



THE LEARNING WORKPLACE – THE SWEDISH WAY





The European Social Fund in Sweden, ESF, has five national theme groups whose mission is to collect, analyze and systematize experiences from the social fund's projects in Sweden. The theme group Arbetsplatslärande och omställning (Workplace learning and adjustment to changes in the labour market), A&O, is one of them. This publication gives a progress report of how the theme group views the development of workplace learning in the social fund's project when half the project period has passed. It also aims to provide a picture of some interesting projects within workplace learning and a more general picture of the challenges and conditions for competence development in the workplace in Sweden. The material is based on a series of A&O's own documents and reports as well as interviews conducted during the summer of 2011. The text is written by Gunhild Wallin, a journalist specialized in working life.



"This publication is based on interviews and mainly on a series of A&O's own reports and documents"

The report "Avslutade genomförande-projekt inom socialfonden" (Completed implementation projects within the Social Fund) by Magnus Nygren (June 2011) www.europaportalen.se

Socialfonden i siffror 2011 (The Social Fund in Figures 2011), the Swedish ESF Council

Att kompetensutveckla sig ur en kris, A&O:s rapportserie
Fallstudier av varselprojekt inom Europeiska socialfonden, A&O:s rapportserie nr 1
Kompetensutveckling i Socialfonden, A&O:s rapportserie nr 2

Source: Communication from the Commission "Europa 2020 – En strategi för smart och hållbar tillväxt för alla" (Europe 2020 - EU strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth) www.spraksam.se

Sketch of communication plan for A&O

"Sweden: EWCO CAR on "Getting prepared for the upswing. Training and Qualification during the Crisis" by Mats Kullander and Oskar Eklund, Oxford Research www.eurofond.europa.eu/ewco/studies

"Changes over time – first findings from the fifth European Working Conditions Survey" from the European Foundation for the improvement of Living and Working Conditions www.spl.nu



Sometimes changes in working life occur so fast that you do not really have time to perceive them and form an impression of what has really happened over time. Imagine looking back two decades. Although we talked about the new technology then, few could have imagined the profound evolution in the digitization of working life. It is a change that includes both positive and negative elements. What we see ahead of us is a growing digital divide in society and in working life, a gap investigators in the Swedish Trade Union Confederation LO termed “Digital Taylorism”. And even if we then, as now, spoke of globalization, there were few who could foresee the significance Japan, India, China and South Korea have had for the economic development in the world, not to mention the Nordic countries. Two decades ago, we saw these countries as growing export markets for Swedish products. Today, China is a dynamic factor in Swedish industry – both in terms of mining in the north and the automotive industry in the south.

Sweden is, like most countries in the European Union, in a state of permanent structural change. Agriculture is becoming a smaller but increasingly efficient part of production, the industrial sector has increased in productivity but reduced in volume and service industries are

growing dramatically. The flagships of Swedish enterprise have been gradually scrapped; the textile industry and the shipyards are almost forgotten examples. Today the automotive industry is facing extraordinarily hard competition, where the issue of SAAB’s survival is a perma-

nent wound in Swedish enterprise. The telecom market too is subject to increasing international competition, which is also hitting distributors, department stores and retailers.

Cities based on a principal industry are harder hit by structural change – it is not just groups such as immigrants, the poorly educated and people with disabilities

who lose out. Employees of small and medium-sized businesses that work as subcontractors to larger companies are equally affected. Major changes have also occurred in the public sector, especially in light of an increasingly ageing society. One of the most important tools to address these structural changes is to invest in education, competence maintenance and learning at work. The resources made available within the European Structural Funds, in particular the regional and social funds, are particularly significant in this context.

This publication gathers knowledge about learning based on the theme group A&O (workplace learning and adjustment to changes in the labour market).

Although the focus is on individual learning, the social fund’s project assists in the promotion of organizational learning in the workplace and institutional learning on the regional level. It is not just individuals who are to create their own change competence – the same goes for companies, municipalities and regions.

Theme A&O is developing a new Swedish model for competence maintenance and workplace learning. The model has several general features that are also of great importance for competence maintenance and learning in other European countries. The social fund may therefore be seen as a tool for a Learning and Innovative Europe – and a development towards EU 2020 which has been jointly created by the member countries of the European Union. Preventive competence maintenance and the development of a learning working life is always more profitable in the long term than pumping course packages into a development that has already gained momentum in a negative direction. Investment in competence maintenance and learning also provides security for change and adjustment, which many of the examples in the publication show.

Stockholm, September 2011

Kenneth Abrahamsson
*Programme Director FAS and
one of the initiators of Theme A&O*



KENNETH ABRAHAMSSON



ABOUT THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND IN SWEDEN



THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND IN SWEDEN

Sweden has during the period **2007–2013** received more than SEK 6.3 billion from the European Social Fund to find new ways to reduce alienation and bring more people into work, and to strengthen the competence of those who are in work. Supplemented with an equal amount from Swedish co-financing, there is approximately SEK 13 billion to be distributed to around 3 000 projects.

The Swedish Social Fund finances five national theme groups, whose task is to analyze and systematize knowledge about and from the projects. The five groups are: Theme (workplace learning and adjustment) A&O, Theme youth, Theme integration in working life, Theme equality and Theme entrepreneurship.

The European Social Fund, ESF, is the EU's tool to meet structural changes and to create more and better jobs in Europe. It has existed since 1957. During the programme period 2007-2013, the fund will pay out SEK 750 billion to the European countries. Since 2000, the Swedish ESF Council has been in charge of the Swedish programme.



THEME WORKPLACE LEARNING AND ADJUSTMENT, A&O

In January 2009, the European Social Fund, ESF, decided to give SEK 70 million to five national theme groups to disseminate experiences from the projects. A&O, which is one of them, was granted approximately SEK 15.6 million and is a collaboration between Luleå University of Technology, LTU, University of Gothenburg, GU, Linköping University, LiU and the foundation APEL R&D centre. The coordinators are based at LTU.

A&O compiles, analyzes and disseminates experiences from the projects. The aim is to create knowledge of how workplace learning creates profits and benefits the community, businesses and individuals. Through this work, A&O wants to help policy makers and other actors such as authorities, trade unions, entrepreneurs and other stakeholders to make decisions that support a labour market in transition.

