

Background material to the report:

*Navigating difficult waters:  
learning for career and labour market transitions*  
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## **Data analysis**

Few particularly informative stories – the iconic cases – are here analysed in great detail to illustrate country specific themes.

*Disclaimer*

*This text is presented in its original form.*

*It has neither been revised nor edited by Cedefop.*

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## CHAPTER 1.

# Denmark: support structures – opportunity or barrier for learning?

Different countries have different opportunity structures within which individuals have to negotiate their careers (Brown et al., 2010) and one of the interview themes of this study was the role of support in helping individuals manage their career transitions. The three individuals (the Danish iconic cases) were chosen to offer commentaries on the role played by different forms of institutional support as they tried to find work and/or a new career direction. In each case the informants tell about their wishes to engage in learning activities to make transitions on the labour market. The researchers analysed how support structures and learning possibilities interact and how the dialectics of agency and structure (the dynamic interplay between agency and structure) produce a dialectic between opportunities for learning and wishes for future labour market transitions which unfold in the interviewees' narratives, which include quotes from the interviews.

The three cases were chosen to illustrate the significance of different support structures. 'Management' as an important support structure in relation to opportunities for learning is illustrated in the case of Mads. The cases of Mette and Anna illustrate how the public employment service (PES) can operate as an (un)supportive structure. Mette and Anna are chosen as contrasting cases as they illustrate different attitudes and approaches to career change. Whereas Mette actively seeks to find meaning in her working life, Anna's need for security is a barrier for making a change. In all three cases the opportunities for, and barriers to, learning are discussed.

### 1.1. Negotiating learning opportunities with supervisors and management

#### *Iconic case: Mads*

Mads is in his late thirties. He lives in a farmhouse in a village in a rural setting. Mads is married and has two young children. His educational background is as an industrial electrician and he has worked as such when he completed his training at age 21. Mads has worked at different workplaces – from small

enterprises to large factories. For the last seven years, Mads has worked as an electrician in a military base nearby.

#### **1.1.1. Categorising learning opportunities from a participant perspective**

In his interview, Mads talks about different kinds of learning opportunities in his current work as an electrician at a military base. He mentions the following:

- learning opportunities that are available to him because they provide him with competences needed for the job (soldering, sonar, etc.);
- learning opportunities that are available because they are potentially needed in the job (rescuing from heights, setting up alarm systems);
- learning opportunities that are unavailable because his leader does not think that his employer would benefit from providing Mads with the opportunity to gain these competences (management courses, leadership training).

Whether a learning opportunity is available through work, according to Mads, comes down to his boss's perception of whether the employer would benefit from the competences acquired at the course in question or not.

Mads is frustrated with this and in his first interview he talks about the annual MUS-interview (MUS: employee development dialogue) he has with his manager. Mads has for several years stated his wishes for leadership training, but the manager will not allow him the opportunity he repeatedly replies with different explanations, such as lack of time, lack of resources/finances. This does not mean he does not get to attend courses at all. Every year he gets the chance at pursuing other learning opportunities within category one and two. Mads grasps those opportunities, but it comes down to whether his manager finds that the course would provide Mads with competences needed for the job he is currently doing. Moreover, Mads finds that the decisions about his participation in learning do not follow a long-term plan. Decisions are taken on day to day basis, Mads explains.

This reflects that Mads has wishes for career development which are different from what his manager finds fits to workplace needs. Career development in this workplace seems to not follow a long-term plan for finding relevant learning opportunities – rather learning opportunities seem to be happening from one day to another and not specifically related to the wishes of the learner. Mads has experience getting learning opportunities, just not the ones he really wishes for (leadership training): 'You cannot really say that the wish of the employee is considered. It is more like the boss sits there and he decides what the company needs and that is what you get. You can say that you are tied to the job because you can never move on.'

Mads talks about how previously there was an agreement with the union that workers were entitled to two-weeks training courses per year (*tjek dette med det indledende kapitel*). One week the company decided and the other week the employee could decide for himself. Mads does not know when this agreement ended. It was gone overnight, probably during negotiations. On the other hand, Mads tries to understand that a company might not be willing to provide learning opportunities that will lead to an employee leaving the company. He says: 'It will just lead to negative employees if you don't develop them. But that is a consideration the company must do for themselves and decide what to do.'

The potential negative employees that Mads is referring to are not far from what he is experiencing himself. The following quote illustrates Mads' mind-set around the importance of him gaining support in relation to his wish to attend a leadership course that will support his future labour market change: 'I find it boring to be an electrician actually. It is not exciting anymore. OK, I can turn the light on and get other things to function, but it doesn't speak to me anymore. I would rather do something where I can talk to people or be outside. I think it has become boring but I have also been doing this since 94, 20 years. I am getting bored. I will probably stay a few more years though [...] I regret that I haven't started on a leadership course. OK, I haven't had much time. But I do regret it. I think that I am wasting my time at the military base. It doesn't get me out of the hole. It doesn't move me onwards. I do think that I waste my time, both my time and the company's. I want to move on and try something different.'

Mads would like to make a mid-life career change, but he perceives the barriers as insurmountable.

### **1.1.2. Supervisors and management as gatekeepers**

Mads' narrative illustrates how managers at workplaces can have a significant impact on motivation for learning and on creating support structures and opportunities for learning. Mads, of course, could have signed up for a leadership training course, used his 'own time' and paid for this by himself. That action is not easy as Mads explains – of course he might be able to save up the money but then there is the time. If he can't get off from work to attend the course it should be after hours, during weekends and holidays. Since his wife is currently following a course related to her work it would be quite a challenge to pay for this in addition to the expense associated house, cars and two kids. A common solution to this problem in Denmark is that the employers pay the course fee and the employees invest their own time when attending the course.

Tax levels in Denmark include the labour-market contribution (*Arbejds-markedsbidrag, AM*) which is used to pay for the AMU (*Arbejdsmarkeds-*

*uddannelser*, adult vocational training programmes) and the tripartite negotiations each year set aside funding for competence development. This funding is administrated through the competence funds. The competences funds are to be used for competence development through participation in different learning activities. The funds can be used to pay for the activity or to pay for a temporary worker replacing the worker who is taking part in competence development. The establishment of the competence funds is meant to support employees to invest their own time in learning opportunities. The collective agreements from different branches establish the right, which vary slightly from union agreement to union agreement. For instance, the Office and logistic agreement says that from January 2009 the employee has the right to 10 days free choice education every year and 10 days 'normal' continuous or further education every year. As of January 2013 the employees are also given the right to save their days for their free choice education for three years so that unspent days can be spend the following years. When it comes to the agreement applicable to Mads there is a slight difference regarding free choice education. The collective agreement with the electrician trade union states that employees are entitled to 10-days free choice education but with the addition that this should be relevant to the trade/sector in a wide sense <sup>(1)</sup>. Many of the other agreements do not have this addition.

### **1.1.3. Follow up interview**

Since the first interview nothing has happened regarding Mads' wish to attend a leadership course (*merkonom*). His manager had given reasons relating to money, time and resources but now the manager says that he is willing to pay if Mads will complete the education in his own time. The interviewer asked about the collective agreement and Mads explains that it will not be possible for him to attend the course on the circumstances that are possible. He says he will slowly die in the job and it has become increasingly difficult to get a new job without attending competence development courses: 'We are highly specialised and that might decrease our possibilities for getting a new job.' Mads thinks that the system should benefit the interests of the employees more. Employees should have more influence on their job and on their possibilities for further learning. Much of what Mads does is manual labour. It does not challenge him and he finds that he seldom gets to use the knowledge and skills he acquires at the learning activities he does get to attend. Mads' boss says at his annual review interviews that he will take his wishes into consideration and discuss it with his

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<sup>(1)</sup> <http://ipaper.ipapercms.dk/TEKNIQ/Overenskomst/Elektrikeroverenskomst20122014/>.

boss. However, it is not Mads' impression that he does, as he has never returned to Mads with an answer. He has also talked with the shop steward who says that the boss is just following the collective agreement.

It is Mads' impression that his workplace does very little to support the competence development of the employees and they have been told that a reduction of staff is coming. 'This will be a huge task for the job centre to up skill those employees.' Mads reports that he will start looking for another job. He is disappointed as he thought that the possibilities for learning would be better in a military base, a State financed workplace, and they are not. Mads talks about the possibility to save his days for education from one year to another and thereby making it possible to use more days in one year than another. This is actually a part of the relevant collective agreement, but the employer still has the final say for which kind of education it can be used.

#### **1.1.4. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Mads is a classic case of growing into an occupation (job) and then eventually out-growing it. The metaphors Mads uses are instructive: growing into the job (growing fast); dying in the job; being stuck in a hole. Support structures in the form of access to education, training and guidance were there for his transition into becoming an electrician and then learning through varied challenging work in different contexts together with some work-related training ensured he developed his expertise within his chosen field. His employer, his union and society generally see a highly skilled, well-trained mid-career worker in a permanent post with an employer where his long-term employment prospects are secure: they see a labour market with many problems, but this is not one of them. From there perspective this is a success story with an employee well-matched to his job.

Mads does not see it this way. His occupation had initially been his career anchor, giving him stability and a sense of purpose, now it is seen as a chain – locking him into a job where he feels he is dying. Abhaya (1997) makes the point that even when we find a psychological home, after time we may feel it is time to move on: 'It [home] is our familiar environment, a place where we know our way around, and above all, where we feel secure' but 'the developing individual can feel trapped by all the norms and values which 'home' stands for'. Mads is a developing individual who needs fresh challenges. Until now his labour market transitions have worked well, but he needs to move on, to make a major career transition, but he lacks support to achieve the outcome he desires.

## 1.2. Potential of PES and career guidance from a participant perspective – in search for career counselling

### *Iconic case: Mette*

Mette is in her forties and lives in Copenhagen. She is single and has no kids. She has moved twice to be closer to her sister but also says that family has not been very significant to her. At the time of the interview Mette was doing an internship at an acupuncture clinic and trying to set up her own business as a massage therapist. For this iconic case we have chosen to present a chronological narrative very close to the way Mette presented it to the interviewer, the reason for doing so is that the narrative provides us with the opportunity to analyse points of contact (potential career guidance points), where Mette has been or could have benefitted from career guidance in relation to exploring learning opportunities. In this respect we talk both about the potential of career guidance, as we can point to and we extract the potential that Mette identifies when talking through her learning, and her work-life history.

Mette herself talks about seeking support, for instance at PES, but feeling that her wishes are not met. This is different from the iconic case of Anna (see below) who does not talk about seeking support.

#### 1.2.1. Chronology

Mette left school after basic VET (EFG *kontor og Handel basis*). She began her working life as a junior (*piccoline*) in a large travel agency. After that she worked shortly as a 'hatter' for a month. Then she worked for three years in a big warehouse. During the time in the warehouse she considered an apprenticeship as a decorator. She saved money for going to guide school, but when the time came for the exam for travel guide school Mette fell ill and the company would not allow her to do a re-examination. She was made redundant and was then unemployed for one month. Then she got a job at a hospital kitchen, which she liked very much. During her employment at the hospital she got a work-related injury but the hospital would not recognise it as such. Mette went to work the day after the injury, which is what weakened her case. The case made it difficult for her to work in the hospital kitchen and she decided to resign. Mette was then unemployed for a short while. Her next job was in an amusement park, where she was selling sweets. Her employer was very hot tempered and yelled at her; she stood up to him and got fired. She was unemployed but received support from the union and did voluntary work in first aid in the amusement park. She kept doing that for many years during summer periods. At age 22, Mette decided

to do upper secondary exams (HF): 'I knew I wanted some kind of education I was 22 by that time [...] it was about time. I thought I had to find something steadier instead for doing all different kind of things [...] I didn't know what I wanted to do.'

Alongside studying for upper secondary exams Mette worked at a toy shop. The education went well for a long time, but Mette lived with a man who was alcoholic, as was the rest of his family. Mette was the only one providing for them. It came to the point where she could not keep up with her studies because of the chaos at home. When she decided to stop studying she talked to a counselor at the school. They talked about her having a break and then coming back. Mette got very good grades, but she never went back to her academic studies. There then followed some years of seasonal work. During the summer she worked at the amusement park as a toilet cleaner and in winter Mette cannot recall what she was doing. She then found work in a restaurant in the amusement park. The couple who owned the restaurant helped Mette to leave her alcoholic boyfriend.

To get away from the amusement park Mette took up entry level education and training (Basic VET) and started looking for office trainee positions. She gets a trainee position in a law firm as a secretary. Mette is now 25. She had a good boss at the law firm and the only reason why she left this firm was because of her conviction that she could never move away from the role of 'the trainee' if she stayed in the same company in which she was trained. The firm helped her find a position and recommended her for it. (She kept her job at the amusement park during summer periods). Mette did not keep her job at the next law firm for long. Shortly after she started she fell ill. She stayed a lot with her sister during that period.

Her sister lived at a farm in another part of the country. Mette liked living in the countryside and applied for a job nearby. She got a job in the administration of a phone company through a temp agency. Her next transition was to a large law firm in a nearby city, but she found the work impersonal and boring. She kept the position but also found a job for the weekends at the check-in counter at the local airport. Mette reports 'I like having more than one job.'

Mette then got a full time position at the airport security and completed an internal course on airport security (*statens lufthavnsvæsen*). She became shop steward and started teaching airport security check to new colleagues. The job at the airport started to get boring. Through the airport she got a job in Human Relations in a production company as timekeeping assistant. She cared about the workers and tried to help them if she saw that they had problems, for instance related to alcohol. Mette liked the job but then got an opportunity to work in at an

airbase overseas. At first she said no, but immediately as she had said it, she felt deep down inside, that it was the wrong decision. When she called back the day after the position was taken. She then called the head office every Friday until a position was open. 'It almost became an obsession because I felt I made the wrong decision when I was offered the job at first.'

Mette finally succeeded in getting the job at the airbase working with cargo. Mette's supervisor then left for another job and encouraged Mette to apply for the position as supervisor. Mette found that there was no one else to do the job, applied and got the job. She worked as a supervisor for a year and found the work interesting, but did not see herself as a leader, she enjoyed doing the work. Mette then got a manager who she describes as a psychopath. She takes leave but returns when the manager is fired and works at the airbase for a couple of years again. When Mette decides to return to Denmark she finds work as legal secretary – but soon gets bored with it and she decides to move back to the provincial setting where she worked before. Mette soon finds a job as a legal secretary at a law firm.

Alongside working as a legal secretary she attends courses in life and business coaching, nutrition and fitness. Mette meets a coach that tells her to listen to her heart she decides to quit her job as a legal secretary and set up her own coaching business. Before she gets to do to that she is contacted by a law firm in Greenland that offers her a job as a legal secretary, which she accepts because it gives her the opportunity to work overseas again.

Mette explains that she meets a totally different working culture and she soon decides to return to Denmark. The day after she returns she starts an education as a massage therapist because she wants to work with people and make a difference, she says. At the time of the interview Mette is unemployed but was doing an internship at an acupuncture clinic in Copenhagen and following different courses on massage therapy and acupuncture.

### **1.2.2. Learning and transitions**

Mette talks about her basic education as (*kontorelev*) 'now I had this, so I have to use it.' During her trainee position she completes an education at the business school as a legal secretary. Mette relates her learning to having the opportunity to do things. During her many different jobs, Mette continues to educate herself in different directions, including as a life- and business coach, in nutrition, as a fitness instructor and attends an Anthony Robbins coaching course in Rome. She pays for most of this herself.

Mette has had a lot of different jobs and for very different reasons. One of the reasons Mette explains was that she was on a mission to find out what kind

of work she really liked: 'I wanted to find out what I liked. It has always been [...] it's been a search for what I wanted to do. There's no doubt about that. And I have been very conscious of that.'

### **1.2.3. Potential career guidance points**

Mette's narrative reflects a constant desire to try out new occupational opportunities; she seems to constantly seek to put herself in new situations and to learn about herself and what kind of work she enjoys through work. A question is whether Mette could have benefited from career guidance? She explains the she attended coaching and this made her able to follow her heart. At the follow up interview Mette is in the middle of a radical change in her working life. She has set up her own business as a massage therapist.

The analyses of Mette's narrative allow us to identify the following potential career guidance points:

- Mette enters and completes office training;
- Mette gets a work-related injury;
- Mette drops out of upper secondary education;
- she gets a trainee position in a law firm;
- Mette falls ill;
- short period of redundancy;
- start education as massage therapist;
- start her own business.

This is not Mette's CV, because Mette has almost her entire life held a job and often more than one, the list comprises potential career guidance points as we can identify them from Mette's narrative and in relation to our knowledge about the Danish guidance system.

### **1.2.4. Educational guidance**

Mette herself talks about different types of support and at different times in her life. Mette finds the support from the counsellor at upper secondary (HF) helpful. Her life was chaotic by then and she had to quit, she was glad to be presented with the opportunity to come back the year after or in a couple of years and felt that the school believed in her being able to complete her studies. But the school (and the counsellor) never made contact again, neither did Mette. If they had Mette would maybe have considered completing her studies, she explains.

### **1.2.5. e-guidance**

Mette contacted e-guidance while she was in Greenland as she wanted to know more about education within physiotherapy and nutrition. She explains that she

was ready to live from study allowances. Mette got in contact with e-guidance when she was looking for information about education through the internet. She sends an email in which she asks for information about the possibilities and gets an answer. She finds it encouraging that this works and the counsellor writes that she is more than welcome to contact her again when she is back in Denmark.

#### **1.2.6. The role of PES in labour market transitions**

When Mette starts her education as a massage therapist, which she pays for herself, she does so while receiving unemployment benefits from her union. This is against the rules but Mette explains that she does not feel bad about it. 'I am applying for jobs but there is no job to get' she says. Mette is reluctant to talk in detail about this: 'they (PES and the unemployment fund) don't do anything to help me get a job [...]. It's a hopeless system. If they find a job for me they make themselves redundant.'

Mette has experienced that the PES does very little to help her find a job. When she returned from Greenland she was contacted by the PES – she explains her situation that is that she has just returned from a job in Greenland, she then hears nothing from the PES and she does not get any money. She then contacts the PES and an employee tells her that they will contact her for a first meeting. Mette says that it's a waste of time as she has participated in the same meeting (with the same agenda and information) just one the year before. Mette talks about the meaningless activities at the PES as a kind of job. 'You get your benefits, you spend two hours applying for jobs, and you spend two hours at a meeting. 6 hours that leaves you with a fine hourly pay.' 'I don't need to understand the system I just need to follow it.'

She uses phrases such as: 'you have to show up' – 'Then they will leave you at peace'. 'If you do something yourself you are in the fast lane, they can't follow you.'

The PES then transfers Mette to a private employment service provider, which should help her find an internship, by that time Mette has found an internship herself and it seems to Mette that the private provider does not know what to do with her.

During her contact with the PES Mette has never experienced that someone asked her: What do you like to do? What are your interests? Mette assumes that she is not the only adult in search of fulfilling work and wishing for a transition on the labour market. Mette says 'I think that 40% of the people who are in the same situation as I they are there because they want a change of work. They don't want to work in an office [...] they (PES) are so eager to get us back into the offices instead of asking. Could we reeducate you to do something different?'

Mette has tried to say to the employment officers she has been in contact with: 'I want to work with something else, can you please help me'. She was told that she can apply for ordinary education and for study allowance as young people do.' Mette was disappointed with the answer, she thinks there are all kinds of learning possibilities and expects the people working in PES to know about them and be able to guide her to relevant learning opportunities that can support her labour market transitions. 'They are so busy trying to fit us back into the same job that we are trying to escape.'

Mette think that it is not acceptable to PES and to her Union that she wants to change her line of business. 'The union doesn't want this because the effect would be that you leave the union too.'

The PES should be neutral in terms of supporting people's learning activities, according to Mette. Mette has also tried to get other courses, for instance cleaning, hygiene. She ended up paying for this herself at AMU. She was entitled to six-weeks course, but she was not entitled to the kind she wanted. 'Yes, but I just think that they (PES) are not even taking the time to sit down and really listen to people. And it has lacked every time I've been there. They are more focused on getting people quickly through the system. Out of their office, yes; not out of unemployment, as such, of course. Somehow I can understand them, because the more people they get back to work, the less they get to do. That is, if they have less work to do, so they will also be fewer. They would close themselves down. So I understand, but it's just not good practice. I think it's a shame there are so many good resources in people we need to listen to what they want. And many of them, they are geared to do something different than what they're doing. Through an interview you could find out. You don't get anything from answering questions on a piece of paper, because the only thing you have to answer is what computer programs you know and for how many years have you been doing Excel. It gets you no wiser people [...] I didn't know what I wanted to do [...] I could not put a title on [...]. So I think the people who sit on the other side of the table should be professional enough to come up with ideas on what it could be. Just like my expectations to the career counsellors in the schools. They should be able to come up with good ideas, well, what do you want to be when you grow up? (Laughs) [...]. And I think it is a real shame because I really think that they (PES) miss being able to get people out in some amazing jobs that they would love wildly.'

#### **1.2.7. Follow up interview**

Since the first interview Mette has started her own business. She has done so because the activities in the Job Centre were aimed at getting Mette to take a

wage subsidy job. Mette found this strange, as it seemed like the Job Centre had a hard time helping her find an ordinary job. At the time of the first interview Mette started an internship at an acupuncture Clinic. The reason Mette was allowed to do this internship was because she was supposed to be assisting in the reception and with bookkeeping as that was what the Job Centre regarded as appropriate. Mette arranged the internship around doing actual acupuncture in the clinic while she was also studying this in the evening. They have a lot of contacts. Mette finds that there is certain negativity about wage subsidy jobs and some employers exploit the system. One lawyer, for instance, had no other employees.

Mette attended meetings at the Job Centre and had the impression that it was one size (internships and wage subsidy jobs) fits all. She overheard people suggesting alternative routes to the job market but was met with resistance from the Job Centre. Mette then decided to start her own business as a massage therapist. She has extended knowledge on how to gain the competences needed to get authorisation and she took part in different learning activities to gain and improve these skills. She is very focused at attracting customers to her business. Mette thinks that she will never go back to being a legal secretary. The big difference is that she is now out of the office as she has chosen not to do her bookkeeping herself. The learning that has supported her in the transition is what she did at her courses in sports therapy, coaching and acupuncture.

