Approaches to work and education over the life course

A two-cohort study of men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway

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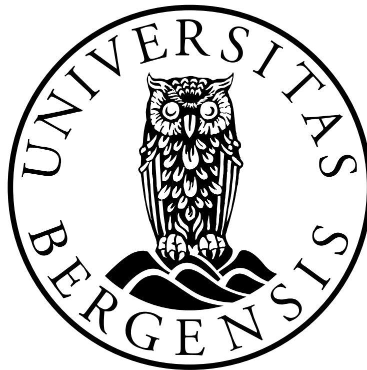

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Abstract

This thesis explores the approaches to work and education of men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway. Its focus is on how their approaches to work and education have 1) changed over historical time and 2) developed over the life course. An empirical exploration of these questions provides the background for a number of contextualized contributions to wider debates about work and education in society. The study is based on a postal survey (N=144) and 28 life story interviews, and compares two educational cohorts (skilled 1968-78 and 1978/79). By making use of life story interviews in a comparative cohort design, the project is able to relate historical changes in the relevant period (1960s to early 2000s) to developments in the lives of individuals.

The analysis shows different ways in which family background has influenced the school-to-work transitions of men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway. The cohort comparison demonstrates how this influence has become more subtle than it used to be. Practices of household work are found to be important for these men's approaches to work and education. It was for instance the context for the cultivation of a broad competence for entering into dialogue with objects. More generally, their approaches to work and education are found to have developed over the life course through a continual interplay of work *experiences*, labour market *actions* and structural *conditions*. The points that turned out to distinguish the cases from one another (with respect to their approaches to work and education) were not hinged at the level of specific occupations. The fact that they did the same type of work, *object based work*, was more important. As a whole, this thesis indicates that a process of formalization (expressed by an increased emphasis on tertiary education), has implications for the balance between types of work in society. The analysis suggests that definitions of talent and merit are becoming increasingly *narrow* to the disadvantage of those talented at object based work, as more and more opportunities and privileges are being turned into rewards for school performance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The general background of the study

This research project has its background in an observation of a *difference of perspective* on questions relating to work and education. On the one hand, the perspectives reflected in focus group interviews with young men entering into manual male-dominated occupations (Vogt 2007). On the other hand, the perspectives reflected in public debates and in much research literature. The impression from the young men was that their vocational education and training was a means of leading them, as quickly as possible, into exactly the kind of work they were motivated to do. In contrast, public debates and social research gave the impression that manual work somehow represented the knowledge of yesterday – that manual work was no longer as valuable in today's "post-industrial knowledge society" as it had been in earlier times. While the young men had no interest in "rotting in an office", the impression gained from the literature was that longer educations would lead to "more interesting" jobs. This raised a number of questions. For example: Was this type of difference of perspective somehow related to the way in which social inequalities are reproduced in society over time? How did this relate to questions concerning hierarchies and power in society?

These were some of the questions that *inspired* the current research project in its earliest stages. The project provides empirical description and discussion relevant to debates on these very overarching themes. However, this has been accomplished by focusing on a set of more specific, and thereby more *researchable,* questions. A good way to start the presentation of these *research questions* is by a brief account of the context in which the current project has its base.

The background in two different research traditions

This study stands at the intersection of two very different strands of research, both with long-lasting traditions at the Department of Sociology at the University of Bergen.

On the one hand the current project has its background in a strong tradition for research on the themes of industry, work and education. This research largely took place in a research group named AHS (Arbeidsliv Historie Samfunn/Work History Society) in the 1980s and 1990s. In a wider international context the most important theoretical point of reference for this research group, was the so called “societal effect” approach (Maurice, Sorge and Warner 1980). Consequently, great emphasis was placed on multi-disciplinary, historical, and comparative perspectives (Sakslind, Halvorsen and Korsnes 1985) and much research activity was concentrated on systems of industrial relations, systems of education/qualification, and on the relations between them. The group made significant contributions to research on a number of topics. For instance, historical developments in vocational education (Mjelde 2006, Olsen 1989, Olsen 2008, Sakslind 1998), work socialization and vocational training in industry (Michelsen 1995), processes of professionalization in technical professions (Halvorsen 1994), the collective memory and social position of yard workers (Hjellbrekke 1993, Hjellbrekke 1999), the structure of qualifications in Norwegian industry and the Norwegian system of industrial relations in comparative and historical perspective (Korsnes 1997). In later years, the research group has made contributions to research concerning culture and distinction in the upper middle-classes (Skarpenes 2007a, Skarpenes and Sakslind 2010) and to research on social mobility and elite formation (Hjellbrekke and Korsnes 2009, Hjellbrekke and Korsnes 2012). This research tradition has formed a necessary foundation for the current research project. Particularly useful has been its insistence on the historical and national specificity of relations between work and education. Another useful inspiration from this research tradition derives from its way of transcending sub-disciplinary boundaries. In other

contexts, questions concerning work and education tend to be researched more separately; in each their separate sub-fields of the discipline of sociology.

The other platform on which this project stands is a tradition of life course research, which also has long-lasting roots at the University of Bergen. This research took its starting point in studies of women (e.g Nilsen 1992, Skrede and Tornes 1983, Skrede and Tornes 1986, Wærness 1975) but has since expanded its interest to a number of different directions. The greatest strength of the life course approach for the current project lies in its sensitivity towards the *relations* between individual action taking place in people's lives, and wider structural contexts. In other words, its strength lies in its potential for relating biography and history, agency and structure (see Brannen and Nilsen 2005).

The current project has its background at the intersection of these to research traditions. It investigates a type of work and education previously studied by the AHS group, but with a perspective and approach influenced by life course research. In other words, it explores how institutional changes of the kind studied by AHS group have influenced people's lives – the *lives* of men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations.

The main research questions

This research project has been focused on the following research questions

> *In what ways have the approaches to work and education of men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway 1) changed over historical time and 2) developed over the life course.*

In order to explore these two main research questions empirically, men skilled as bricklayers, builders, plumbers, electricians, industrial mechanics, platers and

industrial plumbers were selected for investigation.[1] These occupations are among the most male-dominated in the Norwegian labour market, and they are also still the most male-dominated tracks in upper-secondary school. As much as 10% of men active in the Norwegian labour market are employed in these occupations alone. Although many jobs in manufacturing have been moved to low-cost countries from Norway (as from many other western countries), both industrial trades and crafts trades have persisted at a fairly high level, partly due to oil-related industries.

The research on these men was conducted with a very specific research design. First, a postal *survey* (N=144) was administered, and then, based on the postal survey, a total of 28 individuals were selected *life story interviews*. This procedure enabled data to be generated on two *educational cohorts*: men skilled between 1968-1978 and in 1978/79. In other words, this project has made use of *life story interviews in a comparative cohort design.* This is not unusual within life course research, but which has hitherto been quite *un*common in research on men in male-dominated manual occupations. It is this feature of the research design that has enabled the current project to produce data appropriate to address both of the two main research questions:

In order to explore the *first* of the two main research questions the use of a comparative *cohort* design was vital. This is what has enabled the current project to shed light on historical developments. The concept of cohort was developed within demography as an analytical tool for investigating social change (Ryder 1965) and has since been widely used within life course research. Because they were skilled at different times, the two cohorts had been confronted with different institutional arrangements (contexts), both in the education system and in the labour market. Empirical analysis of differences and similarities between the two cohorts has been a useful way to produce knowledge on contextual change and continuity over the historical period in question.

[1] The points in the following section will be made in greater detail (and with the appropriate references) in Chapter 2 and 3.

In order to explore the *second* of the two main research questions, the use of *life story interviews* was vital. This is what has enabled the current project to investigate the ways in which the approaches to work and education (of these men) have developed over the life course. The interviews were focused on the interviewee's experiences and thoughts concerning work and education as these had developed over the life course. In the analysis this has enabled detailed analysis of individual cases.

These two main research questions have been research simultaneously. This has been accomplished by the already mentioned feature of the research design: the use of life story interviews in a comparative cohort design. In fact, it is the dual interest both on historical developments and developments over the life course that enables the current project to empirically investigate ways in which history and biography are related (Mills 2000[1959]).

Before proceeding, it is necessary to define some of the concepts that are used in the following chapters. The concept of *approach to work and education* is defined as a person's perspectives, thoughts and motivations concerning work and education. With basis in the empirical investigation this is conceived as something that develops over the life course through an interplay between experience and action. A person's approach to work is thereby *not* conceived as a permanent feature of his/her personality, but rather as something highly liable to change through experience. This is discussed and explained further in Chapter 5. *Education* is defined here as formal education (certified by educational institutions). Likewise, the concept of *work* is used here predominantly to refer to activities that take place in paid employment. Exceptions to this rule are however found both in Chapter 4 and chapter 7. In fact, chapter 7 explores precisely the *relationship* between employment work and household work for the men in this project. This open definition of work is in part inspired by the interviewees, who used the term "work" about activities both within and outside employment. The concept of *skill* is used here in its formal sense, that is,

as denoting certain competence, attested by a certificate/diploma, and required in a specific type of job. In order to avoid the conceptual confusion which has been associated with the concept of skill (see Vallas 1990) it is not used in its wider and less formal sense (see Sennett 2008: for this type of usage). When it is people's more general (not formally certified) capabilities that are in question, the broader term competence will be used. The last concept necessary to mention here is the concept of *class*. This is relevant because male-dominated manual occupations have been termed *working-class occupations* in much previous research. In the current research project, the concept of class will be used in the same way as other concepts, in a sensitizing way (see Chapter 3).[2]

Overview and outline of the chapters

Chapter 2 gives a broad account of the context and background for the current research project.[3] The first part of the chapter makes a wide sweep in the history ideas in order to understand how processes of educational expansion have come to be so closely intertwined with notions of societal progress. It also discusses idea of Education Based Meritocracy, and accounts for some of the criticism against it. The second part of the chapter narrows the focus to, first, a review of relevant patterns of educational recruitment and social mobility in Norway, and then, to explaining some more specific institutional changes relevant to the cohort comparison in this project.

[2] Class is a difficult concept which is used in a great variety of ways (see Devine et al. 2005, Wright 2005: for useful overviews and discussions). A number of scholars have, inspired by Weber, made convincing arguments for keeping class and status analytically distinct, and warned *against* using the concept of class in a broad and unspecific way. For instance, Mills warned against using class as a *sponge word*, because**:** "…if you define it so as to make it a sponge word, letting it absorb a number of variables, then you cannot ask questions with it concerning the relations of the analytically isolatable items which it miscellaneously harbours." (Mills 1942:264). More recently, Scott has argued it is expedient for an investigation into social stratification to *analytically* distinguish class and status (although class and status will often be empirically intertwined) (Scott 1996:35). Similarly, Goldthorpe has objected to "thinking about class as some kind of umbrella concept" (Goldthorpe 2008:350). However, treating the class concept in this analytically precise way sets great demands on data, and since the current research project has not been *designed* as a study in social stratification, the concept is not used a great deal in the following text.

[3] This way of contextualizing the current project *based on previous research* has been preferred over a "traditional literature review". This is partly because this was found to be most in accordance with the research design of the project (explained in Chapter 3). This way of presenting the research project is inspired by Dunne (2011).

The chapter ends with some critical remarks concerning some currently influential epochal terms, such as “post-industrial society” “knowledge society”, that have contributed to relegate manual work as the work of the past, and as the opposite of so called “knowledge work”.

Chapter 3 describes the methods and research design of the current project. The current project has made use of *a contextualist life course perspective* with a *grounded biographical case-study approach*. The first part of the chapter explicates the rationale behind making use of this research design. The second part of the chapter is structured chronologically, as a step by step description of the research process. Towards the end of this chapter it is explained how the five empirical chapters (Chapters 4-8) explore a set of more specific research questions. These questions are empirically based *specifications* of the two main research questions, and were developed throughout the research process.

Chapter 4 examines the question: *What are the main similarities and differences between the school-to-work transitions of the two cohorts and what can this tell us about continuity and change over the relevant historical period?*

This first empirical chapter analyses characteristics of the school to work transitions for the men in this project. As in the other chapters it is based on analysis of all the cases under study, although a smaller number of cases are selected for presentation. In this chapter, 12 cases (6 from each cohort) are presented. The transitions of the *older* cohort took place in family and community context. As young men they had been expected to contribute to the household economy as fast as possible, and, an apprenticeship in a trade was an opportunity in accordance with this expectation. Often, older men would informally arrange apprenticeships for them, or a position as an unskilled labourer. At the very least their fathers would provide very clear advice: “get skilled in a trade”. In contrast, the *younger* cohort was faced with a very different context when they were to make their school-to-work transitions. They were met with a more formalized, standardized and individualized setting. Their transitions were not

conceived as a family concern. On the contrary, they were expected to make individual choices. They acted in this context by placing emphasis on making *secure choices*. At the end of Chapter 4, a threefold typology is presented. This was developed in order to differentiate the main types of knowledge that the younger cohort relied on in these choices. Older men were important in this transition context too, either as facilitators of *experience based knowledge*, or through serving as examples in context (as sources of *observation based knowledge*). The chapter indicates a persistent influence of the family in school-to-work transitions, but one that had become much more subtle than it used to be.

Chapter 5 explores the question: *How are the types of labour market action that these men have taken related to different types of experience in work situations (and to different structural conditions)?*

This chapter took its starting point in an interest in the separation of paths over the life course. The men in this project started their working lives in very similar positions (as skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway). However, over time, variation and inequality had clearly increased between them. Chapter 5 is organized around the presentation of a typology which was developed in order to understand this process. This typology distinguishes four types of experience in work situations, and four related types of action. Ten cases are used to describe and discuss these types of experiences and actions, and also, the structural conditions necessary for these actions. This analysis has a wider bearing on how these men's approaches to work and education were constituted. It shows how their approaches to work and education were continually constituted through an interplay of experiences, actions and structural conditions. The development of these men's approaches to work and education over the life course was not determined by family background, nor by fixed properties of their "personalities". On the contrary, it was through work *experience* that the cases had come to know what kind of work (and thereby what kind of education) they were most motivated for at specific times of their lives.

Chapter 6 explores the question: *What were the circumstances and conditions under which "climbing up" (upward mobility in existing work organizations) took place in the two cohorts, and what can this tell us about continuity and change over the relevant period?*

This chapter was originally a part of Chapter 5, but was made into a separate chapter when it came to be structured as a cohort comparison (unlike chapter 5). It starts with a brief outline of the four main types of further education that had been considered and pursued among the men in this project. After this, six cases are presented in order to describe and discuss the circumstances and conditions for climbing up in the two cohorts. This comparison shows both similarities and differences. For both cohorts, the action of "climbing up" was related to a motivation to take charge over the production process, and sometimes also, to a future-oriented fear of becoming burnt out. And, for both cohorts, the *timing* of further tertiary education over the life course was problematic (because of economic responsibilities). This was however a *greater* problem for the younger cohort because tertiary had become required to a greater extent for "climbing up" to take place. The younger cohort seemed to have encountered *credential barriers* more quickly, and to have enjoyed less *credential flexibility* than the older cohort. In sum, the chapter suggests that the *barriers* to "climbing up" had become higher over the historical period in question.

Chapter 7 explores the question: *How did these men perceive and spend their non-employment time, and what are the wider implications of these thoughts and practices?*

The questions analysed in this chapter were not intended to be a central part of the research project. They turned out, however, to be significant for a wider understanding of these men's approaches to work. The chapter presents an analysis of how these men spent their non-employment time, shows through this that their approaches to work transcended the boundaries of any specific occupational categories, and had their basis *not* only in the labour market. The work that these men did in their non-employment time was similar and related to what they did in their jobs. Within household work they performed a great *variety* of highly *un-specialized* work tasks which were

practical/manual in nature. They had been introduced to this type of household work through *cooperation across generations* in childhood. Particularly, household work had constituted an important context for father-son interaction and cooperation. Because of extensive practice at this kind of work over the life course, these men were not only specialists in each their trades within employment, but they were more broadly *cultivated* at *dialogue with objects* (making and manipulating things). In the course of their lives they had developed a competence for entering into dialogue with objects and this was practiced and maintained in everyday life. Some cases expressed a *strong drive to work* (an "itching" to keep busy at various creative and productive work tasks) and an *aversion against non-productive use of time* (a dislike for "idling about" or "sitting around"). The chapter also describes and discusses how this type of household work could not only be fulfilling, but also economically rewarding, through practices of *lending a hand* and *exchanging favours* with friends and colleagues.

Chapter 8 explores the question: *How did these men perceive and experience the work that they did in relation to other types of work in society, and what are the wider implications of these perceptions and experiences?*

In order to provide a set of answers to these questions it was necessary to conceptualize in some way, what was characteristic of the work that these men did (as they perceived and experienced it) in contrast to other types of work. The solution to this predicament came through the development (from the data) of a three-fold typology of types of work. In this typology the work that these men did is termed *object based work* (directly or indirectly focused on *things*). In addition, the typology distinguishes two other types of work, *analysis based work* (focused on text/ideas/symbols) and *relation based work* (focused on people). In previous research, acts of social position-taking on the part of manual workers, such as expressions of opposition against office work, have been interpreted as tensions between workers and managers, or tensions between people in manual and mental labour. Based on individual interviewee's interpretations, occupational hierarchies appeared to still be operative and powerful. However there seemed to exist within object based work a

type of mutual respect. The experiences and perceptions of the cases indicated a certain degree of *interaction, cooperation and sense of common interests* between workers and management (across occupational hierarchies) within object based work. In contrast, relations with people in analysis based work seemed to have been more infrequent and more problematic. The last section of the chapter describes what is termed a talent for object based work, which was defined in opposition to a talent for analysis based work. While talent for *analysis based work* seemed to be rewarded in schools, the talent for *object based work* seemed to suffer from a lack of an equivalent institutional backing.

Chapter 9 discusses some important and recurrent themes from the previous chapters, and synthesizes the discussion.

Chapter 2: Background and context: Progress, education and manual work

Introduction

As explained in the previous chapter, the main aim of this research project has been to provide knowledge about the approaches to work and education (over the life course) of men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway. This chapter constitutes a necessary first step towards toward this end. Its purpose is to contextualize the main research question – to indicate why an investigation of approaches to work and education among these men has been found interesting and important. The chapter is intended to serve as a general background to the more thematically focused, and empirically based, chapters (Chapters 4-8). The hope is that the subsequent chapters will benefit from this account of relevant historical context and institutional arrangements.