A&O organizes its work in five sub-projects:

- Workplace learning in new ways
- Unions undergoing change
- Gender mainstreaming as competence development
- Competence development, work place organization and health
- Validation as a basis for learning and development

The starting point is that working life is in constant motion. Every year 500,000 jobs disappear and almost as many new jobs are created. For the individual to cope with change and adjustment, lifelong learning is required where the workplace is an important arena for competence development. A&O argues that workplace learning is a prerequisite for a prosperous working life, that it contributes to a sustainable development, increases the employability of people who lack formal education and raises the level of knowledge and competence in the workforce.

www.arbetsplatslarande.se/ao-in-english



Workplace learning for a changing world

Through five national theme groups, the social fund wants to capture and systematize knowledge and experience from the many projects. One of them is the group for workplace learning and adjustment, A&O, which works to strengthen structures for competence development and whose vision is to create a new Swedish model for workplace learning.

“One of A&O’s most important tasks is to identify interesting examples of learning from the projects and use them to have an impact on how we think and organize learning in Sweden. This is important for us all,” says Carina Åberg, CEO of APeL R&D centre and one of the partners in the theme group.

“IT’S NOT ENOUGH TO SEND PEOPLE ON COURSES, A GOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IS ALSO NEEDED.”

Per-Erik Ellström

THE VIEW ON LEARNING

The starting point for the group’s work is the view on learning in working life. The participants all have extensive experience of research on workplace learning and know that when it works, efficiency and productivity increase. Those who learn new things also become curious and will increase their capacity for adjustment and renewal. And the workplace that offers development will also become attractive, which will benefit the competence management of the future, a challenge that awaits many businesses.

But for that to happen, a conscious stance to learning is required. The workplace needs to create support for learning,

so that no newly acquired knowledge lies untapped and creates frustration.

It is therefore important to define learning as more than courses.

“It’s not enough just to send employees on courses. The employees’ new knowledge must be translated into action. Otherwise it’s just a waste of resources,” says Per-Erik Ellström, professor at HELIX VINN Excellence Centre at Linköping University.

That does not mean that courses are wrong. They may be of interest to the individual, but the question is whether they lead to change? A&O argues that if learning is to make the individual employable and be the success factor for companies



FOTO: ANNA-KARIN FLOREN



PER-ERIK ELLSTRÖM

A NEW MODEL

» and society as portrayed by keynote speakers, the individual's and the workplace's learning need to be integrated, they need to be connected. If the individual's learning is to be of use to the company, it requires an organization that benefits learning and where the employees and not least the management, all works for the development and management of knowledge.

"We have seen in our evaluations and our research that major educational efforts can lead to frustration. When employees receive new knowledge about how they can work to improve

customer satisfaction or results and the workplace is not prepared to take care of that knowledge, many become frustrated," says Carina Åberg at APeL R&D centre.

Per-Erik Ellström emphasizes the management's role for successful development.

"That managers perceive employee development as part of their task as manager is important in order to create organizations where learning takes place in everyday life, both at an individual and an organizational level," says Per-Erik Ellström.

A WAY TO GATHER KNOWLEDGE

It was during the previous programme period that the European Social Fund in Sweden, ESF, took the first steps towards the decision which means that there are now five national theme groups, whose aim is to find the interesting lessons learned in the many, and often local, projects. Since Sweden joined the EU, 90,000 projects have been funded by the social fund and 350,000 people have been included in these projects. There are many stories about what this has meant, but also criticism of complicated systems for applications and reports,



FOTO: ANNA-KARIN FLORÉN

A JANUARY CONFERENCE WAS HELD TO MONITOR HOW CRISES MANAGEMENT AND COMPETENCE CAN BE USED IN A RECESSION.

among other things. The fund has also been criticized because of valuable knowledge from individual and local projects falling through the cracks.

Therefore it was decided in 2009 to allocate SEK 70 million to create a system for collecting and systematizing knowledge. “Changing systems requires systems for change,” writes the ESF on its website where they outline the background to the theme groups and their work.

“The basic idea of the theme groups is to avoid a situation of having lot of projects where the results are not analyzed or

the knowledge captured,” says Åsa Lindh, who is Director General of the European Social Fund in Sweden, ESF.

STRATEGIC IMPACT

The five theme groups have different focuses – workplace learning and adjustment in working life, entrepreneurship and enterprise, young people in working life, integration in working life and equality. It is their work that will produce the effect, the structural change that the social fund programmes are aiming for. This will be achieved through the dissemination of experiences in various



ÅSA LINDH

UNIONS UNDERGOING CHANGE

The unions have, through making use of the Social Fund, been able to take on a new and active role in the development of new methods of workplace learning. This could be a new question for the future for the unions. It is especially IF Metall in Central Norrland which has been at the forefront. It has run five projects in the region and has also been project owner. The background was the realization that an average IF Metall union member in the region receives about 30 minutes of competence development per year. The work had just begun when the crisis hit. IF Metall in Central Norrland was part of the redundancy announcement and has used competence development as a means to work for improved opportunities for continued employment and for increased employability on potential redundancy. The aim was also to strengthen the

participating companies in the face of growing competition. The union has a vested interest in companies remaining in business and in competence development being a common issue for employees and employers and an issue were they can meet.

The Social Fund has granted IF Metall funds for additional projects, and the idea to use the ESF structure has become widespread in IF Metall.

The sub-project has established contacts with researchers and practitioners in the field of Union Learning and is applying for funds to start a network within the area. There is also a transnational collaboration with the Scottish Trade Union Congress, STUC, and the Wales Trade Union Congress, Wales TUC.

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ways within ESF, between projects and to decision makers and other stakeholders.

“The Social Fund has a lot of focus on the individual,” Åsa Lindh says. There is a desire to ensure that the individual is employable, but the fund’s project will also work for the adjustment of competence. The idea is to connect business development of the workplace with the individual’s competence development.

“Unfortunately we see quite often that companies leave out that analysis. There is a huge challenge to get competence development that is connected and beneficial to both companies and individuals. Some of the projects which have succeeded in doing this were initiated by the union IF Metall,” Åsa Lindh says.

The theme groups are different, as are the methods each one chooses to distribute the knowledge generated during the programme period. A&O is a collaboration between the universities in Luleå, Linköping and Göteborg, and the APeL foundation, based in Örebro. There is



» also a strategic steering group involving, among others, the labour market parties.

The national theme group workplace learning and adjustment, A&O, is based at Luleå University of Technology, LTU, which is located 900km north of Stockholm and 150km south of the Arctic Circle.

