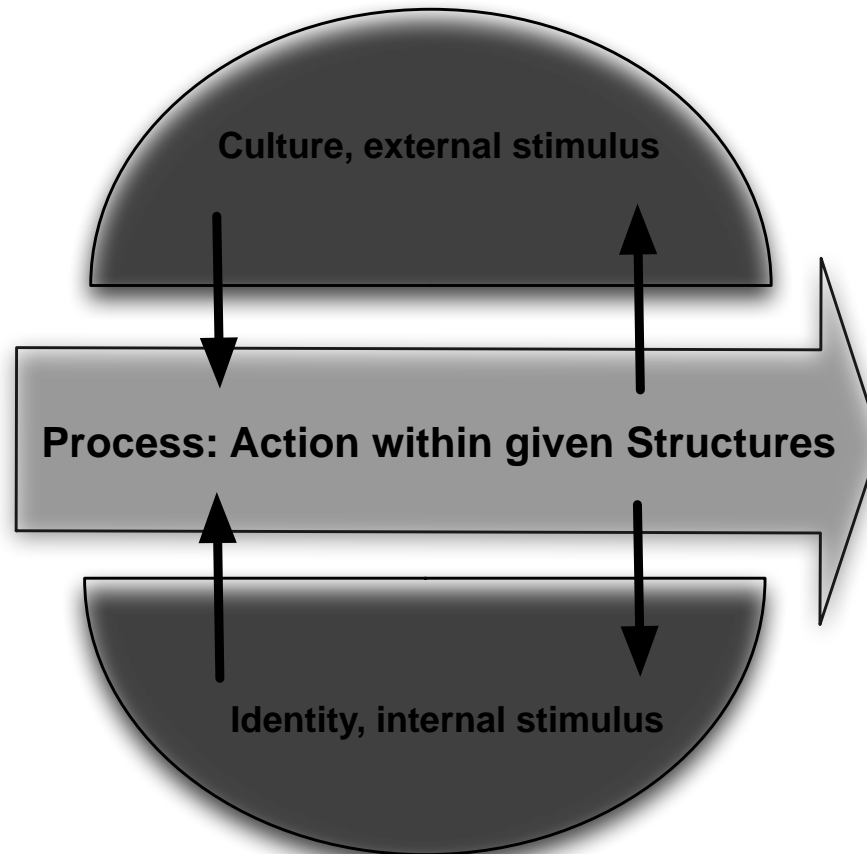
Common themes FRANCE

- Strong preference for applied/practical rather than academic learning
- Learning from and liking someone are linked
- Acute awareness that lack of formal qualifications severely restricts career choice

GERMANY

- 5 men, 10 women
- Aged: 25 – 42 years
- Mixture of single, divorced and married
- All employed (partly stable, partly precarious)
- All left school with no or relative low level qualifications
- Highest current qualification is a Level 4 (DQF)
- 8 located in urban environments, 7 rural
- We have identified 3 patterns within this group