The chapter begins with an outline of how education, over the course of history, has become closely linked with the idea of progress. This wide sweep in the history of ideas is indebted to Kumar's (1978) book *Prophecy and progress*, and traces the roots of the link between education and progress back to Enlightenment thought. In the 19th century, the notions of progress that were linked to educational expansion were associated with expansion of general *schooling* – teaching people how to read and write. In the post-war period, however, similar notions of progress gradually became associated with expansion of the *higher* education system. Continued educational expansion came to be seen as having *continued* equalizing effects on society, an idea that has since been questioned by a number of prominent scholars.

The second part of the chapter proceeds to examine previous research more specifically relevant to the current project. First, some general patterns of educational

recruitment in Norway are discussed. The tendency in Norway, as in many other western countries, has been one of persistent patterns of educational recruitment, particularly with regard to social background. After this follows a section on vocational education in Norway. The focus here is on some institutional changes that are relevant to the cohort comparison performed in the current project. In the relevant period (between the 1960s and the early 2000s), vocational education was subject to processes of scholarization and standardization. This is related to its incorporation into the state education system, which culminated with the Reform 94 and has continued since. This reform was influenced by ideas that relate to the epochal terms "post-industrial society" and "knowledge society". In the next section, these terms are related to the notions of societal progress that were discussed in the first part of the chapter. The ideas about social change that underpin these epochal terms arguably put *higher* education and theoretical knowledge centre stage, and relegate manual work as the work of the past. Indeed, the very term "knowledge work" has come to be defined as somehow *opposite* to manual work. The final section puts the descriptive accuracy of the epochal term "post-industrial society" into question by examining some relevant statistics on the Norwegian employment structure.

Education and progress: The wider context in the history of ideas

It is widely held that ideas from the period referred to as "The Enlightenment" (1687-1789) still have a great importance on western society. At the centre of the Enlightenment movement within social thought stood advocacy of reason and rationality. The movement was spurred and inspired by innovations in the natural sciences, perhaps most notably those of Isaac Newton. Within social thought, belief in rationality and reason brought challenge to traditionalism, superstition and authoritarian political regimes. And, what is most relevant here, with the Enlightenment, the idea of *progress* became firmly established in the European mind (Kumar 1978:14). In Enlightenment thought there was a shift of focus towards the future. Until then, the "golden age of man" had been located in the ancient past.

Enlightenment thinkers were the first "ideologists of progress". They introduced the notion of stages of development, each stage leading upwards on an ascending scale (Kumar 1978:26). This image of progress was fertilized by two subsequent historical events. The French revolution planted firmly the idea that a fundamental transformation was taking place, one with great positive potential. And, from the industrial revolution … "was compounded a powerful *image of industrialism*" (Kumar 1978:48). The notions of progress fostered in Enlightenment thought were highly influential on social thought in the nineteenth century. As Kumar puts it, "Nineteenth century theorists inherited the eighteenth century idea of progress a tradition of social thinking that emphasizes whole orders and epochs" (Kumar 1978:57). This inheritance has been carried on up to our own time.

In the Enlightenment idea of progress *from* an age of superstition *to* an age of reason, a main part was written for education, and particularly its products in the form of "intellectuals" and "scientists". Scientists were thought to be those to whom one should most be looking for direction in the new "industrial" society (see Kumar 1978). Here, in Enlightenment thought, lie some important historical roots of the idea, which is still influential, that theoretical education-based knowledge has liberating effects both for individuals, and at the societal level (Lauder, Brown and Halsey 2011:23).

In the second half of the 19th century, the idea that an increase in levels of schooling in the population would bring about a more equal and democratic society became influential. An early formulation of this idea was made by the British liberal thinker John Stuart Mill, in 1859 (but the following quote might perhaps just as well have been said in a political speech of today).

> "Great as are the differences of position that remain, they are nothing to those which have ceased. And the assimilation is still proceeding. All the political changes of the age promote it, since they all tend to raise the low and lower the high. Every extension of education promotes it, because education brings people under common influences, and gives them access to the general stock of facts and sentiments" (Mill 1859, quoted in Kumar 1978:93).

In the historical context in which this was formulated (mid-nineteenth century Britain), there was established very little, if any, universal schooling, and children were widely included in the labour force. When Mill was talking about how every extension of "education" would promote equality, general *schooling* was the point in question. The goal in this historical period (late 19th century) was to improve the common good by providing all citizens with a minimum standard – most importantly, knowing how to read and write.

The "industrial image of society" that emanated from Enlightenment thought was predominant in social thought for almost 150 years, and was combined with evolutionism along the way. It was still highly influential when the 1960s and early 1970s saw an upsurge in epochal terms describing a *new* Great transformation of society. There was again, as in the 18th and 19th century, a wide spread sentiment among social theorists that society was on the brink of a new era that would exhibit fundamentally new features, and thus call for a whole new terminology. For instance, the terms "post-industrial society" (Bell 1973) "knowledge society" (Drucker 1969), caught on in this period and have, arguably, had an ever-increasing influence since. Just like the Enlightenment thinkers had felt that scientists "carried the seeds of the future within them", the "prophets" of the post-industrial society subscribed to a type of "technocratic elitism" (Kumar 1978:43). Again, a leading role in societal progress was written for education.

At the same time as social theorists were beginning to subscribe to these new images of society, many countries were undertaking policy measures towards educational expansion. By the 60s and 70s, most western countries had come a long way towards establishing universal schooling. And when basic schooling had been established, one kept raising the levels. Somewhere along the way, a shift occurred, from expansion of *schooling* to expansion of *education*. Arguably, the educational expansion at this time was not so much about improving the common good as it had been for Mill and others

a hundred hears earlier. Education was now not only considered a key tool in bringing about desired form of progress, but also, the desired forms of individual social mobility and "equality of opportunity". There was a strong faith that the education system could and would keep performing functions central to democratic societies upon continued expansion. This is related to the fact that in the affluent post-war context, the prospect of each new generation gaining higher qualifications was actually quite realistic. And also, many states, such as Norway, were in the process of building up welfare states, which were increasingly staffed by people with higher education. The general picture is that European states drastically expanded opportunities for admission to universities in these early post-war decades (Collins 2000:236). One saw the advent of mass university education and, what is most relevant here (and in Chapter 6), the "triumph" of the modern university-centred credentialing sequence" (Collins 2000:232).

Another relevant aspect of the historical context of the education optimism of the 1960s relates to the cold war context. The Russian space shuttle Sputnik had in 1957 given the USSR a lead in the race for dominance in outer space, and placed investments in science and education at the top of the Cold war agenda (Berg 1973:26). This spurred investments in education and research to increase greatly. For instance, in the US, Presidents Kennedy and Johnson launched grand progressive education policies in the late 50s and early 60s.[4] Educational expansion became a way to keep the large post-war "baby-boom" birth cohorts contained and preoccupied.

In this historical context a new wave of epochal terms were launched, attempting to conceptualize the great social changes that were taking place in new and catchy ways. The most general among these efforts was arguably that of Daniel Bell. His treatise *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: a venture in social forecasting (1973)* was to become highly influential. The same can be said about the term that Bell found timely

[4] These education policies constituted the context and background for several seminal works in the sociology of education (for instance Coleman (1966), Berg (1973) and Collins (Collins 1971).

less than a decade later, in 1980, "the information society" (1980). Both of these epochal terms maintain the Enlightenment faith in rationality and progress (Kumar 2005:31). Most notable in the current context is that Bell emphasized the primacy of theoretical knowledge and singled out theoretical knowledge as the most important feature – the source of value, the source of growth – in the post-industrial society (Kumar 2005:30). Indeed, Bell has argued that "education" is becoming "the condition of entry into the post-industrial society itself" (1973:128), and declared that in post-industrial society, "knowledge, not labour, is the source of value" (Bell 1980:506).

In his vision of post-industrial society, Bell picked up on the idea of *meritocracy*. In fact, Bell has been held to have most clearly formulated the idea of Education Based Meritocracy (for instance by Goldthorpe and Jackson 2008). The post-industrial society is, according to Bell, "the codification of a new social order based, in principle, on the *priority of educated talent.* … meritocracy is thus the displacement of one principle of stratification by another, of achievement for ascription" (Bell 1973:426, emphasis added). By implication, merits, competence and knowledge within *work,* which are not authenticated by an education credential, will become less valuable, and thus provide a more uncertain foundation for mobility in the labour market over the life course.

Several critics have pointed to problematic aspects of the great faith in the democratic functions of mass higher education that emerged during these decades. Some of these sobering criticisms have a clear relevance for the current project. One relevant criticism concerns *what* is to constitute *criteria* of merit in a meritocracy. A fundamental problem with the notion of Meritocracy has been the uncertainty about what constitutes *merit*. As pointed out by Lister (2006) many notions of meritocracy have tended to rely on "narrow" definitions of merit. Mostly, merit has been defined as *educational* merits, as suggested by Bell. For instance, a rather typical interpretation of the concept, would be to contend that society becomes more meritocratic, the more

allocation of positions in society is based upon schooling (see Hernes and Knudsen 1976:XI for an example of this).

A number of authors have pointed out the somewhat misguided nature of the idea that education *in itself* will have equalizing, liberating effect in society. Bernstein was early and influential in making this case, for instance in his paper entitled "Education cannot compensate for society" (Bernstein 1970). The work of Bourdieu and colleagues (Bourdieu 1984, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) has long constituted a pillar in this area. Another example is Thurow (1978:335) who anticipated much empirical research to come when he noted that "our reliance on education as the ultimate public policy for curing all social problems, economic and social, is unwarranted at best and in all probability ineffective". Because, more recently, and with basis in a wealth of empirical research, Blossfeld (2009:290) for instance, has noted that: "The modernization theorist's hypothesis that educational expansion results in greater equality of educational opportunity must therefore be turned on its head: In modern societies, educational expansion actually facilitates to a large extent the persistence of inequalities in educational opportunity". In short, much empirical research has questioned what has been termed Education Based Meritocracy. Goldthorpe and Jackson (2008), for instance, after reviewing a vast body of research, undercut any idea that the acquisition of educational credentials is strictly determined by ability and effort.

Many have pointed out unfortunate consequences at the individual level of widely held presumptions that an education based meritocracy exists. Bernstein (1958) was among the first to warn (over fifty years ago) that the democratization of the education system would lead to an "individualisation of failure". That is, he anticipated it would cause more people to blame their failure on their own shortcomings, and conversely, others to justify their advancement in society with reference to their successes in the education system. Similarly, Sennett and Cobb (1972:182) argued that the notion of equality of opportunity could in fact have the effect of "making everyone responsible

for their own social position". More recently, Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011:161) point out the same type of individualistic consequences: "Today, the winners in society are encouraged to see themselves as self-made and to feel little sense of obligation to the losers because the competition is judged to be fair and based on individual performance". McNamee and Miller (2009:265) sum up this type of criticism in a precise way when they say that: "the *myth* of meritocracy is harmful: it provides an incomplete explanation for success and failure, mistakenly exalting the rich and unjustly condemning the poor".

Nevertheless, despite all these objections and worries from notable scholars in social science, it seems that the idea of Education Based Meritocracy has not in fact weakened its hold in society over time. On the contrary, during the same decades as the weaknesses of higher education expansion in terms of social equalization have become apparent, the idea of Education Based Meritocracy as a fair arrangement has not only prevailed, but arguably even proliferated. If anything, recent decades have seen increasing rhetoric emphasizing that social mobility and "equality of opportunity" can be achieved through higher education, and that this is a still valid recipe for progress. As pointed out by Giddens, "education and training" continue to be somewhat of a "mantra" for social democratic politicians" (Giddens 1998:109).

Although Bell is widely credited for making the most influential case for the fairness of an Education Based Meritocracy, it was not really his idea. He picked up on the term meritocracy, like many others, from a fictional novel written by sociologist Michael Young (Young 1958)(1958) *The Rise of Meritocracy*. The intent of Young's futuristic novel had been to visualize that meritocracy could have harsh and unfair consequences. But the novel was widely misread. As he explained in an interview in 1994, the book was meant as a warning, but was "taken as a sort of blessing" (Young 2006:77). In 2001, Young (who was a former advisor to the Labour party) took issue with what he perceived as a contemporary naïve faith in the fairness of meritocracy. It is fitting to end this section with a quote from Young's criticism.

> “With an amazing battery of certificates and degrees at its disposal, education has put its seal of approval on a minority, and its seal of disapproval on the many who fail to shine from the time they are relegated to the bottom streams at the age of seven or before. (…) They can easily become demoralized by being looked down on so woundingly by people who have done well for themselves. It is hard indeed in a society that makes so much of merit to be judged as having none. No underclass has ever been left as morally naked as that.“ (Young 2001).

Persistent patterns of educational mobility in Norway

After this very general discussion of context in the history of ideas, which has largely transcended national boundaries, the following sections are more focused on the Norwegian context. The following sections will outline first some general aspects of educational recruitment and mobility in Norway, and then go on to focus on the more directly relevant institutional arrangements in Norwegian vocational education and training.

Norway was a pioneer at establishing state financed comprehensive schooling (of 7-years) in the mid-war years. After World war II, the further improvement and expansion of schooling was high on the government agenda. When it came to schooling and education there were no alternatives to the state-run institutions. This was characteristic for Norway in contrast to most other western countries (Lindbekk 1975:214). In 1947, a state-funded institution that would provide reasonable student loans was established (“Statens lånekasse for studerende ungdom”)(Hernes 1975:6). In 1969, 9-year comprehensive schooling had been established. After this had been achieved, a period of rapid expansion within secondary and tertiary (“higher”) education began. In part, this expansion was related to the coming of age of the large post-war “baby-boom” cohorts.

In Norway, as elsewhere, this great educational expansion has had significant implications for patterns of social mobility. There is a consensus among mobility researchers that the most important driving force for changes in patterns of social mobility is changes in the employment structure – what is often termed structural mobility (Ringdal 2010:195). Changes in the Norwegian employment structure in the post-war period have been substantial. Most notably, the growth of welfare state has created many professional and managerial jobs. This is a central backdrop for the great increase in educational levels in the post-war period.

Although comparative research has consistently put Norway among the "more open countries" with respect to social mobility (Breen and Jonsson 2005), social inequalities in recruitment to higher education have proven remarkably persistent (Hansen 2005b, Hansen and Mastekaasa 2003, Hjellbrekke and Korsnes 2012), as is the case in other western countries (Breen 2004, Breen et al. 2010, Shavit and Blossfeld 1993). In other words, the social position of parents still has a strong influence on the social position of their children. Recent research even indicates that social inequalities in the recruitment to Norwegian higher education has been *increasing* in the most recent decades (Hansen and Wiborg 2010, Næss and Støren 2006:67). The effect of parental income on the educational level attained has *increased* from cohorts born after 1960 - (¨Hansen and Wiborg 2010:207). In other words, the use of the Norwegian state financed higher education system appears to be increasingly skewed in relation to social background. While more are accessing – access is becoming more stratified.

As Ramsøy (1977:106) noted in her now classic study of *Social mobility in Norway* (for cohorts of men born 1921,1931,1941), rising rates of mobility have tended to be unequally distributed in the population. This finding is consistent in more recent studies as well. For instance, in an analysis of educational mobility (for cohorts born 1950-65), Hjellbrekke and Korsnes (2004) found that there were "two zones of relatively strong intergenerational mobility" – at the top and at the bottom of the educational hierarchy. In other words, the most likely to end up with similar level of

qualification as their parents, were, on the one hand, the children of those with much education, and, on the other hand, the children of the those with little education. In sum, one can say that Norway is no exception to the general rule in western countries: Short distance mobility is rather common, but long-distance mobility is still seldom (Ringdal 2005, Ringdal 2010:196). Or, put differently, in keeping with the general tendency towards upward structural mobility in the post-war context, children often attain higher qualifications than their parents, but generally not a great deal higher. And here it must also be noted that this type of structural mobility implies that over time, *higher* levels of qualification are required for achieving *similar* social positions. Collins has famously termed this process "credential inflation" (1979, 2002).

Patterns of social mobility and educational recruitment in Norway have also been highly gendered. The ways in which they are gendered is different in different parts of the education system. Within higher education, the balance in the student population shifted in the early 1980s. Up until then, men had been in the majority among students. Since then, a gendered pattern opposite to the old one emerged. This can be illustrated by inspecting the proportion of male and female 19-24 year-olds in higher education. In 1980, 11% of both men and women in this age group were in higher education. Today, 37,6% of females in this age group are in higher education, as opposed to only 25,1% of the males.[5] However, while drawing attention to this, it is important also to note that this female majority in higher education is so far evident at the student level. Women still constitute only 22% of university professors.

It is well documented that, whatever it is that influences recruitment to different types of work and education, makes its influence *early* in life. In Norway, as in other countries, the transition to upper secondary education at age 16 is held by leading mobility scholars to be especially *decisive* with respect to educational recruitment patterns (Hansen 1997, Hansen 2005a). *This* age is decisive because it has (for some time) been the point at which compulsory schooling has ended and young people have

[5] Statistics Norway 2011 (Sosiale indikatorer: Tabell 4: Utdanning)

been divided between vocational and academic tracks of upper secondary education. Because of its direct relevance for the current project, the following section discusses some of the institutional arrangements that concern vocational education in Norway.

Vocational education in Norway

The social background of those who have become skilled in male-dominated manual occupations appears to have been stable well before these routes of qualification were firmly included in the state education system.[6] This is in accordance with the general pattern of stability in educational recruitment and mobility (noted above). For example, in a review of mobility patterns in Norwegian industry during the period 1970-1990 , Korsnes (1997:448) observed that recruitment to industrial work overall had been stable. Almost 80% of employees in the industry came from families where the main providers had done the same type of work. This was in accordance with Ramsøy (1977:159), who had demonstrated that those who were recruited to industrial work in the cohorts born 1921,1931,1941 were also predominantly sons of industrial workers (and partly also sons of farmers/fishers). This type of stability is also indicated by data from a representative survey from 1999, which showed that around 50% of those employed in "manual occupations", had fathers from the same occupational groups (Hjellbrekke and Korsnes 2006:89).[7]

But what has tended to motivate those who have entered the industrial trades and the craft trades? Research on this point indicates a *stability* over historical time for successive cohorts (Olsen 2004:180). The pattern as far back as research on the subject goes has been that they have wanted "something practical" (see for instance Arnesen 1997, Bjørnstad 1997, Edvardsen 1985, Mjelde 1988, Olsen et al. 1998, Olsen and

[6] This is far less investigated than recruitment to higher education, and the patterns are thus more inconclusive. In general, recruitment to industrial trades has been more investigated than recruitment to craft trades.

[7] It should be mentioned here that in a historical-comparative perspective, the category "skilled industrial worker" in Norway has been in practice more of a wage category than an educational category (see Korsnes 1990: and , Michelsen 1990: for discussion on this point) .