#### **1.2.8. Talking about unemployed access to adult education**

Mette finds that it is tough, economically, for adults to enter the education system on the same terms as young people. She also finds it difficult to gain access to the educational system but at the same time it necessary and crucial for her to persevere, as she needed the further knowledge and skills to radically change her working life.

It is Mette's experience that the system for tackling unemployment in Denmark is directed at the wrong people. Instead of focusing on helping those that are motivated, they target those that are unwilling to find work with various control and monitoring systems. They forget to help those that are willing and when they do get to them, they fail to help them in the right way. They say: you are in this line of business; you stay in this line of business. Mette finds that the unions contribute to this because they would lose members if people changed their occupations. This is therefore a weakness in the system. Mette feels that this kind of logic is not sustainable in the long run. Through her learning activities Mette has met other people who have paid for their education themselves. This does not create equal opportunities and makes it hard to succeed because they have to earn money while attending learning activities.

While Mette is able to pursue further education, Mads was reluctant as he has more risks and family obligations. This in turn leaves him with different and fewer possibilities for changing his line of work.

#### **1.2.9. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Mette exhibits a strong sense of personal agency and resilience, which enables her to bounce back from adversity, while maintaining a positive forward-looking disposition. Her self-efficacy was also high, she believed in herself and had high 'efficacy belief'; where she feels she can exercise a degree of control over her activities and environment. Mette has a clear commitment to her own learning and professional development, but also has a natural facility in helping others, as she was made a supervisor precisely because she was naturally supporting her colleagues in her previous non-supervisory role). All these attributes meant Mette demonstrated career adaptability as she made a series of successful transitions in a labour market which itself was undergoing considerable change. She was also seeking greater meaningfulness in her working life at a time of transition.

### **1.3. Potential of PES and career guidance from a participant perspective – managing on my own**

#### *Iconic case: Anna*

In this case we will also analyse potential points of contact. One significant difference between the two cases is that where Mette is seeking support within the support structures available to her the PES, her union and e-guidance and she is disappointed when her needs are not met, Anna is not expressing a search for support. This will be counterposed in the discussion surrounding the three cases presented under the theme support structures.

Anna is in her forties. She has been divorced for 15 years and lives alone. She has two children above 18. She lives outside the Copenhagen area in a four-room flat. Her educational background is general upper secondary education (Gymnasium). She later acquired a vocational qualification as a clerk through recognition of prior learning and a 18-week VET course at a commercial college. She has had a working life characterised by many shifts and has worked primarily in low skilled functions (receptionist, punch operator, sales). She is currently unemployed (since nine months) and is connected to the Job Centre and will have to be activated within the next couple of months.

During the interview, she reflects on the fact that she took the general education route (Gymnasium) after basic schooling and that this, when she talks about her choice retrospectively, was the wrong route for her.

#### Anna's CV:

- temporary work in an office after Gymnasium;
- temporary work in a stock room;
- steady employment in Y bank (14 years);
- temporary employment as a Temp:
  - receptionist;
  - office work;
  - warehouse operative (few weeks);
  - mobile telephone company (few weeks);
- HGS (VET to become a medical secretary);
- unemployed (four year):
  - activation in a company in Copenhagen;
  - temp in a kindergarten (eight weeks – activation);
- stress;
- benefit claimant for a short period;
- employed in X bank (five years);
- stress;
- unemployed:
  - course in accounting at a commercial college;
  - job and assessment of competence;
- future prospects: clerk with customer contact – all round office work.

#### **1.3.1. Labour market changes and personal transitions**

In a way similar to Mette, Anna has tried out many different jobs in her life (see above) and she describes how it was possible, back then, to come from the street and be employed without any certificates or references. She does not think this is the case today: the labour market focuses more on formal qualifications. One of her explanations for this is the high unemployment rate, which makes it easier for companies to 'pick and choose'.

When Anna was asked about the many jobs she has had after working in the Y bank she constructed her shifts as a deliberate choice she made. She wanted to try out something new. The changes between jobs are not narrated as being problematic or challenging. But despite this seemingly appetite to try out new things, security is a key word for Anna's working life. She has never dared to move beyond the positions at the lower echelons of an organisation. She was asked in bank Y if she wanted to become a leader, but she turned it down with this reason: 'I prefer to blend in.'

### **1.3.2. Learning opportunities**

Anna started in an unskilled job where she worked packaging invoices and moved into a job in a stock room, which was physically hard. She was then employed as a punch operator in a bank where she was on piecework. This job opened up new job opportunities where she learned administrative tasks through on-the-job learning: 'I was in customer service, I wrote letters, all kind of tasks. And everything was learning-by-doing. Well of course, I had somebody who taught me but [...] back then you could come in straight from the street and find employment. The only requirement for my employment was a maths test. And this I remember clearly. [Anna laughs]'

This is characteristic of her entire working life. She has learned on the job and through peer instruction. As to formal learning, she has taken some courses at vocational colleges especially during her unemployment periods but she does not narrate these to have been put to use in her working life. For example, Anna signs up for a course at a commercial college to qualify to become a medical secretary. She takes classes in Latin in Copenhagen. Most of the participants wanted to become medical secretaries but 'as our applications for positions as medical secretary apprentices were unfruitful, people dropped out of the course.'

Anna did not complete the course as she did not get an apprenticeship position. The courses that she has taken have not promoted her chances in the labour market in this sense and she does not see any connection between course participation and the jobs she has had. It is her work experience that has helped her to get a position as a clerk.

Anna's narrative illustrates in various ways that she constantly returns to the importance of feeling secure in her job and that she is less likely to take chances. Here career guidance could help her see and feel that security while she is in transition and that might in turn release a learning potential because she can relax about the security and truly pursue what she is doing. This could have applied to her attempt to educate herself as a medical secretary, which she quit because she could not find an apprenticeship.

### **1.3.3. Points of potential career guidance points**

In terms of her many transitions Anna has never looked for support beyond her friends and her feelings. 'I discuss it with myself, I think: what do I want? What is my gut feeling? Is this what I want?' From an outside perspective, there seems to be at least three transitions in Anna's life where career guidance might have been helpful:

- the transition from basic schooling to Gymnasium. Retrospectively, Anna finds that she chose the wrong route. The question is whether she could

- have benefitted from being guided into a VET programme as the Gymnasium qualifies for further and higher education, not for entry into the labour market;
- Anna's return to the education system where she wanted to become a medical secretary. This seems to be a critical turning point where guidance might have helped her to complete the programme instead of dropping out. Especially a kind of guidance advocacy which actively served the interests of the adult students and took an active part in marketing the more mature students to help them secure the apprenticeship that is necessary to complete their education;
  - her current situation as unemployed where she runs the risk of falling out of the unemployment benefit system within six months. Despite two activation courses, Anna does not report on an interview, which was helpful in allowing her to realise her own barriers for learning and making a career change.
- We go more into point three below.

#### **1.3.4. The role of PES from a citizen perspective**

During Anna's long-term unemployment she was connected to the regional labour market centre (PES). She felt that the unemployed people were treated in a condescending and humiliating manner. She tells how people who had been in the labour market for 40 years were treated badly. This experience made her think 'this, I cannot accept. And then I meet an old colleague from the bank by accident and she says, I work in X bank. And then I sent an uninvited job application to the bank.'

She still feels that being unemployed is humiliating and that the treatment by the job centre (PES) is condescending. She thinks that support from her Unemployment Fund is better at supervising unemployed people. At the job centre individual job interviews are often mass meetings where the individual client has to draw a number to get access to individual support. At the time for the first interview Anna is soon to be activated according to the Law on early activation. She starts in May and the activation ends in June. Her activation activity will be a course that focuses on writing a CV and job application. She has been through similar courses five times and Anna is very critical. She thinks it is a waste of time. It would be more meaningful if she could have a wage subsidy job. Anna is not alone with her criticism of the Danish activation system at the moment the system is heavily criticised from different perspectives (see e.g. the

ironic description from the perspective of an unemployed: Aaen, 2012) including the Minister of Employment <sup>(2)</sup>.

Anna was interviewed again in March 2013. She told about her job situation, which was unchanged, that is, she is still unemployed. She had been through two activation courses, one in May 2012 and one in January 2013. The activation courses lasted four weeks and took place on weekdays from 8.30 to 14.30. The activation courses took place in the same place and had similar content.

The activation courses were run as part self-study, part exercises and part interviews. Anna compared the two courses and said that this time it had been more structured and included more exercises, however it was still primarily based on self-study. That is, the participants were applying for jobs during the course and the teachers were helping them with writing the application and teaching them to answer a telephone. The participants included recipients of unemployment benefits, social security and those eligible for help because they had fallen outside the unemployment system (recent legislation has reduced this period from four to two years).

Anna said that many of the participants were not motivated and spent most of the day playing cards. It was up to the individual participant to make use of the offer and ask for interviews with the teachers. The teachers put their network at the disposal of the participants, but for most participants the course did not lead to employment. However, Anna thinks that the course was helpful in the sense that she had something meaningful to take part in and she enjoyed being part of the group. She found the conversations with the other participants very helpful. But otherwise, the course was focusing narrowly on writing CVs and on job interviews.

Returning to the first interview and her dream of becoming a medical secretary, Anna narrates the main barrier as one of the companies being reluctant to take adult apprentices. She still perceives this as a main barrier and says that today the only way to achieve this dream is to receive student grants and this is an economic barrier. She says: 'it is damn difficult to start studying when you have settled down. If you had a load of money, you could do it.' Anna sees the limitations and not the possibilities.

Another major barrier in Anna's narrative is that of transport. It is something that she mentions several times: that she does not want to work too far from home. She simply cannot overcome working too far from home. She talks about

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<sup>(2)</sup> See Ministry of Employment website:  
<http://bm.dk/da/Aktuelt/Pressemeddelelser/Arkiv/2013/02/Ny%20beskaeftigelsespolitik%20skal%20sikre%20ledige%20en%20bedre%20indsats.aspx>

being afraid of taking public transport and relates it to her experience with stress. Although, she has been to a psychologist and says she has learnt a number of ways of dealing with stress, she is still easily brought into a condition of feeling stressed. This was something that she discussed with the participants in the activation course, many of whom had gone down with stress or depression.

When asked about the future, Anna says that she might have to take a job in a local supermarket. This is the only solution. Her daughter works there and she might be able to get employment and accept the low pay. She talks about crowding-out in the labour market, i.e. people with higher qualifications taking low-qualified jobs. When asked about her 'dream job', Anna says that she would like to work for a humanitarian organisation in a job half-clerical, half-social work. However, this is also narrated as problematic: you have to start working as voluntary help and you cannot be sure to be employed afterwards. Her reason for dreaming about this kind of job is that she would like 'to work with people'.

#### **1.3.5. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Anna initially tried out many different jobs in her life and did not regard her educational experiences as successful. It was her work experience that helped her to get a position as a bank clerk. Later in life she had a strong desire for security and this made her unwilling to embark on further career change. She turned down opportunities to train for higher clerical positions, preferring 'to blend in.' She was existing in a 'safe' job, but the labour market had changed since she was first employed in the bank and she was looking vulnerable if she lost her job for any reason. So since she first became unemployed, she has indeed struggled for over a decade, mainly on temporary work, activation programmes and unemployment spells. One longer spell of working in another bank was demanding and she quit because of stress. Anna never engaged in any substantive learning which may have been useful for future career transitions, even when she had her 'safe' job, and now feels crowded out in the labour market by people who are much better qualified. At several points in the past she would have benefitted from more substantive career guidance which could have helped her establish a new sense of career direction rather than the low level support about how to make job applications.

### **1.4. Summary across the three iconic cases**

From Mads' narrative we categorised three kinds of learning opportunities based on her interpretation of the type of competence development they would each provide.

- providing competences for the job;
- providing competences potentially relevant for the job;
- providing competences wished for by the individual learner.

This categorisation actualises the collective agreements as well as the views of managers as gatekeepers for employees to gain access to learning. The case suggests that there are unequal opportunities for funding possibilities within the structures, due to the nature of the unions' collective agreements and the competence funds. None of the participants in the interviews mention the competence funds. It could be interesting to analyse Mads' case in the light of the flexicurity model where the logic of Mads' employer according to Mads seems to be that withholding learning opportunities can serve as a means to sustain employees in their current positions which is quite the opposite of the values and ideas on which the flexicurity model was based. Mads point to a wish for greater individual disposal to learning opportunities.

Mette exposes a strong and complex wish for the possibility to make stable but radical changes in her working life. Mette thinks she has had a need for career guidance. She wanted to change her line of work and was met by practitioners who wanted to keep her in the same line of business.

Whereas Mette's case illustrates a search for counselling, which can help her explore possibilities, Anna is in no search for exploring her possibilities. This does not imply that there is less potential concerning Anna's participation in career guidance activities. The two narrative interviews point to a number of personal barriers for learning which Anna could be made to reflect upon in cooperation with a counsellor. Counsellors could become active promoters of apprenticeships. Such support structures are identified by the NICE-network as a function of career guidance and counselling under the headline 'Social systems intervener and developer' and described as one of five core competences as social systems intervention and development (NICE, 2012).

## CHAPTER 2.

# Italy: opportunism and careers with a singular focus

The two Italian iconic cases were chosen to illustrate two very different approaches to career development. In one case, Mercuzio made opportunistic changes of career direction and then followed each change with enthusiasm and commitment until another exciting opportunity presented itself. On the other hand, Lucia only ever wanted to work in the area of fashion design and pursued her career within that field with a singular focus, developing her career in a variety of ways and through a number of different roles. However, these two cases both emphasise the importance of personal agency in learning for career and labour market transitions, and seek to develop their skill sets in a wide variety of ways as they seek to develop their general skills and their vocational expertise.

### 2.1. **Mercuzio: a mercurial talent engaging in opportunistic changes of career direction**

#### *Iconic case: Mercuzio*

Mercuzio is in his forties and currently works part-time as a janitor in a city hotel. He is in a time of change, one of the many transitions he experienced in his working (and personal) life. Therefore, his 'equilibrium' is unstable and there might be important evolutions within the next few months.

He studied at a professional institute for commerce and got a certificate after the first three years. Later on in his life, he continued his upper secondary studies in a different school (professional institute for assistance in childhood shelters) for two more years, so as to receive a high school diploma and be able to access university. The choice of the second school had nothing to do with his interests, nor with his job, but was determined by the necessity to study on his own, without attending classes.

After three years of high school, Mercuzio wanted to work. At the age of 16, he started his working life by helping his brother who had just taken over a snack bar, the first *Paninoteca* (snack bar specialised in sandwiches) opened in the town. After a couple of years, he was called for the military service (mandatory for men at that time) and spent the whole year in a town in the north east of Italy,

as a barman in the barracks. These first two experiences gave him a precise orientation, so that when he returned from the military service he immediately started looking for jobs in bars. For several years, he remained in the same field: 'Until the year 1990, I worked in bars, changing roles and types of environments. I experienced the morning bar, where I used to prepare breakfasts, but also the evening bars, the *birrerie*, where I served alcoholic beverages. Then, for about three years, until 1993, I worked as a waiter in restaurants.'

At this point, Mercuzio lived his first important transition, when his passion for manufacturing, the *fil rouge* of his working life, started revealing itself: 'I had heard so much about the mythical figure of my uncle, who had a coffee shop in Naples and was a self-made man [...]. My dream was to work on my own [...] so, in order to prepare myself for the 'leap', I became an employee at a big coffee factory in (my town). After a year in the sales department, I asked to be transferred to the mechanical department, where I could learn how to repair coffee makers (I had never used a wrench in my life!). My request surprised everybody, since the post I was leaving was considered much better than the one I was getting [...]. Anyways, they accepted my request and I went to the mechanical department. If you want to make good coffee, you must be able to operate and repair the machines!'

In a short time, Mercuzio became passionate and knowledgeable about coffee and coffee makers. As soon as he felt ready, the new adventure began: he launched his own business. Since he did not have capital to invest, and did not want to ask for bank loans either, he organised it so to reduce fixed costs to the minimum: 'I used to buy the coffee from factories and then sell it on my own in (my town). Unfortunately, I wasn't making a lot of money with this business, so I kept working as a waiter on Saturdays and Sundays, or at weddings. One day, I met a person who introduced me to a new environment: a wine bar. A few months later, I closed the coffee business and was hired as the wine bar manager in this large structure, where they also had a bakery and a food shop.'

With his usual enthusiasm for new experiences, Mercuzio started working at the wine bar and the sales of wine immediately increased: he liked the job and he did it well. Meanwhile he attended courses for sommeliers and participated to the Italian Association of Chefs and the Italian Association of Barmen. The latter asked him to give lessons about coffee, since he was considered very knowledgeable in the field. When he was running his own business, he had learned a lot about the product; he also used to spend time on Sundays with an expert (a sales representative who had worked for 30 years in the coffee market) to discuss and exchange ideas about coffee. Despite the frequent changes in his working life, Mercuzio always maintained the passion for manufactured products,

for the transformation process and for the manual work that creates them. The experience at the wine bar lasted two years. Mercuzio's boss, 'a rather strange lady' in his opinion, brought it to an end: 'I knew that if she had mistreated me as she used to do with the other employees, I would have left [...] and it happened. Since she was one of the owners, I could not argue, I just decided to change job. At the time, my dream was still the same: create my own business in food service. So I went to work in a restaurant as assistant to the chef. It was not a problem for me to start all over again: I had a long experience, but in a different field, and I needed to learn everything in this new environment.'

Simultaneously, Mercuzio was working at a new project. At the wine bar, he had met an American businessman who was planning to open a restaurant in Seattle and had asked Mercuzio to participate in the project. With his usual generosity and optimism, Mercuzio had shared with him all his ideas about an innovative restaurant, where customers could order food and have it cooked in front of them. Thanks to a good knowledge of English and to his long experience in the food industry, Mercuzio would have been an ideal business partner [...] but the American businessman changed his mind at the last minute, when everything was ready: 'the disappointment was so bitter that I felt the need to detach myself completely from the food industry. I had a grandfather who was a shoemaker. I've never met him, but heard so much about his marvellous shoes [...] I decided to attend a course for shoemakers, after all I've always had a fascination for manual labour.'

Mercuzio attended this 900 hour-course, organised by a private school in partnership with the Region, and simultaneously started working with little shoemakers' shops in town. The old artisans were gratified, at the beginning, for the interest shown by Mercuzio, but after a short while they would become jealous, seeing his strong will and determination to learn the craft. The practical learning proved to be very difficult for Mercuzio, because of this antagonistic attitude. Luckily the course he attended was very good and, right afterwards, he could find a job in a large shoe factory, where he was hired as the assistant of a shoe designer. This was an intense and valuable experience for Mercuzio, because he could work on a variety of models and set of samples. It lasted two years, then the idea of 'working on his own' led Mercuzio to invest, once again, in the creation of his own business. He started a partnership with a couple of shoe makers, husband and wife, who owned a small shoe factory: 'I was their designer, and I was also responsible for selling the products [...]. The first two seasons went well, but then problems began to arise. First of all, I had not taken into account the fact that, when you sell, you're also supposed to cash in [...] and

I hated to do that! I hated to waste time as a credit collector, while I should have been doing my job instead: designing and selling shoes.'

'The other issue was that I used to design innovative models [...] at the beginning I thought it was a good thing, but then I realise it wasn't. In fashion, you have to follow trends, you can't move forward too fast.'

When this experience was about to end, Mercuzio got married. His wife, a young South American architect, started a brilliant career. One day, almost by chance, she was asked to design a cutlery tray. Mercuzio seized the moment: since she did not have time to complete the project, he helped her. They worked well together and the project was a success. From this short, but intense experience, they came out with a new idea: work together on restoration and renovation projects, where he could do the research and she could dedicate to architectural planning. With this plan in mind, he enrolled in university to get a degree in Humanities, with a major in Art History.

'For the whole first year, I used to attend classes during the day and work at the market as a barman at night. My working hours were from 2 am to 9 am, then I would run to class. With this intense rhythm, I took my first six exams, the fundamental ones for my degree.'

At the end of his first year of university, another personal transition came about: his wife decided to leave him. This time, he did not want personal issues to interfere with his professional plans: he continued, and finished, his university course. To have more time and energies to study, he quit the job at the market and found a less heavy job as a night janitor in a hotel, the same hotel where he is still working now. Right after getting his university degree, he gave himself a piano as a present and started to take lessons, with the idea of becoming a professional player. He invested a lot in this new project, but soon realised that he is not as talented, nor as motivated as he thought. Now, Mercuzio is sailing in the sea of his mind. He is searching for a new passion to plunge into, disorienting everybody around him, except for himself. For him, transitions are the natural, cyclical process that scans his life.

### **2.1.1. Skills, knowledge and understanding development and impact on transitions dynamics**

Mercuzio learns mainly by doing; he is very keen on manual work, on creating and making objects, on transforming shapeless matter into products or objects. He is a creative individual, full of imagination and passion for what he does. Naïvely, Mercuzio would like to 'shape' his life as if it was a sculpture, but many times, he clashes against a hard reality. Besides practical skills, Mercuzio's

strength is also in social abilities. He can interact successfully with all types of people and is able to integrate well in very different environments.

As far as formal education is concerned, Mercuzio's path is very fragmented: three years of high school, two more years and a diploma at a later stage, finally university after many years of work. Still, in his mature age, he seems to give a higher value to formal education, since he got a university degree while working very hard every night. He also mentions his intellectual *maestro*, a professor of philosophy who teaches students with a low educational degree and even detainees; he instilled in him the interest for study and books and the passion for knowledge.