Structure of identified influencing factors



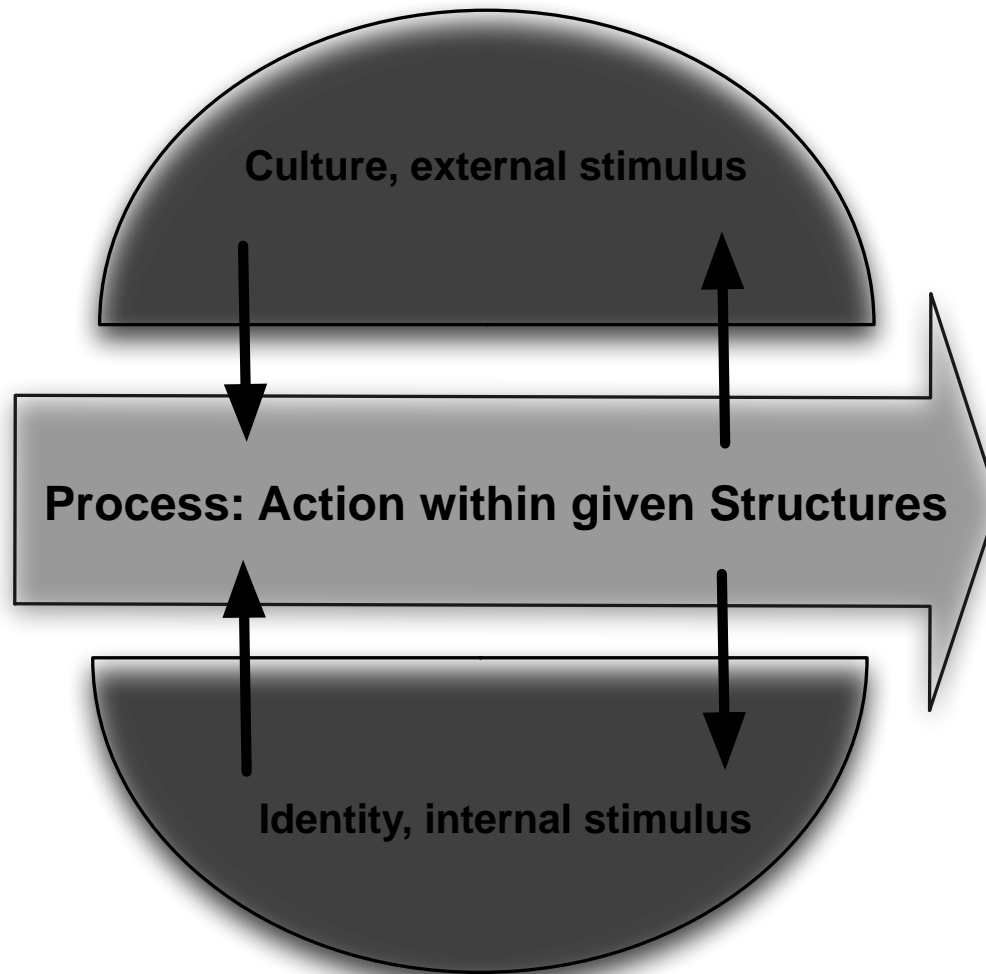
Graph: Heuristic for Code-Families, Culture and Identity as stimulus and result of dynamic (educational/counseling) processes (Weber/Kochem 2013)

Attitudes to learning

- *Barriers to learning:*
 - biographical
 - institutional
 - individual competence to steer the process (making plans, taking action, evaluate)
- *Motivators to learn:*
 - relevance of learning to the *current* job is less important (learning -> future orientation)
 - goal orientation: realize a sufficient change and stabilization (challenging work)
 - learning follows *life motives*

Common themes

- If learning is an option the IP consider, they need a very concrete path bringing them closer to an identified goal (so missing basic qualification is a massive obstacle)
- Mastered qualification in combination with job experience offer new & better possibilities (e.g. flexibility on labour market and higher aspiration)
- *Emotional aspects* (stability/instability) play a role in learning in nearly all interviews
- Learning must go in line with *life-themes*. *These themes rule the aspiration (not other way around)*



Graph: Heuristic for Code-Families, Culture and Identity as stimulus and result of dynamic (educational/counseling) processes (Weber/Kochem 2013)

Support structures for learning

- Role of parents/careers
- Role of school
- Role of companies/HR
- Role of institutional Support (e.g. PES, Grants)
- Role of significant others

Work activity & career progression

- Broad range of branches - > similarity in situations
- Career navigation?
- Identification of patterns

Education, Experience & Navigation

Navigation - > to *take* direction - > aspiring based on reflection (personal competence / environmental situation - > plan & take action)