Seljestad 1997, Vogt 2007). This apparent stability has constituted an important background for the current research project, and has contributed to motivate a research design sensitive towards processes both over historical time, and over the life course.

The older cohort in this study (who was skilled between 1968 and 1978, and born between 1948 and 1952) completed lower secondary school around the mid-1960s. At this time, compulsory schooling was 8/9 years[8] and many left school at age 15 to find work as unskilled workers or apprentices. This was possible due to an absorbent youth labour market, and also the fact that Norway was the world's largest seafaring nations at the time. Young men, in particular, could quite easily find employment in the Norwegian fleet by mustering onto a Norwegian owned ship. In the craft trades, the general pattern for recruitment at this time was that apprentices were recruited without much regard to educational background (grades etc), and sent to apprentice school on a part time basis in the course of their apprenticeship (Høst 2009:132). With this arrangement, the theoretical parts of the training were commenced in evening school, one or two nights a week. In other words, the practical and theoretical parts of the vocational tracks were highly integrated, and largely organized in parallel, resembling the pattern in German vocational education.[9] But in contrast to Germany, Norwegian vocational training was characterized by a *low* degree of age segregation (Høst 2009:129).

In the 1960s, the use of apprenticeship system was in decline and under threat. It was widely viewed as an anachronism within education policy (Mjelde 2006, Olsen 2002). Part of the reason for this seems to have been that the apprenticeship system was

[8] The "youth school" (lower secondary school) reform in 1965 complicates this point slightly for this cohort. Because of rural/urban differences regarding the implementation of this reform, then, depending on year of birth and place of residence lower secondary school for the older cohort spanned two or three years. It was varyingly called framhaldsskole or ungdomsskole ("youth school"), depending on the municipality. Upper secondary education at the time ("realskolen") had a distinct theoretical emphasis, insufficient capacity (Lindbekk 2001:65). And, it should also be mentioned that pupils here were not eligible for state sponsored student loans.

[9] After 1971 there was also an arrangement that enabled workers to become skilled (take their apprenticeship test) on the basis of extensive work experience (these were termed "paragraph 20 candidates"). And even before this, some arrangements allowed one to take a merely *practical* apprenticeship test, and thereby escape theoretical/written testing altogether (see Korsnes 1997:443).

largely labour market based, and that the education optimism of the period brought about an eagerness to *centralize* all types of education in the *state*-administered education system. The 1976 reform of upper secondary had intended to incorporate vocational training, but was not implemented as planned, and in practice had few consequences for the vocational tracks (Mjelde 2006:51). In fact, the old labour market based apprenticeship arrangement (lærlingeordningen) experienced a revival in the late 1970s and in the 1980s. Many young men continued to leave school and get apprenticeships without preparatory schooling in upper secondary school. As late as 1982-84, for example, 50% of those who started apprenticeships, went directly from compulsory schooling (lower secondary school) into apprenticeships (Mjelde 2006:43).

In the late 80s, there was a renewed policy interest in the apprenticeship arrangement (lærlingeordningen) which culminated in its incorporation in state education system by Reform 94 (Mjelde 2006:43). The younger cohort in this project (who were skilled in 1998/99 and born 1978/79) were the first to experience the effects of this Reform. An important part of its background was the high rates of youth unemployment associated with the economic recession in the late 1980s and early 1990s. With this Reform, everyone born after 1978 got the statutory right to three (of four) years of upper secondary education (videregående skole) of either vocational or academic type. The Reform involved only minor changes to the academic tracks, but involved some quite fundamental changes to the vocational tracks. For example, with the arrangements which were in place shortly *prior* to the reform (the early nineties) there were 113 introductory vocational introductory courses. With the Reform 94, these were merged and reduced to 11 (Grunnkurs). Another main change was that the vocational tracks were now to be arranged according to a 2+2 model. The general model for vocational tracks was now two years of preparatory schooling, followed by two years of apprenticeship. And, also, in addition to trade-specific subjects the two years of school based learning would include more general academic subjects. Previously, preparatory schooling, where it had existed, had been only one year and involved a higher proportion of *practical* work shop training. The use of the school workshops was

considerably reduced with Reform 94 (Mjelde 2006:58). General subjects were, on the other hand, increased in the vocational tracks. The rationale behind this was to stimulate transferable skills with the goal of creating more labour market flexibility. A main thought was that general knowledge (in effect, academic knowledge) would be more flexible and transferable than more specialized (trade-specific, practice based) knowledge (see NOU 1988).

Vocational education in Norway had long been highly gender segregated (see Mjelde 1999). This tendency has continued after Reform 94. Since the reform, the pattern has been that approximately half of all 16 year olds have entered a vocational track, and the other half have entered an academic track. The proportion of males in the vocational tracks has remained at approximately 55%. But, more tellingly, approximately 70% of the young men in these vocational tracks attend courses with more than 90 % male-dominance.[10] The share of females in the female-dominated courses is almost as high. This makes vocational upper secondary school the most gender segregated part of the Norwegian education system (Støren and Arnesen 2003:151). This is related to the fact that the Norwegian labour market is highly gender segregated compared with other countries (Birkelund and Petersen 2003, Nermo 1999, Puchert, Gärtner and Höyng 2005).

On this basis one could say that the gender segregation in the vocational tracks was only made more *visible* with the Reform 94 (through the production of standardized statistics). Age segregation, on the other hand, clearly *increased* markedly with the reform. In fact, this has been forwarded as one of the main consequences of the Reform. It restructured upper secondary education after age-based divisions – and adults were effectively “shoved out” (Høst 2009:130). After R94, the pattern has been that almost 99% of each birth cohort *start* upper secondary school at age 16 and that around 70 % complete within 5 years (Nygård and Sandbu 2011). It thereby involved a considerable age-standardization of the school-to-work transition.

[10] This calculation is made in Vogt (2008) based on data from Statistics Norway.

Increased hegemony of school based learning and knowledge

Several scholars have interpreted Reform 94 as the culmination of a process that had begun earlier and has continued since: scholarization of learning, or more specifically, scholarization of vocational education and training in Norway. Mjelde (2006:201), for instance, has argued that the changes in the education system in the recent decades have made the old contradictions between mental and manual labour more visible and pertinent. In a related manner, Halvorsen (1995:113) has noted that school-based learning gained almost hegemonic power as opposed to practice based learning. Likewise, Olsen (2002:65) has argued that "Norwegian education has built on a hegemony of theoretical and general education and upon a predominant tradition which sees the classroom as the optimal place of learning". In short, it seems safe to say that vocational education and training in Norway has become increasingly school-like, particularly with R94, but also with the more recent reform, Kunnskapsløftet, in 2006. Vocational education has been expanded over time, but the institutional autonomy of vocational education has continually been challenged by the stronger inclusion in the state education system that this expansion has entailed (Olsen 2008).

The set of ideas underpinning the Reform 94 have also been analysed extensively by Skarpenes (2007b). Of especial interest in the current context is that Skarpenes took note of an influence from Bell's theory of post-industrial society, and Lyotards theory of postmodern society upon the Reform 94. Skarpenes (2007b:201) pointed out that these gained a stronghold in Norway during the late 80s and early 90s. And indeed, there are a number of similarities between Bell's vision of society (outlined above) and the Governmental report that lay the foundations for Reform 94. At a time when illiteracy had been defeated, new frontiers were carved out for Norwegian education policy. Now, one began to talk about combatting "scientific illiteracy" (vitenskapelig analfabetisme), and the danger of having "an uninformed public" (et uopplyst

folk)(NOU 1988:10). Further, the report put great emphasis on theoretical knowledge. Its first passage was entitled “The knowledge explosion”, and contends that: “ The growth of knowledge has become one of the most important driving forces in society. Great investements in research, development and education drives society forward. … New knowledge is constantly unsettling the fundamental technologies … These changes can only be met with knowledge based skills” (NOU 1988:9).[11] Whereas this 1988 report used its own term “the knowledge explosion” to conceptualize this type of presumably epochal shifts, later government reports have turned to the very similar (and more common) terminology about “the knowledge society”. Government reports in the 2000s appear to be riddled with the term, and the contentions about different types of work in society that come with it.[12]

Manual work in “post-industrial knowledge society”

Epochal terms such as “knowledge society”, “education society” “information society” and “post-industrial society” have flourished in recent decades.[13] However, the descriptive accuracy of these terms is mostly taken for granted. The criteria presumably used in order to perform this type of epochal classification are seldom specified. Arguably, these classifications rely upon a definition of knowledge as *theoretical* knowledge. For example, Drucker (2001), who coined the term “knowledge society” in 1969, simply defines “knowledge workers” as “people with considerable theoretical knowledge” and adds that theoretical knowledge can be acquired “only through formal education”. In this perspective, “knowledge workers” and “manual workers” seem to be mutually exclusive categories.

[11] In the original Norwegian version: “Kunnskapsveksten er blitt en av de viktigste samfunnsformende krefter, drevet fram av store investeringer i forskning, utvikling og utdanning. … Ny kunnskap forrykker stadig de bærende teknologier, forvandler arbeidsmarkedene… endringen kan bare møtes med kunnskapsbaserte ferdigheter”

[12] For example, Stortingsmelding nr. 44, 2008-2009 “Utdanningslinja”.

[13] For a critique of the vagueness of this kind of epochal terms, see Anderson (1998), and for a discussion of the influence of “epochalisms” in the British context, see Savage (2009).

Similarly, the fact that industrial mass production increasingly takes place in non-western localities (low cost countries) seems the main cause for why many find the term “post-industrial” a fitting label for western economies. A more useful alternative to this commonly used epochal term seems to be the term de-industrialization. This allows the given development to be conceptualized as a *process* and as a question of *degrees*. With this perspective, the degree to which processes of de-industrialization actually involve a decrease in manual work can be questioned. As the historian Cannadine (1999) has pointed out with reference to the British context, the majority of manual workers never worked in factories, nor for all their lives (quoted in Thiel 2007). It seems clear that many types of manual work simply *cannot* be performed abroad. As pointed out in an anecdotal way by Crawford (2006:8) “If you need a deck built, or your car fixed, the Chinese cannot help you”. Crawford (2009:28) has also argued that: “The economic rationale so often offered, namely, that manual work is somehow going to disappear, is questionable, if not preposterous”.[14]

If criteria for making use of the above mentioned epochal terms are seldom stated, they are even more seldom debated. A classic and simple example of how easy it is to put these types of epochal terms into question is provided by Heilbroner (1974):

> “it would be hasty to jump from the fact of a higher stock of embodied education to the conclusion that that the stock of ‘knowledge’ of the society has increased *pari passu*. For along with the increased training undergone by the labour force has come an increase in the compartmentalization and specialization of its skills, best exemplified by comparing the wide-ranging capabilities of the farmer with the much more narrowly defined work capabilities of the office-clerk” (quoted in Kumar 1978:227).

Despite such obvious room for questioning, images of society wherein so called “knowledge work” is the norm have proliferated in both public and sociological

[14] Another aspect of the post-industrial thesis concerns technological change. Consequences of technological change have not been a main focus in this study. However, it could be noted that the type of technological change that was mentioned in the interviews was not primarily of the kind that *replaced* skilled labour (such as robots, information technology etc), but of the kind that would made work tasks easier and less straining on the body (a new type of tool). It can also be mentioned that gaining mastery of this new and technologically improved machinery did not seem to require more education, but rather, basic instruction.

discourse in recent decades, mostly with opaque empirical backing. The fact that such obvious room for questioning is not often utilized can perhaps be understood with reference to the old link between education and progress, outlined at the start of the chapter.

Mythical and actual changes in the employment structure

In the Norwegian context, the novelist and sociologist Seljestad has argued that manual work has fallen victim to a type of invisibilization: "One of the things we as a society have grown blind to, is that there still exists working people and a working class in this country"[15] This observation is difficult to validate empirically, but in public discourse one can find evidence which would corroborate it. Not seldom can one see commentators in news-papers write things like: "the new world of work has no use for men with low levels of education. They have neither the accuracy that is demanded in information work nor the social skills that are important in care work"[16] This type of commentary implies that male-dominated manual work is now a thing of the past. Statistics can have a sobering effect in the face of such epochal visions. The following section briefly examines some statistics concerning relevant changes in the Norwegian employment structure. [17]

As indicated above, the presumed disappearance (or at least marginalization) of manual work is often tied to a presumed disappearance of industry. However, the number of people employed in "industry" has only been reduced with approximately

[15] In Norwegian: "Ein av dei tinga, vi som samfunn, nærmast er slutta å sjå, er nettopp dette, at det framleis finst arbeidsfolk og arbeidarklasse i dette landet" (Klassekampen 19/08-11).

[16] In Norwegian: "Det nye arbeidslivet … har ikke brukt for menn med lav utdannelse. De har verken den nøyaktighet som kreves i informasjonsyrkene eller de sosiale evnene som er viktige i omsorgsyrkene" (Egeland i Dagbladet 21/04-2007).

[17] It has not been possible here (or necessary for the current purposes) to produce a more *exact* overview of people employed in manual work in Norway. Obviously, the number of people employed in manual work (for instance) depends upon the definition as well as the available data to categorize according to the definition. Were such an overview to be produced, it would be useful to question the fact that physically demanding female-dominated work has tended to be regarded not as manual work, but as service work, or care work.

30% during the last 25 years (Hjellbrekke and Korsnes 2012:90). In addition, it should be noted that a number of relevant changes are suited to cause confusion upon dealing with this type of historical developments in the employment structure. The numbers above may actually exaggerate the degree of de-industrialization. In a discussion commissioned by Statistics Norway, Farsethås (2008) pointed out that the employed "in industry" should be seen in relation to the fact that many jobs that were previously counted under the label "industry" are now classified as service work. This relates to the spread of practices of outsourcing and downsizing. Jobs such as cleaning, accounting, catering, transport and maintenance work were previously often integrated parts of the industrial companies. Farsethås argues, therefore, that it is *misleading* to present highly aggregated statistics as evidence for a simple story of industry yielding to services (Farsethås 2008:50). Changes relating to the *construction* of categories and classifications can serve to *exaggerate* processes of de-industrialization.

A main reason why the degree of de-industrialization has been rather limited in Norway (in contrast to some other western countries) relates to the stronghold of the oil-related industries. In its infancy (1962-71), the industry employed mostly foreign workers, but this changed in its second phase (1971-85). The historian Sejersted has termed this period The Great Norwegianization ("den store fornorskingen") of the Norwegian oil industry. This process was aided by the fact that Norwegian policies *favoured* Norwegian sub-contractors. Consequently, during this period, the oil industry made extensive use of competence developed in the well-established and advanced ship building industry. However, in 1986, the Norwegianization was given up, much due to a fall in oil prices. The management of the oil industry was "de-politicized", cost-cuts were emphasized and foreign producers were welcomed back in (Sejersted 1999).

The rationale for the sampling in this project is explained in the next chapter. However, in the current context it is relevant to provide information on *how many* people are actually employed in the occupations in question. Generally, 17 % of men

active in the Norwegian labour market are employed in “crafts and related trades” (håndverkere). The male-dominance in these occupations is (still) over 95%. Further, over half of these are employed in the specific occupational categories most relevant to the current project. That means that the occupations that the men selected for inquiry in this project had been skilled in employ 10% of all men active in the Norwegian labour market.[18]

Closing remarks

The above discussions have provided some useful background for understanding why the main research question pursued in this project was found interesting and important. That is, why there has been a need for the inquiry which is presented in the following chapters, despite the existence of all the previous research discussed above.

A main point in first part of the chapter was that education has been historically linked with notions of progress. This link seems to enjoy a continued influence, and can clearly still serve a number of different (ideological) purposes. It seems relevant as a background when manual work is sometimes portrayed as a thing of the past, as requiring very simple (if any) knowledge. An awareness of this historical background has certainly been useful for the current inquiry into questions concerning approaches to work and education over the life course among men in male-dominated manual occupations.

An important point to be drawn from the second part of the chapter concerns various types of persistence over historical time. On this point, previous research indicates that men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations are typical cases of the more

[18] These calculations are based on data from Statistics Norway for the year 2011, published in 2012 (Yrkesdeltaking 01, tabell 3: sysselsatte etter kjønn og yrke. Årsgjennomsnitt 2011) and (Registerbasert sysselsettingsstatistikk 2011). In 2011, 131.334 persons were employed as bricklayers, builders, plumbers, electricians, industrial mechanics and platers. This constitutes approximately 5 % of everyone active in the labour market and 10% of all *men* active in the labour market.

general pattern. Recruitment has been stabile with respect to social background. The young men recruited to be skilled in male-dominated manual trades have consistently aimed for “something practical” as far back as research on the subject goes. A need for more knowledge concerning this type continuity and change, over historical time and over the life course, is an important reason why the current project has been designed in order to understand temporal processes. The very specific research design, which is explained in the following chapter (Chapter 3), is what enables the empirical chapters (4-8) to demonstrate and discuss various types of continuity *and* change (over both historical time and over the life course) on an empirical basis. The project has applied what is termed a *contextualist life course perspective with a grounded biographical case study approach*. The procedures of inquiry signified by this label are explained in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Methods and research design

> “ `Method’ has to do, first of all, with how to ask and answer questions with some assurance that the answers are more or less durable. ‘Theory’ has to do, above all, with paying close attention to the words one is using, especially their degree of generality and their logical relations. The primary purpose of both is clarity of conception and economy of procedure, and importantly just now, the release rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination”
>
> (Mills 2000[1959]:120)

Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design of this research project. It also describes how the data in this project have been generated and how they have been put to use in the analysis. In other words, how the data collection and the data analysis have been conducted. This is central for understanding and assessing the content of all the subsequent chapters, and for evaluating the merit of the research project as a whole.

The chapter starts with explaining the basic features of this research project. The project has employed what is termed a *contextualist life course perspective with a biographical grounded case-study approach*. The first section begins to un-pack, piece by piece, what this rather long and wordy label is meant to signify. An important point here is that this research design invites making use of a range of different perspectives and concepts (not giving privilege to any particular theoretical apparatus). The second part of the chapter is concentrated on a fairly detailed description of the research process. Here, the more detailed methodological decisions that have been taken are described and discussed. This second part is structured chronologically, and thereby attempts to explain the research process step by step. It explains the sampling rationale, the conducting of the survey, the use of survey-data, the sampling for the interviews, the conducting of the interviews, and, finally, a longer discussion explaining the different analytical procedures that have been put to use in this project.