### **2.1.2. Significant work and learning transitions**

Among the several changes in Mercuzio's life, three transitions stick out: the detachment from the food industry and the attendance of the course for shoemakers; the passage from shoemaking to the idea of architectural design and restoration with his wife, and the beginning of university studies; the end of university studies with the newly born (and rapidly vanished) passion for music. In all cases, there is a strong influence of emotions in decision-making. Mercuzio is a very passionate and emotional individual, who apparently listens to his heart more than to his mind. This characteristic supports him in transitions: whenever a door closes in front of him, another door opens in his heart. After a disappointment, he is able to start a new life with renewed enthusiasm and energies. Versatility is also an important trait of his personality that supported and still supports him in transitions, acting as a shock absorber.

### **2.1.3. Significant learning experience**

In Mercuzio's professional story, the two 'learning landmarks' seem to be the experience at the coffee factory and the one at the shoe factory. Thanks to these organisations, Mercuzio gained precious practical skills that he could use and re-use in different environments and when working on his own.

Generally speaking, Mercuzio learned from all his work and life experiences: 'learning allows you to enlarge your vital space, enclosed between desires and fears. I believe that we, human beings, are unlimited within limits [...] such as space, time, soul'.

### **2.1.4. Nature of support**

Mercuzio is well integrated into a network of friends, acquaintances, customers and colleagues that proved to be very important in his personal and working life. Many of Mercuzio's transitions happen thanks to such informal network and would not have been possible without it. Mercuzio's wife supported him in his

effort to get a university degree, an important step in his life. But, then, she suddenly disappeared. Mercuzio's present partner is not mentioned often in the interview, but according to Mercuzio, she is struggling with his emotional waves and very confused by his frequent changes and reverses.

#### **2.1.5. Future development options**

Mercuzio is now fascinated by the idea of becoming a writer. Most likely, he will keep his part time job as janitor in the hotel and, at the same time, give vent to his new aspirations. Mercuzio acknowledges that his frequent changes are a way to go along with his emotional waves, his agitation and instability, and even more so, he does not want to repress his instinct.

#### **2.1.6. Learning from previous changes and transitions and moving forward new opportunities**

Mercuzio has learned a lot about himself thanks, or due to, the many transitions he faced in his life. He knows he needs to indulge to his own desires, aspirations, emotional swings. He has also developed a strong determination and self-confidence. Whatever he decides to do, he will do it with passion.

#### **2.1.7. Further influences**

Mercuzio claims to be a follower of a medieval spiritual *maestro* and attends the meetings of a sect, which tends to seek personal fulfilment at all levels.

#### **2.1.8. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Mercuzio appears to be in almost constant transition, with some aspect of his work, learning or other aspects of his life almost always under development. His life is always full of projects and he is happy to engage in various forms of learning to make progress towards his goals. His changes in career direction tend to be opportunistic, responding to opportunities as they arise. He has considerable personal resources (enthusiasm; strong determination; self-confidence; passion; resilience; willingness to learn; gets on well with other people, etc.), is a graduate with considerable practical skills and has demonstrated his adaptability in a challenging labour market. Career guidance could help Mercuzio delineate his options, but Mercuzio has been resourceful in making sure he has been able to access a range of learning and development options. Mercuzio is successful in learning for his career transitions. So it is perhaps less about what he needs to learn about institutional and other structural support and more that those institutions need to learn that there are people like Mercuzio whose careers are not linear and predictable and that structural support should seek to promote adaptability.

## 2.2. Vocational mastery and cognitive, practical, relational and emotional capabilities

### *Iconic case: Lucia*

Lucia is in her forties and is currently a teacher in a professional school of fashion and design in Rome. She teaches sewing, paper modelling and dress-making to different groups of students: from professional tailors and seamstresses to amateurs who simply want to learn the basics and enjoy a manual, creative activity. Lucia studied accounting and IT in high school and was going to continue studying computer science at university. But when the time to choose her path came about, she changed her mind and followed a passion she had since she was a child: ‘when I was about 10 years old, I used to take my mother’s clothes from the wardrobe and modify them. I would cut, sew, narrow them and add creative elements so that they could fit me well. Sometimes my mum got angry at me because I ruined her clothes. Most of the time, the results were very nice [...]. I also loved to disassemble clothes in order to come up with a paper model [...]. Later on, when I started to have boyfriends, I would create original pieces of clothing for them and they were very proud of wearing hand-made pants or shirts.’

Right after school, Lucia almost accepted an apprenticeship in a fashion firm that specialised in sport clothes. The recruiter offered her the position, but at the same time suggested her to invest some more years in professional education to enter the job market with a higher qualification. Lucia ended up following his suggestion and after searching and considering the different options, she decided to enrol in the school where she now teaches. The programme lasted three years and covered theoretical and practical subjects, such as: history of fashion and design, study of materials, drawing, fashion-plate, paper modelling, sewing and dress-making. Lucia attended classes every morning and had lots of additional work to do at home. It was, overall, a very demanding course, but Lucia believes that it gave her a good understanding of the whole process of dress-making. At the end of her second year, Lucia found her first job in a small laboratory. She was hired part time as a pattern-maker and sampler, and her ability to follow the whole process, from the fashion-plate to the final piece of clothing, immediately came out.

‘I was not ready at all when I started my first job. I threw myself into the fray. This is my personality. I am very brave and self-confident. I’ve always looked much younger than I really am, therefore nobody believed that I could actually work [...] until I showed them my abilities. My first work experience lasted a little longer than a year, but it was important for me to understand that I needed to

engage in various activities: from the creative phase until the practical realisation, I liked to see and participate in the whole process. I could have never become the fashion designer who draws the idea and then subs all the rest.'

When Lucia finished vocational school and found a job in an atelier for wedding dresses. It was a small business: the owner was a stylist, Lucia was hired as a pattern-maker, then they had two seamstresses, an embroiderer and an ironer. As soon as the owner discovered Lucia's creativity and her practical skills, she was given a lot of autonomy and space. During the three years she spent at the laboratory, Lucia designed her own wedding dresses and got them published on Vogue. The owner asked her to become a part of the business, in place of her children who were not interested in taking it over. But Lucia already had other plans and refused the offer. She really wanted to gain new experience in the industrial sector and in a period of five years, she changed jobs five times, going from prêt-à-porter to high fashion, and playing alternatively the role of stylist, pattern-maker and sampler. She remembers the sharp difference between high fashion industries, where they spent a long time studying and anticipating the trends and they prepared the samples a year ahead of time, and the prêt-à-porter industries where the pace was much faster and she was clearly invited to copy the models from the other brands. During these five years, Lucia was also cultivating an entrepreneurial project. She and her friends were going to open a fashion design laboratory, something that was rather innovative at the time. 'Together with some of my friends, I started my entrepreneurial adventure. We used up all our savings in order to buy a computer and software that had just come out. This tool allowed to make patterns and develop them into all different sizes. It was already used by many firms in northern Italy, but not yet known in the centre and south. We almost immediately realised that our idea was too advanced at the time: the local market did not respond well and we were impatient [...] so we quit after a year [...] I wish we had waited longer, because a few years later there was a real boom for this kind of fashion design laboratories.'

The experience was still very useful for Lucia, because she learned how to use the innovative software for pattern-making and therefore she was ready for new opportunities. She immediately found a full time, well paid job: 'around 1995, the fashion industry grew a lot and professionals who could supervise the whole dress-making process were precious. I was contended for by many firms; whenever I tried to leave they offered me a rise, and the competitors would offer even more [...]. I felt I had contractual power and it was very rewarding to see that my hard work and the various experiences I had gained were producing positive results.'

When Lucia started a family, things suddenly changed. She began looking for a part time job, but the role of pattern-maker seemed not to be suitable with her needs. She finally found a firm that was willing to adapt to her morning work schedule, but she still did not make it, commuting was exhausting and the agreement did not last long. At this point, Lucia changed her approach to the job market completely and started working from home. 'I proposed myself as a pattern-maker, for a much lower price than before. The firm used to send me pictures, instructions and information by email; I would make the pattern and send it back to the firm. They created the first sample and send it to me with requests of changes, I would retouch the model until it was perfect.'

Lucia admits that this solution was not a choice as much as a necessity. She believes that the pattern-maker should always be present at the firm, since he/she is responsible for the results of the whole production. But at the same time she had a family and needed a salary, it was impossible to do differently. With this agreement, she could work early in the morning or late at night when her kids were sleeping, and she always respected the deadlines. A few years ago, the crisis of the fashion sector hit many of the small and medium enterprises in centre and south Italy, and one day Lucia discovered that she could not be paid for her work anymore. During her career, she had always dedicated some time to teaching [...] this ability saved her from unemployment. She decided to teach full time. Among the different schools she works for, there is her own school. In the same classrooms where she used to learn, she now teaches.

Lucia believes that the long experience she has in both the traditional and industrial sector has made her a good teacher. When she was a student, she did not like the gap between school and real world: 'School can prepare you up to a certain point. The professional world goes much faster, and teachers who do not experience it will very soon lag behind. I am glad I could have a long experience and lucky to be able to continue working as a consultant, because this way I feel up-to-date and I am always at ease in the role of teacher.'

Lucia has worked for about 10 different fashion firms in the area and this network is now very precious for her. Her former employers keep calling her when they have an issue with a pattern or a sample; she goes for one or two days and solves the problem.

After many years of experience and multiple transitions, Lucia still loves her job and communicates her passion every day to her students.

### **2.2.1. Skills, knowledge and understanding development and impact on transition dynamics**

Lucia's practical competencies are outstanding. In the fashion sector, it is common to find technicians who are specialised in one single phase of the process, but it is rare to find a 360° competence on the whole dress-making process. This wide range of abilities has been a result of Lucia's multiple transitions and, at the same time, her safety net in difficult situations. Her emotional competence is also strong: in particular, she shows a high level of self-confidence and resilience and a good balance between determination and realism.

### **2.2.2. Significant work and learning transitions**

Lucia experienced three main transitions in her career: from the traditional to the industrial sector, from hand-made work to computer guided work and finally from a full time engagement in structured organisation to independent work as a teacher and external consultant. While the last transition was a consequence of her maternity, the first two were the result of her need to learn new things, see new environments and develop new skills.

### **2.2.3. Significant learning experience**

The three-year programme in fashion design made a difference in Lucia's career. Had she started working right after high school, probably her results would not have been so brilliant. Thanks to the professional training, she entered the labour market at a higher level, with the cognitive and practical competence to analyse the work environment and to carve out a role for herself. In addition to that, the school experience turned out to be precious when she decided to become a teacher herself.

### **2.2.4. Nature of support**

Since she was a child, Lucia's creativity was appreciated by her family members and friends. It became her feature; later on in her life, Lucia decided to transform it into a job. [Preoccupation became her occupation]. The appreciation she receives by people helped her to overcome difficulties in her career and gave her energies to continue searching for new experiences.

### **2.2.5. Future development options**

Lucia likes teaching and might decide to create her own dress-making school. Alternatively, she might continue teaching as a dependent worker and open a small traditional laboratory to sell her creations. Her future also depends heavily

from the general situation of the fashion industry in Italy, which seems gloomy at the moment.

#### **2.2.6. Learning from previous changes and transitions and moving forward new opportunities**

From her multiple transitions, Lucia has learned that in the fashion industry things can change very rapidly and that being up-to-date is essential. At the same time, she seems aware that certain roles in structured organisations are not suitable for her anymore, and that teaching is probably the best way to capitalise her experience.

#### **2.2.7. Further influences**

As many women and mothers in Italy, Lucia's professional path was heavily affected by her maternity. When she divorced from her husband, the workload related to the care of two children increased, making the conciliation between work and family even more difficult.

#### **2.2.8. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Lucia is in some ways the polar opposite of Mercuzio. She has had a clear sense of vocation since she was a small child and has achieved complete mastery of all aspects of the field through passing through a range of complementary occupational roles. On the other hand, Lucia too has a strong sense of personal agency, considerable personal resources (well-developed cognitive, relational, emotional and practical skills coupled with deep work process and subject knowledge), is well respected for the depth and breadth of her vocational expertise, has extensive personal and professional networks, is committed to her own learning and development and supports the learning and development of others. Her career adaptability comes from her T-shaped skills profile: broad skills coupled with depth in a specialist area. She has had many in different jobs in fashion design and her use of various forms of learning to facilitate future career transitions was exemplary.

## CHAPTER 3.

# France: career decision-making

The need to take account of research on career decision-making styles to improve the effectiveness of support for individuals engaged in career and labour market transitions influenced our decision to include this topic in our approach to data collection. Then, subsequently, we decided to represent the different career decision-making styles in the strategic career and biographies we present of interviewees. For ease of presentation it was decided to present these together drawn mainly from a single country, France, which we do below.

The Bimrose et al. (2008) longitudinal study, of how adults who had had career guidance subsequently developed their careers, highlighted how the participants used one of four career decision-making styles: evaluative, strategic, aspirational and opportunist. These decision-making styles mediated behavioural responses to career progression, learning and development. Our research examined the career decision-making styles of our interviewees. Mercuzio, in Section 2.1 above, is a classic case of an opportunist, so in this section we will examine the other three styles: two are evaluative, one is strategic and two display a mix of strategic and aspirational styles across the life-course.

### 3.1. Evaluative career decision-making

#### *Iconic case: Adèle*

Adèle is an example of a worker with a strong commitment to her own learning and development who nevertheless feels her career choices are constrained in a number of respects.

Adèle is a mid-career woman in the younger age group. She is married and lives with her husband and their two young children. She met her husband at work. Her educational background is general upper secondary level (Bac) and higher education (three years nurse diploma). She undertook two major geographical moves. The first move was from her home town in eastern France to Paris and then she moved back to the same area a couple of years later. She worked for five years as a nurse in several hospitals and units in the two cities. Her second move was to live near the Franco-Swiss border, when she started working for three years in a large hospital in Switzerland as an endoscopy nurse. She has been working permanently for five years in a smaller hospital as an acute care nurse in Switzerland.

When in Paris, she started training to qualify as an operating room nurse. She did not complete the training because she moved out of Paris for personal reasons. She undertook several non-formal continuing education training programmes during her career. None of them resulted in formal qualifications. A major one comprised eight months' work-based training when she joined the oncology department of a hospital in Switzerland.

There were several interesting contrasts. First, many of her career decisions (to go part-time, change job, etc.) have been led by work-family balance issues. However, she also seems to have faced several set-backs at work at the same time.

Personal and contextual reasons are interestingly blended into her narratives: 'every time it was a personal life decision-making and then well, you are more or less forced to change'. Second, even though she changed job twice because she found the environment much too stressful, she is still driven by challenging work. What drives her is learning new things and mobility. She says that it is in her character. She feels unable to stay in a routine job. She is happy with this small hospital, which is less competitive but still provides her with many opportunities to learn and grow professionally. She is representative of an evaluative career decision-making style.

Overall, Adèle has a permanent, part-time (60%) post, is well qualified (Bac+3, nurse diploma, several non-qualifying training courses and considerable experience) and is working as an acute care nurse in a small hospital in Switzerland. Her career trajectory exemplifies the interplay of structure versus agency and she can be considered as a frontier worker with an evaluative career decision-making style for whom work-life balance is important.

Adèle is representative of an 'evaluative' career decision-making style. Her narratives allow identifying an 'ongoing process of critical self-reflection, based on emotional as well as practical considerations'. For instance, the three major life and work transitions she mentioned were initiated by a blend of contextual, emotional and practical factors: work and emotional overloads, practical issues (joining family) or work-life balance issues. Moreover, her narrative shows an evolution over the years toward an enhancement of self-awareness about her skills, an increase in self-confidence and the identification of longer-term career goals. 'Now that I've started to train [...], I wish to go further. They [her superiors] understand what I want. Yeah, as a small hospital here, there're many opportunities to do many things'.

### 3.1.1. Chronology

Adèle narrates her working life chronologically:

- completion of nurse diploma in an eastern French city;
- for two years: in the same city, right after graduating, first full time employment as a nurse;
- for three years: full-time employment as an operating room nurse in thoracic surgery in Paris;
- for two years: moved to another hospital in Paris, still working as an operating room nurse but in obstetrics and gynaecology alternately with intensive care;
- started training to get qualified as an operating room nurse, but did not complete it;
- two years full-time employment as an endoscopy nurse in a large Swiss hospital. Then reduced her working time to 80%;
- eight months work-based informal training to become specialised in endoscopy;
- four years: works part-time (60% including 10% dedicated to staff medical support) as an acute care nurse in a small hospital in Switzerland. Much smaller and less stressful structure comparing to what she experienced so far;
- completed several in-job training programmes: one as corporate trainer to support apprentices' learning (lower skilled medical workers), one as a nurse for staff medical support (*médecine du personnel*).

### 3.1.2. Transitions

What Adèle considers as important changes in her working life are associated either with a job change or a geographical move. The transitions she outlined are as follows:

- moving from eastern France to Paris, having to get adapted to a new living environment. She left because of personal/family problem (death) and unbearable working schedule. Her brother was living in Paris. 'I said to myself 'It's not the life I want'. Then I spoke to my boss and the head nurse. She said that it was the way it was and that's it. Since my personal life was also in transition, I said that I was leaving. I chose Paris because I had relatives there';
- moving back from Paris to her original area to join her family. From there she found employment in Switzerland, while still living in France;
- changed her job in Switzerland. This has been a crucial transition both personally and professionally. She left her job right after returning from her

second maternity leave. Working there had been too stressful in light of a difficult family time and the incapacity of the hospital to give her some time to get adapted. When arriving in the smaller hospital, she found out a much less competitive environment but also an environment suitable for growing her career in different ways (managing projects, training responsibilities). However, since this hospital was less specialised, she first felt like she was regressing in her own job since she had to relearn some basic skills and care duties. 'Coming back from my maternity leave, [...] I was treated as an ancient even if when you're on maternity leave, you lose a lot. [...]. It was very very stressful. [...]. When I was coming back home at night, I found out that I was unavailable for my children. [...] That's the reason why I changed.'

There was a conflicting or, at least, blending of positions in her narratives on the reasons she invokes for having made work changes. Twice she described very difficult work conditions she could not stand while evoking 'personal reasons' (presumably family reasons) for change at the same time. There is indeed a contrast between the way she justifies her career decision-making (go part-time, change job), mainly led by work-family balance issues, and the unbearable work conditions or refusals to offer support she encountered at some crucial points. 'Every time it was a personal life decision-making and then well, you are more or less forced to change.'

It seems that the blend of several factors led her not to attribute the most relevant input for change primarily to structural influences or barriers. However, she is very aware that her bosses who refused twice to let her calm down at work at crucial points were themselves constrained by the structure and the increasing competitiveness of the labour market, even in the public sector. Finally, her conscientious personality plays a crucial role as well. Indeed, she states this at the very end of the interview, synthesising the whole interview: 'I hadn't any bad acquaintance at work. Even if I forced myself to leave, my superiors did not say: 'You've got to leave'. I was unable to stand this additional stress. This was also linked to my character, I like mastering what I'm doing [...] the almost is unbearable to me.'

### **3.1.3. Learning**

Informal learning is a major part of the job of a nurse. Listening to her, it seems that this job comprises mainly learning by doing activities. Adèle is very aware of that: 'I always moved, I learnt a new job even if it was still practising as a nurse: the job in the operating room, it's different, thoracic or gynaecological surgical, it's not the same thing. It's not the same kind of interventions. You've got to learn.'

But she also raised several times the issue that there is no recognition for learning neither in terms of qualification nor in terms of salary.

Even though she changed job twice because environments were too stressful, she is still driven by challenging work. What drives her is learning new things. She says that it is in her character. She feels unable to stay in a routine job and her superiors noticed it.

#### **3.1.4. Support**

An important type of support comes from peers at work. In a very competitive environment, she is often referring to key persons she could rely on when in transition or in need of support at work: 'within a unit, you need to find two or three people with whom you get along [...]. Otherwise, there is no official support to integrate people [...] I'm working like that. You need a strong character [...] not being shy. At first, I was very shy but at the end, you need the courage to go to others because they won't come to you'.

Interestingly, Adèle did not notice many differences between Swiss and French labour markets concerning nurse employment. The crucial point for her was the size of the hospital, which would provide her with the opportunity (or not) to get help from colleagues when you need it, with much more stress and less support in large hospitals. 'In large hospitals: they ask for efficiency, you've got to get by, namely great adaptability, availability, you've got to be malleable [...]. Others don't have time to help you, they are overwhelmed, it's very intense.'

Family was also a crucial support for Adèle in her transitions. For instance, when she first moved to Paris, she chose this place because her brother was leaving there.

When asked which kind of support she would need in the future, she started a long narrative about the lack of support for nurses wishing to re-orientate during mid-career (see section below).

#### **3.1.5. Future development**

In her actual employment: after having trained as a nurse for staff medical problems, she has been asked if she wanted to enrol in training for becoming corporate trainer (*formateur en entreprise*), a post which she accepted. So she is negotiating an additional 10% within her 60% to be able to teach staff for handling back pain problems. She is building a project called 'health and security at work' and is trying to enrol some people in it. According to her, developing her career at the moment is much about chance and taking opportunities when they show up even if it was often stressful for her because of the uncertainty of those kinds of projects. As she becomes more experienced 'I am much less stressed, there is less of an unknown'.

From an external point of view, it would appear that Adèle is in a crucial stage of her career if she wants to develop or move to another sector of care. She needs to mobilise her resources to get over the anxious part of her personality and the contextual barriers she is facing.

As for the contextual barriers, on the one hand Adèle mentioned that nurses are under-informed about opportunities in their late career and this prevents them from a smooth transition to a 'mature' part of their career. [This could be an example of a latent interest in career change]. 'Nurses after 20 years, I can understand they can get tired of working in hospitals. This is still a reality that nurses' career life is short, you barely see 60 years old nurses in hospitals.'

On the other hand, it seems that despite the fact that French nurses learn and train a lot during their careers, they usually do not get further qualifications. Adèle mentioned it several times during the interview. This may prevent them from being able to show a differentiated profile to get a higher qualified position or apply to another sector of care, such as nurse for the staff (as she is doing) or school nurse.

These two remarks speak in favour of the important role that career guidance professionals may play in informing mid-career workers on subsequent opportunities for their career and on helping them to validate their skills acquired while working.