There, at the Department of Human Work Science is a group of researchers specializing in work life studies and it is they who coordinate the efforts within the network that forms A&O.

“We chose to start a collaboration between four strong research actors. In

this way, an important dissemination of knowledge takes place. The Commission has not been so fond of our organizational model, but we believe that we can move the state of knowledge forward through the way we work,” Lena Abrahamsson, who is professor at Luleå University of Technology, says.

WORKPLACE LEARNING IN NEW WAYS



Many Social Fund projects are searching for new solutions on how to work

with competence development in the workplace. They want to find alternatives to courses and traditional educational activities and seek forms of development that combine theory and practice. Operational needs are the starting point, and it is also in the operations where structures are built to support and make use of the new knowledge being developed.

Other projects are developing partnerships between workplaces, training providers and a so-called intermediary, or facilitator. An intermediary can be the initiator of a project and make the investment possible by bringing together companies with similar needs. They can have networks of consultants and training providers, but are not themselves providers. Examples of such facilitators are learning centres and network organizations in which municipalities work with local

businesses and other stakeholders. Creating knowledge about how these work are part of the competence development for regional development.

The sub-project has four main areas.

–To study how workplace learning is organized according to the survey and description made of the needs.

–To see what the conditions for learning look like in relation to the organization, managers at various levels and support structures, e.g., a supervisor.

–Are the learning environments designed by the management or have employees been able to influence the planning and implementation?

–Is there an intermediary, that is, someone from outside, who has ensured that it comes into being, creating the network and ensuring that there is a functioning system?

Some projects will be selected and analyzed with the aid of studies of project applications and final reports, evaluation reports and interviews with project managers and evaluators.

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THE QUEST FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

The EU's steering documents place strong emphasis on lifelong learning, both for the programme period 2007-2013 and in the Commission communication “Europe 2020 - EU strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”. One of the seven main initiatives states that an agenda for new competence and new job opportunities shall modernize the labour markets and give people empowerment through lifelong competence development in order to increase participation on the labour market. Learning shall provide a better match between the supply and demand of labour, and better mobility. There will be more and better jobs, and a way to realize this vision is through a modernization of labour markets and systems for learning.

Behind the ambitions are some troubling statistics. The experiences of the recent economic crisis also directed focus on the need for lifelong learning, particularly related to working life. Increased knowledge creates more security for the individual and creates a greater opportunity for flexibility. Currently, sixteen per cent, or 37 million workers, in Europe feel insecure at work, a figure that has increased by two per cent since 2005, and which was reinforced by the financial crisis, as well as the fact that the number

of temporary workers is increasing. Of Europe's workforce, which consists of approximately 235 million workers, over 80 million people are considered to be unskilled or only having basic skills. But despite that, those who already have higher education, as well as those with permanent employment, are the ones who get to take a greater share of lifelong learning. The European employers, however, are showing a greater interest in competence development than for many years – in total, 34 per cent received training paid for by their employer in 2010, which is the highest figure since 1995. One explanation is that the increased interest in further education is due to the crisis. Suddenly there was more time. There is also a trend showing that more learning occurs in the workplace.

THE CHANGING LABOUR MARKET

At the same time, labour markets are changing quickly. In the EU until 2020, it is calculated that sixteen million jobs will require a higher competence level than today and the number of jobs with low competence requirements is expected to decline by 12 million. In Sweden, the labour market is renewed yearly with half a million new jobs. Meanwhile, figures in both Europe and Sweden show that many today are excluded from the labour market. In Sweden, it is especially true for young people and people of foreign origin or with a disability. In this context we should take into account increased competition through globalization and that changes tend to happen at an increased rate. Right now, many countries in Europe are struggling with their finances and we are facing a generational change. Europe has an ageing population, and soon fewer

will support more. Therefore emphasis is put on good work, empowerment at work and lifelong learning. It will heighten the ability to compete, but also the ability to adjust in times of rapid change.

MANY PARTS ARE JOINED TO FORM A WHOLE

But for lifelong learning to become more than words it needs a systematic knowledge about when learning in working life functions well. A&O has chosen to build and systematize their work into five sub-projects – Workplace learning in new ways, Unions undergoing change, Gender

mainstreaming as competence development, Validation as a basis for learning and development and Competence development for learning and development. ESF initiated its own national announcement of SEK 90 million for competence development and development of the work organization for learning and increased health, granting in the spring of 2010 funds to nine projects on the theme of strategic competence management. These nine projects will now be studied by researchers to show how current competence needs can be met while developing the organization to promote >>

GENDER MAINSTREAMING AS COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT



When a project is applying for money from the ESF, there must be a gender mainstreaming

plan, but the question is how integrated gender mainstreaming issues are in the projects. The good intentions mostly seem to remain as grand words on a piece of paper. The sub-project wants to examine and change this.

Three case studies examine the projects from a gender mainstreaming and learning perspective. The purpose is to gain knowledge about what it takes to change gender patterns in a workplace in a more equal direction. It focuses on three projects in the retail sector.

The survey will be based on textual

analysis of project plans, result reporting to the Social Fund and other documentation deemed relevant.

There will also be workplace visits and interviews with project managers and other key persons. A report will be written in collaboration with the theme group on equality, and the goal is to find good examples and through these reach and create an interest in the labour market parties for how gender mainstreaming and learning are interrelated.

Transnational activities have also begun through the contact established with The European Community of Practice on Gender Mainstreaming (www.gendercop.com)

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» health. “A unique project in Europe,” says Per-Erik Ellström, who manages the coordination and gathering of knowledge from the nine projects.

“Learning environments and healthy environments are closely related. It is about participation, flexibility and support from managers and management. As monitoring scientists, we will see how they affect each other,” he says.

The projects that A&O monitors may be large or small. They can be anywhere in Sweden and concern widely different activities. Project owners can be municipalities working together, labour unions or regional learning centres. The mission is to monitor projects that can create new knowledge about workplace learning, and it can be done in the large company, Scania, in the project, VästKraft, which was created in Western Sweden as a result of the economic crisis, or in a small firm in the northern coastal town of Örnsköldsvik.