A contextualist[19] life course perspective with a grounded biographical case-study approach

A main inspiration behind assuming a ***contextualist*** perspective in this project has been the work of C. Wright Mills. Mills suggested a conception of social science as "the study of biography, of history, and of the problems of their intersection within social structure" (2000/1959:134). Although Mills did not conduct biographical research himself, he famously recommended, in his book *The Sociological Imagination,* that the relation between history and biography be made a central topic in sociology. More generally, Mills wanted to emphasize how social action was embedded in in historical and institutional contexts. This was in partly inspired by Mead who emphasised the processual nature of the self and how social action is constituted *in the present,* and partly inspired by the more continental tradition of Weber, Marx and Mannheim (see Gerth and Mills 1963[1954], Mills 1939, Mills 1940, Mills 1960).

From this contextualist perspective follows a goal of providing contextualised answers to the research questions. With this perspective, questions of *structure* and *agency* are approached in terms of *layers of context* which can be specified empirically with reference to the given type of *action/agency* in question. This type of specification of context has required that the project make use of a rich array of data and information. In addition to making use of existing data (such as that available from Statistics Norway), this project has generated original data by making use of two different methods of data collection: first a postal survey and then, life story interviews.

[19] The epistemological foundations of this contextualist perspective is in accordance with what Mjøset has termed "the contextualist approach to social science" (see Mjøset 2009). This position *defies* the often presumed dichotomy between realism vs. constructionism. It would require much space, and extend beyond the purposes of this dissertation, to account for all the epistemological debates potentially relevant for this project. It suffices here to state that the epistemological position assumed in the current project is in accordance with the "contextualist approach to social science" as outlined by Mjøset (2009) and, more specifically, with previous work that has suggested a combined approach to the use of life story data, emphasising *both* the social/historical context *and* narrative aspects concerning how stories are told (Kohli 1981, Nilsen 1994, Nilsen 2008).

In accordance with this broadly Mills-inspired contextualist perspective, the project applies a ***life course*** approach. This represents the particular *type* of contextualization that has been pursued in the current project. Life course research is a body of research that crosses several disciplinary boundaries, and is especially well-established in psychology, demography and sociology. Elder (et al 2003:10) defines the life course perspective as “a theoretical orientation that guides research on human lives within context”. His classic study *The Children of The Great Depression* (1974) was conducted at a time when much social research aimed to produce knowledge that presumably transcended specific contexts. Elder’s research constituted a persuasive critique of this type of search for universal (that is, a-historical) knowledge about human lives. This was achieved by an empirical demonstration of how the *same* historical event (the great depression) had influenced individuals very differently depending on differences in their chronological age. The implication was that research concerning human lives should be designed in a ways sensitive to the relations between historical time and age. Since this classic study, the body of life course research has grown, and Elder has been among those to forward it as a suitable “translation” of Mills’ programme of contextualization into appropriate research practice (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2003).

The way in which placement in *time* is specified is perhaps the most distinctive feature of life course research (Mayer 2004). The question of *how* lives are embedded in history is approached by placing emphasis on specified types of temporality – historical time and biographical time – and on the relations between them. In other words, the influence on historical context upon human lives is investigated by stressing the *timing* of various events in the life course of individuals.

An important conceptual tool for the performance of this type of contextualization is the concept of the *cohort*. The first to elaborate the analytical potential of this concept in the social sciences was Norman Ryder (1965). Ryder defined a cohort as: “the aggregate of individuals who experienced the same event within the same time

interval" (1965:845) and argued for its potential in the study of social change. Ideally, the concept of the cohort enables different *types of influence* on individuals to be specified in a precise way – arguably, in a *more* precise way than that provided by alternative concepts.[20] The differentiation of influence deriving from age, cohort and period have since been a pillar in life course research. However, notably, estimation their "effects" (relevance) is always provisional since age, cohort and period are *necessarily* confounded (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2003:9).[21]

Importantly, the great emphasis on historical context in life course research does *not* imply that individuals are viewed simply as "*products*" of their context (Mayer 2004:180). On the contrary, life course research can serve to *accentuate* the ways in which different types of *action* take place "within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance" (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2003:11).

The approach to data collection and data analysis in this project can broadly be termed ***grounded***. This does *not* mean that the project has strictly followed the procedures suggested by those who first launched the term "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Contrary to more "strict" varieties of grounded research, both the *main* research question and the sampling rationale in this project were developed based on a close reading of much previous research. However, decisions as to what were to be the more specified research questions (the exact focus of each of the empirical chapters), were made based on what were considered the most interesting and important issues emerging throughout the empirical analysis. In accordance with this grounded

[20] The term "cohort" is related to the term "generation", and the two are often confused. Both terms refer to placement in historical time, but this commonality does not make them equivalent. The concept of generation has largely been abandoned within life course research due to its "multiple meanings" and the related "conceptual confusion" (Alwin and McCammon 2003:24). As Elder et al (2003:9) have put it, the concept of generation has a more "loose connection to historical time" than cohort, which invites a "more precise historical placement". Here it should be mentioned that Mannheim's concept of generation bears more affinity with the concept of cohort than other concepts of generation (because kinship bonds are not central).

[21] The standard terms "age effect" "cohort effect" and "period effect" are very technical in nature, designed for research making use of large scale datasets. In a project like this one, it is more appropriate to point out when "age is relevant", "period seems relevant" and so on.

approach, the data has served as a guide in determining which parts of the existing research literature were relevant and useful.

The methodological approach of this project can be termed ***biographical***. A biographical account is defined here as "a story told in the present about a person's experiences of events in the past and her or his expectations for the future" (cf. Nilsen 1997). With a biographical approach to data collection and data analysis the context of the social phenomena investigated *in biographies* is important, because it captures a personal interpretation and meaning. This is *one* way of investigating how social action is related to experience in different historical and institutional contexts. In particular, a biographical approach was considered ideal for the current project because (as explained in the previous chapter) its interests lay both with processes of historical change, *and* in processes of change taking place *over peoples life courses*. A goal of the project has been to provide knowledge on the relation between these two types of process – that is, the relation between history and biography. In accordance with this, the project has made use of biographical interviews, or "life story interviews". The life story interview has been forwarded as an ideal instrument for relating lives and social change (Bertaux 1981, Thompson 1981).

Finally, in the analysis, each interviewee has been analysed as a "case". This is why the approach can be termed a ***case-study*** approach. Cases were selected *purposively* based on a number of very specific criteria. These criteria set the boundaries for what the interviewees are treated as cases of men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway, during specified periods. The project is thereby in keeping with approaches to case studies that have emphasized that cases must be cases *of* something (Gomm, Hammersley and Foster 2000, Ragin and Becker 1992). This type of sampling can be termed both systematic (Gomm, Hammersley and Foster 2000) or alternatively, theoretical (Corbin and Strauss 1990:9). The sampling is the first thing to be explained more closely in the following account of the research process.

The research process

The sampling

In keeping with the contextual life course perspective, cases were selected based on a comparative cohort research design. The cohorts chosen for study in this project are two *educational* cohorts: two cohorts of men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway. They were skilled during the two periods 1968-78 and 1998/99. This meant that they had about thirty years between them in terms of age (born 1948-53 and 1978/79). They were 30-31 and 55-60 years old at the time of interviewing.[22]

The rationale behind these cohort based sampling criteria was to facilitate a comparison that could produce knowledge on processes of continuity and change in the education system and in the labour market. The older educational cohort approximates the large post-war "baby boom" cohorts. They were skilled around the time often considered to be the "height" of "industrial society" in Norway (1970), and were approaching the end of their working lives at the time of research. The younger educational cohort was chosen because they were the first to experience the institutional arrangements installed by *Reform 94* – the most wide-ranging reform in upper secondary education in Norwegian history. During the period that had elapsed since their apprenticeship tests in 1998/99 up until the point of research, they had acquired work experience of a substantial duration.

[22] A note on access: For the oldest cohort, names and birth dates of the men who passed their apprenticeship test (*fagprøve*) in Bergen during the years 1968-78 were available at *Fylkesarkivet i Hordaland*, *Statsarkivet i Bergen* and from EBL (*Energibedriftenes Landsforening*). For the youngest cohort, names, birth dates and educational information were registered in an electronic database of *Hordaland Fylkeskommune*. This information was made available through application to *Fagopplæringskontoret*. Provided these names and birthdates, contact information was retrieved from *Folkeregisteret*, through application to *Sentralkontoret for folkeregistrering*. As the project included storing of personal information, it was reported to *Norsk Samfunnvitenskapelig Datatjeneste* (NSD) were it was approved before data collection started (Case number: 18955/2/KH). The wider time span of the older cohort was chosen because the age-variation for taking such tests was wider in this cohort.

The specific *types* of education (trades) chosen for sampling in this project were, as mentioned, ones that provide skills for certain male-dominated manual occupations. In order to compare like with like, the sample was restricted to trades that required formal skill certificate (trade diploma)(fagbrev) for both cohorts. From the craft trades (håndverksfag), builders, plumbers, bricklayers and electricians[23] were selected, and, from the industrial trades, industrial mechanics, platers and industrial plumbers were selected. The criteria of being male-dominated was set by the proportion of men/women that the trades had in upper secondary school. These trades all *still* recruit well over 95% men (measured at the project onset in 2007).[24]

The survey

Following these principles of sampling, a postal survey was first administered to 273 individuals. This constituted the *total population* which matched the sampling criteria in the local Bergen region. The delimitation to people whose apprentice-ship tests were registered in the city of Bergen was set for practical reasons. It was necessary to limit the geographical scope of the research project. This geographical limitation is however not held to have any major theoretical implications. The population under study was still mixed in terms of rural/urban background. Their training had often been undertaken in adjacent rural areas although their apprenticeship tests had been registered in the city of Bergen.[25]

[23] Electricians were included in the initial sample, but had to be excluded for reasons related to lack of access. For the other trades, the records of those skilled as electricians in the older cohort, were not stored in the state archives (*Fylkesarkivet i Hordaland* or *Statsarkivet i Bergen*). This was not the case for the electricians. The organisation entrusted with these records, EBL (*Energibedriftenes Landsforening*) was contacted, but requested a payment for cooperation that was irreconcilable with the financial limits of the project. Men skilled as electricians were thus excluded from the sample.

[24] It was not a specific goal of this project to produce knowledge about the situations and perspectives of the minority of women in these trades. However, out of the 273 persons who matched the sampling criteria, 2 were female. These were in the younger cohort, and were among the ones who did not reply to the survey.

[25] Also, the Apprenticeship law of 1950 (Lærlingeloven 1950), under which the older cohort received their certification, had only been fully implemented in urban areas because trades and industry in rural areas were not always capable of assuming the responsibilities that the law entailed (Høst 2008:50).

Response rates to surveys have been dropping in recent decades. The tendency in Norway is the same as in other countries (see Savage and Burrows 2007). For this reason, the survey in this project was made relatively short (one page), with the goal of producing a high response rate. This strategy worked well. The final response rate was 44% [26] Among the 144 who replied to the survey, 63 % marked off that they were "willing to be interviewed at a place and time of their choosing". The older cohort was more often willing than the younger cohort (79% in the older cohort and 46% in the younger cohort were willing to be interviewed).

As the questionnaires were returned, the results were plotted using statistical software (SPSS). This enabled a range of descriptive analyses to be carried out. This included overviews of number of job-shifts, current occupation, "title" in job currently held, duration of job currently held, length and type of further education pursued, type of employment contract, their family status, parents' occupation, number of children (see Appendix 1). This information provided a useful addition to more general information about such matters, provided for instance by *Statistics Norway*. It served to enhance the understanding of the relevant context – to map the terrain in a way that was not possible on the basis of existing official statistics. The survey data is thus in many ways at an intermediate level between official statistics and the interview data. The main purpose of these descriptive analyses was to facilitate sampling to the interviews. Therefore, in most instances they are not presented.[27] When they *are* presented, they are used to contextualize the analysis based on the interview data.

[26] By comparison, this is substantially *higher* than the response rate to a *longer* survey that another research project administered to a largely equivalent group. A recent research project on people skilled in the late 1990s noted a low response rate (26%) which was reported to be *especially* low in mechanical trades (Hagen, Nadim and Nyen 2008:9).

[27] In terms from Mills one could say that these descriptive analyses of the survey data were found useful in the "context of discovery" more than in the "context of presentation" (Mills 2000[1959]:222). Mills was inspired by Reichenbach on this point.

Based on these descriptive analyses of the 144 survey responses, some respondents were selected to be interviewed.[28] In this selection, an equal number of interviewees were chosen from the craft trades and the industrial trades. And further, within each type of education (skill), some who had pursued further education (if any) were selected. Likewise, some who had changed occupation, and some who had remained in the same occupation, were selected. Some who had changed jobs many times and some who had remained in the same work place their whole working life. And so on. In sum, one could say that sampling decisions at this stage were "designed to represent relevant kinds of heterogeneity within the population" (Foster, Gomm and Hammersley 1996:66).

The interviews

The interviews were conducted over a period of one and a half years. For practical reasons (researcher paternity leave etc.), they were conducted during three shorter periods: October-December 2008, October-November 2009, and March-April 2010.[29] The interviewees were contacted by the telephone, and were given the opportunity to choose the location of the interview themselves: their work-place, their home or somewhere else (a suitable room in the Sociology Department, a café etc.). Most preferred to be interviewed in their homes. They were also given the opportunity to choose a suitable time, and most interviews were conducted on weekday evenings. The interviews lasted between 1.5 hours and 3.5 hours, but most were around 2.5 hours.

[28] Those whom were no longer in gainful employment (according to their survey responses, due to illness, disability, early retirement etc.) were not selected for interviewing. This was because the research interests of the project concerned not only retrospective accounts of *approaches to work and education*, but also present perspectives and thoughts on future opportunities and constraints.

[29] The project was not designed to evaluate the impact of the financial crisis. The project was started up and designed during the autumn of 2007. It might be added here that in comparison with most other European countries, the crisis has had much less impact on the Norwegian labour market (so far). As of October 2012, the unemployment rate in Norway was 3%, the lowest in Europe. This is strongly related to the stronghold of the Norwegian oil industry.

The interviews were conducted by following an interview-guide. The set of questions asked to the two cohorts were very similar, only with slight differences pertaining to the questions about family life and the activities of their children. It was made clear before the interviews that the topical interest of the interview was predominantly on *their* experiences with, and thoughts on, work and education, but that they were free to bring up anything that came to mind along the way. The interview guide was structured by a strategy of directing interviewees to particular periods of their lives (time frames) in different parts of the interview[30] After some introductory general questions about their present work situation, they were asked questions about their working lives *from* their apprenticeship tests up to the present. After this, they were asked questions about their activities/thoughts during childhood *up until* apprenticeship. Then followed a more general section on their *present* lives, and, finally, questions about their thoughts on the *future*. The rationale behind this *time frame interview structure* was to start with topics that were assumed to be relatively easy to talk about, such as their current job and their employment trajectories, and postpone themes that *could* be difficult to talk about, like childhood and family, until the later stages of the interviews. This was in accordance with a more general goal in the interview process; to encourage the interviewees to talk in long stretches at a time – to not interrupt their narratives more than necessary. In cases where this predesigned temporal time frame structure was perceived as an obstacle to the narratives of the interviewee's, the interview-guide was approached in a more relaxed way, as "check-list".

A general challenge in the interview situation was to establish a climate of trust. Communication between two people in interaction can be easy, or it can be more strained. This is also the case in an interview situation. A main goal in the interview situation was to establish a climate in which the interviewees were *comfortable* with telling about their experiences and thoughts. For this reason, topics and questions that

[30] This approach was favoured over giving the interviewees the freedom to cover their whole life stories in an unstructured way, as is the practice with some other approaches to the use of biographical methods (see for instance Wengraf 2001).

were experienced to reduce the comfort-level, and the level of interviewee-interviewer trust, were avoided.[31]

The impact of various social differences between interviewee and interviewer were subject to wide-ranging debates about reflexivity in social science in the 1980s and 90s, often under the heading of researcher "reflexivity". One topic here was consequences of social differences between interviewer and interviewee (concerning class, gender, sexual preference etc). On this point, Strauss (1955:336) was likely among the first to note that "the interview is a conversation between the classes". Although this is certainly debatable as a general claim, in the current project, there was certainly a type of social distance between interviewer and interviewee. This was very likely noticed also by the interviewees, and *could* have affected the data production in a number of ways. It could for instance explain why *some* of the interviews got off to a rather slow start. However, even in these interviews, the passages of uninterrupted interviewee talk always got longer slightly into the interviews. Especially, a number of specific follow-up questions (probes), which were designed in the course of each interview, seemed to function as a means of establishing a climate of trust. It could also be mentioned that several prominent scholars have held this type of social distance (between social researchers and the people under inquiry) to have several *positive* consequences. For example, Schutz (1944) and Simmel (1971) have argued that the role of "the stranger" could in some ways be an advantage in the analysis of social phenomena.

The basic structure of the interviews was the same in all the interviews, but following from the fact that analysis was an inter-related part in the whole research process, the content did change slightly over time. As the number of interviews accumulated, so did the knowledge gained from them. This knowledge was incorporated into the

[31] The interviewees were for instance *not* asked to produce precise accounts of wages or school grades. And, for the same reasons, questions about the gendered division of labour in the home were more prominent in the first interviews, but were toned down in the later interviews. The interviewees often seemed un-interested, if not un-comfortable in talking about such matters. The impression was that *that* was not what they had signed up for.

following interviews. Questions were modified, and probes in one interview could be informed by knowledge gained from another, and so on. Assertions developed as data collection progressed and were sought verified or qualified in subsequent interviews, and were thereby revised and developed further. In this way, the analysis is not only based on interview transcripts, but the analysis has also been developed through the act of interview*ing*. After 28 interviews the decision was taken to end data collection. This was based on a combination of practical reasons and signs of analytical *saturation*[32] (see section on Analysis below).

The Analysis

Methods of data collection, such as those described above, in *themselves* have very open epistemological implications, and are not exclusive to a particular perspective or approach. This point has been stressed in the mixed methods literature (Greene, Caracelli and Graham 1989, Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003), and also with specific reference to life story interviews (Bertaux and Kohli 1984). Like other types of data, data from life story interviews can potentially lend themselves to many different analytical uses. This means that specifying which method of data collection is used immediately raises questions on *how* it is used. The function of a type of data in a given type of knowledge production is in no way clear without further specification. The following section aims to describe and clarify (as far as possible) how the analysis in this project has been conducted.