#### **3.1.6. Work-life balance**

Work-life balance issues have largely influenced Adèle's career path. In all of the career changes she mentioned, family is somehow present in her narratives. There is a permanent negotiation between personal and professional issues and she often sounded as the one in charge of those decisions. In that sense, her narrative is probably much gendered:

- on the move from Paris: 'I was preparing an exam (*concours*) to become operating room nurse [...] at the end for my personal life, again, and not to impose heavy commuting to my daughter and avoid not seeing her, we decided to leave Paris';
- on leaving her job after birth of second child: 'I was saying to myself: I haven't had children for that. Consequently, I favoured my mother role to my professional role. That's the reason why I changed and I came here.'

#### **3.1.7. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Adèle presents a generally successful career narrative. Her career exemplified purposeful transitions; with a commitment to learning new things; seeking challenging work; clear development across all four domains (practical; relational; emotional; cognitive); and a strong occupational identity. There were challenges

to be overcome, due to problems with working relationships and the work could be very intense, and family commitments influenced her career decisions. Adèle was in a career, however, with very clear occupational structures, progression pathways and patterns of work organisation, but within those constraints Adèle acted in ways which gave her a feeling of greater control. Adèle's learning and development was broad and deep, but the lack of further formal qualifications could leave her vulnerable if she does want to make a career change at a later date.

### 3.2. Aspirational career decision-making

#### *Iconic case: Eugene*

Eugene is in his forties, working as a consultant and coach, living with his partner and their children in rural France. He has had extensive geographical mobility. He was brought up in a coastal city, but moved for his Bac studies. His first job was in Africa, then he was based in provincial France, followed by promotion to Paris, with extensive overseas travel as part of his job. He then relocated to a very small village as a lifestyle choice for his young children.

#### **3.2.1. Education and training paths**

Bac Economics followed immediately by Bac Science. He had to secure ministerial permission for doing a second Bac, ostensibly to pursue engineering (although this path was never actually taken). His vocational training consisted of *Brevet Technicien Supérieur* (Bac +2) in International commerce.

#### **3.2.2. Significant jobs/positions held:**

Overseas work in equatorial rain forest; had always dreamed of exploring, and had extraordinary opportunity at age 20 to work in Africa, harvesting timber for export 'it was real Indiana Jones stuff'. On his return to France, he followed up an invitation from a customer (who imported hardwoods into France) who offered him a job.

Formative job, fast learning, rapid promotion; employed as commercial export attaché in this family run factory (300 employees), which produced plywood. Unusually for a sales appointment, he was first set to work on the factory floor for six months. Subsequent work in export required lots of sales trips to customers ranging from self-employed cabinet maker to chief executive officer (CEO) of large scale furniture production. He rose to become export manager responsible for half the turnover of the business (some 125 million francs).

From the provinces to Paris: head of export zone for automatic taps (timed to shut off after being pressed on, widely used in communal housing (common in facilities such as barracks and prisons). This job was much better paid and involved extensive travel (100 countries in 18 months) particularly to the emergent eastern bloc.

International sales director: still in Paris but with different product (lingerie) across greater area (Middle East) and more managerial responsibility (sales team reporting to him). This job represented another big jump in salary and involved lots of sales trips, high end hotels and milieu.

Sales director multinational company: head-hunted to this extremely well paid job, but he reflected that it involved no real work, but his appointment added value to the company which was being targeted for a hostile takeover. 'I was like a mannequin in a shop window. I wanted to go but I was trapped. In the end I asked them to sack me'.

Unemployed over 12 months: he then needed time to readjust, and to identify what his priorities were. His personal circumstances had changed, he was now remarried, living in a blended family with four children.

International sales director (reprised): approached by his old lingerie bosses, he readily accepted a big sales job.

Sales Director, provinces; wanting to move out of Paris as a lifestyle choice, took this job further down the sales ladder to secure income in the countryside.

Self-employed coach and consultant; wanted to take charge of his own destiny, now self-employed as consultant by businesses, typically working closely with chief executive officers. He has also advised politicians and those running for national office. As a deliberate counter-balance, he offers online coaching for minimal cost.

### **3.2.3. Reasons for transitions**

Reasons of the heart are the recurrent spur to action. Even his first active decision, to take a second Bac, was because he wanted to follow his then girlfriend who moved away to study. The African job was, in part, an opportunity grasped but, in part, gave him the chance to act out his boyhood career fantasy of adventure and exploration. The move back to France was precipitated by a fatal accident in the logging team he was part of; he found this experience 'destroyed me. It was 22 years ago but I remember it like it was yesterday'.

### **3.2.4. Emotional impact**

Emotions are keenly felt by Eugene. He refers to himself more than once as Romantic; wanting travel and adventure, not studious but instinctive, following his heart. He acts out of emotion: being devastated by the accidental death of one of

his African workers he returns to France; following his ex-wife when she relocated to Paris with their child because he could not bear to be far from his son; feeling so angry with the multinational company that he asked them to sack him. This experience clearly still rankles: 'I had an enormous salary, really enormous. For eight months I did nothing. I was there simply to justify the rent on a prime location. I was angry, really angry. Disappointed in myself, for having taken the money. I didn't listen to my own good sense, I listened to the voice of temptation'.

It is his own betrayal of the instinct and intuition that he prizes so highly that he finds hard to bear – and this redoubles his belief in following his heart, thus leading to the massive lifestyle change from highly paid globetrotting executive to moving to a hamlet deep in the French countryside.

### **3.2.5. Key aspects of learning and development**

Self-confidence and both internal and external validation of worth are evident in the interview. He places enormous trust in his own instinctive judgements, and places far higher value on intuition than on reason – entirely in keeping with Romantic ideals with which he so strongly identifies. There is a defiant tone in his insistence that he be judged on his proven ability to take on complex and demanding roles, rather than being judged on the basis of a modest bank of formal qualifications. Nevertheless, he is heartened that Mensa rated his intelligence highly, and found that a great boost to his shaken self-confidence during his period of unemployment.

Attitude to learning: he prizes learning highly and has invested enormously in learning all he can from effective role models and from thinking about what he is doing and how he is doing it. He thought about doing an MBA but not having a first degree was an insuperable barrier, so instead he bought the books and ploughed through them himself.

When advising jobseekers through his online coaching, his stance is more equivocal: 'I don't tell them it's good not to get qualifications, but I do ask them to have an open mind'.

Dis-accreditation of experiential learning and retaining identity: Eugene articulated his concept of dis-accreditation which is the meaning he makes of how recruiters react to his lack of formal qualifications. He described a job interview: 'the recruiter read the first page of my CV, which is great – I've had a good run. Then I watched him read the second page, he saw BTS <sup>(3)</sup> and I saw

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<sup>(3)</sup> *Brevet de technicien supérieur* is a vocational qualification (higher technician certificate) which can be taken post-baccalauréat, often at a *lycée professionnel*. The

everything in him change. He started picking holes, and I got angry (I'm hot tempered) and it hurt me terribly – a deep wound'.

He is very clear that the positions he has held would normally require Bac+5 whereas he has Bac+2 now dating back over 20 years. He refuses point blank to consider formal accreditation of his experiential learning because, for him, it is putting round pegs into square holes and, as a Romantic, he would not conform – because to do so would, in his words 'deny my own identity'.

### **3.2.6. Career decision-making style**

Heart rules head so consistently, and does so with such passion, that Eugene's style is most consistent with aspirational.

Skills, knowledge and understanding required: In his current job (consultancy and coaching) he explicitly transfers learning from one context to another: 'sales teams who complain that customers are idiots are saying pretty much the same as jobseekers who say recruiters are imbeciles'. Communication skills are key, along with the ability to get on with anybody at any level in an organisation or in the course of everyday life. The basis of this was laid in his first job in Africa, where the culture and values were so obviously different to what he had hitherto experienced he had to find a way to get in and get on with people. He consciously applied that approach to his work on the shop floor in the plywood factory and used that basis to grow his relational approach to sales.

### **3.2.7. Support Mentor and role model**

During the interview, he referred to people with whom he had worked and from whom he had learnt.

Key among these was his first boss in the plywood company. He describes him as; 'a self-made, self-taught man, something of a perfectionist, quick-tempered but fair. He was aware what other (educated) chief executive officers might make of him – a peasant who'd done well.' Eugene refers to him as his spiritual father, the relationship developed as the boss accompanied his protégé on sales trips. During these long car journeys, the boss would talk through the problems and difficulties of running the business; Eugene listened and learned.

In the lingerie company, he reported to a Sales director who 'was a good guy, really good on the technical side (of sales)' who was happy to pass his know how on.

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curriculum has a strong practical orientation and lasts for two years. The disappointment of the recruiter is presumably because he was expecting to interview a university graduate.

### **3.2.8. Future development:**

To maintain his balance between corporate consultancy and socially responsible low cost coaching. He is undertaking a formal (nine month part time) course in coaching, wanting to 'transfer intuition into technique'. He readily concedes that diplomas 'aren't my thing – but it promotes transparency'.

### **3.2.9. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Eugene was an aspirational career decision-maker, whose decisions were ruled by emotions. He engaged in purposeful transitions; with a commitment to self-directed learning and learning from others (but he has few formal qualifications); seeks challenge in his work; has great strengths in the relational domain; high career adaptability with identity attached to his skill set which can be applied in a variety of contexts, rather than a particular occupational attachment.

## **3.3. Strategic career decision-making**

### *Iconic case: Henri*

Henri is in his thirties. He is married and lives with his wife and their daughter near the Swiss border. He has been working full-time for two and half years as an engineer (operational manager) in watch and jewel micro-technology in a city in Switzerland. He eventually reached his 'dream' managerial position of production manager. On the side, he is self-employed in France. On the one hand, he is assembling manufactured pieces and selling his own micro-technology products. On the other hand, he created a business for his wife who is optician. Now that the shop is running quite well, he is much less involved but he is still managing administrative aspects.

Henri grew up in the French Jura area. His educational background is general upper-secondary education (Bac in technology). Then he enrolled in a preparatory school to become an army officer. He extensively studied maths and was very successful. As he was not allowed to enrol into an army career because of health problems, he completed a BTS in optical engineering instead. This has been 'the huge transition of my life'. Since his parents could not afford to support him in further study, and he lived close to the Swiss border where job prospects were much better, he went directly into the Swiss labour market, but continued to live in France.

After getting his first job as a technician, he undertook higher education training in Switzerland to become an engineer. This degree corresponds to a Bachelor degree and was undertaken in a high school for engineers. This school is more focused on practical aspects than would be the case with a university-

based academic degree. This was a five year part-time programme alongside his full-time employment. This diploma has been crucial to him to get higher positions. Attention is focused on practical and cognitive development, coupled with strong socialisation and identity development as an engineer.

Henri is typically representative of a strategic career decision-making style. All his career decisions so far have been led by very focused goals. He had set this goal of reaching a particular job position: production manager. He subsequently adapted his career decisions to follow opportunities, which would probably lead him to this goal. This is the main reason for the several transitions he made. Whenever he was facing an opportunity for getting closer to this goal, he grabbed it. However, he refused some very interesting opportunities because they did not fit into his career plan. 'I know what I am looking for as an employment. I want to be head of production that is mastering technical, development and also trading aspects [...]. When I left this company, they proposed to me a position as a head of production. I refused it because I hadn't any experience in production'.

Consequently, his career has followed a fairly linear, vertical and hierarchical development in his field. Moreover, his narrative does not contain any emotion. In the first interview, he had nearly reached the expected position and he does not know yet what he is going to do next because this position of head of product is going to be a big and exciting challenge to him. He is a frontier worker, who uses strategic learning and rationality to develop his career. He could be an iconic case for strategic thinking, behaviour and attitudes. He is not very reflexive, but he strongly believed his dream job as head of production was within reach.

Henri bases his career decisions on rational conditions. His whole narrative contains very few emotions. This 'tendency to marginalise emotions and his emotional self in his decision making' is obvious in his narrative about his work with delocalisation of some sectors of a company to India (out of 200 employees working on the French site, only 20 remained after two years). The interviewer told him that I guessed it might have been a pretty heavy responsibility for him. He replied: 'No, not when you're aware of it from the start [...]. This job has been the most exciting experience in my life [...]. This is exactly what I love. You are being called in the middle of the night because of the time difference with the USA, always working, you never get bored. You've got many projects over the head. This is the way I like working [...]. If I'm not stressed, I'm not efficient.'

This career decision-making style shows an interesting blend between gender and personality issues, although the context of a buoyant labour market may also be a factor too. Adopting strategically rational behaviour is easier when the opportunity structures permit a wide degree of choice, and where gender,

personality and context also value fairly traditional career progression, then there can be strong alignment between career goals and career progression. Henri did indeed feel driven by his career goals: 'I am a never-ending dissatisfied person. As soon as I get something I wished very much, I want something else. I look for challenges.'

### 3.4. Chronology

Henri narrates his working life chronologically:

- 18 to 22 years old: works as a part-time ambulance driver on the side of his studies;
- first job as an engineer in Switzerland;
- higher education in Switzerland, school of engineering, five-year training while working. Successively more responsibilities at work: fitter (*monteur*), maker (*constructeur*), and project manager (RandD);
- he was about to buy the small company he was in for six years but left suddenly because of internal conflicts in the company;
- five months as a project manager in a big company but left because he got quickly bored of not having enough projects to manage;
- two years in a big company working on delocalisation of some activities of the company to India;
- at the same time he set up a business at home. He created a device for a client and set up the business in order to be able to sell it;
- two years as a manager in a company specialised in the cutting and machining of noble materials;
- at the same time: set up a business for his wife. They set up an optical shop;
- For the last three years he has been working as a manager in a small watch and jewel micro-technology company. By the time of the second interview he was just about to start in his desired position (*directeur de production*).

#### 3.4.1. Transitions and labour market changes

An important transition for Henri had been a reorientation of his aspirations at the age of 19. Henri had completed his general upper-secondary education (Bac in technology) and he enrolled in a preparatory school to become an army officer. He extensively studied maths and was very successful. He had not been allowed to enrol into an army career because of health problems (heart murmur): 'this has been the huge transition of my life. I wanted to become an officer [...]. I am happy to have been reformed. But back then it had been difficult.'

He completed a BTS in optical engineering instead. Interestingly, the career path he is performing now has similarities with a career in the army in the sense that his career looks very straightforward and vertical. He wants to reach one of the highest hierarchical positions.

Moreover, the way he moved from a position or a company to another one was either through networking (a friend told him a position was available) or through internal promotion. In that sense, it looks like a traditional career path (i.e., not much uncertainty, remains in the same field, always following the same career goal). The reasons for leaving were always linked to dissatisfaction from his side. At least, his narrative shows that he wants to keep control of what happened. Since Henri's professional life has always been very intense and most of his life seems to have been dedicated to work (very few vacations, intense working schedule), important transitions for him have been professional in nature.

#### **3.4.2. Learning (and identity)**

After getting his first job as a technician in Switzerland, he undertook part-time higher education, which coupled with learning while working enabled him to become an engineer. His five-year programme corresponded to a Bachelor degree and was undertaken in a school of engineering (*Haute école spécialisée*), which is more focused on practical aspects than a similar training path at university. This diploma, as a qualified engineer, has been crucial to him to get higher positions.

Unlike some other interviewees (Françoise, Antoinette), Henri has a very strategic way of thinking. Learning is seen as a way of fulfilling career objectives, such as becoming recognised, but is also pursued to facilitate sense-making, involving a deep understanding of processes as well as knowledge: 'I've got a big flaw. I need to understand everything. This is also the way you'll get recognition in a company [...]. I didn't impose myself through management, but I imposed myself through knowledge.'

This deep sense of technical knowledge and understanding is also fundamental to his identity – he is not 'a manager in a company using specialist technology', he is 'a specialist engineer who is performing the role of production manager'. Indeed his earlier decision not to take a management position in another company because he did not have sufficient work process knowledge bears out it is his technical expertise, which he sees as fundamental to his work and identity. Henri has not made a transition to seeing himself as a manager following a typical 'top manager career path' – indeed it was telling that his dream job was production manager rather than a higher but less technical position. He is rather trying to cultivate the culture of the engineer educated in the field. He

wants to be recognised because of his skills. 'I'm from the field. They [the employees] like that people who manage have an idea of what they are talking about.'

There is also a well-known competition in Switzerland between engineers educated in the kind of school Henri attended and those educated at university. Henri sees himself as a representative of the more practical tradition of the former as against the more academic orientation of the latter. [By the way, a similar kind of competition might occur in France between engineers having completed their studies in prestigious school versus universities diploma]. In Switzerland, this conflict opposes the two groups in a positional competition as to who should fill middle-range versus higher-range positions. It is mainly focused on the opposition between mastering more theoretical versus more practical aspects and Henri makes his position clear: 'I know some EPF [people from *École Polytechnique Fédérale*]. Some of them are sort of French style. When French engineers get out of school, they are a bit swollen-headed. EPF is a bit the same style. Those I met who were like that, this was not going well with me.'

Henri had considered whether he should do an MBA, but his decision not to choose to pursue an MBA could perhaps partly be linked to this particular professional identity issue. That transition would have led him to some extent away from his technical expertise to develop a wider range of other skills. That he felt would have meant he would become too much disconnected from the field and it was too early in his career to follow that route.

#### **3.4.3. Support**

'I've done everything on my own.' Henri has the narrative of the 'self-made man'. What he undertakes is very difficult, very challenging, and purposeful. He is the one who decides to go somewhere or to quit a job. In such a perspective of controlling everything, logically one does not need support.

#### **3.4.4. Future development**

Henri has nearly reached his desired position and he does not know yet what he is going to do next because this position of head of production is going to be a big and exciting challenge to him. His current identity based on technical expertise represents his psychological home – it is where he belongs. It is an interesting question as to when he will feel like leaving this home, because he also likes new challenges. In his second interview, just nine months later, there had been a subtle shift, where he was already able to imagine he could move on from the position that had for so long been his quest.

#### **3.4.5. Work-life balance**

Henri presumably has some sort of personal life since he is married and has a daughter. However, this part of his life does not appear in his narrative. Sometimes, working sounds like a hobby in his commentary: 'I developed a device for a client [...]. I set up a small business in order to be able to sell it. I'm still producing it. Parts are manufactured in Malaysia, I assemble them. I have an office in my attic. It is small holders for micro-technology [...]. This is like a toy for me.'

Moreover, whenever Henri mentions a family issue (his wife encountered difficulties in finding a job), his reply had been very professional: 'I said: 'opticians do not want to hire you? You'll see what's going to happen. I'm going set up a shop for you!.'

#### **3.4.6. Second interview (nine months later)**

Within nine months, Henri progressed a lot on his multiple professional projects and achieved key goals. He said himself it was a very good year where many projects progressed.

As for his main employment in watch and jewel micro-technology, he is now about to officially take on the position of head of production in the same company he was in last year. This position is what he has mainly been working for in the last 10 years. While showing much satisfaction, he mentioned it as a first achievement implying that great decisions are going to be made: 'my boss asked me what I would like to do in 2014. I said I just would like to be where he needs me [...]. I just need to take pleasure in working.'

Regarding his freelance projects, on the one hand he is progressing a lot with his business in designing and assembling micro-technological machines. The business is growing and he is getting successful. On the other hand, he is about to open a second optician shop. As a reminder, he opened the first one a couple of years ago for his wife who had difficulties in finding a job.

In terms of learning, Henri was strategically balanced between taking a MBA or German lessons. While a MBA will give him opportunities in a long-term perspective, such as accessing top management position at the head of the group, taking German lessons was considered much more efficient on the short-term. He wants to be able to speak with his Swiss German clients. 'In my mind, two years is a very long period. To get an impact in only five years [with an MBA], no, today top management doesn't interest me. In five years I'll be 40 years old and I will be a potential candidate, maybe 45 it depends what for.'

This example is just an additional confirmation of how strategically Henri leads his career both in the short and long-term. Again, his life is dedicated to his

career and that is where he finds satisfaction. It is maybe just too early in terms of career plan to decide about whether an MBA will be of benefit.

Interestingly, Henri labelled himself with the syndrome of the independent man, namely someone who is dedicated to the company as if this company was his own. This aspect leads to some disagreements with his subordinates. Henri is definitely an iconic case with regard to strategic career decision-making. He is self-confident, even arrogant, goal-focused and in an amazing workflow. The values of the private economy live in his very technical narratives (competitiveness, profit, efficiency, rationality, etc.).

#### **3.4.7. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Henri was a strategic career decision-maker engaged in purposeful transitions; with a commitment to learning to support career goals, for understanding and seeking new challenges; continuing development in practical and cognitive domains – seldom mentions relational issues and emotions not at all; he has a very strong occupational identity and organisational attachment. Henri has broad general skills, coupled with a deep sense of technical knowledge and understanding which is fundamental to his identity – he is ‘a specialist engineer who is performing the role of production manager’.

### **3.5. Mixed career style: aspirational and strategic career decision-making**

#### *Iconic case: Nicole*

Nicole is in her forties and is married, with one child. After leaving school, and following family pressure, she started training as a hairdresser, rather than as a healthcare assistant. However, she did not complete her initial training and instead went into a job in retail. She worked, predominantly in sales, for a number of different companies, over a 20-year period, involving seven job changes, reflecting changes in function, location and progression. Nicole then spent five years in professional re-orientation training to start a new career in healthcare. For the last six years, she has worked as healthcare assistant (*agent hospitalier*), a full-time permanent (open ended) work contract, finally achieving her adolescent dream to work in healthcare. No real change took place between her first and the second interview. Although she is quite happy with her job as a healthcare assistant, she is interested in getting (at least) an equivalent formal status by obtaining the State diploma of assistant nurse (*DEAS, diplôme d'état d'aide soignante*) through the validation of acquired experiences (*VAE, validation des acquis de l'expérience*) or through paid professional training leave (*CFP*,

*congé de formation professionnelle*) to follow a DEAS training programme. For her, holding a DEAS diploma is an important step toward international mobility or working on free-lance basis.