“You can find pieces of the puzzle in different projects that can be put together to form new knowledge,” says Carina Åberg, APeL R&D centre.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LEARNING IN A CRISIS

A&O has also monitored and analyzed how competence development can take place during a financial crisis. When the financial crisis hit the world in 2008, Sweden with its great dependence on exports was hit hard. From one week to the next, the spinning wheel of a booming economy turned into a reality with empty order books and silent phones. GDP declined in 2009 by 5.1 per cent, and unemployment rose from six to nine per cent during the same year. One of the

affected industries was the automotive industry and its subcontractors, which hit hard against Western Sweden and Västra Götaland.

The Social Fund issued an announcement that would encourage competence development instead of redundancies in the areas and industries that were primarily affected. About SEK 500 million

was awarded to 69 projects. The whole process was quick compared to how long it usually takes to apply for money from the Social Fund.

“We processed applications under extreme pressure and feared that it would just turn out to be support for sitting out the storm rather than long-term change, but the result was better than we feared.

COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT



Competence development projects are seldom related to health or illness. In

2010 the Social Fund noted this and decided on a national investment in competence development, focusing on work organization for increased learning and better health.

“It’s a unique investment, the like of which I have not seen in Europe before,” says professor Per-Erik Ellström at Linköping University and head of the project.

Many competence development projects have not integrated the participants’ competence development with operational or organizational developments in the workplace. There is often no “breeding ground” for learning in the workplace – individuals are not able to make practical use of their knowledge, and the potential of the workplace as a learning environment is not utilized. It also means that you rarely see the relationship between

competence development and health, but issues of health tend to fall into pure wellness projects. While that may be positive, the starting point of this investment is that a long-term change in favour of health starts in the way the work is organized. It could be work organization, work environment, technology or other factors at work.

The second idea behind this effort is the importance of support and shared learning for the nine projects involved, but also between them. Therefore it is central to have a network at national level where workplaces, process supporters, researchers and other stakeholders come together to support the individual projects and long-term knowledge development.

Project implementation started in May 2011. Project leaders for A&O’s sub-projects that came about from this investment are professor Per-Erik Ellström, Linköping University, Christina Ehneström, APeL and Louise Svensson, Linköping University.

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To some extent, that is maybe what happened, but the support contributed to small and medium enterprises managing to take off by performing a business intelligence analysis and competence analysis of their businesses,” says Åsa Lindh, Director General of the European Social Fund in Sweden.

PRAISE AND CRITICISM

A&O has conducted extensive analysis on fourteen of them, which were presented on a day conference, entitled “The A&O of crisis management and competence”. Also the report “Developing yourself out of a crisis” portrays experiences from the so-called redundancy projects.

Several of the projects examined are

collaborative projects. Companies got together and coordinated their training efforts. New networks emerged, several of them with a more or less pronounced intention to continue after the completion of the project. In three of the selected projects, the municipality plays an important role. The project Våxtkraft Kinda, www.vaxtkraftkinda.se (Growing power Kinda) was formed as a cooperative association with a view to strengthening ties between Kinda municipality, located in Southern Östergötland, the LO unions, banks and enterprise. City Akademien, www.orebro.se/4710.html, was run by Örebro municipality and involved companies in Örebro, Karlskoga and Lindesberg – all of which are towns

in central Sweden. In the northern city of Luleå, the municipality ran the project Jobbakuten through Luleå Näringsliv AB, www.lnab.se/

One of the conclusions of the municipal projects was that they tended to involve a great deal of administration. Another experience was that there was a large focus on courses and that many were conducted on the companies’ conditions. They were the easiest to administrate and urgent needs had to take precedence over long-term efforts. At the same time, many employees got to take part in training at work for the first time. It is estimated that fewer were made redundant than would have been otherwise and that companies who invested in competence development were better prepared when the recession turned. It also seems that the companies became more aware of the need for continuous competence development as a way to become more competitive but also more attractive as an employer.

New structures and forms of collaboration, such as between county administrative boards and municipal regional federations, evolved, which is assessed to be able to benefit regional development for the future. There were also large joint procurements with various education businesses, which meant reduced prices.

“I am fascinated by the fact that it was arranged so quickly. What is required and what made it happen so quickly? Here is a source of knowledge for the future. We have something here in Sweden and we need knowledge about it so that we can put it into action. That would make us better prepared for the next dip,” Carina Åberg of ApeL R&D centre, says. ●

VALIDATION AS A BASIS FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Many of the ESF projects make use of validation in various forms.

This sub-project disseminates experiences from these.

Validation is measuring a person’s formal and informal knowledge. The formal is what has been learned through education. The informal is what has developed from experiences of working life or other interests. Validation is used to identify the starting point from which to continue the learning and organizational development.

The project has so far surveyed ten projects through telephone interviews. There have also been visits to three projects, and several workshops have been conducted.

It turns out that the projects use validation in different ways. Some do so explicitly and use the concept as a starting point in their work. Others work with efforts which in effect involve validation of some form. Then there are those who would benefit from having validation as a part of the development work. There is thus a variation in how validation is defined and how it is used.

The idea of the sub-project is to contribute to competence development within the projects that work with validation, but also to create exchange between the projects that use this work method.

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Language development at work

In the spring of 2009, the project SpråkSam started with the aid of money from the Social Fund. The year following a similar project was started financed by the City of Stockholm. The projects combine language and competence development for employees within elderly and disabled care in the county of Stockholm.



So far 600 people at more than 50 workplaces have been included in the project. The target group was employees who do not have Swedish as their first language. The woman is from Bangladesh and in her late fifties. She is in a recreation room in the nursing home Skoga in the Stockholm area. In front of her are about forty co-workers sitting and listening to her lecture on diabetes. When she is finished she receives a round of applause.

“A few months ago it would have been unthinkable. When we started SpråkSam she barely said a word, although she had worked in elderly care for many years. Now she is able to give a lecture. I sat at the front and was almost moved to tears. Imagine going from saying nothing to being able to share this,” Annelie Herrstedt Westman says, a teacher at the elderly care programme who has been a teacher at Skoga nursing home within the project SpråkSam.

It has been a new way of working for her, as a teacher. She had been on the students' home territory, and the

workplace has been able to be used in the language teaching in a direct and concrete way. If someone wondered about something, they could simply go and look. Annelie Herrstedt Westman has also been around in the hectic morning hours in order to better understand the work and then use the experiences in teaching.