In accordance with the perspective and the approach of the current project, analysis has not been restricted to the last phase of the research process. Analysis was decisive already in the research design phase, in the act of reading previous research. And, as

[32] The concept of saturation is from Glaser and Strauss (1967). In the present context, it was taken as a sign of saturation when the added value of each new case (interview) seemed to be of decreasing value *for providing answers to the research questions.* As argued by Bertaux (1995), very specific sampling criteria are an important precondition for achieving saturation in life history research.

already indicated, analysis was an *integral* part the data collection. However, when this is pointed out, it should also be noted that each phase of the project has relied on different *modes of analysis*. The questions in the interview guide were of a different *order* than the analytical questions asked to the *interview data as a whole*. The former type of questions were directed towards producing information on the life and thoughts of each individual interviewee, whereas the latter have been directed towards producing answers to the research questions of the whole project.

After the interviews were conducted, the audio recordings of the interviews were fully transcribed. Then, the interview data was analysed guided by the project's main goal of providing contextualised answers to the main research questions. The following sections will therefore attempt to specify how contextualisation has been performed (was strived for) in the analysis of this project. This question is important because it seems, as pointed out by Mjøset, that "Contextualisation as a research craftwork (is) underrated in the community of social scientists" (2009:64).

This project has followed an approach to the analysis of biographical interviews similar to that described by Brannen and Nilsen (2011). With this approach, three elements were considered especially important in each biography: "the factual events in the person's life; the meaning these have for him or her; and the way the story about them is told." (2011:609). All these elements in each biography were interpreted with reference to the different layers of context within which the lives of the interviewee's had taken place. In other words, the interviewee's actions, meanings and narratives were interpreted in light of the social context in which the interviewee was situated.

In addition to these modes of analysis inspired by life course research, data have been used in this project to provide "rich", or "thick" empirical descriptions of cases in context. When this has been done, the "set of questions being asked" has served as a "guide as to how thick a description should be, or rather where a description needs to

be thick and where it does not" (Hammersley 2008:67, expanding on Geertz). The concept of structure has been discussed in terms of *layers of context* relevant to the cases (see Brannen and Nilsen 2011:609). This stands in contrast to approaches that conceptualize structure in terms of "principal declarations of elementary particles" (such as micro-macro terms, see Mjøset 2009:49). Conceptualizing social structure in this way (as layers of context) allows for questions of structure and agency to be treated at a high level of specificity – as *empirical* questions. Another way of saying this would be to say that a main goal of the project has been to demonstrate *specific* linkages between conditions, actions and consequences in each specific case (Corbin and Strauss 1990:11).

As mentioned above, one of the goals of this project has been to provide an understanding of continuity and change with reference to the main research question. In doing this, the project has needed to rely on retrospective accounts. There are a number of important epistemological issues related to the use of this type of data. Within quantitative research there has been much discussion on issues such as "memory bias" (Manzoni et al. 2010) and "the reliability of recall data" (Dex 1995). These issues have relevance in qualitative interview research as well (see for instance Gittins 1979). In this project, specifically, the use of retrospective accounts has been considered especially carefully upon *comparing* biographical data from the two cohorts. Due to the age difference, the two educational cohorts were at very different life stages at the time of the interviews. One could say that the *present* from which the cohorts were invited to *recall* the past, differed systematically due to their age differences. Because, according to Mead (1964), the past can only be reconstructed from the perspective of the present

"When one recalls his boyhood days, he cannot get into them as he then was, without their relationship to what he has become; and if he could, that is if he could reproduce the experience as it then took place, he could not use it, for this would involve his not being in the present within which that use must take place" (1964:336)

"If we had every possible document and every possible monument from the period of Julius Caesar, we should unquestionably have a truer picture of the man and of what occurred in his lifetime, but it would be a truth which belongs to this present, and a later present would reconstruct it from the standpoint of its own emergent nature" (1964:337)

And, what is more, Mead emphasized the *way* in which a past event is recalled in a given present, is highly related to the future. In this perspective, the chief reference of any present -and thereby of any account of the past – is the emergent event (Mead 1964:332).

Comparison as an analytical procedure has long been considered central to sociology. For instance, Durkheim regarded the comparative method as "the only one suited to sociology" (quoted in McKinney 1969:7). Likewise, a main strategy of Weber was to conduct "comparative analysis of comparable units" (Gerth and Mills 1946:64). In the current project, the cohort comparison has been the main axis of comparison. It is the very specific sampling procedures (described above) that have *constituted* these two cohorts as "comparable units". However, the cohort comparison has not been the *only* comparison important to the analysis. In addition, the project has relied on a more general comparison across all the cases. This was a less structured kind of comparison, and its central feature was the search for similarities and differences between the cases. With respect to some of the research questions, *other* differences between the cases turned out to be more important than the cohort difference. It is for this reason that analytical chapters 5, 7 and 8 are *not* structured as cohort comparisons.

A specific type of comparative analytical strategy important to the current project has been *typologization.* In accordance with the general contextualist perspective, typologies have been "maintained, revised and improved by updating of cases and addition of new cases" (Mjøset 2009:64). A number of typologies have been developed from the data. These have functioned as analytical constructs to help analyse the data. According to the differentiation developed by Elman (2005:297) the

typologies developed in this project are *descriptive* in nature (as opposed to *explanatory* or *classificatory*). The analytical procedures in this project have not been formalized, as in some strands of grounded research (such as Glaser and Strauss 1967). The process of typologization has been a continual part of the more general analysis process.

More generally, the project has made use of concepts from previous research in a *sensitizing* way (Blumer 1954). This is in accordance with the grounded approach of the project, by which the analysis has been as data-driven as possible. The use of concepts in a sensitizing way was helpful in the continual balancing act between building upon previous research, and limiting the preconceptions that follow from doing so. As Ragin has noted "Strong preconceptions are likely to hamper conceptual developments" (1992:6). The main goal of making sensitizing use of existing concepts has been to make as much *analytical use* of the data as possible. As such, this use of concepts is inspired by Charles Peirce's slogan "Do not block the way to inquiry" (quoted in Skagestad 1981:30). With this approach, ideally, each concept should have *earned* its way into the study through demonstrations of its relationship to the phenomenon under investigation (Corbin and Strauss 1990:9). Thus, the analysis has not driven by a commitment to (or especial interest in) any particular theoretical apparatus.

The question of generalization has long been much debated within the qualitative research community. Indeed, its alleged failure to produce generalizable findings has been one of the most prominent criticisms of qualitative inquiry (Hammersley 2008:32). The position taken on this question in the current project is that there exist several different types of generalizability of research findings (see Gobo 2009 for an overview)**.** *One* of these relies on statistical representativity. This type of generalizing typically requires large datasets and, often, a *probability sample* drawn from a larger population. This type of generalization has *not* been pursued in the current project. The survey was sent to the total *population* of cases matching the criteria, not to a

probability sample. Decisions as to what constituted the appropriate number of cases were based on a non-probabilistic logic. That is not to say, however, that the number of cases required was arbitrary. For example, three cases, would most certainly not have sufficed for the analytical purposes of this project. But the point here is that this numerical criteria is not based on probability but, rather, on case specification. A fairly large number of cases (28) proved necessary to be able to distinguish what were general *patterns* and *tendencies* (for the cases under study) from what was individual level variation.

In case study research, *systematic* case sampling has been held to enhance generalizability (Foster, Gomm and Hammersley 2000:106). A decisive point in this regard has to do with sampling criteria. In fact, Gobo concludes his critical review of generalization practices in qualitative research by noting that "few cases may suffice. Provided they are chosen carefully" (Gobo 2008:210). In accordance with this, within life history research, Bertaux (1981, 1995) has argued for rigorous sampling criteria.[33] As a consequence of the highly specified sampling criteria, the cases in this project can be analysed *as* cases of men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway, in the given periods. The cases here are individuals (as opposed to for example groups or institutions, see Gomm, Hammersley and Foster 2000:3).

The general rationale behind the type of systematic (or theoretical) case sampling can be said to be one of *specification*. This is in accordance with the contextual perspective of the project. Because, according to Mjøset, in the "contextualist strategy of generalization … specification and generalization are not opposites" (2009:53). Further: "The contextualist position is committed to explanation of single cases by means of comparison with other cases. The dual purpose is better specification of the original case and development of contextual generalizations. But these generalizations emerge through the analysis of specificities." (Mjøset 2009:48). This goal of

[33] According to Bertaux, life histories can serve as an "excellent discloser of underlying socio-structural relations" (Bertaux 1981:36), provided they are chosen from a specified "sector of society" (Bertaux 1995:72) or a specific "social milieu".

specification is why each chapter sets out to "describe and discuss" the data that have relevance for the question asked.

In accordance with this procedure of continual specification through comparison, in the current project, cases have been *specified* not only through the sampling criteria, but also in the analysis process more generally. As explained above, the key instrument in this further specification has been the continual comparison of cases. Likewise, the practice of providing "rich", or "thick" case descriptions in the *presentation* of the data, has served to *specify* the cases. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, then, it is in the procedures of case specification, that the generalizing potential of this research project lies. It is through careful specification that contextualized answers to the research questions have been developed from the data, and likewise, it is in this careful specification that the key to the *potential* transferability of the findings lie.

The presentation

The empirical chapters in this thesis (Chapters 4-8) are structured in different ways. However, their structure has been established by a *similar* procedure of analysis. The analyses that are presented in each of these chapters all started with very general and open research questions ("what are the main tendencies in the data concerning x"). After this, the data were scrutinized in order to determine with a greater accuracy (specify/narrow down) what conclusions could be drawn in each chapter. Through this procedure, the research questions themselves developed over time, through a process of dialogue with the data. The questions that are stated at the beginning of each empirical chapters (Chapters 4-8), can therefore be considered as *empirically based specifications* of the two main research questions of the project (see Chapter 1).

Based on analysis of all the cases (the whole body of collected data) it was determined which inferences could be drawn, and the chapters were structured according to these findings. However, all the cases are not presented in all the chapters. *That* would enable only brief characteristics of each case to be presented, and hence, the case presentations could not have been *specified* to the desirable degree. Rather, a manageable number of cases have been selected for presentation in each chapter. These were cases that were found to demonstrate and highlight central elements from the analysis of the whole dataset, *and* to provide rich contextual description (and thereby specification) relevant to the research questions described and discussed in each chapter. An overview of which cases are presented in the different chapters can be found in Appendix 3.[34]

In the presentation of the cases, authenticity and anonymity were found to sometimes collide. In these instances the principle of anonymity was given priority and, consequently, a number of identifiable characteristics have been omitted, or altered to an equivalent alternative. The interviewees are referred to by fictitious names and the case descriptions are sometimes deliberately unspecific on points such as: name and nature of businesses, geographical locations, exact occupations of siblings and parents etc. Information on family members is only presented where it is found to be relevant for the discussion, and *not* to be in conflict with the principle of anonymity.

[34] The interview excerpts that were selected for presentation were translated from Norwegian to English by a bi-lingual translator, a native speaker of British English.

Chapter 4: Changing school to work transitions

Introduction

This chapter takes as its departure point the persistent patterns of social mobility that have been demonstrated in previous research. More specifically, the aim is to enrich the understanding of the apparent stability in recruitment to male-dominated manual occupations (see Chapter 2). Previous research has provided invaluable overviews of mobility patterns, but little as to how and why such structural patterns are maintained at the level of individual action. The cohort comparison in this chapter brings out how the two different structural contexts have provided different opportunities and constraints for individual action.[35] This analysis has some implications for understanding the role of the family in processes of social reproduction across generations. The chapter explores the following questions: *What are the main similarities and differences between the school-to-work transitions of the two cohorts and what can this tell us about continuity and change over the relevant historical period?*

The following chapter will use the term "choice" in a sensitizing way (Blumer 1954). That is to say, it will be used when found appropriate for describing the data, and not without pointing out the context-determined boundaries within which choices are made. Educational choices are analysed as closely related with other aspects of the transition from school to work. The concept of *transition* is from life course research and has been useful in bringing to the fore the context in which choices (and other forms of social action) have taken place for the two cohorts. A school-to-work transition, as it is conceived here, does not refer to a specific point in time, but to a

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[35] This dual concern with both opportunities and constraints in these transition contexts is partly inspired by Giddens' argument that structure has both enabling *and* constraining features (Giddens 1984:169). Or as Blau stated it ten years later "structural opportunities and constraints are complementary" (1994:8). This dual perspective is helpful in order to avoid telling either a simple story of opportunity/progress, or a simple story of constraint/worsening.

process that needs to be analysed in light of historical context (Hareven 1978, Jones and Wallace 1992).

The first part of the chapter describes and discusses the main tendencies from the older cohort concerning the research question explored in this chapter. The first three cases (Arvid, Karsten and Helge) have been selected to show how the transitions of the older cohort took place within a family and a community context, and especially how the informal influence of older men in the community was often decisive. The next case (Geir) is used to show how the financial concerns of often large, one-income families was relevant when the transitions of the older cohort were conceived of as a family matter. Geir, for instance, was expected to contribute the household economy as fast as possible. The next case (Atle) shows the kind of advice the older cohort had gotten from their fathers: "get skilled in a trade!". Atle's reflections on the likely background of this advice indicates an underlying process of structural mobility. Finally, the last case from the older cohort (Arne) brings attention to some enabling features of the transition context of the older cohort. Namely, the way in which it could allow for trying out different types of unskilled jobs, and provide opportunities for proving one's talents through work practice.

The second part of the chapter describes and discusses the main features of the cases from the younger cohort concerning the question explored. This is accomplished by presenting another six cases. The first case (Rune) shows a phenomenon which seems to have been more common in the younger cohort than the older cohort – school-tiredness. In a brief discussion, this is related to some specific institutional changes and what may be termed a *sentencing* approach to school. After this introductory case, the presentation moves on to describe and discuss the main impression with respect to the transitions of the younger cohort. The main impression was that, in comparison with the older cohort, the transition had become formalized, standardized and institutionalized as a question of personal choice. Three cases (Roger, Magne and Steinar) are used to show how the younger cohort responded to this situation by a

concern to make what is termed *secure choices*. The final two cases show the kind of knowledge these *secure* choices tended to be based upon. This discussion brings forth a typology which distinguishes three main types of knowledge according to their value/priority in the educational choice situations of the younger cohort. The concluding discussion sums up the differences and similarities between the cohorts transition contexts and discusses some implications of these findings.

The transition context for older cohort

Transitions in a family and community context

The transition from school to work for the older cohort was embedded in a family and community context. This has become evident through the comparison with the younger cohort. Very often the fathers of the older cohort played a key role in arranging the transition for their sons. This type of arrangement resembles what Young and Willmott (1957), in their classic study of working class life in a London estate, called a “speaking for system”. In this system, boys were assisted upon labour market entry by older men who would “put in a good word” for them. The arrangement also resembles what Mills termed “fixing a man into society” (Mills 1951:237). The power and responsibility of older men in the community, most notably the fathers, in arranging the school to work transition for the older cohort in this study, is clear from the first three cases presented (Arvid, Karsten and Helge).

Arvid: skilled as a bricklayer, born 1950

Arvid grew up in a central part of Bergen. His mother was a housewife and his father was employed as a salesman in a carpet store in the centre of town. He had one brother. Arvid left school at 15 (in 1965) and had dreams of signing on to a ship and seeing the world for a few years, and then perhaps becoming a truck driver like his uncle, who drove for the local brewery. As Arvid says: “As a boy I dreamt of driving a

great big truck and driving it for great distances". This plan was however abruptly terminated when his father informed him one day that he had arranged an apprenticeship with a local mason (murermester), an acquaintance of the father. The matter had been settled without Arvid being consulted. This is how Arvid recounts his father:

Arvid	you're to start up with Arnesen, I've had a word with him, you can start Monday.

It is interesting that this is very similar to data on recruitment to the British car industry from the same historic period. One of the interviewees quoted by Thompson (1988:53) recalled: 'me dad got me a job at the Alvis. . . . The old man says, "You're at work tomorrow", and that was it.' This, together with the above mentioned parallel with Young and Willmott's (1957) research, suggests that this was a *period* specific arrangement that to some extent transcended national borders.[36] However, Arvid is an extreme (atypical) case with respect to this arrangement as he is the only case where this type of paternal practice as guide in the school-work transition took place in command-like form. A more moderate variation on the theme is provided by the case of Karsten.

Karsten: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1949

Karsten grew up in a central part of Bergen. His father was a machine control operator (maskinist) at sea and was hardly ever at home (according to Karsten, in retrospect)[37]. His mother took care of Karsten and his brother, and also worked from home as a seamstress for a local producer of fur coats. His five year older brother was a sailor for

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[36] The arrangement at least transcended the border between Britain and Norway. This arrangement for the older cohort might be related to more general questions concerning the *authority of fathers*. When Arvid was asked if he did not protest against his father *commanding* the course of his education-work transition, he explained that "I never protested what my father said, until, I guess, the late 1960s". By then Arvid was well into his apprenticeship and they disagreed about membership in the EEC.

[37] Such cautionary remarks will be left out of the text where they are considered to be obvious. For instance, as in this case it is obvious that the judgement that the father "was hardly ever at home" refers to Karsten's version of what happened, as he recalled the past and performed his account of it in the interview, at the age of 61 etc. Thus, it is not a researcher assessment of how much the father was at home.

a few years and then got an apprenticeship as a jeweller through some contacts that his father had. When Karsten had completed 8 years of schooling, it was his turn. He was secured an apprenticeship thanks to a neighbour who vouched for him at a local ship engine manufacturer.

Karsten	I could start as a prentice down at (a local shipyard), just down the road, if the people from our street who knew me could *put in a good word for me*. Well, we weren't exactly on best of terms, they'd kick up a fuss when we played footy on the green and, you know, that sort of thing. But they put in a good word for me anyway, and I started my apprenticeship.

In other words, when the transition was not arranged by his father, who was absent at sea, other informal contacts were decisive. This indicates that we are not dealing with a strict family based system pr se, but more precisely, an informal system based on assurances in the form of trust and honour in the local community. And also, the references to social control performed by neighbours suggest a fairly tight knit community. Notably, this seems to have been a system of *men*, in which older men would vouch for the younger. When father did not perform the paternal role in this “speaking for system” (Young and Willmott 1957:97), other older men in the community could fill his role. In Karsten’s case it was performed by neighbours in an urban community (“down the road”). In the following case, the case of Helge, the role as guide in the school to work transition was performed by an uncle.

Helge: skilled as an industrial plumber, born 1952

Helge grew up on a small farm on a remote island as one of 7 siblings. His mother tended to the home and the small farm. His father was at first a fisherman but started as a self-employed unskilled builder after having children. Helge’s only older brother had started working with their father, but this was not an option for Helge: “there wasn’t room for me there… it was normal back then for builders who built houses to work two and two”. When it was time for Helge’s transition from school to work, at age 15, he got an apprenticeship at a shipbuilding factory in Bergen. This was several

hours travel from his parents' home, but the company would provide him with the necessary housing as a part of his contract.