### **3.5.1. Learning transitions**

After the completion of her comprehensive lower secondary education, she was highly interested in going for an upper-secondary qualification (such as a Baccalaureate in science and biology) which would have allowed her ultimately to follow her studies in nursing with the aim of becoming a generalist nurse. But, given that her family was well established for generations in commercial activities, they used all their influence to convince her at an early age to go for an upper secondary vocational education and training connected with this sector of activity. Consequently, she opted for following her upper secondary vocational education and training in hairdressing and obtaining the following related qualifications: professional aptitude certificate (CAP, *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle*) after three years of study in an upper secondary vocational college and a two-year professional certificate called *brevet professionnel* in mixed hairdressing, organised by the regional Chamber of Trades. But for financial reasons, she had to stop halfway through this second qualification and start working as a sales assistant in retail: selling different ready-to-wear and accessories brands. Nicole had therefore had two abrupt changes of career direction even before she had started work, both due to circumstances, which greatly constrained her 'choice.'

### **3.5.2. Significant work learning transitions, experiences and their impact**

The transitions characterising her career trajectories since starting work, can be grouped into three basic stages according to the type of undertaken occupations, activities, responsibilities and the basic motivations for undertaking them, including their impact and implications for learning and future career development:

- work transitions connected with the development of a career in retail sales;
- transition associated with professional re-orientation and re-conversion towards starting a career within the healthcare sector;
- transitions associated with working and developing her career within a specialist unit of a large public hospital as a healthcare assistant.

The first stage in her working life, extending over 20 years, was devoted to the development of her career in retail sales. It included a succession of the following seven occupational work transitions and related learning experiences within the same sector of activity:

- she started working as in sales for about a year;
- then, she was offered a better job with a better salary and more responsibility as deputy sales manager by a fashion shop for women, where she worked for seven years;
- she then moved to another job working as a manger of the sales shop of the French brand of women's clothing and accessories for a fashionable youth brand;
- due to her high performance in terms of achieved turnover during the first two years she was manager, she was offered a job with a better salary through a transfer to a city to take in charge the management responsibility of a newly created regional sales for the same brand. As she did not have family commitments then (and including her motivation for earning a higher salary), she accepted and worked there for about two years;
- following the pressure of her new family commitments connected with her marriage and having a child, she decided to move back to her city of origin and take a different job as a sales manager for a different brand which was ready-to-wear for about two years;
- then, as she wanted to change to less standardised but high quality brands more connected with ready-to-wear luxury products, she did a job as a manager of a store selling a luxury line of products for about two years;
- as her attainments in terms of achieved turnover within the brand did not reach the level of her contractual commitments as a sales manager, she switched to another job as manager of a branded sales store for about one year;
- her last job in sales consisted of assisting a friend of the family in his business connected with selling toys. She worked for him as a sales manager of the toys store for about a year. As the whole business then had to close due to financial difficulties, she benefited from the compensation period of unemployment to prepare herself for a complete change of her career path by undertaking a series of preparatory re-conversion training actions and competitive exams for access to a job as a healthcare auxiliary/assistant.

During the early transitions in her career in sales, Nicole benefited from a set of CVT courses connected mainly with sales promotion and with the responsibility of sales team management, namely:

- training in merchandising, window dressing and display organised for two days per month during her first year of work;
- training in the management of sales teams for two days per month during the first year of her work as sales manager for a particular brand.

Her work and learning experiences accumulated during the first stage of her career in retail as a sales manager, effectively learning through challenging work, allowed her to develop the following basic professional skills and competences:

- complete and autonomous management capacities of a sales area;
- capacity to develop an individualised sales turnover;
- team working and the ability to manage a team of two to 10 people;
- stock management competences connected with replenishment, reception and inventory of supplies;
- human resources management and development capacities connected with planning and scheduling working hours and shifts, recruiting and training sellers, performance evaluation and follow-up in terms of individual turnover achievements, resolution of conflict;
- skills and competences connected with merchandising, window dressing and the implementation of attractive visual layouts of the products;
- capacity of undertaking effective targeted promotional and marketing actions;
- management of customers, including settling cases of dissatisfaction or dispute.

The second stage of her working career, extending practically over a period of about five years, was basically connected with the following professional re-orientation and re-conversion transitions towards starting a career within the healthcare sector:

- Nicole prepared for the competitive entrance exam to assistant-nursing studies with the financial support and tutoring follow-up and accompaniment of the training department *Refome formation* of the local employment agency. The undertaken preparatory courses, in parallel to part-time temporary work contracts, consisted of upgrading her level in general subjects such as French, mathematics, human biology and subjects connected with socio-healthcare careers at the NQF level 5 (EQF level 3);
- after the completion of this preparatory period, she undertook a competitive written and oral entrance exam to a nursing school with the aim of obtaining a DEAS after 10 months of study. But fate was not on her side this time, given that the number of available places at the school was limited (75 students to be selected in a decreasing order of obtained marks among about 680 candidates). As a consequence, although she passed the written test, she missed the oral one by one point. If she was selected for entrance to the nursing school, the employment agency which supported her during the preparatory stage would have remained committed to take in charge of all the costs connected with undertaking 10 months of study within the school

- leading to obtaining the required qualification for working as an assistant nurse;
- as she could not have, at beginning of the period, direct access to a job as an auxiliary health care worker within the healthcare sector without prior working experiences in hospitals/clinics, she benefited (after a certain persistence) with the help of the local employment agency from a professional accompaniment contract (CAE, *contrat d'accompagnement à l'emploi*). It was a tripartite contract signed between her, the employment agency and one of the main city hospitals, for six months renewable over two years. In terms of this contract, the payment of her salary as an on-the-job trainee was shared by both the hospital and the employment agency. Five years after starting out with the intention of changing career, she was confirmed in the job as health assistant (*agent hospitalier*) through recruitment on the basis of a permanent work contract according to the employment status of civil servant within this hospital.

The third stage of her work experience concerned her new career within the healthcare sector. Nicole has been working as a healthcare-assistant within a specialist unit of the city hospital. Although she is formally attached to the latter as an employee, her activity is exercised through different units in three public hospitals in the city:

- within the specialist unit of the main hospital to which she is formally attached in most of her work;
- within the trauma, the emergency and the functional re-adaptation units of a second hospital;
- within the orthopaedic sports unit of a third hospital.

Her tasks as a healthcare assistant consist basically of the following:

- washing and dressing patients;
- toileting, including helping patients to undertake personal tasks such as washing, showering and using the toilet;
- changing sheets and making beds;
- giving out bedpans and collecting used ones;
- serving food to patients and helping them to eat if they are physically weak;
- helping patients to move around their environment and feel comfortable, this includes keeping their living area very clean and tidy;
- talking to them to ease loneliness and feelings of isolation;
- listening to the particular need of patients and acting on these needs as appropriate;
- assisting with patients' overall comfort;

- monitoring patients' conditions by taking temperature, pulse, respiration and weight;
- assisting sometimes in setting up equipment in use in the treatment sessions;
- contributing to record keeping.

In exercising these tasks, she has to keep-up with rules of safety and prevention of bio-contamination and to work in concert and cooperation with nurses, assistant nurses and doctors. In this connection, she also benefits from regular periods of internal continuing training of three to four days per year, including training specifically connected with feeding regimes and stress management.

### **3.5.3. Personal evaluation and future development**

Nicole likes what she is doing as a healthcare assistant. She finds it personally rewarding as she can identify herself with it as a vocation (or as a vocational identity) rather than a simple profession connected basically with pecuniary reward. Her work learning experience as healthcare assistant allowed her so far to develop the following skills and competences in healthcare service provisions to individuals:

- team working and relational interactivity capacities;
- capacity of listening and communicating with open mind and tactful caring nature;
- ability to remain patient and keep calm in tough situations;
- reliability, trustworthiness and ability to keep sensitive information confidential;
- desire and ability to communicate and work with people of all ages from all backgrounds;
- organisational and planning skills;
- autonomy with responsibility and rigour in keeping up with the requirements of work assignments and ethics;
- flexibility in coping with requirement of changes at workplace;
- contact, communication and sociability skills;
- ability to manage stress;
- polyvalence developed through her functional and geographical mobility within different units of the specialist unit connected with three hospitals located in three different areas of the city. This includes the capacity of working with different teams within different locations, work environments and conditions.

There has been no declared career change taking place between the first interview and the second (follow-up) one conducted in January 2013. But concerning her expectations for future development, she confirmed having in perspective the following intentions. First, continuing her preparation for obtaining the DEAS (State diploma of assistant-nurse) through the use of the VAE regime (validation of acquired experiences). Although the position she is occupying at present (as healthcare assistant) is in practice equivalent or even higher than that held by an assistant-nurse, it is not classified as a formal qualification or a title registered within NQF repertory (RNCP). By contrast the DEAS held by an assistant-nurse is a State diploma registered within the NQF repertory as a formal qualification with national and some international recognition. For her, holding a DEAS is an important step forward towards international mobility or going for work on free-lance basis within the healthcare sector. In this connection, she already applied in November 2012 for undertaking through the VAE scheme a competitive entrance exam to DEAS (assistant nursing State diploma) programme during the second trimester of this year (2013). In the case of success, she will complete the related 10-month programme and benefit from taking a paid professional training leave (CFP) called alternatively in healthcare a professional promotion leave (*promotion professionnelle*). CFP is equivalent to CIF (*congé individuel de formation*) scheme used in the private sector, and it is accessible after accumulating three years of working experience. Its maximum duration is 12 months, during which she will be receiving 85% of her salary and all training related costs, will be taken in charge by the employer.

Second, obtaining a DEAS qualification will certainly reinforce implementing her intention of either taking non-paid leave to work in one of the French overseas islands or launching her free-lance activity as a healthcare assistant in collaboration with one of her friends practising as an independent professional nurse. Alternatively, she might even go (after obtaining her DEAS qualification) for further studies in nursing with the aim of obtaining a State diploma in nursing (DEI, *diplôme d'État d'infirmier*) at EQF level 6.

#### **3.5.4. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Nicole's career decision-making was aspirational and strategic; she engaged in purposeful transitions; has used a wide range of means of learning and professional development, including experiential learning, CVT and reskilling. Her first transition into vocational training illustrated the tension between her attempting to exercise personal agency (with her strong identification with a healthcare vocational identity since childhood) versus structure (the constraint of strong family identification with their commercial hairdressing business which

they wanted her to enter. In the event Nicole's first career was in retail and she built a successful career. However, when the business she started with a friend collapsed, she took the opportunity to change career direction completely, following her original aspirational goals. Nicole then acted with determination to access support to reorient her career into healthcare and she has further plans to develop her career further. Her personal resources (sense of personal agency, efficacy belief, determination, relational skills and willingness to engage in learning and development) and commitment supported the transition.

### 3.6. Evaluative career decision-making

#### *Iconic case: Didier*

Didier is in his thirties and is a self-employed garden designer. His geographical mobility has been very limited. He has always lived and worked in north-east France, where he was born and brought up. He never had any plans to move out, and he is even less likely to move now he is established with dependants.

#### **3.6.1. Education and training paths**

At university level, Didier started a degree in sports education, training to be a sports teacher. However, a knee injury sustained when playing sport meant he had to rethink his career options, so he left degree programme with *diplôme d'études universitaires générales*. His vocational training commenced, when, at the age of 30, he enrolled on a professional baccalaureate (bac pro) in landscape gardening, opting for a correspondence course because of the flexibility that offered, thinking he could combine study with working. He completed the first part of the course, but realised he simply had not put enough time into his studies and so withdrew.

#### **3.6.2. Significant jobs/positions held:**

- series of insignificant jobs after he had to leave his sports teacher training, interspersed with medical attention for the knee problem that had forced him out of his original career path;
- summer job – garden labourer: he had a summer job working alongside a self-employed gardener who held the contract for tending military cemeteries and returned to this during several vacations through his late secondary and early university education;
- municipal gardens: gardening assistant. Placement by family contact based on prior experience with gardening;

- work placement: six months as a trainee landscape gardener. This was paid work, integral to his bac pro distance learning programme. The employer was part of a large organisation which had several major contracts with the city council – big scale works, often regeneration and urban amelioration;
- junior landscape gardener: very similar work with similar, rival company also delivering big scale contracts for city council;
- landscape/garden design commission: first project he undertook as a sole trader, although all done through informal economy. This led to current, legitimate, self-employment as gardener doing both maintenance and design.

### **3.6.3. Reasons for transitions**

A knee injury triggered the school-to-work transition because it led to a reorientation from the intention to become a sports teacher. It was accompanied by a partial loss of self-confidence and self-esteem which in turn led to a prolonged period of uncertainty in which Didier was searching for direction. Several transitions, in and out of short-term jobs, followed.

Alongside his interest in sport, he had always loved plants. Although he did not consider this interest to turn into a career, he ended up in landscape gardening. The summer job in the military cemetery was originally considered nothing more than a summer job: 'I'd learned quite a lot to start with but it was a bit boring in the end, not creative at all. Sometimes it felt like I was just picking up litter and pushing the lawnmower, just vroom'.

It turned out to be the pathway into landscape design and garden maintenance. However, his unease with a production line approach meant he left the first big scale landscaping company because it was a temporary appointment within a placement framework. He felt he 'progressed a lot, the work was very intensive, and I grew in confidence, in my work and confidence in myself' but they had different task groups for the different aspects of landscaping, and he found it 'a bit of a production line; the bottom line was all they cared about it – there was no heart, no reflection'.

Even though he received a job offer at this company he accepted the offer from a rival company. However, again he experienced discomfort with large scale commercial operations: the rival company was actually a very similar set up, again with different gangs for different tasks on these large scale landscaping projects: 'it was really hard, really intensive, and it was super organised, more industrial really; a real landscaping enterprise with them constantly looking at whether it was viable. You were just a labourer, just doing manual work'.

This job confirmed his belief that he wanted something much smaller scale; artisanal rather than industrial.

#### **3.6.4. Key aspects of learning and development**

His first landscaping commission came from the parents of a college friend. He was acutely aware that this project would become his calling: 'I flipped out a bit at the beginning'. He was aware of just how much he had to learn: 'if I'd known then how much I'd have to learn, I would never have taken it on. I went back to books, did a lot of thinking, also going with my intuition, reflecting. I asked some people and actually some of the clients' friends offered advice. I looked at all the product cards in the garden centres and got some help learning how to handle all the materials [...]. I was learning every single day; it was like doing my bac pro.'

#### **3.6.5. Attitude to learning**

He can see the value of formal learning: 'training like that gives you a good basis, and lets you try things out'. But he also places great emphasis on reflecting and trusting instincts; he used the phrase 'follow your gut instincts' several times during the interview. Although it was clear that he learnt a lot from the placement, it was his first commission involving challenging work that was the major learning experience for him. If timing had been different, he would have preferred to have got training before undertaking this commission, but felt it was a once in a lifetime chance and if he did not go for it, he would never get such an opportunity again. He readily acknowledges that formal qualifications are a bonus when you are looking for employment, but he does not see the need for them now he is self-employed.

#### **3.6.6. Career decision-making style**

Didier's original career plan was to train as a sports teacher and he worked steadily towards that goal until forced to abandon it because of injury. He talks of career planning as 'heartfelt, fundamental stuff; you've got to trust your instincts and go with your heart. Policy [on career guidance] is somewhat industrialising, but they need to realise that it's all on a human scale, living and working with your own environment'.

His actions fit with the evaluative approach: a lot of reflection, increasing awareness of skillset and therefore self-confidence, which is supporting him in sketching out longer-term career goals of self-employment possibly even setting up his own company.

### **3.6.7. Skills, knowledge and understanding required**

There is a mix of hard and soft materials in gardening and landscaping. The landscaper draws on a range of trades in handling stone, wood, concrete and metal. The soft landscaping uses gardening techniques including weed control and pruning, underpinned by extensive knowledge of plants and planting. Didier argues that logic plays a significant role in his work, and that he needs to think through and reflect on plans before putting them into action. He also talked about the ability of the landscaper to envisage the outcome of a particular intervention (either planting or trimming) and contrasts this with the client's limitations in this regard. He was adamant that the way he had avoided big mistakes in his first commission was thanks not solely to this technical understanding and underpinning knowledge, but because: 'I asked the clients lots of questions, to check out what it was they really wanted – that's what really helped me to avoid mistakes'.

### **3.6.8. Adding value to routine maintenance**

Didier talked in detail about his present job, which is garden maintenance for private households. Although some people just want 'to give you the key and let you get on with it' and although there is a certain routine, he finds there is great scope for doing something beyond the routine in undertaking routine maintenance: 'I'm a bit of an idealist, I'm a bit different because I think about how it could be; it's more holistic than just doing the usual stuff so I don't just cut something back because it's getting in the way, I try to find the shape, to reveal or frame something [...] adding value for the enjoyment of their garden'.

Significant work and learning transitions: the interview focused primarily on the last few years when Didier, having decided that landscape was where he wanted to be, has done everything he can to work towards that goal. His initial experience was working closely as a garden labourer with a principal gardener in public spaces, namely the military cemetery and the municipal gardens. He progressed to big scale works, in much bigger teams. Although he is clear he learnt a lot here (not least how to work big plant machinery) it confirmed his preference for the small artisan scale over the large industrial scale. He had the chance to go solo and since that first commission, has found a steady flow of work; to the extent that he is considering setting up as a small trading company, which would be a step on from his current set up. Without doubt, the first commission he undertook was a watershed in his career development.

### **3.6.9. Parallel economy and 'services cheques'**

Time and again, the interview referred to the pivotal experience of undertaking his first commission. The fiscal arrangements here are telling, and repay some

consideration. Didier was unemployed when this commission came his way: he was entitled to eight months of financial support, which he was claiming. His friend's parents, having renovated their house had had a formal estimate for garden redesign which was 'out of their reach'. They were therefore looking to save money by bypassing the formal economy; so they paid him unofficially and he took this paid work on while claiming unemployment benefits. (He was aware that he could have secured financial support for formal training, but knew this commission could not wait so went ahead).

#### **3.6.10. Service cheques**

A subsequent client proposed using the 'services cheque' system. Introduced about 10 years ago, aimed primarily at domestic cleaners, this system has had very little take up. Its intention is to bring the informal economy onto a more formal basis. Someone offering personal services (such as gardening or cleaning) sets up a contract with each of their clients. The client pays the provider direct and also contributes towards the on-costs of social security. The advantage for the provider is that they have legitimate work with all the benefits that follow. The advantage for the client is that, as they contract directly, they pay less than if they had used an agency. And the advantage for the revenue is that everything is above board. In this example the hourly rate paid is EUR 15 with on-costs of EUR 10 as compared to an hourly rate of EUR 35 through an agency.

#### **3.6.11. Support**

During the interview, he referred to people with whom he had worked and from whom he had learnt. He recognised the lucky breaks he had had, and talked about a sense of destiny in this career path. But when asked directly about support, he was a bit flummoxed. His parents did not want him to go to teacher training, they thought he had be better off working straight after secondary school – and they were not totally convinced about the landscape gardening. Ultimately, he sees that he has done it on his own – although without unemployment benefit, he could not have taken on the commission which launched him into self-employment.

#### **3.6.12. Future development**

He is finding work is coming in steadily without him having to search it out, and so is considering expanding to take on more clients and bigger projects. But he needs to be formally registered as a micro enterprise; feels it is a risk but one he can manage. His hesitation is that he is not sure if he wants 'all that professional stuff; bills, accounts' but thinks he is heading in that direction. He will trust his gut instincts.

### **3.6.13. Implications for learning for career transitions**

For Didier injury forced a major change of career, but after a period of uncertainty this was followed by a gradual transition into landscape gardening. He used a wide range of means of learning and professional development, including experiential learning, CVT and reskilling, but he did not complete his formal qualifications. His transition to a landscape gardener was in part facilitated through working in the grey economy, while claiming unemployment benefit. His particular form of vocational identity as a landscape designer was tied up with aesthetic reasons and having a degree of personal control: as he is self-employed there is scope for creativity rather than the industrial approach required of an employee. Didier is thoughtful and reflective and has mastered his craft, although he has no relevant formal qualifications, so he is approached by prospective clients. Didier's entry into his career is idiosyncratic, and other entrants would be advised to follow more formal routes, but he does show he can use his skills productively and plot a way through to his goals.

## CHAPTER 4.

# Germany: varying importance of a sense of *Beruf* (vocational identity)

Occupational identities were very important in Germany and the search for a *Beruf* was a pressing concern for many of the German interviewees. However, the following are examples where that central theme of importance of a work identity is undermined in different ways.

### 4.1. Successful career transition: factory worker and representative at the local parliament

#### *Iconic case: Ali*

Ali is in his forties, a factory worker, and has been a representative for the local parliament for five years. For the duration of the full-time post he is released by his employer for this post under full guarantee of employment. After *Hauptschule* he first went to a vocational school for hotel and restaurant business since he could not get an apprenticeship. As finding work was difficult, Ali spent another five years finally completing his *Abitur* (adult learning courses) and then entered university to study political science. Alongside his studies he started to work for an automobile supplier, where he ended getting a full-time unlimited contract which made him quit the university studies. He worked for this employer for about 10 years overall, moving from the warehouse to learn and train others in the introduction of SAP. He was finally in charge of applying the SAP system to the logistics of the warehouse. Ali's political career started in parallel to his job career in the 1990s. When Ali did the civil service in an elderly care institution he became interested in social issues and became engaged with a political party, where he assumed ever more responsibilities over the years up to his current full-time representative assignment. Ali's career narrative revolves around the 'double' career pathways, which over the years both developed coincidentally and unsystematically. Ali says that he never planned either of these careers and regards himself as somebody who takes chances, has many interests and a high learning affinity. While his post at the local parliament is likely to come to an end he is relaxed about possible future employment opportunities. Although he liked his former job with the automobile supplier, he does not see himself going back

there. Rather he sees himself in a completely new professional area such as cultural or media business.

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#### **4.1.1. Contextualisation**

The interview with Ali was conducted face-to-face at his administrative workplace and lasted for about 70 minutes. He spoke very fast so that it is the longest transcript of all the German interviews. All interviewees received EUR 20 remuneration for their participation, but Ali was the only participant who refused to accept any money for the interview. Given his representative position, he regarded talking to people (probably including giving interviews) as part of his job. For some parts of the interview he insisted that the information given being treated truly confidentially given his political position.