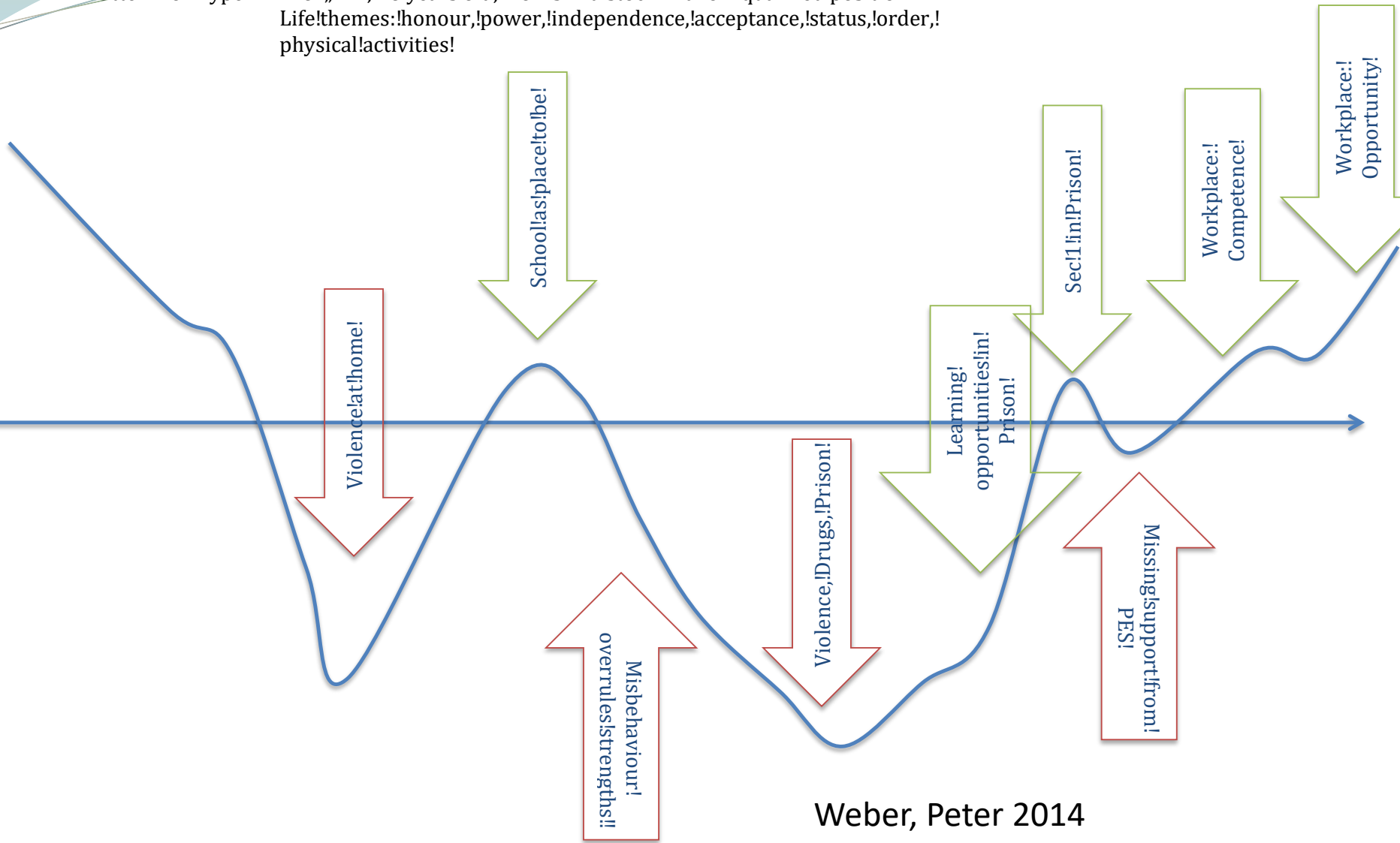
- Navigation to maintain job (e.g. IP2, Andrea)
- Navigation to be successful/make a major change (e.g. IP1, Ali; IP12, Larissa; IP15, Franziska)
- Navigate to complete something (e.g. IP3, Claudia) or to find “my place” (e.g. IP 7, Tina; IP6, Paul)
- Navigate to be independent (e.g. IP 5, Kai)

3 identified typical patterns (so far)

- **Pattern 1** (e.g. Ali, Kai, Larissa, Kim, Andy)
- Low results in school learning. Reason mainly conflict and missing self control or change in environment, not intellectual ability
- We found *turning points* later in life where they caught up with learning (to different extent and success)
- Values/motives: Independency, Power, Honour

Weber, Peter 2014

Pattern for Type 1: "Ali", 26 years old, works in a stock in a low qualified position.
Life themes: honour, power, independence, acceptance, status, order, physical activities!