One of Helge's uncles had earned a lot of money lobster-fishing during WWII and used it to pay for an education as graduate engineer (sivilingeniør) in Trondheim. This upwardly mobile uncle was decisive for Helge's transition from school to work. The following quote shows how his uncle advised his parents, not Helge himself:

Helge	it was my uncle, who was working then as an engineer down at (a shipyard) in (a city), who put the idea in my mum and dad's heads that I ought to start down at the yards.

His uncle had reliable knowledge of the fact that there was a great demand for workers in the Bergen ship yards at the time. He knew that there was "a lot of activity in the shipyards in Bergen at the time, that it was quite easy to get a job". This expanded the radius of Helge's perceived opportunity structure, and thereby illustrates a more general point: how knowledge received through family and community relations in many cases was decisive in the formation of perceived opportunity structures. The following quote from the interview with Helge, enriches the understanding of the role of knowledge in this transition context, and also shows (again) how Helge's transition from school to work was conceived as a family matter.

Helge	… well when you left secondary school, then you knew you had to find some work. You had to do something. Right? And, I think maybe sixth form was mentioned. But I think my dad, well he had the sea in his veins like, a fisherman who went ashore, became a carpenter. And, what with my mum being a housewife, well going on to sixth form seemed a bit flash, you know, and it cost more and they couldn't really see that it did the kids who went there that much good. Right? So it was, well, pretty obvious really, we had to find me a trade sharpish like.

An important point in this passage concerns the spreading of transition-relevant knowledge. Helge's parents, "they didn't really see where those who went to realskole (an academic track of lower secondary school) ended up". Given their highly rural place of residence, his parents most likely did not interact much with people who had

attended, or sent their kids to, upper secondary school. However, they did interact with the uncle, who had first-hand experience from the shipbuilding industry. The centrality of knowledge attained through interaction and practice is central to the chapter and will be discussed in relation to several other cases. The point from Helge's case that will be pursued further now, is his mention in the passage above that realskole "cost more money". The male breadwinner family in which he grew up was not capable of providing for all these children any longer than what was strictly necessary. This kind of economic context seems to have had implications for norms of conduct, or put differently, for what kind of action was expected of the older cohort. As Helge said "when you went out of lower secondary school (framhaldsskolen), you knew that you had to find something to do". This indicates the importance of certain economic aspects of the transition context for the older cohort which will explored further in the following section.

The household economy: the transition as a family matter

When the transition from school to work was arranged in a family context for the older cohort (as evident in the cases above) this is very much related to financial matters. Bringing about a successful transition from school to work seems to have been highly relevant for the *family economy* as a whole. This is important for understanding why it was perceived of as a family concern and not as primarily an individual concern. It was a question of strategic allocation of often scarce family resources and thus best not left to the discretion of 15 year olds.

This relates to the historical context of the 1950s and 60s. The period is often referred to as the house-wife period (husmortiden). Most of the cases in the older cohort came from one-income families. The fathers were mostly low-level, low-skill workers in crafts, industry, sales, transport or fishing/farming. Most mothers were house wives. These families seem to have had what could be described as "stretched" household economies, and this has clearly been an important background for why the older cohort

were expected to *contribute* to (or otherwise alleviate) the household economy after finishing compulsory schooling. The following case, the case of Geir, provides a rich description of the type of consequences this could have for the school-to-work transitions of the older cohort.

Geir: skilled as a plumber, born 1950

Geir grew up in a semi-urban area close to Bergen. His father was a sailor on a ferryboat operating in the fjords of western Norway, and was only at home one evening a week. His mother ran the family and its finances and raised 8 children (in Bergen, where they had no kin). Geir mentioned that there was not money for any education. Upon probing, he explained how his school to work transition was limited by the family economy.

K	But this situation … that your family couldn't afford to give you an education, have you ever wondered what you would have done, if money was no object?
Geir	Yeah well let me put it this way, when you were young then, you couldn't rely on your parents, they didn't have the means to send you off to some school or other. So that sort of idea wasn't bobbing around in your head, cause you knew that … well, there was no point in thinking about it, we didn't have that sort of money. So it was a case of finding yourself a job, paying your way. Right? That's just how it was in those days. So when you got to 15, well you had to get your ideas sorted, get by on your own. …you couldn't mope around at home and not lift a finger. To put it plainly. You had to pull your weight and … well, get on with your life.

Geir had not even considered schooling past the mandatory level ("there was no point in thinking about it"). It was out of the question because of the costs it would potentially have to put on the family economy. These cost were not *directly* related to expenses (high tuition fees) but to time and financial support. Geir considered it as his responsibility to relieve – and certainly not put further strain – on the family economy as soon as possible. The course of his school to work transition was clearly not just a matter of Geir's "choice" but a matter relevant to the family as a collective.

After he completed his 8-year schooling, Geir's father got him a job as an engine operator (motorman) on the ferryboat that he himself worked on. Geir held this job for two years, until he was 17, but then left it because it was "too monotonous… you get tired of covering the same distance on the fjord every day (laughs)". In other words, for Geir, work experience as an unskilled worker helped him determine what kind of work he did not want. (This point will be discussed further shortly, after the presentation of the case of Arne) He saw an ad for a position as a plumbers' apprentice in the newspaper, which fit well with his approach to work at the time:

Geir	Something where I could use my hands, that much I knew. I mean, I wanted to be something, and to do something where I could work with my hands. That much I knew, but whether I should become a plumber or a carpenter or something, maybe an electrician, I mean, as far as that was concerned, I didn't have the faintest. I mean, it was just pure chance that it turned out that way. Could just as easy have become a car mechanic as a plumber, it was pure bingo, in my case anyway. But I liked to, you know, tinker with things, take them apart and put them together. I was certainly good at taking things apart (laughs). At least that 's what they said when I was a kid.

What he is describing here is a type of *openness within limits*. He was sure about going into a crafts trade (håndverksfag), but had no strong opinions about which trade. This type of high intensity preference *for* male-dominated manual work, and low intensity preferences *within* male-dominated manual work was also found in Vogt (2007), among seventeen-year-olds whom were entering into similar occupations. And this point which will be important in all the subsequent chapters – that these men's approaches to work and education seem to transcend the boundaries of specific occupational categories. But notably, this transcendence is confined within a concrete type of work (what will be termed Object based work (in Chapter 8). Geir might just as well have become a mechanic as a plumber – the point was that he liked to "tinker with tings" and "take things apart". In combination with the expectation of doing something that would get him a job fast, this landed him as a plumber's apprentice. An apprentice's wage was lower than a normal workers wage. It would likely *not* have

been sufficient for Geir to establish a separate household. However, the point was that it was sufficient for him to quickly make a contribution to a stretched household economy.

Clear advice from unskilled fathers: “get skilled in a trade!”

When the older cohort was asked about what kind of advice they got in relation to education and work when they were young, most mentioned the advice from their fathers, or alternatively, other older men (who thereby took on a paternal role). The mother’s opinions in such matters was seldom mentioned. When mothers were mentioned, their role was generally toned down relative to that of the father. In some cases (like in Helge’s above) the interviewee’s spoke of the parents as “they”. But concerning employment, the impression is that the father was the one calling the shots, and the mother had more of a consulting role. This could be related to the ways in which women’s work was, during this historical period, largely rendered invisible (Wærness 1975). Some interviewees mentioned that their mother’s had encouraged them to put in an effort at school, but that they did not listen to her. As one of them (Jan) said: "I can remember my mum saying to me, when I was at school – right? – that I had to shake my ideas up, had to read more, if I wanted better marks…but I didn't pay much attention (laughs)". Or as another (Arne) said: "Of course my mum tried (to get me to work harder at school), but she was only, you know, it should have been my dad doing that job. Right? You've always got more respect for your dad."

Previous research from other national contexts (from roughly the same period as the older cohort made their school-to-work transitions) showed fathers in manual occupations *not* wanting their son’s to enter the same occupations (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1981:182, Brown and Brannen 1970a:79, Goldthorpe et al. 1969:131, Newby 1977:296). These studies have all noted relations between a negative view of the desirability of a given occupation and an envisaged negative future for that occupation. This sits well with the current data. Many of the fathers of the older cohort

were unskilled workers. Their advice to their sons (both from the skilled and the unskilled fathers) was very clear and explicit: “get skilled in a trade” (“skaff deg et fagbrev”). A skill in a trade seems to have been widely viewed in this 1960s context as something that would *benefit* their sons in the future. Very likely, they considered it to be a very *future oriented* goal to pursue, because skilled workers were in increasing demand in the labour market context at the time, and the demand for unskilled workers was beginning to decline. In other words, this advice is *not* to be interpreted as “nostalgic”. Rather, it is highly “realistic”, in the sense that it was based upon an assessment of the relevant (and changing) historical-institutional context. This aspect of the transition context for the older cohort is clear in the case of Atle.

Atle: skilled as a bricklayer, born 1949

Atle grew up in the centre of Bergen, his father worked as an unskilled worker at a cash-till manufacturer. His mother was also employed part-time, as a seamstress and later as a nursing assistant (hjelpepleier). When Atle was asked why he went into bricklaying right after mandatory schooling (which was 9 years in his municipality), it was clear that his father’s advice to become skilled in a trade had been important.

K	But becoming a builder, why a builder, had you seen someone, was there someone you knew?
Atle	No. I didn't know anything about it. I really didn't.
K	It was just…
Atle	It was really to get a diploma. I suppose there was a bit of, well I wouldn't call it pressure exactly. Let's say that my parents had a strong desire to see me get a diploma. And so I decided that…well, builder was as good as anything else.

Later in the interview it became clear that this pressure from home was related to his father’s work situation as an unskilled worker.

K	Do you remember getting any advice at the time?
Atle	Yeah, my dad was very keen on me getting a diploma.

K	Ok, right.
Atle	Yeah. So he pushed the idea quite a bit.
K	Did he have any qualification, any diploma?
Atle	No, I reckon he was thinking of himself, to be honest. I mean he landed a job at the warehouse (at the cash-till manufacturer) and that was pretty much that. So I reckon that was the reason, yeah, he had a strong desire to see me get a diploma. Yeah.
K	But it was all the same to him which trade you followed?
Atle	Yeah. And he said as much, it doesn't matter what you choose, as long as you get a diploma, then the world's at your feet. And that's what he believed, something along those lines.

This data indicating an unskilled worker wishing for "something better" for his son, is reminiscent of a concept from Sennett and Cobb (1972). They interviewed workers in the United States largely equivalent to the fathers of the older cohort in this study (often unskilled, same age group, same period). Sennett and Cobb used the concept of *sacrifice* to describe how the workers they had interviewed would endure toilsome work motivated by a hope that their children could harvest rewards from them doing so, in the future. When they saw no prospects for improvement in their own work situations, they nurtured hope that their son's would make something better for themselves.[38] For the fathers of the older cohort in the current project, this "something better" seems to have been acquiring a skill in a trade. The background of this advice was, very likely, that the fathers had observed and experienced side-effects of a larger social process – a process of structural mobility. That is, that the level of qualifications in the population was increasing and that skill requirements were rising in accordance with this development.

So, when the fathers of the older cohort advised their son's to become skilled in a trade, it was not just a matter of getting them out of the house. Nor was it necessarily a matter of encouraging their son's to make a social "climb" – in the sense of striving for

[38] A similar observation was made by Nichols and Beynon for (unskilled) workers in Britain: "These men have sacrificed their lives working for the boss so that their children can lead a decent life" (Nichols and Beynon 1977:195).

upward social mobility. Rather, this seems related to security – to the negative prospect of not having a job. These fathers were encouraging their son's to acquire a type of qualification which they (given the on-going structural mobility) likely considered would be easily exchangeable in the labour market well into the future.

Trying out work and proving talents by practice, as an unskilled workers

The cases above have shown *apprenticeships* being secured by the assistance by older men in the family or in the community. Now, this did not happen in *all* the cases from the older cohort. In those cases where a position as an apprentice was not secured, the older cohort would enter the labour market as *unskilled* workers at age 15. The fact that this was possible is related to the relevant historical context. Norway had a highly absorbent youth labour market during the period in question (1960s and 70s)(see Chapter 2). One of the interviewees summed up what seems to have been the situation: "of course, for anyone born, say around 1950, there was no problem getting a job".

An important point to note in this context is that entering the labour market as an unskilled worker was not synonymous with remaining in this position. Apprentices were largely recruited from many age groups and often with very little regard for educational background (see Chapter 2). The selection of apprentices was not centralized, formalised and age-standardized, as it would be for the younger cohort. On the contrary, vocational training schemes, and more generally, processes of skilling, were highly un-standardized (see Korsnes 1997). An important point here is that this seems to have allowed a *wide* range of criteria to be used in the selection of apprentices. This is clear from the following case, the case of Arne. His case shows a type of *flow* between different opportunities as an unskilled workers in the youth labour market before he finally was signed on as an apprentice. His case shows a highly enabling feature of the transition context for the older cohort: it provided opportunity for *trying out* different types of work, and for *proving by practice* whether one had talent for a given type of work.

Arne: skilled as a bricklayer, born 1948.

Arne grew up in a semi-urban area close to Bergen. His father leased a small farm close to Bergen for a period, but ended up as an unskilled worker at a timber dealer (trelast-lager). Arne's mother was a house-wife. When Arne was asked about "choosing" education, he objected to the wording of the question, and pointed out the historical and institutional specificity of this important term.

K	But…when you had to choose an occupation, what were your thoughts then?
Arne	You see when I was growing up, well it wasn't really on the cards to choose a career in that way. Cause the school system didn't work like that then, that you should make a choice. What you could do then, well you could actually become anything you wanted, there was enough work for everybody then. So in my case it was, I'd put it this way, it was pure chance. My choice of trade was down to pure chance.
K	You really think so?
Arne	Yeah, I do. It was pure chance.

Instead of the term "choice", Arne preferred the term "coincidence" for explaining how he ended up in the trade that he did. He was keen to point out that the institutional context in which he had to act did not invite much "choosing". The reason why Arne (and some others) perceived their transitions in this way seems related to the fact that they were expected to contribute to the family income from the time they quit school at age 15. In this situation they needed to get work quickly – exactly what kind of work they got was of secondary importance. Then, local labour market demands would very easily become more central in deciding what kind of work one got, and, consequently, any specific individual preferences one might or might not have, would become less important. This context, in which labour market demands (external to the individual) were decisive, seems important to understand why some in the older cohort narrated their transitions in terms of "coincidence". When they say that the outcome was a coincidence, this is a way of saying that it was *not* the product of a process of self-searching.

In the following passage, Arne explained *why* he saw his fate being a “complete coincidence”. He emphasized how he tried out a range of different jobs, before he got into the bricklaying trade. It started with him getting some part time employment through his father, sweeping chippings at the local timber dealer (trelast-forhandler).

Arne	I started off in (the local timber yard). That came about via my dad. Right? And there were boats full of timber coming from Sweden and Finland. And the men on those boats, they needed dockers. They would stack the timber and offload it, and then it needed to be driven up to (the timber yard). And that's where I came in. I was a good worker, quick on my feet. So they saw that…yeah, I was a good worker. And so I was asked if I wanted to come with them on a trip. And so I went along… I was on that cargo ship for a little while, and then I did a stint on an Icelandic trawler. Then I came home, back here again and, well I liked the life at sea, so I wanted to start at Fisheries College. While I was at home waiting to hear whether I'd got in or not, along comes (local mason) and asks me if I'm up for some work…as a labourer, an assistant. Cause someone had tipped him off that I was a good worker. He was short of men, he was working on a big job… And then… well I started with him.
K	OK. So you mean you were just going with the flow and…
Arne	Yeah.
K	…it wasn't you who, your wishes, so to speak, that was…
Arne	No. No, I didn't have the faintest notion when I was young that I would become a bricklayer, become a master bricklayer. Didn't have a notion, no way. It was absolutely crazy. Completely down to pure chance.

After trying out some various types of labour available to young unskilled men he eventually entered into the bricklayer trade. Note that he entered this trade first as an unskilled labourer, not as an apprentice. In addition, it is important to note how, in all these job changes, his *abilities were assessed by prospective employers based on work practice*, without reference to performance in school, or other credentials. The youth labour market at the time allowed him to try out and prove by practice what kind of work he was suited for.

Arne's talents continued to be discovered through practice. After he had entered into bricklaying, the aforementioned mason – an older male in the local community – had observed his talent for the trade.

Arne	I really loved the trade. And I took to it quickly. He never said as much to me, but he'd told my mum. That he'd never seen anyone who took to it so easily, as if it was in my bones.
K	Oh?
Arne	Yeah, that's what he said. He'd said that to my mum, but he never said it to me. But I had a gift for it.

The very specific conception of embodied talent alluded to here is highly significant and will be subject to further description and discussion in chapter 8. There it will be termed a *talent for object based work*.

In sum, all the above cases suggest that the transition context for the older cohort was embedded in a family and community setting. The transition arrangements have been informal, and older men have been central in arranging the transitions. When they were conceived of as a family concern, this seems highly related to the nature of the household economy. The parallel between this picture and the transition arrangements depicted in British research from the relevant period (Young and Willmott 1957, Thompson 1988), testifies to their historical specificity, and suggests this type of transition context has likely been significant beyond the Norwegian national context. But now we turn to the school to work transitions of the younger cohort.

The transition context of the younger cohort

Transitions institutionalized as choice

The main impression from the younger cohort is that the school-to-work transitions had now, by the mid-1990s, become embedded in a school system context. The transition arrangements appear as highly formalized, centralized and standardized in

contrast with the older cohort. But although their transitions were formally dis-embedded from the family and community context, family background has clearly had a strong influence here well. The influence of family in this more contemporary setting has been much less direct and explicit – more subtle – and is in part hidden by a vocabulary of choice and personal preference. In the new transition context, the younger cohort was *expected* to make individual choices, and, consequently, accounted for them as such in retrospect. But, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the picture is more complex than them having a specific type of "personal preference". The key to understanding the persistent influence of family background becomes clear upon looking behind the level of narrative and self-presentation, at the level of experience and practice. More specifically, at their accounts of how they had actually made their choices and what they emphasized upon doing so. This reveals that they have emphasised making *secure* choices, and these were reliant on various forms of knowledge. At the end of the chapter, a typology is presented that distinguishes three types of knowledge in the educational choices of the younger cohort. This typology has been developed from the data, and can, arguably, provide an understanding of *how* and *why* it is that family background has a persistent influence on the school-to-work transitions of men skilled min male-dominated manual occupations in Norway.