#### **4.1.2. Work biography**

Ali said that he realised fairly late how important education is. After having completed the lowest level of compulsory schooling he continued schooling just because he neither got an apprenticeship nor a job. He was thus placed in the so-called transition vocational system first for one basic year (*Berufgrundbildungsjahr*) and then to continue for another two years at a vocational school for hotel and restaurant business having in mind that perhaps he would go back to Turkey with his parents and maybe work in the hotel industry. Since upon completion of the programme he did not find a job he continued schooling for another two years to the next level (*Realschulabschluss*) following full-time adult education classes. At that time he discovered that he actually liked schooling and thus continued further for another three years up to the level of finally completing the *Abitur* to get university entry qualification. Subsequently Ali entered university to study political science, but was disappointed by the crowded classrooms and bad study conditions. Being the only child, during all these years Ali was supported by his parents and he also continued living at home until he was 25 or so. Looking back he said that his parents never put pressure on him to find a job, but rather supported and

encouraged him. He rationalised that maybe this was because he was gradually progressing in education so that they could actually see that there was a positive and progressive development in terms of gradually reaching a higher level of education. He also justified that alongside these extra 10 years of schooling he had informal and temporary jobs to be financially more independent from his parents.

Despite these jobs and work experience Ali focused on his education and did not seek regular employment during all these years. It was through a friend that as a student he started to work for a large automobile supplier, in the storage during the holidays to finance his studies. He started as forklift operator and received the required formal trainings for this job and also for performing other tasks that Ali gradually took over. After less than a year he was offered a full-time permanent contract, which made him quit the university programme to work regularly in the factory.

Due to the many legal obligations in the sector that require formal certifications based on short-term training, over the years Ali experienced several bouts of on-the-job training. With an ordinary job application he would never have had the chance to work for this employer, but since he was hired through a friend and his boss wanted to keep him, he was able to take over responsible tasks even as an unskilled worker. With the various additional certificates and his work experience he thinks that today he would be equally or even better qualified than a trained worker for warehouse techniques.

Although unskilled and trained-on-the-job Ali earned very well and started to take over ever more challenging work at the warehouse. At some point the company was looking for committed staff that could support the internal restructuring process linked to the introduction of SAP. Ali was one of the employees selected by his employer to undergo a one year intensive training organised by Siemens Business Systems to introduce SAP in the organisation of the warehouse and to subsequently train other staff on SAP. This one year intensive training was followed by another two years of periodical training, all of which was certified. With this development Ali moved to a key position as so-called 'key user', being in charge of the reorganisation of the warehouse and having a high level of responsibility combined with organising a cascade kind of training system for other staff members. This put Ali on a different career track by which he realised that he really likes learning and passing on knowledge to others. This more administrative and training position in the automobile factory was what Ali had been doing until he became a representative of the local parliament for the last four years.

Overall, Ali enjoyed his work at the automobile supplier. He said it was very hard work, but with a very good salary, challenging work and a very good team. Above all, he stayed there for over 10 years because of the work team (about 35 colleagues with both men and women). Ali said that he still regularly sees some of his former colleagues and they do things together – yesterday they went to a concert together. In contrast to his political post he misses the teamwork and also the good working atmosphere in the factory. When asked if he was missing the factory, Ali replied: ‘Yes! Well, (laughing) always on Monday mornings in the smoker’s lounge and we really just talked rubbish, but there was this friendship, of course there was also friction. But it was honest (laughing). Here it is just different. Here everybody is a lone fighter, each against all. One evening somebody is your friend, but not the next day anymore. This you have to learn and it was difficult for me. At (name of the company) I knew who liked me and who didn’t like me. Here everybody likes me, but nobody really likes me, this is so.’

Ali misses the interaction with his colleagues and working in a team and also training others more than the actual physical or technical work. He said that he is not at all missing the technical side of factory work but just the team. ‘The SAP training was something completely new for me and something interesting. You were actually trained to help your colleagues. And this brought us even closer together. We built small teams, I had three, five colleagues whom I had to train separately. This I really enjoyed, working with people. I think I don’t care whether it is computer-based or technical or crafts-based, I just need to interact with people. I could never imagine myself working on a machine and this is why I said production, I never worked in production. I could not imagine myself, where the machines dictate how to perform, no, not in production.’

In Ali’s description, his political career somehow developed in parallel to being a factory worker similarly coincidentally. For Ali it started when he sought to obtain the German citizenship and became enlisted for the military service. Instead of the military service he opted to do the civil service under which he worked for an elderly care institution for 13 months. His supervisor at this institution asked him and three other young colleagues to become engaged in a national political party. Ali’s father had been a socio-democrat already back in Turkey so that Ali had some kind of inclination to this political orientation and so he became politically more interested. This was in the mid-1990s when Ali became involved in the different party activities, assuming ever more responsibilities over the years. After eight years he obtained for the first time a more responsible elected political post within the party to coordinate certain activities within the local community. All this political work, however, had been

voluntary and alongside working in the factory full-time. It was four years later that he was elected into his current full-time representation assignment.

### **4.1.3. Transitions**

#### *4.1.3.1. Most decisive transitions*

Given that Ali has a political and a worker career, he identified decisive transitions for both career pathways. The first decisive transition has been from being a student to become a factory worker. This was a crossroad in that it was a major decision to work in permanent employment and to abandon the university to do so. Ali negotiated with his employer a permanent contract with additional personal benefits and for him these were the preconditions to quit his studies and start a career in the factory. Ultimately it was very important for him to have a certain level of job security and good employment conditions.

As a factory worker the key transition was from the position of an ordinary warehouse worker to become responsible for the introduction of SAP and provide SAP training to colleagues. In his view this was pure luck and enabled him not only to undergo substantial training and job-related learning, but also to move to a fairly different and much more challenging position. He still appreciates that his employer put him on this track, which also enabled him to benefit from a number of fairly expensive trainings that ultimately made him become an SAP expert.

For his political career, but also for his personal development, the civil service in an elderly care institution was very decisive. In the interview Ali stated several times that these 13 months were the best time of his life. At some point he specified that it was the best time because he learnt so much through this job – about life, about people, about fates, about death. This had a huge impact on his personal development, too. The home was for people who were shortly going to die. Ali and some other colleagues were in charge of organising social activities for the elderly (such as drawing, cooking, singing, going to the park, doing some shopping for them, etc.). When asked why he did not pursue this route further professionally, for example by moving into social work or nursing, he said that he never thought about it, but it made him become politically and socially engaged. It was the key experience for his later social and political engagement and voluntary work channelled through his engagement with the political party. Now he can see that actually it built a professional bridge because in his political job he takes charge of social issues, which can be linked back to this first work experience in the social field.

#### 4.1.3.2. *Future expected transitions*

Ali is anticipating having a career change in the near future when his political post comes to an end in 2013. However, this is uncertain and he might as well be re-elected. If not, he does not think that he would go back to his former workplace. Rather he would seek to make use of the networks he has established through his political post to potential employers. One area he is interested in and where he could imagine himself professionally would be the cultural or media field. While he is not sure which direction to take he is confident that something will work out. Here he trusts in his so far successful approach of taking chances.

#### 4.1.4. **Interacting with people/working in a team**

Working and interacting with people plays a central role for driving both Ali's learning and also professional life in both his career pathways. Teamwork was the key motivational factor when working in the factory and also when asked about possible future career directions. Ali said that he actually does not care about what concretely to do professionally, but working with people would need to be central.

#### 4.1.5. **Learning**

Learning played a key role in Ali's qualification and work trajectory. In terms of his own career development for a considerable period of time he followed a learning career by spending overall twenty years in formal education. For a period of ten years schooling and adult education programmes substituted for a professional career and being in employment. This initially developed from a situation of remaining without an apprenticeship and thus unemployed and changed from an alternative route to employment to a main progression route. Moreover, the educational programmes he followed were not career oriented but mainly focused on reaching the next educational level without any concrete ideas about subsequent or future job opportunities. In fact, the job at the factory Ali got by chance and working as unskilled worker this job was completely disconnected from his educational pathway. In principle he could have done the same unskilled work after having left secondary education at the age of 17. However, Ali pointed out that although it was unskilled factory work he only got this job when being a student at the university – and he thinks that it would have been very unlikely that he had gotten this job at any point in time earlier in his career. Thus in his perception there is a linkage between his high level of education and getting access to work for a company with a high reputation and recognition as unskilled worker. When later in his career he became a SAP expert to train others one could even argue that this development would have been very unlikely without his high level of education.

While initially learning had its own value, learning for professional development became key when Ali started to work in the factory, but also for his current political post. As a factory worker Ali followed a significant number of job-related formal trainings that in his view combined with his ten years of work experience made him to be equally or even better qualified than a skilled worker in this area. In particular with the specialised intensive SAP training he has achieved an expert status. This special training was linked to his most decisive career transition as factory worker. On the other hand, this training also made Ali become a trainer himself, linking learning to his own professional development in a very specific way. This new aspect of his work made him realise that what he likes most is working and interacting with people and that this will also become his future career focus.

In his current position as parliament representative learning also plays a key role in that Ali has followed a series of job-related trainings related to his current position. This training included mostly social and communication skills such as moderation, conflict resolution, rhetoric, team working, presentation techniques, and so on. These are intensive workshops on weekends he participates in about 8 to 10 times a year. Most of this training is also certified.

#### **4.1.6. Implications for learning for career transitions:**

Ali represents those people following a pathway where their major skills development comes from roles outside their main work responsibilities and has significant implications for their career development: other examples include working as union representatives or as members of supervisory boards. Ali took programmes in formal education for personal development for a number of years, as well as engaging in a wide variety of forms of work-related learning. He has a T-shaped skills profile: broad general skills, especially in relation to social skills and emotional development (e.g. able to understand the perspectives of others), coupled with specialist expertise, which led to him having responsibility as a trainer for supporting the learning and development of others.

## 4.2. Over-identification with work and unintended transitions

### *Iconic case: Anke*

Anke is in her forties. After completing secondary school she initially wanted to do an apprenticeship in a commercial field but then decided to go straight into automobile manufacturing, assembling parts as there she could earn more money. Cars were then her fairly expensive hobby. Overall, she has been

working for different suppliers for about 25 years (mainly piecework) also in different regions of the country. During this time she undertook different specialist trainings, mostly employer directed as the employer recognised that Anke was interested in the technical field. She also completed a distance learning study course in electrical engineering. She mostly changed jobs in pursuit of earning more money (she herself describes it as money addiction), finally moving to a main city in the former eastern part of Germany to work for a company that produced medical supplies. This job was very hard and Anke worked a lot of extra hours, eventually up to 22 hours non-stop to make more money. Her plan had always been to stop working at the age of 50 to emigrate to Canada. She reflects that she learnt being a workaholic from her parents. She would take over work from colleagues and work extra hours continuously. She neglected her children over working and says that the hardest time for her in life has been the short periods when she had to stay home during maternity leave. About five years ago she was totally burned-out and had to stop working altogether. Since then she started to live on her savings she had accrued to emigrate to Canada. At some point, Anke was admitted to a psychiatric clinic for nine months while her children moved to their father. For the last year Anke was placed in an activation programme, working in a museum/cultural institution. She has extended this job because she likes it as she learns a lot about herself. She says that she will never be able to go back into technical work but is now doing technical stuff more as a hobby.

#### **4.2.1. Contextualisation**

The interview took 45 minutes and became partly very emotional and personal, the interviewer seeking to balance emotional involvement and keeping a distance. The interviewee was open, but also emotionally challenged and partly over-challenged. Thus the interview was stopped at a certain point. Overall, it was a very difficult but also very interesting interview.

#### **4.2.2. Work biography**

Anke completed basic school (*Hauptschule*) and then continued to *Realschule* which she completed with a specialisation in commerce. She then, at the age of 19, thought to follow an apprenticeship in the commercial field as suggested by her parents, but then decided to get a job straight away and started to work in an automobile factory where she could earn good money through piece work and working in the assembly line. Responsibilities also included quality control and technical check-ups. The piece work was best paid, but also under high time pressure. 'And then (after school) I thought I would learn a trade, shipping specialist (*Speditionskaufmann*) and, well, this was, well, in the end I thought I

would not earn good money. I was young then and I thought even when I complete the apprenticeship I won't earn that much. I also had a very expensive hobby, it was cars. And so I went to work in the factory and got a job as assembler and actually had a very good income.'

In the following 25 years Anke continued in this job with different employers, starting to study electrical engineering alongside working in a distance learning programme and completed her basic studies. The study course was paid by the employer. In addition, Anke also followed a series of other training courses related to her work such as brazing or IT, all offered and supported by her employer.

#### **4.2.3. Transitions**

In her job as fitter, Anke had several employers. She worked with her first employer for eight years until she had her first child, which made her stay home for 1.5 years to then return to the same employer. She moved to another city, but continued basically the same kind of job but with another company and then moved to another big city to work for a large company that produced medical supplies. Her transitions, in her case change of employer and jobs, were motivated by earning more money. But it also resulted in Anke overworking herself to finally encounter her first burn-out when she worked in medical supplies, which was a very exhausting job: 'Yes, it was very successful. I always wanted to achieve more and earn more money. I then also moved to (major city), to work with a company that produced medical supplies [...] because there I could earn more money. And this was a very very hard and exhausting job. It really required 200%. And this is when I had my first burn-out [...] I worked there for two years and that was it.'

Anke initially tried to ignore the symptoms, trying to continue as before but could not get back into a normal working routine like before. She thus moved back to the city where she had lived before and when, in Anke's view, 'she had still been alright'. Here she started to work for a small newcomer company with four employees, but which was also a very demanding job that made Anke sometimes work 22 hours continuously (without informing or getting permission from the employer) up to a point where she had to quit working completely.

To the question whether Anke sought professional help or support she answers: 'Well, no, not medical care or something like that. When I was in (major city) they (the employer) did not really understand what was happening and neither did I. And then I thought well, doctors, better try to continue. And because I also had this idea that who works cannot have depressions, something like that. Even if you have them, they will eventually go away, more or less.'

When having her children, Anke went on maternity leave for some time, for 1.5 years when having her first child and again for 1 year when having her second child. These periods at home and out of work were experienced as extremely difficult. She cleaned the entire home every day to keep herself busy and to feel that she was doing something useful. Her main concern was to get back into work, for example she enrolled her children to get into day care/kindergarten right after having given birth just to make sure that they are covered so that Anke could get back into work as soon as possible.

She has now been with the cultural institution, a city museum that tells about the history of the city by means of contextualised drama sequences, as part of an activation programme, for about one year. After her psychiatric therapy the job centre offered Anke three different job opportunities/projects (a horse ranch, a social project and the cultural project) of which Anke opted for the cultural institution. She says that she likes being there very much and that she learns a lot about herself. Her job implies interaction with people, communication and trainings in drama, rhetoric, etc., and dealing with a lot of different people, clients and colleagues. The job also requires a high degree of flexibility. She, in particular, likes the less hierarchic structures of the working environment and that also newcomers are treated friendly and equally. Compared to her work in the factory the communication structure is very different, guided by mutual respect and understanding. Anke realised that this produces a more friendly working culture and that people are generally happier at work, have more fun. Anke thinks that this, in the end, makes working more productive. She realised that this has made her change herself and her own work attitude and attitude towards others – that probably when she was in the factory she was also treating newcomers and less experienced colleagues with little respect.

As Anke recognises that she benefits very much from her current position she has extended her stay at the institution for another six months at the time when the interview was conducted.

#### **4.2.4. Strong work ethos**

Anke has been educated by her parents that working has absolute priority over anything else and that you have to work your heart out. Over this principle Anke neglected not only her personal needs and physical exhaustiveness, but also her two daughters (who had to come to the workshop if they wanted to see her). Despite Anke's father also having worked to his limits, he at the same time transmitted this strong work ethos. With her household duties and responsibilities as a mother combined with her exhausting working life Anke was, for many years, totally over-challenged, but could not admit that it was too much for her.

Only when she experienced the burn out and had to reorganise her life she allowed herself a deeper reflection.

She also recognises that working that much was very much driven intrinsically, not by her employers. In fact, she thinks that if she had spoken to her employers they would have accepted that Anke worked less hours or even part-time. She herself, however, never considered this even being an option. Instead, she would, for example, take over work from colleagues if they did not feel well, while at the same time totally ignoring her own needs and limits. Today he realises that she was caring too much for others, taking over a lot of their work, but was not able to take care of herself. 'It would never have come to my mind to say 'I can't' or 'I am not feeling well'. Not me. I went to work with high temperature, headache, with all kinds of sickness symptoms, you know? [...] In eight years I took sick leave once for one day.'

#### **4.2.5. Being an outsider**

When working in the primary labour market (regular, skilled jobs) Anke experienced transitions between jobs as initially involving additional demands, particularly in terms of convincing peers and new colleagues that she actually had the required skills. In the beginning, when starting a new job or a new position through job rotation programmes, Anke initially always felt like an outsider. This was not a particularly pleasant experience. 'I think this is always the case on the first labour market, that if you are new in a company you are the dummy and the others demonstrate 'well, I know how it works, I can show you, and you really don't know anything' [...] And this is how I also experienced it when I changed jobs, that in the beginning you are always an outsider until you have proofed your skills and then the others realise 'ok, she is good and can work fast, we accept her into our community'.'

#### **4.2.6. Being proud of herself**

Taking on ever more additional and challenging tasks, including further training and following a study programme, was very much motivated by self-affirmation. Anke was proud of herself that as a woman she was technically skilled and recognised by her colleagues in a male-dominated field. Being proud had a higher value and was more important to her than recognising the stress and burden of work and realising that this was actually harmful to her. Anke also categorises not showing how she felt to others as a form of pride.

#### **4.2.7. Working for a life dream**

Anke directed her entire working and personal life to fulfil one particular dream: to stop working at the age of 50 and have enough savings to emigrate to Canada.

Her intensive working life was very much driven by this dream and making ever more money. Now that she cannot continue in her former job and had to stop working altogether for some years Anke had to abandon her dream since she has now been living on her savings for large parts.

#### **4.2.8. Support structures**

During the difficult periods Anke encountered, she did not seek for and also did not get any kind of support from her social environment, family or employers but she mainly struggled with coming to terms with feeling burn out by herself. This, however, would also be her approach to dealing with difficulties, i.e. not really asking for or seeking advice, but managing difficulties by herself. When she became unemployed she received counselling support which helped her to reflect upon her life. In this period Anke became very isolated as she could not interact with other people anymore. Her two daughters moved to their father so that Anke was left with her dog, not leaving the house anymore. Initially then Anke started a retraining programme at a bakery, but this could not be sustained as Anke was unable to interact with people. The agent from the unemployment agency then effected that Anke underwent some medical check-ups through which she finally was admitted to a hospital for six weeks and then, later on, through an occupational therapy programme, was diagnosed to be placed in a psychiatric hospital for nine months.

#### **4.2.9. Learning**

Anke has been undergoing a broad variety of learning processes, both formal and informal. Back at her 'regular workplaces' in production Anke had continuously engaged in further training, including a distance learning study course in electrical engineering, to develop her technical skills further. Apart from being interested in the field this probably also had a compensating function since Anke never had a formal technical qualification but started as an unskilled assembler. The gradual increase of her technical skills over the years made her earn higher recognition by her colleagues and peers and ultimately also facilitated career progression, which in Anke's narrative is related to progressively higher income and earnings.

During the period of crises (burn-out, unemployment, psychiatric clinic) Anke, above all, learnt self-perception and to become more aware of her own needs and limits. This learning process was supported by radical negative experiences with her own personality (not being able to leave the house or interact with others, not being able to take care of her children) and eventually by professional help through doctors and career counsellors.

Through the activation programme and working with a cultural institution Anke is now acquiring a whole set of new, mainly social and communicative skills, as well as learning a lot about herself, but also about a different working environment and other, more equal forms of interaction at the workplace.

In Anke's case learning has significantly facilitated transitions. First, formal training has helped her to upgrade her skills to move between jobs and employers in a progressive way. Second, learning during the transition into unemployment combined with a period of personal crisis has helped her to actually overcome a personally very difficult situation. Some of this learning process was guided professionally and to date Anke is still in therapy. In her current position formal and informal learning help Anke to get back to normal life. She now manages her life on a day to day basis, with the professional career or future dreams being secondary among her concerns. She is now considering to pursue some new extra work activities and hobbies, such as playing the guitar, to pick up things that she liked doing when she was young. What Anke is definite about is that she will not go back into technical work due to the pressure and harm it did to her. Technical work has rather become her hobby, for example, she repairs technical equipment for friends and relatives. Anke has also learnt to accept her limits, being aware of her own needs, and not caring too much for others. This also involves being able to demonstrate others how she feels. When asked why her employers never realised that Anke was not feeling well she says that she did not show it and nobody would realise her true feelings, not even she herself. It is something that she is still working on, also in her current place, to learn to be able to show her feelings and not hiding everything behind a mask of happiness. She is also still learning to relax.

#### **4.2.10. Main development**

Anke is still in the activation programme working for the same institution. She works towards improving her health situation so that she can get back to a healthy approach to work and stabilise her private life. She feels she is improving and seeks to take advantage of the activation programme as a learning experience.

##### *4.2.10.1. Theme 1: Managing the work situation*

Anke is still struggling to regain her strength to be able to manage a more or less regular working day. In the last year she has increased her working hours from 4 to 5.5 hours per day, which she feels she can now handle without problems. Anke said she is stabilising and since about eight months she did have a relapse. Last July she had the last relapse after having increased her working time to 6

hours per day and partly stopped taking the drugs. Then after the relapse she initially could not work at all for about two weeks and then she started slowly at both ends – slowly increasing her working hours and slowly decreasing the drug intake. Anke is still with a psychologist who cooperates with the employment agency to make sure that all measures and programmes are damaging Anke's health status.

#### 4.2.10.2. *Theme 2: future plans*

The employment manager has advised that Anke could additionally try a mini-job if she feels strong enough. Apart from the additional income the mini-job should give Anke a new work orientation as it is not clear what kind of job she can do in the future. Definitely she cannot go back to her former technical work as then she would fall back into the old routines or habits. However, if necessary she can continue working in the institution as long as needed.