Weber, Peter 2014

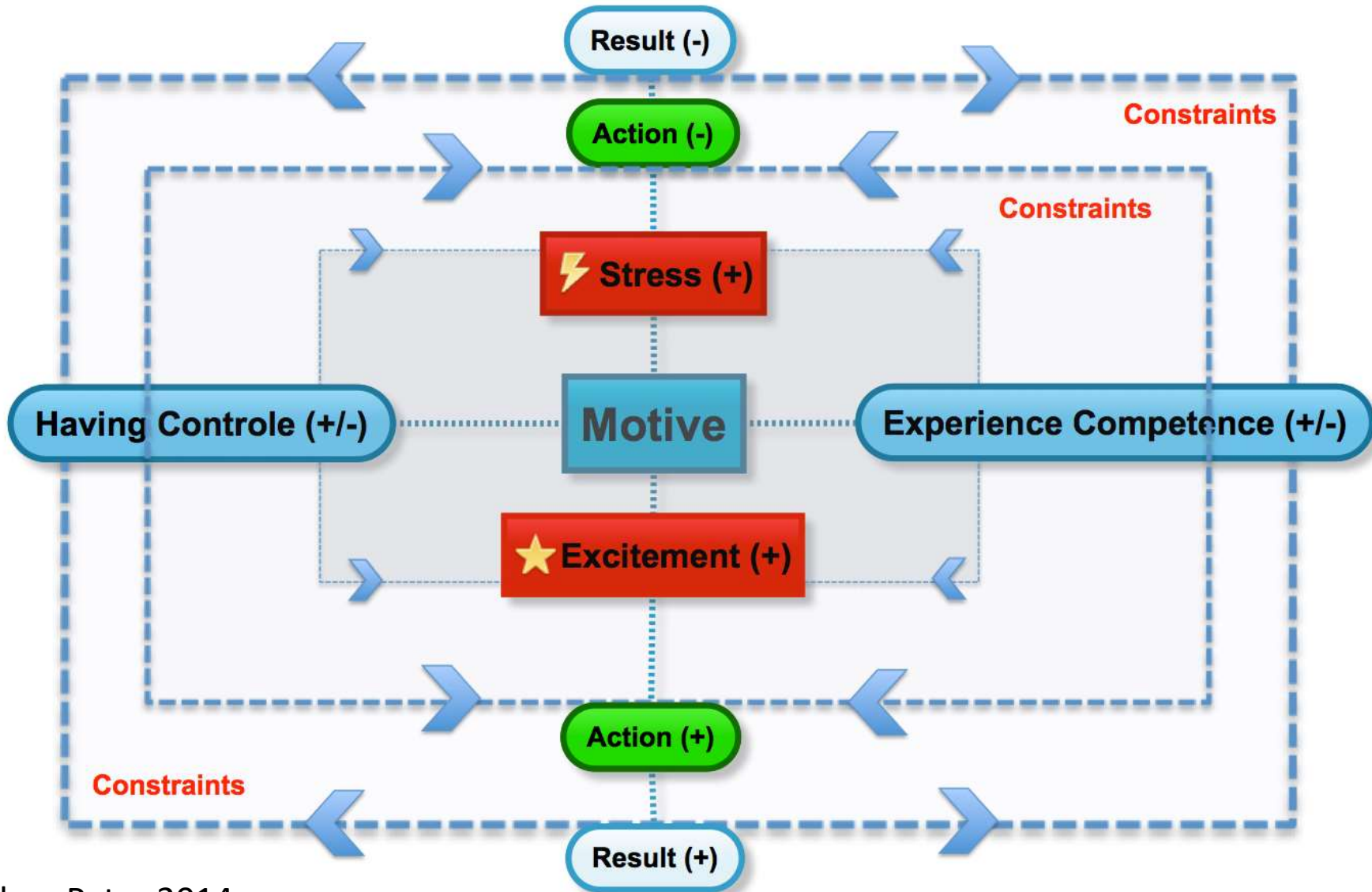
3 identified typical patterns (so far)

- Pattern 2 (e.g. Andrea, Wiltrud, Larissa, Franziska, Mandy)
- Low results in school learning mainly, stability in family, intellectual ability, low achievement
- Show a “stable career” on a low level that satisfy them more or less, often a turning point in environment (instability) makes learning needed
- Values/Motives: Stability, family, tranquillity, predictability/control

3 identified typical patterns (so far)

- **Pattern 3** (Claudia, Paul, Tina, Julia, Larissa)
- Higher educational achievement supported by family but problems to cope with school from different reasons (e.g. health, clarity of goals). Achievements have been higher than results.
- Show an unstable, fluctuating career pattern (e.g. a first choice for a VET, that does not match interest). Often different approaches and detours
- Values/motives: Identity, Idealism, Independency, Integration

Integrational Model for the internal Process: Action within given structures (draft)



DENMARK

- 7 women, 8 men
- Aged: 26-40
- Mixture of single and married
- Mostly employed and/or studying
- All finished compulsory school + upper secondary/basic vocational training/none
- Highest level of qualification: 4 EQF
- 8 located in urban environments, 7 in rural
- Some aspirations: better job possibilities/security, better income, better quality of life, becoming a professional, opening SME

Attitudes to learning: barriers

- Disinterest
- Previous learning environment: during education and training
- Lack of parental support/interest
- Structural barriers: availability of apprenticeship, economic compensation, time

Does education matter?