Before substantiating this argument with five detailed case descriptions, a bridging case is presented. The first case presented below is the case of Rune. This case provides data on an aspect of the transition context for the younger cohort which has received some academic attention in previous research; school-tiredness (skoletrøtthet).

School-tiredness and educational choice

The younger cohort in this project were the first to go through upper secondary education in Norway after it was subject to its most extensive reform, the Reform 94

(see Chapter 2). The two years of preparatory schooling that this entailed were described by many as tiresome and uninspiring. Some were tired of school even before starting the two years of further schooling which were now part of upper secondary school, when they were 16 and 17 years old. School-tiredness was mentioned by the older cohort as well but the data amount to suggest that the changed transition context had served to enhance/augment this (fairly old) phenomenon. The older cohort *had* indeed left school at the age (14/15) where some in the younger cohort had started to get tired of school. When school-tiredness is more important in the transition accounts of *some* in the younger cohort, this is likely due to the fact that they were kept within the school system for longer than the older. The younger cohort was kept between two or three years longer in school, during which they were subject longer hours, and more general and "theoretical" subjects than the older cohort had been. This did not result in *everyone* in the younger cohort becoming tired of school, but nonetheless it is useful to present one of the cases who did.

Rune: skilled as a plumber, born 1979.

Rune grew up in a semi-urban area close to Bergen. His father was unskilled, employed as a salesman. His mother had a part time job as nursing assistant. She worked night-shifts so that she could be at home when Rune and his sister came home from school. The following section shows how school-tiredness affected Rune's transition from school to work.

Rune	Well, I mean, after secondary school, I was at that point when, you know…enough's enough.
K	Yeah.
Rune	So…
K	So it was never on the cards to consider a career that involved sixth form college or…?
Rune	No way!... I don't think I ever gave it a second's thought. It was a case of getting into a pair of overalls, the quicker the better.

Like it had been for Geir (and others) in the older cohort, further education was utterly out of the question for Rune. Rune's "I don't think I ever gave it a second's thought" is very similar to Geir's expression "there was no point in thinking about it ". But while in Geir's case this was explicitly hinged on the limitations of the family economy, in Rune's case it was hinged upon school-tiredness. This is also clear from the following passage. He had already talked about how he disliked the general subjects in the two school based years of upper secondary education (Grunnkurs and VK1). He referred to them as "the useless subjects", and talked about being frustrated about wanting to learn plumbing but having to learn a whole range of un-related subjects. In other words, he wished for an apprenticeship model, much like the older cohort had been subject to.[39]

Rune	I was fed up of school. And bored. It wasn't what I wanted…plumbing wasn't often mentioned, to put it that way.
K	No. That's what you wanted to do (plumbing)?
Rune	Yeah, that was the course I was on. But, that's what I'm talking about, if people want to do vocational training, what's the point of dragging in Science and Geography and foreign languages when they just want to get out into the workplace. How motivated I was for those subjects then? … Well, I think they accounted for quite a bit of my truancy (laughs).

When school-tiredness has received attention in previous research it has often been understood with reference to Willis' classic *Learning to labor* (1977). However, Willis interpreted this type of data as expressions of an oppositional counter-school culture, and the transferability of *this* kind of interpretation is more debatable. In his empirically based assessment of the mid-70s British data Willis asserted that "The counter-school culture and other working class cultural forms contain elements toward a profound critique of the dominant ideology of individualism in our society. … In particular, the counter-school culture identifies the false individualistic promises of the dominant ideology as they operate in the school" (Willis 1977:128). Although this may well have been a perfectly valid interpretation given Willis' data and the relevant

[39] Bear in mind that the interviewees are all among the ones who successfully completed the schooling and training to become skilled. Similar discontents are an important theme for those who have failed to become skilled in this context (Markussen et al. 2006:138).

historical context, there is little to suggest that this interpretation is valid in the contemporary Norwegian context.

In the current data there is little evidence of working class oppositional youth cultures of the kind that Willis observed. First of all, there is the *form* in which the school-tiredness sentiments were put forward. They are expressed in terms of *individual* preferences and not in collective terms of “we” (the lads) and “they” (the poofters) as in Willis’ study. Second, the school-tiredness is not transformed into *system critique* in any detectible way. That is, school tiredness is not interpreted as a social issue, but as a personal problem (in terms from Mills 2000[1959]). Third, the *forms of action* which the younger cohort reported having taken upon experiencing school-tiredness were highly individualized. Consider for instance the passage above. How did Rune act when he resented the general theoretical subjects during the two years of preparatory schooling in vocational upper secondary school? *Not* by attending with disruptive behaviour (as Willis’ lads), but by not going to school. Absenteeism arguably has little potential in terms of bringing about any change to the relevant institutions. In other words, it is an ineffective form of structural agency. It however has great potential for doing harm to those who perform it. For instance, truancy records have been one of the most important factors in assignment of apprenticeships after Reform 94, and have (together with grades) been one of the best predictors of early school leaving/dropout (see Vogt 2008: for a review of this research).

Rather than the active and subversive agents of Willis, a more fitting theoretical reference for understanding the school-tiredness evidenced in the current data seems to be Sennett and Cobb (1972). In their book *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, they described how children who did not do well in school developed a kind of *sentencing approach* too school. In fact, the following quote from their analysis sums up surprisingly well the impression from the current project concerning school-tiredness. Those who were tired of school acted “as if they were serving time, as though schoolwork and classes had become something to wait out, a blank space in their lives

they hope to survive and then leave. Their feeling, apparently, is that when they get out, get a job and some money, *then* they will be able to begin living" (1972:83)

The concern with making secure choices

Now we turn to the more general question of what guided the school to work transition for the younger cohort. As mentioned above, they were *expected* by both the school and their family to make *individual choices* at age 15. In the interviews, they were invited in different ways to reconstruct how this had taken place. The analytical questions asked to the data afterwards were in turn: Under what circumstances did they make these choices? *What* did they emphasize upon making their choices? A main finding here is that they have been concerned with making *secure choices*. In this concern, *risk* arguably figures as a *silent discourse* (Bernstein 1996). The world of work which they were about to enter was perceived as *risky*. As a consequence, one best plan carefully, and place one's feet wisely upon making the transition from school to work. Arguably, this indicates a persistent influence of economic concerns. Although such concerns are not presented explicitly (as they were by some in the older cohort) the emphasis on security certainly speaks volumes. The following three cases (Roger, Magne, Steinar) are used to describe and discuss this important aspect of the school to work transition for the younger cohort.

Roger: skilled as a plumber, born 1979.

Roger grew up on an island outside of Bergen. His mother had attended an academic track of lower secondary school (realskolen) and worked for a short period as a secretary before having children. She was at home until the youngest child had started school, and worked part time as a nursery assistant after that. She was the one that helped Roger with homework, when that was deemed necessary by him. Roger's father had grown up on a farm on a small island and had started out as a fisherman and later become skilled in the flooring trade (gulvleggingsfaget). This work had caused

him to become solvent damaged and retire with disability pension. His only advice to his sons was “don’t go into the flooring trade”. Roger’s mother was silent on the matter. In retrospect, Roger thinks he got “annoyingly little help” in making the choices he had to make. This shows how the expectation of individual choice had clearly entered the scene not only in the institutional context, but also in the family context, of the younger cohort. Roger was left to make his own choice. No one was going to do it for him. The question then becomes, what did he emphasize upon making his choice?

When Roger was called upon to fill in the application for upper secondary school at age 15, he was uncertain about what to choose. A concern for making a *secure choice* became decisive.

Roger	Well, you’re sixteen or thereabouts when you make that choice. Or fourteen. I don’t know how old. But anyhow, in my last year I sat there and counted and wondered which box to tick. So it became technical building trades. I could just as easily have followed an academic track. that wouldn’t have given me any difficulties. There were a lot of options open to me, and I didn’t know which one to pick. I felt very uncertain, so that’s why I picked the most secure option.

Roger had clearly been quite uncertain about what to choose. He said he wouldn’t have had any difficulties with an academic track of upper-secondary that would lead to some type of tertiary education, but was *uncertain* about what kind tertiary education that would be. He decided on pursuing what he perceived as a more secure route, getting skilled in a trade.

It is also worth noting how filling in forms is prominent feature in Roger’s memories of choice. The form structured the *act* of choosing, and therefore also structured Roger’s memory of it. The decisive choices did not happen around a kitchen table, as one might imagine they did in the older cohort, but at a school desk. The choice-question is remembered as a question of “which box to tick”. The prominent place of

forms was a more common feature in the younger cohorts' accounts of their educational choices. This is one way in which the transitions of the younger cohort appear (quite literally) to be more formalized (than the transitions of the older cohort). Other interviewees listed what their choices had been in terms of "my first choice was", "my second choice was" and so on, with reference to the priority they made in the application forms they filled in at age 15. As mentioned above, with Reform 94 not only the application to upper secondary school itself, but also the application for apprenticeships (which were now an integrated part of upper secondary school) had been centralized and formalised through an application process administered by the state school system.

Magne: skilled as a builder, born 1978

Magne grew up close to the centre of Bergen and was the son of two teachers. This is a highly a-typical background in the sample. [40] But Magne was not a-typical in his concern with making a secure choice. Magne's parents had only encouraged him to do whatever he felt like doing: "I guess they wanted me to do whatever I wanted to do". He was left to figure things out for himself. Then the question is, how did he do this? What did he emphasize?

Magne had spent much time with his grandfathers during childhood, on weekends and during holidays. They had both been employed in male-dominated manual occupations. Magne mentioned how he tagged along when one of his grandfathers worked as a builder. "I was always to be found at his building sites". And he greatly admired the practical inventiveness of his other grandfather: "he was a wizard at making all sorts of things out of nothing. He made a snow-thrower out of an old washing machine. Which he could operate from his tractor." Another important influence on Magne was a neighbour who was a builder. In grade eight, when they had

[40] Only 7% of the parents of the survey respondents from the younger cohort had been in occupations that would typically require tertiary education (teacher, engineer etc.)(at age 14). Magne was selected for interviewing based on the principle of representing the relevant types of heterogeneity in the population (see Chapter 3).

what is called a "work-week" (arbeidsuke) at his school, he worked with this neighbour and liked it a lot. He continued to work with this neighbour during the summers when he was 15 and 16. In sum, where his parents appear to have been rather withdrawn (and uninspiring), Magne drew inspiration from work practice with these three *other* older men. They supplied him with first-hand *experience* of a specific type of work and provided positive *examples in context.*

Like Roger (the case above) Magne was not especially tired of school. He had considered an academic track of upper secondary (studieforberedende), but decided on a vocational education in building.

Magne	…then I'd at least have a diploma. I'd have something to show for it, and didn't drop out and let it all come to nothing. I remember thinking that people always have to have a house to live in. Right? Just like people have to eat. People have to have clothing. They do in Norway at any rate.
K	Yeah. Yeah.
Magne	…so if you toe the line within a trade, well you're pretty sure I'd say. Sure of getting a job.

Magne was clearly concerned that whatever he pursued in upper secondary should secure him job. Ending up with "something to show for it" was considered secure. In the above section, he also mentioned having made a type of assessment of future labour demands. In this assessment, building would be a secure choice in the long run. Continuing on in the education system, in contrast, seems to have been considered more insecure because it was related to the provision of necessities. In particular, he was concerned not to become one who ended up with a half-finished higher education and "let it all come to nothing" (ikkje bli *nokke*).[41] This all has a wider significance because it concerns the questions of secure choices, and risk as silent discourse. Just like it had been for some of the unskilled fathers of the older cohort, security was related to the prospect of having a job, and insecurity was related to the prospect of not having one. This specific notion of security was made explicit by Magne. In other cases it was present more in the form of silent discourse, that is, it was taken for

[41] The concern to "become something" (bli nokke) in the course of secondary education was similarly an important and common theme in the focus group interviews in Vogt (2007).

granted to such a degree that it was not articulated. The following case, Steinar, has also been useful for exploring this notion of security.

Steinar: skilled as a plater, born 1978.

Steinar grew up in a semi-rural area close to Bergen. His mother was at home until Steinar's younger sister had finished school, and then trained as a nursing assistant. His sister had herself later been trained as a nurse. Steinar's father had spent his whole working life at small grocery, and had eventually become shop manager (butikksjef). In the following paragraph Steinar reconstructs his parent's educational advice.

K	But what advice did you get from your parents at that point? Your mum and dad?
Steinar	Well, I had to choose something I wouldn't get tired of. I mean you were going to do many years of this. I had to choose something I wouldn't get tired of and… well, I mean something I could get a qualification which I could use, not just a qualification for the sake of a qualification. I mean, they wanted to see me choose a course that would lead on to something. Right? That it wasn't just some random course, that I would drop out of and have to start again in some other direction. They said I should try and get it right from the start.

What we see here can be termed a two-fold advice. Steinar was advised to follow his interests, but notably to do so within the limits of educations that would be *certain* to get him a job after upper secondary. They also warned him that his choice at 15 might have faithful consequences. They advised him to step carefully and make a choice that would land him in a secure occupation. And again, as in the case above, we see how the risk of dropping out of types of education that have a longer duration looms large. This advice seems to have had an influence on Steinar. In fact, the following paragraph shows how Steinar planned to give strikingly similar advice to his own children, whom were in pre-school age at the time of the interview. He planned to advise them to:

Steinar	…find something they enjoy doing…I mean, I reckon that's the most important thing, that they choose something they enjoy, and then can find some employment in. That the job prospects are there – right? – that

	they're not just following a course with no job at the end of it. Well that seems like the most important thing to me. That they don't take a qualification that is just a waste of time. Right? I'd recommend that.

A notable inference to be drawn from these latter remarks is that Magne considers some types of education to be a “waste” (bortkastet). In his view, an education that does not guarantee a specific type of job afterwards is not only risky, it may well turn out to be a waste of time.

Steinar’s concern with making secure choices directed him towards becoming skilled in a male-dominated manual occupation. Exactly *which* male-dominated manual vocational track he would apply to was decided at an education festival (utdanningsmesse). Compared with the older cohort, this is an institutional arrangement which is quite novel. At this type of education festival, prospective students are presented with a great range of educational alternatives provided by different companies and institutions. Like his other classmates, Steinar attended this event *through school.* Here, he was convinced by one of the representatives from a company in the oil-related industry to apply for an apprenticeship in plating with them. This is exactly what he did. And what was the reason he stated for filling in “plater” as his “first choice” on his application form? “They could guarantee me an apprenticeship and a secure job afterwards”.

The basis of secure choices in experience based knowledge

When the younger cohort was concerned with making secure choices (as demonstrated in the cases above), the crucial question for understanding their transitions becomes: What did they conceive of as secure choices? Some of this was evident in the cases above (predictable educational routes, secure jobs etc). The following section expands on this and argues that different types of knowledge were attributed different value (security) in the educational choices of the younger cohort. When they were institutionally invited to search within themselves after their "own" personal interests and capabilities. They asked themselves: "What kind of work can I be good at?" In order to answer this question, they made use of a very specific type of *knowledge*. And in this way, their past experiences and observations were put into play. This very subtle (but crucial) knowledge-aspect of the transitions of the younger cohort is demonstrated by the final two cases presented in this chapter, Thomas and Terje.

Thomas: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1978.

Thomas grew up on the outskirts of Bergen. Both his parents worked in a road construction company, his mother part-time as an office clerk (kontordame) and his father full-time with operating road construction machinery. He had one sister. Thomas' parents gave him advice very similar to Steinar's parents (above): open within the limits of something that would be certain to secure him a job afterwards. Although Thomas had no specific problems at school, he was very eager to get out and do what he had become interested in in the course of his childhood: manual work:

Thomas	…I mean I can remember when I was young, well I used to say that for me…well it was work overalls for me, that's what I wanted back then, to get into a work overall as fast as possible.
K	What was the reason you thought like that when you were young?
Thomas	Oh that's not so easy to explain really. Well, I mean it's got something to do with what interests you've got. When you're a kid. Right? When I was growing up I had everything you could want. I had a garage, and my dad

	had every bit of equipment you could need. Right? And from the age of 10 I was at it, welding things … repairs and the like. Bikes and motorbikes and mopeds … well it was there, obviously, that the foundation was laid for what things you want to do later on in life. I mean when it came to choosing a vocational track and becoming an apprentice, well, for me, there was no other alternative.

Like Rune (above), Thomas here mentions the work overall. This garment, as it is referred to here, can be interpreted as a symbol for manual work. When Thomas' wanted to get into an overall, he wanted to get out of school, into manual work. The urgency with which he wanted to achieve this goal can be related to the aforementioned school-tiredness. He related this motivation for entering into manual work (via a vocational track in upper secondary school) to a very specific type of early work experience. When he was probed for further information about these early work-experiences, he elaborated and emphasized again how he considered his father's tools to have been a distinct *advantage* to him (relative to other children).

K	Let me ask…when you were young, what is your earliest memory of work?
Thomas	Earliest memory, well as I said I was never out of the garage at home from I was 10 years old. So there was always something going on, you'd be knocking together a treehouse or styling a go-kart, you know. Or tinkering with bikes and BMXs. All the tools I needed were right at hand, not everybody had that you know.
K	How come you had so many tools?
Thomas	Well, I suppose it was just that we had a house with a garage and lots and lots of equipment. My dad had a digger at home and his lorry and all that sort of thing. So, you know, there was always plenty to fix and tinker with, and he had plenty of tools.
K	Oh, really?
Thomas	Yeah. A double garage crammed with equipment.

Thomas' father worked with large road building machinery in his job, and evidently did very similar work on machinery (tinkering) at home.[42] Thomas perceived the bi-

[42] This type of continuity between paid and unpaid work is discussed in Chapter 7.

products of this continuity, all the tools, to have represented a privilege – an *advantage* that he had relative to those who did not have it.

A key feature of this type of early work experience seems to be its potential of bringing about a *sense of mastery* (at a concrete type of work). In the choice situations that the younger cohort were placed in, it became important in the form of an experience-based knowledge – they knew of a type of work which *they* could be good at. This type of positive self-evaluation is specific, in the sense that it derives from practice (experience) at one concrete *type of work.* However, it may nonetheless have a certain transferability to other settings of life, such as the school context. Being good at *something* might be of more *general* value to what Sennett and Cobb (1972) would call one's "sense of worth".

In sum, the approach to work which was important in directing Thomas' transition from school to work had its basis in experience. When he was "interested" in a specific type of work, this was not a "preference" of his choosing, but needs to be interpreted with reference to his early work experiences. His approach to work developed over a period of time in his life (childhood) during which he experienced and observed much of a specific type of work. The parental practices that facilitated this valuable experience, seem to have been focused on unorganised practical activities, more than scholastic, artistic, organised activities.[43] The following case (Terje) shows in a similar way how knowledge derived from childhood inclusion in household work became influential in the transition context of the younger cohort.