#### 4.2.11. **Implications for learning for career transitions**

Anke is an interesting case in that if we had interviewed five years ago, we may have held her up as an exemplar of someone who once they have made a transition commits herself to making a success of her new role. She had a strong organisational attachment, always working as hard as she could, and was flexible in that she was prepared to evolve with the work, building up her technical skills through a commitment to her own learning and development. However, she did not achieve formal qualifications, nor did she have a recognised occupation (*Beruf*), where she may have learned norms and expectations of work. Instead, she mainly worked in settings where employers set the norms through piece-work, and where she could benefit financially if she over-worked. Her over-attachment to work led to cumulative stress, burn-out and a mental breakdown. She recognises now that previously her life lacked balance and that she had sacrificed much through over-work, which was rationalised as being to fund an eventual transition of emigration to Canada. Much earlier in her life she needed to focus upon more immediate and medium-term goals and she would have benefitted from mid-career guidance and counselling: she needed help to find a less instrumental career direction.

### 4.3. **Impact of life events on career**

#### *Iconic case: Martin*

Martin is in his forties. He did a three-year apprenticeship as carpenter after completion of his *Abitur*. Immediately after his apprenticeship he worked for

six months as a carpenter in Egypt and earned quite a lot of money, which he could partly live on later on as a student. After having worked overseas Martin started to study design as drawing had always been his hobby. However, as his girl-friend was working in fashion design, Martin started to work together with her and at some point quit his studies to become a self-made fashion designer. He and his girl-friend ran their own growing fashion business for 12 years fairly successfully until his partner became seriously ill. She died and since Martin could not run the business on his own he had to close it down. In this period of crisis he lost his business, his job and his partner. It was a friend's mother who made him undergo a 15-months retraining programme as electronic publisher/web designer that she also financed. After the retraining, Martin was 35 and immediately found work with a small start-up IT-company where he worked for 2.5 years. Altogether Martin found this job boring, routine and stressful and was finally made redundant when the firm went bankrupt, at the time he was the oldest employee in the firm. Martin was then unemployed for about four years, then worked for a friend's company doing some graphical work for about three years and was then back into unemployment. He got severe depression and fell ill for a couple of years. Martin was then placed in a cultural institution, in the framework of an activation programme where he was working, where both the first and the second interviews were conducted.

Martin's narrative involves several career redirections, which are interrelated in a complex way with personal crisis and illness, retraining and new job entry, but also depression during longer periods of unemployment. His future work directions and possibilities are uncertain.

#### **4.3.1. Contextualisation**

Both interviews were conducted at Martin's workplace. He was calm and concentrating during the narratives, in a way looking at his life as an observer. At the time of the first interview Martin had been in the institution since 18 months, initially having started in the framework of the activation programme part-time, then transferring to work full-time after the first year. While originally he was on a one-year special employment contract and wanted to get back into regular employment, he was still with the institution a year later. The first interview lasted 60 minutes, the second one 45 minutes.

## 4.3.2. Transitions

### 4.3.2.1. *First period of unemployment*

When getting unemployed for the first time in his mid-thirties Martin felt kind of relieved to have all the work pressure being taken away from him. He felt privileged not having to work and at the same time receiving money and subsistence support. Since he had had a good income his unemployment benefits during the first year were quite high (in the first year the unemployment benefit in Germany is a fixed percentage of the last income average over 12 months – at that time 62% for individuals without dependants). But from the second year of unemployment Martin became less motivated, also still seeking to overcome his former partner's death. He had several occasional jobs but was not able to get back into regular employment. Furthermore, he was diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder, which to date remains as a physical drawback.

### 4.3.2.2. *In-between periods of unemployment*

It was through a friend that Martin got back into a more or less regular job but working self-employed for a friend's company who was trying to establish his own business. Martin did some web design and marketing for the firm as a freelancer, which he did not like very much because it was all working by himself with very little interaction with colleagues or clients. Martin moved to another town to be close to his new workplace. When his friend's business went bankrupt after about two years Martin became unemployed for a second longer period.

### 4.3.2.3. *Second period of unemployment*

During the second period of unemployment (lasting three years) Martin suffered from depression combined with his autoimmune disorder. After some medical check-ups he was sent for by his career counsellors from the unemployment agency, his counsellor suggested that Martin should work part-time (50%) and placed him in the activation programme to have him doing something.

### 4.3.2.4. *Activation programme*

Martin started with some hours per week, which were quickly increased to a full-time position, because Martin really likes his current job, in particular interacting with a lot of different people and working in a team. When the first interview was conducted, his main responsibility was the coordination of the programme as well as coordinating staff and clients, but also mediating between staff members. Very soon he became a team leader. He likes the work, which at the same time is very exhausting, particularly since he has been working full-time. While the job is

exhausting, Martin likes the full workday and the stress that keeps him busy and makes him feel needed. As he is the programme coordinator he is no longer in the training programmes like in the beginning when training formed a major part of the activation programme.

#### 4.3.2.5. *Future transition*

Martin was anticipating his next transition since he had a temporary contract that could not be extended. Thus, his situation was transitory – which was regarded as a transition in itself. The main issue here is that Martin does not know what he wants to be doing. He only knows that he wants to get back into regular employment, but not where and what to do. He hopes that through contacts and friends he will get an idea. One key issue, however, is that Martin does not have a well-functioning social network and that in fact he does not have so many contacts, in particular not where he lives and where he just moved four years ago. He wished he would have a social network he could rely on. At the moment Martin has problems to get a career orientation. He knows that he does not want to undergo more training or retraining and also does not need job application training. He is mainly lacking an idea about his future professional development but thinks he has enough skills and qualifications.

#### 4.3.2.6. *Positive transition experience – learning from transitions*

His first transition from after completion of his apprenticeship to get accepted as a design student went smoothly, despite the high competition among talented candidates. Martin was surprised that he got accepted at two different higher education institutes (*Fachhochschule*) immediately. Looking back at his transitions, Martin recognises that he never really applied for a job, although he did apply to enter university. All his other jobs including the apprenticeship he got through personal contacts. This may explain why he feels, in his current situation, that he is lacking contacts and networks to find an appropriate job in the near future. Also his talent for design was coming from his family and relatives of whom some had studied free arts. They also supported Martin emotionally to apply his talents. Overall Martin comes from a very creative and artistically-oriented family. He somehow regrets today that he never completed the design studies but at the same time felt under-challenged at that time and was more motivated to try out something new.

Another positive experience had been to undergo the retraining to become a web designer in his mid-thirties – for Martin and for the IT culture at a fairly old age. The unemployment agency refused to fund this retraining (since Martin was a certified skilled worker) and – again through personal contacts – Martin found a

friend who supported him financially. Through this retraining Martin learnt to apply computer technologies to design, which he liked. The retraining was also an important experience since it helped him to overcome his personal crisis. After the retraining it was also very easy for him to find a job since at that time web designers were in great demand.

#### 4.3.2.7. *Negative experience – learning from transitions*

The transition from the first period of unemployment to become self-employed/work as a freelancer was not a good experience and Martin would not go back into self-employment. At that time Martin also was not totally convinced but was persuaded by a friend – and bought into the idea because he received some public financial support. Issues about freelance work were working alone without much interaction with others.

#### 4.3.2.8. *Managing transitions*

Dispositions that helped Martin to manage transitions include being euphoric and enthusiastic and curious about discovering new things.

### **4.3.3. Working under pressure**

As a fashion designer as well as working as electronic publisher/web designer Martin was used to work under time pressure. When he was younger and doing it for his own business he did not mind the pressures, but when working for the IT company in his mid-thirties he experienced it as too stressful. He felt that his young(er) colleagues were much more flexible, stress-resistant and enthusiastic than he was.

### **4.3.4. Learning**

In his current job, Martin has learnt to improvise and to accept that not everything has to be perfect but to be more relaxed about things just happening. Since it is not a 'product' he has to deliver (like in fashion or web design) but the job is about interaction and working with people, the standards are different and more dynamic. It is also working under pressure, but not towards finishing a product in time according to a specific deadline, but organising something under conditions of high levels of flexibility. A major experience for Martin has been that he can rely on the team and that people are helping each other. This contrasts his former job situations where Martin was largely working on his own, having to rely on himself and working alone.

Through the activation programme Martin has made totally new experiences, for example being publicly seen, which he always thought he would not like (his

sister is an actress) but which now proves to be quite enjoyable for him as he feels comfortable and confident in front of others. For Martin the most important means of learning is learning by doing, experimenting, trying things out.

#### **4.3.5. Main development**

Internal promotion and taking over new responsibilities that connect to his former work as fashion designer; still exploring possible future professional directions

#### **4.3.6. Transition processes**

##### *4.3.6.1. Theme 1: change of status*

In November 2012, Martin got a new one-year contract, which makes him earn a bit more money and gets him out of the activation programme. Given his new role in the institution, he feels needed and would also like to continue working there. This, however, would only be possible on the basis of a regular contract.

##### *4.3.6.2. Theme 2: change of responsibilities*

In addition to his former team leader position Martin has assumed a new role that gives him a special responsibility of leading the guest services. For this position the internal organisation has been restructured, introducing a new hierarchy of four new team leaders, two of which are responsible for the exhibition and two for the guest services. For Martin this implies that he now dedicates one full day per week to this positions which involves costume building and organising special activities. He designs and makes the costumes according to what farmers and poor people were wearing in the medieval time. This is a new and interesting task that connects to his expertise as fashion designer. However, it also involves more work and challenging work as the clothing of the poor of that time is not well documented and Martin thus also has to do a lot of research on it. It also involves cooperation with a textile department of another institution. Additionally, Martin is involved in a long-term school project, whereby pupils have part of their history classes in the institution. Part of the project involves teaching children how to make their own historical costumes to look as realistic as possible. Given that this is a cultural institution and Martin has a special contract, he neither earns according to the level of responsibility he has, nor up to the type and quality of work he is doing. Martin does not feel exploited, because he likes so much what he is doing. Instead he reflects that he has a tendency towards self-exploitation, especially during the time when he was an entrepreneur. Important aspects for him of his current work are creativity, freedom and flexibility as well as the communicative side of it.

#### 4.3.6.3. *Theme 3: future employment perspectives*

The question was raised in the interview whether it might be a strategy for him to make himself indispensable within the institution by taking over ever more responsibilities to increase chances for a permanent position, to build the way for maybe being taken on as regular staff. Martin said yes and no. He stated that this was not strategic, but when he really enjoys his work he puts a lot of effort into it, so it was partly just striving for good performance, but then he was also promoted. 'Well, I really enjoy this kind of work and I think I performed extraordinary well and thus have made myself a bit indispensable. But it also is due to these boring secondary qualities like being reliable, being on time [...]. Being reliable and responsible in particular cannot always be taken for granted among the staff here.'

On the one hand, Martin would like to continue working there as he likes his job and finds the interaction with his colleagues interesting. On the other hand, he considered that being in his late forties it will become ever more difficult for him to re-enter the labour market. And he would really like to get back into regular employment. He imagines that 50 is the deadline – and after that age it will become very difficult to be considered for a job despite his expertise and experience. He said that also in the creative industries he would be too old ('there the only job left for me would probably be the 'senior art director', but there is no way for that'). Thus, Martin is planning to become more active in terms of looking for another job and also starting to write unsolicited applications. He also wants to look for job opportunities nationwide and even in another country where his knowledge of English language would suffice. He has started to look around and keep his eyes open. In a way he is convinced that somewhere out there, there is the right job and challenge waiting for him – the tricky thing is how to find it or how to find the matching. This, however, is a positive feeling based on sufficient self-confidence, which he has regained during the last two years thanks to the activation programme and working in the institution. Other contributors to having regained confidence have been different kinds of support like support from his sister, but also from his colleagues and the employment agency that placed him there.

During the last year, Martin updated his CV and also applied to one job in the cultural industry, but was rejected without feed-back. His sister's birthday present was professional coaching for Martin to find out a possible future professional direction. The coaching covered two half days and was a very interesting experience for Martin. The outcome was that he realised that he would not like to go back to design work that is made in the office, at the desk. Rather he would like to remain in the cultural industry with a focus on interacting

with people. This is where his current interests and skills lie. In terms of skills and qualifications Martin considers that he does not need any further training or learning, but that the key focus will be on actually finding job vacancies and apply for it. At the moment, however, his current job keeps Martin so busy that he finds it difficult to find time and energy to look for alternative employment. In fact, that the job is quite exhausting and absorbing was very noticeable. On the other hand, Martin also stated that formally applying for a job is a new experience for him since he never really applied, but just went into self-employment and got the other jobs in the IT industry through informal networks. Applying therefore is a new and interesting process for him. In terms of his chances Martin says: 'to get back into regular employment? Well, how do I see my chances? If I get the possibility to present myself then I think the chances would be quite good. But just on paper, well, I am not sure.'

#### 4.3.6.4. *Theme 4: learning from instability*

Since Martin has been with the institution his contract was renewed three times and each time just a few days before he was not yet sure whether he would be taken on or not. The renewal of contracts usually is decided at the last minute, sometimes only one or two days before the extension. This is a huge strain on all staff and contributes to a sometimes tense working atmosphere. Martin not only had to deal with this situation of insecurity for himself, but in the position as team leader he is also responsible for boosting the climate (puff) and has a mediating role between staff and management.

#### **4.3.7. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Martin was initially successful in his career based on a strong intrinsic interest, emotionally binding team work with a partner and specific skills. However, his lack of formal qualifications or a recognised occupation subsequently became problematic. Following his second spell of unemployment, he was placed in a cultural institution, a job he enjoyed and is interested in continuing, because he derives satisfaction from interacting with others. The major concern is to what extent future employers will recognise his informally and non-formally acquired skills and competences.

## CHAPTER 5.

# Spain: the use of education as a response to the jobs crisis

The financial crisis provoked a huge loss of jobs in Spain, which has led many people to look for alternatives, including education, to relying on career progression simply through accumulation of experience at work. In this sense, in some cases the crisis affects the desired future transitions of individuals leading them to look for job stability, which for some of the interviewees is a synonym of getting a job in the public sphere because it provides more stability.

### 5.1. Educational qualification for a new career

#### *Iconic case: Eduard*

Eduard, a social worker, is in his thirties and is living in Barcelona with his partner. His story provides an example of someone who, through using his agency, has undergone transitions to change his career completely to do a job which he really wanted to do and one which gives him job satisfaction. He began working as a social worker four years ago and has stayed with the same employer since then. He opted to work with the elderly. Eduard comes from a working class background and left school at the age of 16 as this was culturally expected of him. Like his peers, Eduard chose to do a VET programme in electricity and subsequently another VET major in electronic equipment. He explains: 'when I was a teenager, I did electronics because most of my peers chose this option. And, well, like going with the flow I let the years pass by and I started to work in a factory'.

His father had also worked in a factory. When he finished both his VET programmes at the age of 18 he was recruited by the Spanish army to do his mandatory one-year service. When he was 19 years old he started working as an operator in a factory for a multinational Spanish company which manufactures and distributes sanitary fixtures and fittings (WC). He was rapidly promoted at the factory and became a quality inspector by the age of 21. After five years at the company he moved to another Spanish multinational firm dedicated to constructing and distributing vehicles. He made the transition as this company offered him better working conditions and higher payment than his previous employer. As he explains, the change was to 'improve economically, but I knew

that in terms of satisfaction it would be the same'. Eduard comments that to be able to do the factory jobs 'it was not necessary to have any kind of specialisation' so that his VET studies were not useful or relevant to him. He learnt his skills through his working practice.

When he was 29 years old he realised that his true vocation was to work in the social field so he looked for information about how to enter university to study something related to social issues: 'when you turn 29 years old you reach a certain maturity, so you realise that what you really want to do is social work. What happened is that at that time such idea was not that clear to me; so I decided to go into the labour market and leave that dream. I said I have to do it now or never. And I already had changed the factory but still it didn't satisfy me.'

At first he considered taking another VET programme: 'well, I searched, with the VET 2 of electronics what options I had in order to study. There were engineer programmes, optics, which was something that I liked more. But I decided that what I really wanted to do was to enter in the social field [...] I decided to enter, and I saw for example that UNED (national university at distance) will allow me to access and work at the same time; so I registered at the UNED academy itself [...] they provided courses, tutorial, books, so that was how I did my course to access the degree.'

He prepared for the university entrance exam and was successful and this started his career as a social worker. Factory work had been an alienating experience for Eduard but making the transition to a career which he really wanted to do did mean some sacrifices – both economic and social as he had less money to live on and less of a social life. 'I felt useful again; I did not feel as an extension of a machine. The good thing is that I had the capacity to create, to study; that was the most positive thing. The most negative one: having to give up a part of social life and wages.'

To ease his economic situation during his studies he decided to work as an operator in a factory. He managed to get a job as a substitute in a multinational company for household packing. When he finished his studies at the age of 33 he quickly found a job at a social work organisation which works with the elderly. He felt that he was in a good moment in his life when he finished his degree and started his career in social work. It was a positive work transition: 'finishing the degree, I started to look for a job and I found that, in the foundation [...]. Good for my position, it was a dream, when you start to study the conditions are favouring you for having a job that you want, having a family that is helping you. But you also have difficulties to make real your dreams, I mean life is difficult; finding a job related to my studies quickly was something difficult, so I was thinking that

this would be very difficult, and [finding the job as I did] is very rewarding for you; I feel good.'

At the time of the interview he was 36 years old and still working for the same organisation. He describes the experience: 'the best reality I have faced in the job is that it rewards me, I like what I do. Going to work was an effort to me, but it was not as harder as before; the worst is that for many years I had been giving up more social life, well, when I sought a job that allowed me to combine life, work and studies. I had to reduce working hours and that also means lower payment and had to give up economic capacity and social life. It is a sacrifice. But the best was certainly that I was having a job that satisfies me.'

In the near future he wants to return to educational studies to improve his abilities and knowledge in the field of social work for the elderly. First, however, as a result of the Bologna processes and changes to degree programmes he has had to do a one year course to gain a minor in social work. However, he is adamant that he wants to remain working with the elderly: 'In terms of work, what I like are the elderly people. I do not have any intention to move into children or other kind of target groups. I suppose that at some point in the future I will have the feeling of being stuck, so I will need to move away, but now I am not interested in promoting, because the position I occupy is related to what I like [...] I can do another masters' or other courses, on gerontology, something related with the elderly. I do not know if this is good, good is a transition and continuance and I like to be always in this job, with elderly people, and I don't see a change, unless it's voluntary.'

Eduard's work transitions have been spurred on by feelings of dissatisfaction so that when work became monotonous, alienating and meaningless he took action to change his working life.

#### **5.1.1. Linking transitions to work, learning and skill development**

His initial factory jobs did not require any specialisation or skills but he did gain conceptual knowledge from undertaking the two VET programmes. Instead the skills he needed were learnt on the job and through work experience. To perform his current job he needed university level academic knowledge. However, he remarked that academic knowledge is not enough for social work as it requires sensitivity, empathy, listening skills and patience. He sees these as being innate skills. For him social work consists of a range of different skills as 'people acquire most of the skills as a result of their work experience, although there is an innate part and another part acquired with training'. For him work-related training is essential as it helps individuals to gain the skills necessary for the optimal delivery of their jobs.

The range of skills he possesses are inter-related. In the first place he is very inventive which allows him to create new skills to carry out his work. He stressed that his factory work was very monotonous and that in that situation he could not grow as a person. In contrast, in his current job he has the opportunity to grow and develop as a person as well as in relation to his job. Second, but no less important, he is very investigative. He is very capable of learning how to do certain tasks on his own as an independent learner. It is this attitude that has helped him to develop skills related to his work. He explains that when he started working, his previous professional training on the VET programmes only provided him with some concepts but not skills. These he gained through his work experience. While he recognises that a university degree is essential for obtaining a social work job he feels that his attitude and his way of being allows him to be efficient in his job.

His work is directly related to his mentality because he is very social and it helps him to be empathetic with the people he works with: 'it is very important that the other people know that you are listening'. His personality and disposition means that 'I like to be there for people who are in a vulnerable situation'. His empathy drives him to study social work because, as he says, he enjoys accompanying and helping people in vulnerable situations. Eduard stressed that he has always been like this even before he decided to study social work.

He is aware of the fact that the work as a social worker is very different to the jobs he had in the factory and that he therefore needs to develop skills that he did not acquire in university such as public relations for working with people 'only time, getting familiar with the issue, was a great effort'. However, he highlighted that his inclination for social work is an issue rooted in his family upbringing. He pointed out some of his innate skills such as empathy, ability to listen, to be sensitive but maintaining distances and to be patient. With this statement it becomes clear that the combination of professional training related to work is successful and contributes to the acquisition of the necessary skills by workers in order to be best at their work.

#### **5.1.2. Linking significant learning experience to career and labour market transitions**

Eduard's working biography is marked by two very different and contrasting periods. The first refers to the time when he was working in a factory. In this job he felt that he did not want to be there because it was a very monotonous job and it was also very limited in terms of future prospects. When he decided to change his working career it was mainly because he felt frustrated: 'it was like a dream that I had forever and that I knew I had to try, I didn't see myself in the factory for

all my life doing monotonous work'. He said that he developed the curiosity to study when he was growing up and becoming more mature. 'At the age of 20, I realised that I had this social inclination and what I really wanted to do was to work with people that were in a complicated situation'. Eduard was reflecting upon his present and future life. He stated that he was working in an environment that did not satisfy him at all.

The second period refers to the moment when he decided to quit his job at the factory and to start studying to become a social worker. According to him, this was a very important moment as he was fulfilling his dream of going to university. He had this dream because he used to see that his friends who had a university degree were very satisfied with their respective jobs, whereas he was overwhelmed and depressed by his job.

During the transition period from factory work to social worker he was experiencing some difficulties that were mainly due to the changes in his working life, as he had to deal with a much lower income. 'Before I started studying I had a full-time job which made it impossible to combine it with my studies. But when I started studying I had to find a part-time job which allows me to combine it with my studies'.