- **Henrik:** *“If the qualification does not lead to greater responsibility and added value to an institution it may be of little value”*
- **Søren:** *“To me it is about the future ... well, the long-term prospect of being a kindergarten teacher. If I look at the kindergarten teachers today, I don’t want to be a kindergarten teacher, and it has to do [...] with their working environment, i.e. the working conditions, you just have to be more and more effective.”*

With regards to the financial perspective, Søren says:

- *“And then I have to spend three and a half years on my life on the state grant, to earn 1000 DKK more per month than what I earn now, because I’m fairly well paid due to my length of service. [...] We live the life we have now, two kids, and a house and we have to have something to live off”*

Learning environment

- **Susanne:** ... *I have been a victim of bullying in school. One day I snapped and got in a fight with the three boys who had been the worst. One broke an arm, and the other broke his nose. I even ended up with a broken hand*

Parental support

- **Jeanette:** *It was because I did not know what I wanted to do. I've always felt like a 'late developer'....In 10th grade when I had to say what I would like to do now, I had no idea. Support from home, it has not been there, plus my parents have never asked for anything either. They've never said what to do. It has always been up to me. But there are some things at that age which are difficult to decide on*

Structural barriers

- Availability of apprenticeships
 - Ellinor: *“I think it was sad, but after 100 job applications I don’t feel like going after this anymore. I was plodding up and down the streets of Copenhagen and other towns [in order to find an apprenticeship]. And in the end, I didn’t feel for it. If it has to be that tough, you lose heart.*

Attitudes to learning: motivators

- Proof one-self/to be challenged
- Positive learning experiences
- Gain professional identity
- Future investment

Proof one self

- **Laura:** *I have always had a drive. I have always had a need to prove myself - to my mother and to myself.*

Positive learning experiences

- Jeanette about role of adult education: *I think that I have gained a lot of confidence . There are people who have ... finally there is someone who has said that you are good at something. I didn't get that at home*

Gain professional identity

- **Martin:** *I am excited about returning with all my new professional knowledge I have acquired in this education in such a short time.[...] I am happy about the 8-month programme I have been given. If it was reduced even more I wouldn't learn anything. I see this as perfect. And it has been a long time since I have been to school, so I needed a soft start and I can manage to study a little less than a year.*

Career decision making styles

- 4 aspirational
- 4 strategic
- 4 opportunistic
- 3 evaluative

Support structures

- Lack of support for adult dropouts
- Few interviewees have experience with career guidance as adults
- Several interviewees have experiences with career guidance as youths; both positive and negative

Role of learning/formal learning in relation to career planning

- 9: education is part of their future career planning
- 3: education is absent from thoughts of future career
- 4: entrepreneurial outlook to the future

Attitude to adult education

- Widespread awareness of role of education in
 - achieving a more secure position in the labour market
 - Improving financial conditions
 - Achieving higher esteem
 - Improving business opportunities

Common themes Denmark 1/2

- General willingness to participate in formal learning for different reasons (self, work, life)
- Barriers are often structural (funding/time)
- Review: employers more willing to further educate skilled employees than low/non skilled

Common themes Denmark 2/2

BARRIERS	DRIVERS
<p>Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employers are more willing to further educate skilled employees than low/non skilled	<p>Interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encouraged by management• Recognition of value of education (despite structural barriers such as funding/time)

Data analysis – ongoing

- Managers choice: sending the skilled or the non skilled on courses/education?
- Accessibility to/knowledge of support structures as job centres, Centres for Adult Education and Continuing Training
- Role of unions
- Government subsidized financial support for SME's

ENGLAND

- 8 men, 7 women
- Aged: 25 – 40 years
- Mixture of single, divorced and married
- All employed
- All left school with no or low level qualifications
- Highest current qualification is a Level 3
- 9 located in urban environments, 6 rural
- For some aspirations high, e.g. owning SME, achieving higher level qualification

Attitudes to learning

- *Barriers to learning:*
 - health issues e.g. depression; dyslexia
 - lack of opportunity
- *Motivators to learn:*
 - relevance of learning to their job
 - goal oriented (met a particular need)

Health issues

Health issues had a negative impact on educational achievements and learning experiences of 6 interviewees, such as:

Mental health issues, dyslexia, undiagnosed medical conditions

“One of the reasons was that I do suffer on and off from depression, clinical depression runs in the family. That affected my choices for the future – you don’t think about the future when you’re suffering from depression. You think about the past.”