That the project SpråkSam emerged is due to a number of reasons. Elderly care has changed tremendously the last ten to fifteen years. Those cared for are older and in worse health and the demands on communication are key in this context. Those who work in elderly care must be able to have conversations with relatives and document and interpret the elderly person's needs and wishes. Meanwhile, many employees have a foreign background and Swedish is not their first language. Many in elderly care lack the relevant basic education and have also had brief schooling. For example, 20 per cent of the 300 who participated in the first project had less than six years of schooling. Elderly care is also very

wearing with a high turnover of employees. Managers often end up in the role of recruiter, having to put out fires instead of moving operations forward. It was in the light of this that the idea to create language development in the workplace grew. One of the fundamental ideas was that the learners must also be supported in their learning in the workplace. Another was that knowledge would be brought in by language researchers and teachers from Municipality Adult Education. They appointed language representatives at every workplace, which could provide support in daily work, and they and the managers at the workplaces in question got to go on a six-day course to learn more about language development. To accept the project involved making an agreement. The manager who said yes would also realize that it involved freeing up time and providing premises.

“We take the courses to the workplace. It is an unfamiliar task, and the first thing we did was to have a dialogue with the managers,” says project manager Kerstin Sjösvärd.

At 24 workplaces in the county of Stockholm, managers and language representatives received training, and 300 out of a total of 1600 employees at the 24 workplaces were offered a course at their workplace three hours a week to develop their language abilities. Operations and language were connected by using the method to develop their language at the workplace through reflection and dialogue – a learning environment.

“The manager has been important

in the project. We saw managers who had the ability to communicate the importance of language development and also motivate employees that ‘we want to invest in you’. It may well be a sensitive topic to single out someone for a course to learn better Swedish and therefore it was important to make participants feel chosen, not singled out,” Kerstin Sjösvärd says.

The objective was also that participants would obtain formal competence, but that target has not been fully achieved. “Perhaps the objectives should be more realistic, and that is being considered for the next project which is also aimed at native Swedes,” Kerstin Sjösvärd says.

“We have noted that ethnic Swedes too may need to develop their language. Therefore, we are going ahead with Arbetsam,” she says.

The Språksam project is now finished, but another is already under way. It is called Arbetsam and is also focused on language and communication, but is now directed at those who have Swedish as their mother tongue. The work aims to strengthen those with a weak labour market position due to lack of competence, but also to attend to workplace needs. A total of 800 employees at 60 workplaces in municipalities, districts and private companies are involved in workplace learning and there will be trained supportive resource people in every workplace. Managers will also be supported.

The Språksam project has also cooperated with the Danish School of Education and the Municipality of Copenhagen. ●



FOTO: TOMAS SÖDERGREN

“The union provides companies with tools to make money”

Central Norrland is the location for an ongoing series of projects financed by the Social Fund that enables small and medium companies to develop both their organization and the competence of their staff. The initiative was taken by the union IF Metall and is now being emulated across the country.

An IF Metall union member receives on average 30 minutes' competence development per year, but through IF Metall's projects the situation has changed for members in Jämtland and Västernorrland. Since 2009, 1,386 people from 34 different companies in Central Norrland have participated in a total of 42,000 training hours. "That is how the EU plays an important role for individuals and companies in the region," IF Metall writes in a press statement.

Conny Hansson in Östersund. He answers his phone in the car on the way to Hudiksvall. Distances in Central Norrland are vast, and the hours it takes to get from one part of the region to another are excellent for making all those phone calls that need to be made, as long as there is mobile phone coverage in the sparsely populated areas he passes on his way. Geography was one of the reasons Conny Hansson took the initiative for IF Metall in Central Norrland, as early as spring 2008, to send a questionnaire to 170 companies in the region in order to determine their needs for competence development for their members. Distances are large in the county and it complicates the opportunities for competence development, especially for small and medium-sized companies.

"We knew that the average time that our members receive competence development was about half an hour a year. Large engineering companies can often manage their own competence development, but our region is characterized by many small and medium-sized companies and they have very little competence development," Conny Hansson says.

Out of the 170 companies, 65 answered: "Really interesting!" It was the green lights to start a feasibility study in order to examine what the competence needs were for the companies and their employees.

"We wanted to know what the situation was at the companies and combine their needs with our members' needs. Many small and medium-sized companies have never had a business plan, but kept their office more or less in their pocket," he says.

The department applied for and obtained money from the Social Fund and was just about to roll out competence development in fifteen companies. That is when the financial crisis and the redundancy announcements hit. IF Metall applied for and obtained money to ensure that those who were made redundant received training and work placements.

"It was about a more targeted training to enhance our members' employability. It was also found to be a wise way to strengthen the industry's long-term competence elevation.

Evaluations showed that redundancies were fewer, the crisis could be used for development which contributed to increased productivity," Conny Hansson says.

Now work moves on. In December 2010, IF Metall received a further SEK thirteen million in ESF funds to develop the competence of 1,800 employees at 27 different companies within the project KZY, named after the county initials of the three counties that make up the IF Metall department. The focus is on strategic competence development. The companies are in turn responsible for allotting the time needed for development. The starting point is to see the company and its business plan. How well does it match the individuals' development needs, so that they are equipped with the right competence to keep their jobs or find a new one? The aim is to find systems to work with competence development during boom times as well as in recession without disrupting production.

"We have the same goals as the companies, that is, we want them to remain in business, and with competent staff the chances of that increases. Through our competence development projects, we give them tools to make money," Conny Hansson says.

Also the national IF Metall union is project owner for the competence development project in Västerbotten and Östergötland. It started in 2010 and will run until November 2012. At the moment the project is in a preparation phase where the company's goals are examined to create a strategy on how to achieve them. Thereafter, an action plan that involves courses and learning in the workplace is designed.

"More and more companies are adopting the lean philosophy. The scope of the work might be reduced if you only use certain parts of the lean philosophy, instead of looking at the big picture. We want to broaden the content of work, and for that we need organized workplace learning," Angelica Teiffel says, ombudsman at the IF Metall national office.

She stresses the need for active leaders who support workplace learning and adds that there is a management development programme for them.

For the union to be a project owner is a new role. The advantage is to be able to take part directly and influence the members' opportunity for development. The disadvantage is that it is time-consuming.