Once he finished his degree in social work it was not very difficult for him to find a job. He only spent three or four weeks looking for a job and that was the job he still has today and acknowledged that it is unusual to find a job so quickly. 'Afterwards, after finishing my degree, I was looking for a job for three weeks or one month, I think, well I was lucky. I guess I can say that I was very lucky.'

He explained that he deliberately looked for jobs working with the elderly. In this branch of social work there are increasingly more jobs and he also likes it: 'when I finished my degree, the branch that I most liked was with the elderly, so I looked for a job in residencies, in nursing homes like this one and well here they called me, but it was something that I was sure about [...]. I connect with elderly people that are more isolated and in situations of abandonment. I most enjoy my job when I'm out of the office, when I'm with the people. This week I have been visiting people, I have been in touch with people and I feel better.'

The current economic crisis in Spain is affecting the public sectors like social work. He says that the crisis has directly affected his work organisation. 'Yes, it did hit us, because now we have more work with much less resources. We have to do more with less'. He has learnt to deal with these types of situations as a result of working in the factories where he had to accomplish certain production levels. Furthermore he has acquired organising skills from when he was studying at the distance university. He explained that he has a large workload because the number of elderly people in society is increasing. 'There are increasingly more

elderly people and increasingly more people suffering from neurodegenerative diseases’.

### **5.1.3. Nature of support for most significant work and/or learning transition(s)**

Regarding the support Eduard has received he stated that he had two main types of support. First, he highlighted his friends as being essential supporters in helping him to integrate into the labour market. Eduard points out that he has two circles of friends. One group is composed of friends who are similar to him concerning education and family background. This group left school at the same age as him and also took VET programmes and training. He defines them as his ‘friends of lower qualifications’. On the other hand, his second group of friends are those who have a university degree. These friends are the ones that inspired his curiosity about higher education. They acted as a role model and gave him the confidence to study for a university degree. ‘This is what counts, at the end the fact of receiving greater influence on education and training and curiosity, and I think that was important. They motivate me. Moreover, I said, well they have a job that really satisfies them and they feel good. So I said, why can’t I do that?’

He explained that this group of friends were very happy when he decided to go to university because they thought that this was the right decision for him. However, they did tell him that he would probably have difficulties in finding a job, but he would still have his degree. Fortunately, for Eduard this was not the case as he found a job in less than a month.

The other main support group during his labour transition was his family. He stressed that they supported him with everything and that he probably would not have done his university degree if it was not for their support. ‘The support of my family has been very important. My family told me, well we can afford it that you have lower incomes for some time and if you need anything at some moment we will also help you. Of course, because I had to give up my economic situation, that was quite good. Well so that I could study, but they supported me in anything, because my parents saw that I wasn’t happy with my job, mainly because of my curiosity.’

He recognised that the moment of changing from secondary compulsory education to professional training was crucial in his life. He explains that his family did not force him to do this transition to professional training but they did suggest it. This was in addition to the many friends who followed this path. He pointed this moment out as something that has marked his life and which he remembers with bitterness. He was critical of the fact that he did not receive any careers guidance at the age of 16. Instead it was just recommended to him to do

professional training when he finished secondary compulsory education. His social connections or networks of family and friends were, therefore, critical in helping him with his learning and his work transitions (Field, 2005).

#### **5.1.4. Future development: future plans, career and individual orientation**

Once he has finished his top-up to his social work degree he would like to do a postgraduate course such as a Masters' degree. But first he has to finish the course to obtain the qualification in social work. He explains that he has to do nine subjects and a final project, which is a large workload. This will take him two years to complete as he is working full-time. 'This year, if everything goes well I finish all the subjects and then, for the next year, I will do the final project. Because in this job, I don't have a lot of free time and it is mentally exhausting and you don't have much energy left to study. That's why I decided to do it step by step.'

At the moment he is not considering any future changes to his work plans because of his studies. He explained that if he was to contemplate changes in the future they will be related to social work (a Masters' degree, or a course in gerontology). He likes his current job and in the future he sees himself working in the same organisation. 'I can see myself working here, I like this branch and I like the elderly and, to be true, this is the branch that I prefer.'

He will only consider changes in his work if he feels professionally stuck in terms of no longer learning in his job or if he feels that his job is getting monotonous. Another factor would be if there were no opportunities for professional mobility, which he aspires to as he would like to get a promotion and increase his skills level. If one of these scenarios was the case he would consider looking for another job: 'I hope to continue working here, but it is also true that my character and my personality, if I see that I'm stuck and that I don't learn any more, well then maybe I'll consider looking for alternatives. It depends on the job and if I have possibilities to be promoted. But if I see that in the future I'll be stuck in this job and I don't learn, I'll look for alternatives.'

#### **5.1.5. Learning from previous changes and transitions and moving forward**

In his work trajectory there is a highly relevant transition when he decided to quit his job at the factory. He took that decision because he was not happy with his job. The knowledge that he has acquired during these two periods are crucial to him, as he appreciated the fact that he had studied on a distance learning degree and the experience of having worked with production levels in a factory.

The reason for him to start studying and to quit his previous job was the fact that he was working on a conveyor belt and he was suffering from mental issues

and had difficulties sleeping and also had anxiety issues. Although he underwent work changes at the factory it did not satisfy him. 'Well then I said I have to make a decision. Even if I never find a job in this branch of social work at least I'll have the education.'

Somehow, he feels that having studied at the distance university was more difficult than attending actual classes. But at the same time it was satisfying as he also developed his organisational skills. This helped him to find a job afterwards and to be more self-confident as it required an extra effort which he appreciated: 'well I have been a long time without studying, so I had to do a great effort. I had to develop a methodology to study and that means time to adapt'.

He chose to do a university degree as it is a necessary requirement to become a social worker. He also considers that higher education is very important to make a person grow, because it provides culture and critical thinking skills in order not to be manipulated so easily. To him the work experience is also very important. As he explained his experience in the factory has helped him very much and he even thinks that he might not have studied social work if he had not undergone this experience. 'I don't know if I do a good job or if I don't, but my way of working is related to the habits I gained in the factory, linked to productivity and sacrifice. You had to follow a certain method to achieve productivity and that I, well, besides that I have some part of it innate. But it helped to be aware.'

The fact of maintaining friendships with his ex-colleagues from the factory was very important to him and it shows that he somehow appreciated his experience there even though he was not satisfied with his job. He thinks that his work in the factory has taught him things that he would not have learnt elsewhere. 'To me, I think the life experience has been more important than higher education [...] imagine this job and me at 20 years old. I would do it in a different way. That is why I think that this experience has been very important. And I can see it now with a colleague who has just started, he has the education and he is young. Maybe he is lacking maturity that you only gain with the years.'

Comparing the different learning processes, between the UNED and the work experience, he believes that his life experiences are much more relevant. Nevertheless, he stresses that education is crucial to finding a job.

#### **5.1.6. Summary**

In his labour market transitions Eduard was looking for personal development, knowledge attainment and to know more (personal growth). When he quit his job as a quality supervisor to work in a multinational automobile company he did it to improve, but he realised that the improvement was only economical and that was

not what he was looking for. At this point he realised that he has two options, to give up and stay where he is or aspire to what he really wants. He realised that he has to work. He regards the transitions as a process that is related to and undertaken as a result of personal deterioration as you feel less satisfied and unhappy.

To make the transitions he draws on his personal resources and biography, for example in finding out information about university studies and how to enter the UNED. During the transitional study period he reflected upon his past that was not satisfying, and about the present and the future he was looking forward to. It took him nine years to achieve his career goal. His working transitions have always improved his economic and personal situations in his jobs.

#### **5.1.7. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Eduard's story illustrates the importance of having social networks which for him consisted of both family and friends. These social networks were crucial in providing him with support during his transitions. His university friends acted as role models and gave him the confidence to take the step of leaving factory work and move towards a career in social work. He is a very agentive and determined person. Eduard recognises the importance of both informal and formal learning. He acknowledges the need for academic knowledge and qualifications but also views learning through experience while doing a job as being very important. He was reflexive about his life and realised that factory work was alienating and that in order to grow and develop he needed to return to education and study if he was to obtain a more interesting and humanistic job. Eduard achieved social mobility through education but he did not distance himself from his family and friends he made at the factory.

## **5.2. Education to develop expertise (to complete broad general skills)**

### *Iconic case: Saray*

Saray is in her thirties and works as an administrator in a hospital providing support in a bereavement care unit. Since three years she has a permanent position in that hospital. In addition, she also works as a consultant for a funeral services firm. In this job, she has a temporary position. She is married but does not have any children, lives in Barcelona and, by ethnic background, is a Roma.

When Saray finished her secondary school studies at the age of 17 she studied some courses delivered by the European Social Foundation. These courses focused on how to enter into the labour market. After this she worked in

various sporadic jobs such as an assistant in a fashion store, and as an employee in customer services, and administrative work. The changes from one job to another occurred due to the ending of her contracts or due to the economic crisis (staff adjustments, etc.). Her last position as an employee in these sporadic jobs lasted for about four years until she was 25 years old. However, Saray wanted to progress so she decided to leave these jobs. Together with her sister she opened her own shopselling crafts and gifts. She felt that she had acquired the basic skills needed to conduct such a job through her previous jobs: 'you want to progress and be something [...] or do professional changes [...] with my sister because we had a business together. In the other jobs that I have had, I was like [...] I was on the run, but in this job I said that I will get this job because I want to. I will prepare it, I will do what I need, until it succeeds'.

Once the business was set they organised their schedules to be able to manage their personal life and the family (their parents were ill). After two years working in that business sales dropped sharply due to the economic crisis and Saray looked for a job to secure an additional income. She began working in a part-time job as a telephone assistant in a big Spanish electric company. After one year of working there the sisters decided to close the business and Saray searched for a second job to be full-time employed.

A friend told her about a job in an administrative office of pathology anatomy in a big hospital, which she entered and pursued part-time for the following eight years. Over the next three years Saray worked in this job in the hospital and at the electric company. When she was 30 years old Saray decided to apply to the university, thanks to the support of a lot of people and her boss at the hospital, to study psychology. First though she had to study for the 25 plus university entrance exam which she passed: 'now I am planning what I want to study. And ok, I like more to listen to people, try to understand, see the behaviour of people, how they focus, what they think [...]. How can I help them to improve a little bit, right? And ok, as I am, there were a lot of people saying to me: oh, this [psychology] would be perfect for you [...] your emotional intelligence is something you use a lot [...]. My boss told me: I think you should study psychology because you have the attitude [...] you will fit in such a degree, and I think you will do it very well, and you'll be happy helping others.'

When she was at university she had the opportunity to work in a research centre but the contract was linked to a project with an expiration date. She really enjoyed the idea of doing this. However, such a transition was daunting because this would not be a permanent position for her. Finally, she decided to leave the electric company and try her chances at the research centre but keeping her job at the hospital: 'yes, I was thinking to do it [...] I was sure to try it, just a little. So I

asked for a temporary permit in my job, just to leave and try [in the centre of research], and after three months, when I was sure to be in the centre of research, I came to the previous work and I told them that I will not go back after the temporary permit. I did not do that until I was kind of sure [...] because you know, work is something that you never know how it is going to be [...]. But, well [...] I tried and I said: look let's see how it's gonna work! If because of some reason I do not like it, or there is no way to keep me on the list, then I will go back to my previous job.'

When she finished her contract with the research centre she had to leave as there were no other funds to keep her on the staff list. This left her with just the hospital work. Then, thanks to her connections at the hospital she realised that there was an opening in the funeral services in the same hospital. She applied and they recruited her as a counsellor three years ago. So, nowadays she works as a part-time assistant at the hospital; and also as a part-time counsellor for the funeral services. She also studies psychology at degree level so that she will be able to undertake a new transition and hopes to work as a psychologist in the future.

#### **5.2.1. Significant work and learning transitions**

Her most important work transition was to set up a business with her sister several years ago. Previous working experiences and jobs were always gained through contact with different people. In this sense, the 'word of mouth' has been a crucial way of recruitment for her. Belonging to social networks is a feature of her transitional periods. Being present in the networks, and having contacts, helped her to move easily from one form of employment to another.

According to her learning is not the only relevant factor to develop her skills and knowledge. She also has acquired a lot of expertise drawing on her labour experiences and also working with her family (her family has always been involved in selling in street markets, vending, etc.). Besides this, she also highlighted the importance of her current learning process (psychology), since she considers that this will help her to achieve her ultimate professional career.

When she talks about what were the most and least satisfying aspects of her previous work experiences, she does not highlight anything of relevance. The two most positive experiences in her work life are her current work at the hospital and her previous work at the university research center. In contrast, her work as a consultant for the funeral services is not as rewarding. Many times she has felt overwhelmed by the bereavement of her clients although her background helps her to overcome this type of situation.

When talking about the skills that are needed to perform her current work she always emphasised the importance of her cultural and personal heritage of being Roma. According to her, cultural values are the most important aspect regarding her profile, especially as she works with topics relating to death. Taking care of such persons involves the use of abilities and skills that she learnt within her family. These skills and abilities involve: emotional sensitivity, empathy, etc. As she claims: 'this background helps me to better understand families. You don't see them as objects to obtain your revenues – money'. Her personal and psychological background helped her to perform this work with efficacy. According to her, 'labour transitions are individual and personal'. The cultural intelligence is, for her, one of the most important keys for a successful labour transition.

She feels that being Roma provided her with a body of skills that otherwise she would not have: 'I think that I have a more independent soul, I am a free person; so if you are in front of a problematic situation, then you may react quickly, you are more ready to do it, you are able to solve problems, maybe not in the expected way to do it [...] when people tell you that you are 'very Roma' this is positive. That means that you are a master for business, you are smart, you are clever.'

According to her, she has communicative skills that help her to feel very close to people, skills that are acquired in the Roma culture. She declared that because of her skills she always performs her work with excellence. Regarding her thinking, she points out that she is very clever. She likes to perform her work with excellence, and she really likes it when things are done correctly: 'I like to do things well, I like working together with the team. I like to leave everything controlled, and I feel very responsible if there are other persons who depend on my work. So if there is something to do and there is somebody waiting for it, even if it is an invoice, a document, whatever, I feel worried and I take care so everything will be OK. I do not know [...] I guess that I like working correctly; I am not a lazy person because I always had this kind of responsibilities in my home. Having voice, having a name, being my responsibility [...] this is something I saw in my home, so I transmit the same at work.'

She says that she is a person with very positive values regarding her work, and she likes to do everything well especially when this work entails taking care of other people. She is very serious about her work, and she does not like to joke at work. When she faces difficulties she carefully analyses the situation. 'I analyse the situation in a very analytical way, positive and negative aspects. I try to solve it in the best way'.

### 5.3. Linking significant learning experience to career and labour market transitions

In addition to compulsory education, she has studied many courses taught by the European Social Foundation. After some experience working, she decided to apply for the 25-years-old exam to access the university. She decided to do so because her boss at the hospital and because of family support. Her predisposition to learn helped her to keep studying. As we can see, education is a very important factor to Saray in her transition periods. However, education is not the only way of learning for her. She also draws on her working experiences. As she pointed out: 'now I am working on 'support to mourning' and I am helping also in the hospital [...]. Here I learn to be calm, persistent, sensitive with other people, supportive.' These are the important skills at work. She feels being Roma helps: 'coming from a minority group brings to you a perspective of richness, I know who I am, and what I can do for other people, so I can be part of the society because I have grown within this society. To me, being Roma has always been something positive. I did not have any trouble being Roma.'

Regarding the work hierarchy, she claimed that she has never experienced any kind of discrimination because of being Roma. 'I never had a negative interaction, so I felt refuse, no [...] never [...] I never felt any kind of discrimination at school, and I have never been fired because of being Roma.'

#### 5.3.1. Nature of support for most significant work and/or learning transition(s)

We can identify three types of support that Saray received. All of them are important. The support included her family (parents); her husband; and her boss. Regarding her parents, she felt that they have always supported her. 'My mom told me, my darling, no not come to see me – work hard at the university'. Both her parents were ill. When she went to visit them her mother said: 'Do not come if you have to work for an exam. This is very important'.

Her boss' support means a lot to her in order to enable her to take the 25-years-old exam and to have the opportunity to go to university to study psychology. According to her he is always interested in her studies. He told her : 'if you leave your studies, I will fire you [friendly tone] [...] is like if he was my mental advisor, and he always help me. I felt his support from the very beginning. It was him who encouraged me to go to university, and apply to study psychology'. This support is manifested in two different ways. First, he offers moral support, which is very important to her. Second, the support is provided through giving her better work schedules so that she has time to study. This is

not because she needs extra support for studying, but because there is not much spare time left in between her two jobs.

She also has the support of her husband as he undertakes the housework so that she has free time to focus on her studies. 'He comes to me and he tells me: do not worry because of the housework. I will do it'.

### **5.3.2. Future development: future plans, career and individual orientation**

Right now her main aim is oriented towards finishing her studies in psychology. She has already completed half of the degree although she is thinking about stopping studying during this semester due to work pressures. Saray feels that she has a lot of responsibilities at work, which makes it difficult to combine work and studies. However, her goal is to finish her studies and she aims to do this so that she will be able to work as a psychologist. She wants to be able to help people who are facing problems and who feel unhappy. 'It is really hard for people to explain why they feel unhappy. I will be very happy if I can help them feel happy too'.

### **5.3.3. Learning from previous changes and transitions and moving forward**

She claims that new learning and helping people is what she likes the most in her job. She feels that she has learnt through her ability and also from her workmates. She would also like to help other Romani women to disseminate their culture and values (heritage). Drawing on her past experience she thinks that learning with peers in the workplace is a crucial aspect and it should be mandatory for everybody. When somebody is passing through a transitional period, feelings like fear and doubt are common experiences: 'I think that you can always learn all the time. In professional terms, there are plenty of things to learn. In professional terms, one year ago I had no idea what death would mean for people involved in such a situation. In fact, I was kind of afraid to deal with this kind of situations, as the 90% of the population. Now I have a more informed knowledge. In fact, you need always to keep learning. The work in the hospital is easier to me, because there I have had a number of years doing such work. I already know the situations, so I feel calmer and I have some sense of mastery. However, in this other job everything is new to me, so I am learning right now; but yes, I like to learn.'

In terms of her recent jobs the most significant job for her was the one that she did when she was at the university: 'I learnt first that a better world is possible, and second that we are people who dare to do so. I mean [...] I was at the research centre at the university, and I saw so many people working by the

heart helping other people without waiting for any kind of payment back; to know that this exists is very wonderful.'

In contrast to these positive experiences she remembers other jobs just as a way to earn money. 'Well, I do not know... maybe I learnt in these jobs, but I do not think so. I think that my personality helped me to perform such jobs well. For example, being a phone operator.' She thinks that she has the ability to work with people and to take care of people. She also thinks that her current job at the hospital taught her how to see the human side of situations. 'There are situations that may change people's lives; so we help them to feel better, and your work is to encourage them from an emotional point of view.'

She thinks that her job is related to her attitudes and skills: 'could you imagine if someday I will be a psychologist, so I provide advice to manage emotions, stress, and support to move forward after the death of somebody related to you. Because it is very hard to work in a mortuary. Even in the hospital [...] just think about somebody who lost her baby during the pregnancy, or somebody who lost a significant person; you can help them to better tolerate this hard moment.'

She is now taking psychology because according to her, her boss made her understand that she already has the appropriate attitudes for this subject: 'I like to pay attention to people. I like to talk. I like to help them. I already noticed that I was the kind of friend that if somebody used to come to me, it was because this person was looking for advice, I helped them to overcome their problems. I had this attitude since I was a teenager. Then my boss told me that being such a person, I could go really far just with some training, because that is how I am. So I said: Gee! I can do what I am doing for free, and get paid for that, and be able to bring up my children [...] Where do I sign?'

In terms of informal learning, she highlights the influence of the women that are around her: 'It is true that I came from a group of women who are very determined. I have grown up with brave women':

#### **5.3.4. Implications for learning for career transitions**

Saray is determined and goal-oriented in wanting to achieve her ambition to become a psychologist. Her motivation to make a career change is mostly driven by her desire to help others and have an interesting job rather than for economic reasons. She has always been interested in learning and would have liked to have continued studying after leaving school. Studying for a degree is partly about finishing her education. Her cultural and personal characteristics have influenced her decision to study psychology. Being Roma is a very important and strong aspect of her identity and this is reflected in the way she works and her

studies. Education has also enabled her to become more socially mobile as she has moved from unskilled to professional work. Her early work transitions were brought about because her contracts ended or because of being made unemployed. Her recent transitions at the hospital and university have been brought about by personal motivation and fulfilment. Work/life balance is a major factor around which work has been organised.

Her social networks of family and friends have been important in providing her with support and encouragement to make the transitions successful. Encouragement also came from her boss at the hospital.

Saray has a strong sense of personal agency, and her well-developed relational skills and emotional development underpin her work in bereavement. She has successfully completed a series of transitions and has proved adept in a wide range of contexts, has well-developed networks and is committed to her own learning and development. Her career adaptability has so far been based on her broad general skills, and it is interesting that she decided that she also needed specialist expertise. Her studies in psychology will have aided her cognitive development and will give her expertise, which means she will have a T-shaped skills profile: broad skills coupled with depth in a specialist area and considerable relevant work experience.

## List of abbreviations

CAE	professional accompaniment contract [ <i>contrat d'accompagnement à l'emploi</i> ]
CAP	professional aptitude certificate [ <i>certificat d'aptitude professionnelle</i> ]
CFP	professional training leave [ <i>congé de formation professionnelle</i> ]
CIF	Individual training leave [ <i>congé individuel de formation</i> ]
DEAS	State diploma of assistant nurse [ <i>diplôme d'état d'aide soignante</i> ]
DEI	State diploma in nursing [ <i>diplôme d'État d'infirmier</i> ]
EQF	European qualification framework
NQF	national qualification framework
PES	public employment service
RNCP	national directory of professional certifications [ <i>répertoire national des certifications professionnelles</i> ]
UNED	national university at distance
VAE	validation of acquired experiences [ <i>validation des acquis de l'expérience</i> ]

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