UK1, male, 32 years (clinically depressed)

“I wasn’t the brightest. I didn’t do any GCSE [...] I was always putting myself down because I couldn’t do any written work or anything like that [...] I was just sitting there not knowing what to do ‘cos everything was wrong. I wasn’t quick enough, but kept going to school and didn’t clown like other people, but tried my best”

UK13, male, 28 years (dyslexic)

Lack of opportunity to learn

“No one ever tried to persuade me to go back or keep me on a course. I don’t expect folks to take my side [...] There should be more opportunities for people of all ages to have a second opportunity to get on training courses”

UK9, male, 33 years

A need of learning to be relevant

- Eight of interviews spoke of their learning needing to be relevant to their job.
- Learning had to be practical and useful to their job.
- For some, it was about be able to do their job better.

Goal-orientated learning

- Many of the interviewees engage in what can be viewed as goal-orientated learning.
- For two learning was, or is, linked to their life motives – to run a SME
- For many, learning is/was undertaken to:
 - Gain a new job
 - Maintain employment position
 - Earn money
 - Develop skills

After undertaking a Level 3 qualification, on interviewee said:

“It was the best for the job I was doing and matched to the job role better than the rest.”

UK5, male, 31 years

Work activity & career progression

- Career decision making styles
- Challenging work
- Resilient & proactive attitudes/behaviour

Career decision making styles

- 4 opportunistic
- 4 evaluative
- 3 aspirational
- 4 strategic

Challenging work

- Only 3 revelled in challenging work

She wanted more challenge in her role so started the journey to set up her own business
“everybody thought I was completely mad”

UK3, female, 34 years

“I just keep wanting to learn, but not from books”

UK14, male, 25 years

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“There was in-house training that would be relevant to the job such as audio typing, minute taking [...] Someone in the company who had done the job would show me. I picked it up fine, the problem was that it was not challenging enough. I was picking it up so quickly that I got bored [...] So, I applied for another job and got another one straight away.”

UK2, female, 28 years

Resilient and proactive

- Five interviewees demonstrative resilience and proactivity during the learning and work narratives
- Negative experiences had made some more determined to achieve goals and ambitions, or simply to succeed

“When the 2008 recession started, I almost welcomed it. I thought to myself: Well, this is going to be a real test of my ability to steer my business through rough times. If I can survive this, I can survive anything. Obviously, we had to adapt – we had to get rid of people and change our business practices. We went through some really difficult times, but we came through. I thrive on that sort of challenge. Where others may feel downhearted and give up, I just get more and more determined to succeed’.”

UK3, female, 34 years

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Support structures

- Role of parents/carers:
 - negative
 - positive

Role of parents/carers

Positive and supportive parents/carers

- No consistent links between the positive parents and educational achievements and experiences of learning

Lack of parental/carer support

- Negative, as you would expect

Parental influence

“...there was no way I was going to college. My parents really wanted me to go on to further education, but I refused. They wanted me to make something of myself and said I was wasting myself in hairdressing. But I knew I wouldn't be happy in college.”

UK3, female, 34 years

Father taught him that achievement is positive:

“if you don’t achieve then you’re not happy. It’s not about being in your comfort zone and never having to step out of it. It’s about stepping out of the comfort zone and doing things you didn’t think you could do. That’s where happiness comes from.”

UK1, male, 32 years

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Poor influence...

Mother had no qualifications, but progressed in her job, promoting the mind-set:

“...you didn't need a qualification to get a good job, just determination, so I never thought I needed to get A's”

UK2, female, 28 years

Common themes

- Most interviewees love practical rather than academic learning
- On-the-job is the preferred learning method
- Strong work ethic evident
- Learning has to be relevant to job or have a purpose

Role of learning

- Two reported a lack of opportunities to learn
- Three reported a lack of confidence as impacting on their learning and work path
- Two talked about the significant role of others in supporting their learning and work path
- Three reflected on their school experience and wished they could return to do better

Data analysis - ongoing

- Do poor experiences of school impact on educational and learning experiences in later life?
- Do negative learning experiences impact on work and learning pathways?

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