"We see it like this: if we had not gone into this, the employers would never have changed the work organization, so it benefits our members and company development – things that goes hand in hand," Angelica Teiffel says. ●



From the project stream: **Quality-assured professional role**

How can we find staff for geriatric nursing in the future? One way is to take advantage of and see the knowledge that already exists through validation, linked to the requirements needed to work with the elderly. This is the starting point for the project Kravmärkt Yrkesroll. It is collaboration between several municipalities and city districts in Stockholm and has on several occasions received financial support from the Social Fund.

In the early 2000s, a detailed inventory was made of what you need know in geriatric nursing. Through analysis and diary entries, six occupational requirements and 177 criteria were established.

That was the basis for, with the help of the Social Fund, starting the project to develop competence in a new way. Traditional adult education made many of the employees in geriatric nursing feel worthless. Instead, work was started that focused on taking hold of the knowledge that many have, but have not put into words.

This is achieved by validation done by specific profession analysts, but also by employees estimating their own knowledge. Once that is done, an individual curriculum is designed in interaction between the individual, the profession analyst and the manager. Most of the competence development occurs at the

workplace with the support of supervisors, being partly based on the finding that many do not want to enter the formal education system. To date, approximately 6,000 employees in geriatric nursing have been validated.

The challenge that Kravmärkt yrkesroll now faces is to get the knowledge that becomes visible through validation recognized at the national level. As a way to achieve this a collaboration with the Open College Network, OCN, has been started. Between 2011 and 2013, a new social fund project entitled "Arbetsplatslärande i fokus – Kravmärkt yrkesroll" (Workplace learning in focus – Quality-assured professional role): www.kravmarktyrkesroll.se ●



Training instead of redundancy – the Scania example

When the financial crisis hit the world, and Sweden, in autumn 2008, Scania chose to meet the decline in orders with competence development instead of redundancies. With the help of the county administrative board, they received SEK 120 million from ESF.

Scania manufactures buses and lorries, operates in 100 countries and has a total of 35,000 employees. When the crisis came, Scania's first action was to not renew contracts with 1,000 people on short term contracts. But it was not enough to meet a production loss of fifty per cent. They signed a so-called crisis agreement, which meant that 60 per cent of the members agreed to work 20 per

cent fewer hours for ten per cent less pay. The agreement lasted during 2009.

In addition, Scania chose to, together with the County administrative board of Stockholm, apply for money from the Social Fund in order to offer employees competence development during the period of lower production. In May 2009, Scania received D11 million, the highest amount the Social Fund has ever awarded a project. Scania also invested several hundred million by paying salaries during training. The aim was to improve the employees' positions in the company but also to strengthen their position on the labour market as a whole. They also emphasized that employees who take

part in development training become more involved and engaged, which in turn increases efficiency and productivity. In this way, the company would be prepared when the financial situation got better.

The money enabled the 6,000 employees at Scania to receive further training in industrial engineering, Scania's production system, mathematics and languages. The trade unions operating within Scania were not part of the decision itself, instead it was decided by the management and the county administrative board. The union, however, was positive about the decision. The training was conducted in the workplace at Scania. ●



FOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

Development starts in the operations

Despite all the speeches on the importance of and need for competence development and lifelong learning, the issue tends to fall between the cracks. ESF's projects demonstrates the many possibilities, but also the obstacles and difficulties.

“One culprit is that we are thinking too traditionally about knowledge. We believe we gain knowledge mainly through education, but much of what we learn is acquired in working life. The risk is that we sit back and think that last year this many people got to do a course, but that is not enough today. We see this in our business,” Carina Åberg says, CEO of APeL R&D centre.

Researchers in A&O have over the years managed to see a lot of what works, but also what prevents the fancy words that so many are using becoming reality.

When the group which forms the basis of A&O met in late August 2011 and summarized their experience so far, they could conclude that many of the projects

are about courses rather than integrated learning. The report “Avslutade genomförandeprojekt inom socialfonden 2011” (Completed implementation projects within the Social Fund 2011) also showed that the very concept of workplace learning is difficult to define and is used in many different meanings. And although many projects talk about competence development, in reality it often results in a course with direct application in the workplace. There is still a long way to go before learning becomes integrated in the workplace.

Sometimes the words create confusion.

A term like workplace learning can be clear in theory, but difficult to identify in practice. Per Olof Thång, professor of

education at the University of Gothenburg, gave an example of what he believes is real workplace learning. When he was in his twenties, he did extra work in mental hospitals. As a young, inexperienced substitute he was, along with other substitutes, included along with experienced nurses to listen to the most senior manager's review of the patients. They got to learn, they were listened to and they became alert. Forty years later, he remembers nurse Ulla because she created a culture of learning.

"Competence development is ultimately a question of valuation or culture. At Lillhagens hospital at that time there was a climate that allowed continuous learning, and although it was an old-fashioned mental hospital, it was a good work environment because of the view of learning," he says.

The words about competence development in working life are many and there is a risk that we are deceiving ourselves with the language.

"If we are talking about delivering or providing knowledge, we will not reach the core, which is about the perception of learning. We get into wrong ways of thinking instead of asking the question 'how do we think about what we do?' Today, the competence issue is not present in many boardrooms, they do not exist in the corporate culture," says Per-Olof Thång.

Per-Olof Thång reflects on the Social Fund's crisis announcement, which largely went to the west of Sweden, whose automotive industry and their suppliers were hard hit by the crisis. The situation was acute with about 7,000 redundancies

among IF Metall members in the region. Certain rules, however, prevented the investments in training to get started quickly, and initially the companies were not always prepared for how these efforts would work. In many places one was not prepared, for example, through having performed a needs analysis. This meant that the money did not reach the core issue – how do you get people to want to participate in a development?

"It is important that there is a direction, but also structures that can continue the efforts even after the external funding has ceased. Otherwise, many of the projects will fall on rocky ground.

One problem is that applications can contain well-formed thoughts on the development of both business and individual. In reality it is more difficult. "Development is no quick fix," as Carina Åberg puts it.

Per-Erik Ellström, professor at Linköping University, agrees. Many projects are large and complex and it is not always easy to penetrate the project rhetoric. Sometimes it seems difficult even for the project managers, he notes.

"You cannot use abstract concepts in contacts with companies, but what we want must be connected to the operations. One idea would be to link workplace learning with competence management and ongoing retirements. If it is connected to self-perceived problems, it will be easier," Per-Erik Ellström says.

No matter how much a company applauds competence development, it can be difficult to find enough time. Many companies, especially small and medium-sized, have an extremely lean

organization and have little room, or time, to start systematic learning in the workplace.

When the financial crisis arrived, the government pointed to the Social Fund. "Use the money," was the message. But how could, for example, Carlsson's little workshop somewhere in the country access the money? Small companies cannot manage applications to the fund themselves. Carina Åberg, ApeL R&D centre, would like to see a development of so-called intermediary bodies. They can be educational providers, or learning centres, such as the municipal City Akademien in Örebro, or any of the country's fourteen industrial development centres, created as part of the government's growth initiative.

"They take the role of a broker between the individual workplace and regional nodes and create conditions for the project itself. Their role is not to be providers, but they do have a network of consultants and training providers," Carina Åberg says.

When the crisis announcement came, everything went like lightning – both applications and funding. There is much to learn from it, including that intermediaries were required. ApeL has recently completed its own Social Fund project. It was about strengthening the intermediary role and covered 22 municipalities.

When A&O's members discussed the future, they discussed the problem that the training that occurs in working life is in a different system than traditional training, such as the municipal courses, adult education and in-service training. >>



PER-OLOF THÅGÅRD

“IF WE ARE TALKING ABOUT DELIVERING OR PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE, WE WILL NOT REACH THE CORE, WHICH IS ABOUT THE PERCEPTION OF LEARNING”

Per-Olof Thågård

A&O called for a societal discussion at the strategic level, but with links and ideas anchored locally. They want to highlight the important issue of workplace learning at all levels and have it be a real concern for the labour market parties, the government, the regional actors, enterprise and the research community.

The document that summarizes the experiences of the so-called crisis announcement also formulates a series of suggestions to workplace learning stakeholders. It calls for the government to set a national vision and agenda, based on both formal and informal learning. Let the Social Fund become an innovation fund for projects and innovation in competence development and learning in working life. The regional actors are encouraged to strengthen the collaboration between the structural funds, the regional university colleges, learning centres and the education actors. The labour market parties are encouraged to prompt a dialogue about future models that meet both employers' needs for flexibility and employees' needs for employability and

security. The advice to enterprise is to see competence development and learning as key strategic issues, and thus procedures are needed to identify competence needs. The union, for their part, is encouraged to make competence development a key issue on the union agenda. The ESF Council is advised to have fewer but longer projects, to have clearer demands on ownership and a more systematic demand for the knowledge dissemination of good examples and models for workplace learning.

The researchers' own role is to translate research-based knowledge on competence development in working life and continue to provide knowledge on how to build an organization for learning.

“Our role is to increase understanding for its complexity, to clarify and create order. We will show what happens in what appears to happen, that which is under the surface, and by good examples find new ways to work with workplace learning,” Per-Erik Ellström says. ●

» These sectors must become closer.

There is currently no capacity in traditional education systems to deal with extensive competence development in the workplace, and all too often discussions on competence development and workplace learning revolves around how the training should be implemented and who should pay for what.

The question is where the responsibility should lie? With a separate organization made up of the partners? Or with a government fund? With the unions? Or you can create industry-specific collaborations?

In discussions about the future, staff in

A three-part responsibility



When fancy words about competence development at work are to be broken down into practical work, the praise is put to the test. One conflict of interest is between the individual's long-term need of development and the companies' often acute need for new competence.

Fredrik Gunnarsson describes himself as an expert on competence management, not competence development. He works with the question at Industriarbetsgivarna, a service company for four employer's organizations operating in industries such as steel, metals and chemistry.

One of the major challenges for the industries he works for is the competence management of the future. How do you get enough competent personnel in the future?

"The problem is that there are no longer any jobs where you can hire people off the streets. In general, more is demanded of the workforce today," Fredrik Gunnarsson says.

In particular, there is a need for labour in the mining industry which is going faster than for many years. For example, in northern Pajala at the Finnish border, is a company that needs to hire 1,000 new employees in the mining industry, and within a five year period it is estimated that the mining industry alone will need thousands of new employees.

Industriarbetsgivarna has therefore chosen the strategy to promote a competence elevation among tomorrow's workforce by developing a collaboration between schools, higher education and enterprise to influence young people's educational choices. The focus is on the issue of competence management, rather than competence development.

"But we believe that lifelong learning is important. The only question is who should be responsible for it? It is not obvious that it is a corporate responsibility, but the individual is also responsible for this. We want to educate our employees for what is needed in the job," Fredrik Gunnarsson says.

It may well be that it is jobs that provide great opportunities for development increase the ability to attract workers, but most important is probably still the salary, he believes.

"The mining industry knows that the need for skilled labour is long-term, and therefore the intention is to attract people

by building sustainable communities where it is possible to live well," he says.

He does not see anything negative about long-term competence development, but training in the workplace is firstly about resolving primary needs.

Fredrik Gunnarsson sees that the Social Fund can provide an opportunity for development projects, but is also sceptical of what he describes as a complicated system.

"Sure, our companies would like to get the money, but it's difficult for them to find the time or manage it. Maybe there should be a central solution. If companies want this, we will have to find solutions," he says.

After the evaluations were made by the redundancy announcement, it was noted that many positive things had happened. Fewer than would otherwise have been the case lost their jobs, and for many companies and individuals the projects meant a competence elevation. But there has also been criticism of the fact that



» many training programmes were on the company's terms.

This is what the unions want to influence through their involvement in the ESF's work. Combining the employees' and employers' development needs has been the union's intention right from the mid-1990s, when Sweden joined the EU and we got access to the structural funds. Charlotta Krafft, who works at the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations, Saco, is well aware of this. She is one of the union pioneers within the Social Fund's work and was involved from the start. The labour market parties threw themselves into the work with enthusiasm.

"It was very exciting and we strived from the start to get the Social Fund's project into a melting pot for all policy areas - education, working life and growth - all would be united.

Sectors would cooperate and it would be based on what was perceived as a

developmental need in Swedish working life, as close to the workplace as possible.

Even then there was the direction that, among others, A&O is calling for and which is about those applying for the projects analyzing and articulating their competence needs and then taking over responsibility in the long-term investments. The driving forces would be local. Charlotta Krafft describes the collaboration then between unions and employers as a partnership in the best sense of the word.

"We took responsibility as best we could and felt like we "owned" the programme and wanted to do something good together. We had a lot of conflicts with the fund, but those discussions were necessary," Charlotta Krafft says.

Among other things, Saco and LO were able to reach a consensus on the view on competence development - this would be a step to raising the level at each workplace. Everyone was to be involved, and ultimately it would affect growth.

"It was extremely good, but seems to have been forgotten. There are too few bridges between the programme periods and I have brought this up as a problem," she says.

Charlotta Krafft also want to draw attention to what she calls the gaps - that is, the period preceding a new programme period. It is seldom talked about, but it is an exciting time and it has just begun for the next programme period. That is when lobbying occurs, the policy is evaluated and the organization of

the next period is determined. The parties have one group, politicians another. Then the work is transferred into the formal system. The work for the next programme period has just begun, she says. Charlotta Krafft describes a development in which politicians have gained more influence over the Social Fund at the expense of the parties.

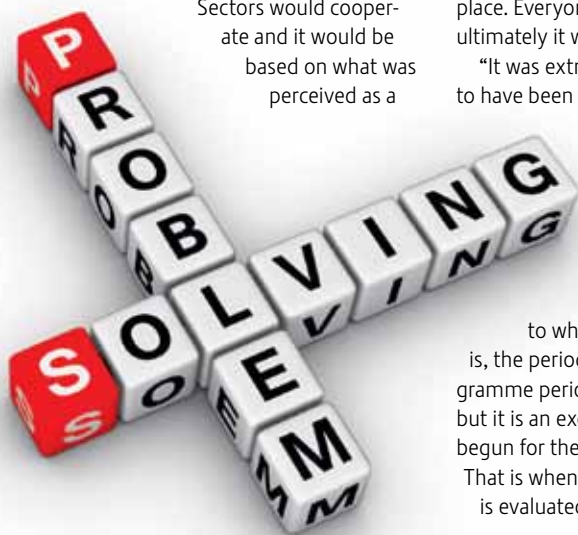
"Now we see that politics plays a bigger role," she says.

Roger Mörtvik, Socio-political Head at the Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees, TCO is crystal clear about the need to promote competence development and lifelong learning. A sufficiently high level of education is crucial for full employment, for competitiveness and ultimately for welfare. But the investment in competence development faces major challenges. Between 20 and 25 per cent of young people leave school without complete grades and have a great need for learning. Simultaneously there is a development in working life where many jobs require more and more education.

"Many will therefore find that one education is not enough for an entire working life. To be employable, one must educate and continue to re-educate oneself several times," Roger Mörtvik says.

Globalization also means that the demands on companies become tougher. It will require rapid innovation and a great ability for adjustment and renewal.

"Skilled labour is the key to this. Many smaller companies must dare to employ academics and invest in training the staff. We must compete on quality rather than



lower wages. We are also moving towards a faster turnover of jobs, and people must to a greater extent think – do I have the right education for the next job?” he says.

Roger Mörtvik is convinced that education will become the most important part of labour market policy, and that society will need to create good and fair systems that give people the opportunity for lifelong learning, both when one has a job and when one does not.

“It’s incredibly important that we build systems where the state, individuals and companies can share the responsibility for this,” he says.

Roger Mörtvik is not an advocate of the concept of workplace learning, which he thinks is a bit fuzzy. Individuals need to have both sufficiently challenging work assignments so that they can grow in their job and the education that allows them to do the job better.

“In the two parts, the parties already have a responsibility today, but it is equally important that there is a system in society that prepares individuals for the next job. It is also the responsibility of the State. The Social Fund may also play a role in that work, but for me it is still a player that is not central when I think of competence development. With so much money it should be possible to create more lasting results, but I do not think that is the case,” Roger Mörtvik says.

One of the important questions for the future is how competence development should occur for those outside the labour market. And recent developments in Europe show that there is a need to raise the question again. Donald Storrie, Head

of unit at the Employment and Competitiveness unit, at Eurofound, in Sweden often referred to as the Dublin Institute. He is concerned about how the European labour market is developing. The trend is that the growth of new jobs happens at the top and at the bottom, that is, there are more high-paying jobs that require high education and more low-paying jobs that require a low level of education.

“There is a polarization of the labour market where the jobs in the middle disappear. It could, for example, be advanced manufacturing jobs and this development often affects men. Income inequality is increasing and it is an alarming trend that threatens the entire welfare state,” Donald Storrie says.

The cause of the polarization is technical progress, which means that routine jobs are disappearing.

He sees that education is a key factor.

“It almost sounds like a cliché, but what else can you do. The question is who should pay, it is a difficult question, and the market does not seem to be coping with it. It is not always profitable to educate people, but socio-economically beneficial,” he says.

When Åsa Lindh, Director General of the ESF, summarizes the parties’ share of the Social Fund’s work, she thinks, from her position, that there is great interest among all the parties and actors. The Social Fund money means a lot for the small and medium-sized companies that develop an ability to look up and look ahead, beyond the next quarter. ESF funding is also a kind of lubricant to get more parties and actors in society to

interact more. The Social Fund has also strengthened the social companies within programme area two which is to become an important actor of reducing alienation, she sums up.

With just over half of the programme period gone, she believes that it is generally good.

“I would like to raise the level of ambition in terms of taking care of the results. There should be a thought, from the very beginning, about what happens when the project period is finished. A project must have an understanding of what one wants to achieve, a control, a project organization and an evaluation. For the next programme period, I would like to move the focus from resource exploitation to the result. At the same time, there is a difficulty in measuring results. What can be measured?” she says.

With her long experience of the Social Fund, Charlotta Krafft thinks that it is a fantastic opportunity to support people’s development in the workplace, even if there are reasons to be critical. The Social Fund’s project is a supplement to collective agreements.

“It should be invaluable in terms of growth to start from the idea that it is not only about finding employment but that competence development near the workplace is about how you view change, new ways of looking at and facing the outside world. Sometimes, that which is not quantitative is seen as worthless, but I also believe that what happens in people’s heads is important,” Charlotta Krafft says. ●



The European Social Fund in Sweden, ESF, has five national theme groups whose mission is to collect, analyze and systematize experiences from the social fund's projects in Sweden. The theme group Arbetsplatslärande och omställning (Workplace learning and adjustment to changes in the labour market), A&O, is one of them.



A&O believes that workplace learning is important in order to:

- Enable companies to survive and thrive within a changing marketplace.
- Increase profitability and efficiency.
- Enhance responsible and sustainable development.
- Raise the level of skills and competences of the workforce
- Increase the employability of people who currently lack skills and/or formal education and paper qualifications.