Terje: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1979

Terje grew up on an island outside Bergen. His parents worked at the local seafood processing plant. His mother worked part time on the production line, and his father

[43] This subject will also be expanded on in Chapter 7, where *an inclusive approach to household work* is described and discussed.

worked full-time in the technical department with the maintenance of the machines. He had one sister. According to Terje, his parents were careful not to influence his choice of education. However, just like Steinar's parents (above) they had *been* concerned that Terje should pursue a track in upper secondary school that would land him with "an education".

Terje	…my mum and dad were determined that I should get an education, but they didn't try to push me in any particular direction. …we were completely free to choose.

Given this rather open parental advice, how did Terje proceed in making his educational choice? As is rather typical in the younger cohort, Terje narrates his own educational/vocational choice as a natural consequence of his own personal "interests":

Terje	I've always been interested in, you know, mechanics and electronics and that sort of thing. So it was in that direction I went to get qualifications. When I applied for further education I remember it was…a mechanical trade, that was first choice, and then carpentry as number two. Can't remember what was third on the list however. Those two I remember.

Here we see how the application forms that structured the act of choosing, also structured Terje's account of choosing (his memory of it). And we see again that the types *secondary* of education which were considered, all prepare for work in male-dominated manual occupations. It is also interesting to note that, like Steinar (above), Terje plans to carry on the ideal of *personal* interest-based educational choice to his children.

Terje	I've got the same attitude as far as my kids are concerned…but I think it's important that they choose something that interests them. I think you'll do better if you choose something (that you're interested in). If I'd chosen to be a doctor, or a nurse, that wouldn't have worked out for me. No way. It would have been on completely the wrong course. And become a lousy doctor (laughs). So I think it's important to get an education in something that genuinely interests you.

It is interesting when he reflects here on how two specific female-dominated educational paths would have been totally wrong for him (becoming a nurse or a doctor). In most cases, the prospect of pursuing opportunities within such occupations were not even mentioned – the thought seems to have been unthinkable.

A key analytical questions to pose to passages such as the one above, is: How, then, did Terje become so certain what his personal interests were? How did he come to know that he had "allways" been interested in "mechanics and electronics and that sort of thing" How had he gained this knowledge of himself? In the following, this will examined in terms of: What *type of knowledge* was this assessment based on? The answer is: it was grounded in *experience based knowledge* with a concrete type of work. What are at first glance simply *preferences* are in fact intimately related to concrete types of work *experience* in a very specific type of social *context*.

In Terje's case, it was clear that tagging along with his father to his mechanical maintenance job at the fish-processing plant had been decisive for him. It was through this practice that he had come to feel that he had a talent for this type of work.

Terje	But then I used to dog every step my dad took. So I don't reckon it's very surprising I got a liking for mechanics. I tagged along the whole time, like, if there was anything going on in the evening, after school…yeah.

Upon further probing about his interest for mechanical work, he elaborated how *play* had contributed in bringing about a feeling that he had, that his skills were embodied in his hands.

K	…what is it you like about it?
Terje	…well, I couldn't say, it's just always been an interest, sort of. Working with *things*, I've always sort of felt I was good with my hands, and had a way with things. Began at an early age knocking together soapbox carts and the like. And then soapbox carts with a motor and that sort of thing.

Here it is notable that when Terje felt that his abilities at a certain type of work had somehow become a part of him, they had become embodied in his hands. Through a

combination of tagging along with his father, and specific types of play, a certain type of competence had become embodied in his hands. This gradual embodiment through experience provided him with a *sense of mastery* at practical problem-solving. It seems to have been this *sense of mastery* that had once motivated him towards mechanical work. And, his current job enabled him to continue to experience this same sense of mastery. He felt every day that he made use of the skills that had got into his hands through early work experience and play.

K	You mentioned that you have always sort of felt that you were good with your hands, good at fixing stuff, could you say more about that?
Terje	Well it's just that things very often break down. And things which are broken, you seem to always get them to work again. Always found a solution … on my own, without having to ask anybody's help, or anything. Always managed to grasp the problem at hand and figure it out, and fixed it myself. Then … well I find it very interesting. Often when something's broke, people have a tendency to ring for help as soon as there's a problem. But I'm more the type who would puzzle it out for himself, fathom it out and take a look in the instruction manuals and try and get to grips with the problem, and see what can be done. I'm a bit, I don't know. If it's possible to tinker with something, it's possible to repair it as well. I've always said that.

This quote suggests that some of what Terje had learnt through play during childhood was a certain way entering into *dialogue* with objects. In other lines of work, and *other* contexts, language may be considered crucial for *dialogue* to take place. A diplomat, for instance, might contend that: "as long as one can talk together, one can find a solution". For the type of dialogue in which Terje specialized, it was not language, but tools which were the main facilitators of dialogue. And it was experience over time that had taught Terje the language of the tools. As an expert at dialogue with objects, he could now contend confidently that "If it's possible to tinker with something, it's possible to repair it as well."

In sum, when Terje was called upon at age 15 to make an educational choice, he did not merely happen to "like" some type of work. He had *come to do so* through

experiencing mastery at a certain type of work at a young age. His view of his own capabilities and talents was not only a construct of his mind, a product of a reflexive "internal conversation" to borrow a term from Archer (2003), but clearly a product of a specific type of *experience*. Through tagging along with his father, and through specific types of play during childhood, he discovered his own potential for mastery of practical problem-solving.

The priority of different types of knowledge in the school-to-work transitions of the younger cohort

In an article on parental school choice, Ball and Vincent (1998) make an important distinction between what they call hot and cold knowledge. Hot knowledge is acquired through ”the grapevine” (family, friends, acquaintances) while cold knowledge is acquired through official, formal and written sources. Ball and Vincent found that especially working class parents would base their choice of school on hot knowledge. Correspondingly, Hutchings (2003) in a study on British working class boys found that they put great faith in "hot" knowledge in making their educational choices. This resonates with the current data, but needs some revision and elaboration in order to provide a good description of the data from this time and place.

For the younger cohort, hot knowledge is distinguished from colder knowledge by the sources it is acquired from, and through *the way in which it is acquired*. Based on the data in this project, and inspired by Ball and Vincent's distinction between hot and cold knowledge, the following typology of *the priority of different types of knowledge* has been developed. The most valued knowledge when they were to make their secure choices, was experience based knowledge. That is, knowledge based on personal experience with concrete types of work. The second most valuable type of knowledge was observation based knowledge – that is, knowledge based on observing the experiences of others. Typically older men in the family would provide this type of examples in context. The least valuable type of knowledge was information based

knowledge – that is, knowledge whose relation to concrete experience was uncertain, and hence insecure..[44]

Table 1: The priority of different types of knowledge (in the educational choices of the younger cohort).

	Experience based knowledge	**Observation based knowledge**	**Information based knowledge**
Value in choice situations	High	Medium	Low
Source	Based on concrete **first-hand experience** with a given type of work	Based on the observation of **examples in context** (someone else's experience)	Based on **written text** *(unclear* relation to any experience in context)

Experience based knowledge was considered the most valuable and secure knowledge to base one's choice on, for the younger cohort in this project. This relates to the fact that experience based knowledge is not only knowledge about external circumstances, but is also knowledge about oneself. In order to make a secure choice, they have not only evaluated the objective opportunities but also themselves. This is why knowledge gained through first-hand experience has been considered so valuable. It can tell you how you react when you are put to different types of work tasks, and also indicate how your performance at different types of tasks is likely to be evaluated by others. The source of such knowledge is first-hand experience. It is acquired *over time* through practice with certain types of work. As boys, the interviewees seem to have been included mostly in the fathers work. As the cases above show, they were thereby introduced to a wide variety of activities (building, fixing, tinkering etc).[45] Inspired by

[44] It is potentially valid for the older cohort as well, but clearly less important in influencing their transitions, because the institutional context of their school to work transition left less scope for much educational decision-making.

[45] More description and discussion of this *household work* is presented in Chapter 7.

the case of Terje, one might say that they were instructed in the virtues of how to enter into dialogue with various objects. *Practice* is the only thing that can tell you which types of work will provide you with a sense of mastery, or which type of work will provide you with a sense of failure. The cases in this project seem to have experienced mastery at specific types of male-dominated manual work in a family context. Conversely, one can easily imagine how other children might (*only)* experience this kind of *sense of mastery* through the experience of school-work, and how that might influence *their* effort at school, and in turn, their grades, and their educational choices.

Observation based knowledge has been important for the younger cohort as an addition to, and in some cases as a supplement for, experience based knowledge.[46] The great majority of older men mentioned in the interviews from the younger cohort seem to have been in male-dominated manual occupations themselves. These men had experience that the younger cohort could draw on upon making their secure choices. In other words, older men were still important for the younger cohort, but in slightly different roles. More than as direct helpers or guides, as in the older cohort, their experiences served as *examples in context* – examples of what kind of occupations could *safely* be pursued. In the older cohort, older men served as providers of *influence* by "putting in a word" etc. For the younger cohort, older men served by *power of example*.

Information based knowledge was hardly even mentioned in the interviews, and does thus not seem to have been especially important for the school-to-work transitions of the younger cohort. This type of knowledge is equivalent to what was defined as "cold knowledge" in previous research (Ball and Vincent 1998, Hutchings 2003). Its source is typically written text, such as brochures etc. that provide "information" about all

[46] This type of knowledge may have been termed "advice". However, that would be misleading. The term advice emphasizes verbalization. A distinct impression from the data is that advice need *not* be conveyed in the form of words in order to be influential. And further, it seemed that in order for verbalized advice to be influential, it needed to be corroborated by relevant observations. Roger's father (above) said "don't go into the flooring trade", but did he really have to say this? Would not the observation of his father (retired with a disability pension after being solvent injured) have been enough to deter Roger from entering the flooring-trade? Would the advice have been heeded had it not been backed by the power of example (experience)?

kinds of opportunities. In contrast to the two other forms of knowledge, a characteristic trait of this type of knowledge is that its roots in to concrete work experiences are unclear.

Concluding discussion

This chapter has made use of the data to describe and discuss the school-to-work transitions of the two cohorts. The following concluding discussion will recount and discuss the main differences and similarities between the two transition contexts and draw up some implications that can be drawn from this comparison.

The transitions of the older cohort took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s and were often arranged by an informal "speaking for system". This was evident from the case presentations of Arvid, Karsten and Helge. It seems that when it was within their power, older men in the community, often fathers, would step in and arrange the transition. The transitions of the older cohort were perceived of as a family matter. This seems highly related to their social background in one-income (low level workers wage) families, often with many children. Geir, for instance, was expected to contribute to, or otherwise alleviate, the household economy as fast as possible. With this context in mind, it seems that when the older cohort entered into the world of work at a young age, mostly at age 15, this was often because their educational opportunities were economically *constrained*. On the other hand, the fact that the transitions were successful secured in all these cases, indicates that this transition also had some highly *enabling* features. The apprenticeship arrangement seems to have provided the older cohort with an opportunity that matched what was expected of them. Through positions as apprentices they had the opportunity to quickly make a *contribution* to the household economy, while at the same time acquiring credentials which were valuable in the labour market.

The older men did not arrange the transition in *all* the cases from the older cohort. Atle, for instance, was on his own – perhaps because his father had no relevant *influence* to contribute with. His father did however contribute with a significant piece of advice. Like several of the other fathers of the older cohort he was very clear that his son should become "skilled in a trade". These fathers were mostly unskilled workers and seemed to have had an impression very much aligned with later research on the subject; that a process of upward structural mobility was taking place in the relevant period, and consequently, qualification requirements were increasing.

The last case from the older cohort, Arne, vividly showed some other *enabling* features of the transition arrangements of the older cohort. These arrangements could provide opportunities for *trying out* different types of work, and for *proving by work practice* the talents one may have at a given type of work. Conceivably, this type of work-based talent assessment can be more *sensitive* in detecting some types of talent than the more standardised and formalised school-criteria. This is important to recognize because the development of opportunities in this period is often viewed as a one-sided story of progress. As noted in the Chapter 2, faith in Education Based Meritocracy seems widespread and the excellence of the education system in providing the context for the school to work transition is largely taken for granted.

Time spent in school, both in terms of years and hours, had increased in the period between the cohorts. With this institutional change in mind it is interesting to note that what might be termed school-tiredness was more augmented in the younger cohort. It had not been an issue in all of the cases in the younger cohort, but it certainly was in some. Rune was one of these cases and he was selected as an introductory case to the younger cohort. He seemed to have taken what was termed (inspired by Sennett and Cobb 1972) *a sentencing approach* to school.

More generally, the contrasting of these two transition contexts indicate a historical process formalization and standardization. For the younger cohort, the act making

educational choices was related in memory to the act of filling in application forms. When the choice was recounted as a (completely) individual choice, this seems related to the way in which the transition had been institutionalized. However, the analysis above brought to light several significant structural influences on these choices. When they were placed in these choice situations, they were concerned to make *secure choices*. The cases of Magne and Steinar served to describe the basics of this notion. A secure educational choice was, to them, an education that would secure a job after upper secondary school, and minimize the risk of having "nothing to show for" an education. Other, more *unpredictable* opportunities were considered risky.[47]

Now, it might seem a paradox, that a concern with making secure choices have lead these young men into the *most* economically unstable parts of the private sector. Judging from their older male relatives and acquaintances they must have been aware that these areas of the labour market can be unstable, and hence insecure, because they are subject to the great market fluctuations. However, this knowledge did not deter the younger cohort from entering these areas of the labour market. The logic seems rather to be the opposite: *given* that they were going to enter these most unstable areas of the labour market, like they had observed many older men before them to have done, they felt a need to make a secure choice, one that would provide them with "something to fall back on" (Magne) as fast as possible. And this something, for them, was to become skilled in a trade (to get a trade diploma).

In the case of Arne (from the older cohort) his talent for the bricklaying trade was discovered by *someone else* (the mason). In contrast, one might say that the younger cohort were called upon by an institutional context to discover *their* own talents – to observe themselves – at age 15, and act accordingly. Because, in order to make a secure choice, they needed relevant and reliable knowledge, not only of their

[47] Mostly, occupations requiring higher education seem to have been considered undesirable, or not have been considered at all. Insofar as they were considered, the risks associated with higher education do not seem to have been calculated in any detailed manner, by drawing up potential costs and payoffs etc. The impression is that it has *not* been the potential economic payoffs or losses involved in pursuing higher education that have been emphasized, but rather the *unpredictability*, and hence uncertainty, associated with these educational routes.

opportunities, but of themselves. And in order to draw reliable knowledge of themselves, they turned to their past experience. This was evident from the last two cases, Thomas and Terje. They spoke of an "interest" they had "always had" for the type of mechanical work they had entered into. But, when they were invited to expand on this, it became clear that it was some very specific *experiences* that had provided them with this feeling. *Experience based knowledge* seems to have been the most valued/secure type of knowledge when the younger cohort had to make their educational choices.

Activities in childhood, often in the grey zone between work and play, became highly influential in determining the course of the school-to-work transitions of the younger cohort. In the cases of Terje and Thomas it was clear how this type of experience had provided them with a sense of mastery – in other words, knowledge of something *they* could be good at. Like several others, Terje felt that this mastery had somehow become embodied in his hands. Thomas raised the perfectly valid question of whether this type of childhood experience could not in fact constitute a distinct advantage, or privilege, relative to those who did not have it.

So far, this concluding discussion has been focused on cohort differences. However, there are a number of cohort similarities that are also important to take note of as well. For instance it is clear that older men figure prominently in both these transition contexts. But again, they do so in different ways. For the older cohort, the older men in the community would *arrange* their transitions, often backed by an informal influence, or at least provide very clear advice. For the younger cohort, the role of informal influence and clear advice from older men was less clear, but they were on the other hand important as facilitators of the decisive experience based knowledge, and as examples in context.

Another similarity concerns the role of knowledge of opportunities in these two transition contexts. Knowledge gained through interaction was clearly important in

both contexts. However, since the institutional arrangements within which this knowledge was put to use were different, knowledge became significant in different ways in the two cohorts. For the older cohort, knowledge was decisive when the transition was considered as a family matter. For instance, in the case of Helge, knowledge received from his uncle was decisive when *his parents* were planning his transition. In contrast, for the younger cohort, especially experience based knowledge became important when they were concerned to make secure choices.

The importance of security is another important cohort similarity. In both cohorts, *risk* was associated with a situation where one could not get a job, and security was associated with having a job. These notions of risk and security were present in the accounts of both cohorts, but, arguably, more as a silent discourse (Bernstein 1996) in the younger cohort. The older cohort spoke directly about the necessity/importance of them getting to get a job as fast as possible. The younger cohort did not make the same kind of explicit references to *having* to get a job fast, or in fact to any other economic limitations in the school-to-work transitions. This fits with a more general tendency that the younger cohort was more reluctant to draw attention to constraints upon their choices. An inference to be drawn from this is that it seemed more important to them to convey that they were free to choose. Bringing attention to external constraints upon their choice seems almost to have resembled a taboo. They did not seem as comfortable as the older cohort at talking about constraints. However, their concern with making secure choices certainly suggested that *something was at stake* when they were to make their transitions.

The last cohort similarity to be noted here is the most overarching one. In both transition contexts, the central role of family is evident. The cohort comparison shows a *persistent influence* of family background, but one that has become much more subtle than it used to be. So subtle are the influences on the younger cohort that they might easily be hidden (or obscured) by the individualized institutional arrangements, and the accordingly individualized transition accounts. The cases from the younger

cohort are concrete cases of *how* specific practices of both work and play in a *family* setting are still vital to processes concerning social reproduction between generations (in the education system and the labour market). One might say that the case descriptions amount to demonstrate how people reproduce social relations "simply by going about their everyday social routines" (Bottero 2004:255).

Through pointing out differences and similarities with past arrangements, central features of the role of the family in *a contemporary context* have been specified. This type of specification is a useful contribution to the research literature because, as Murphy (1990) pointed out two decades ago, studies on the social reproduction (of social inequalities) have tended to be notoriously vague on such issues. Both culturalist and economic accounts of class reproduction have identified the role of the family as central to the reproduction of class (Crompton 1997). Research on *parental practices* in the education system have provided insight into these processes, but as Irwin (2009) has pointed out, much explanatory power has been given to the concept of "class" *in itself* in this literature. As she says, "there is a risk that class ends up doing all the talking" (2009:1137). In social mobility research, the family has long been treated as a "black box" (Bertaux and Thomson 1997). This chapter does most certainly not resolve these general issues, but can hopefully stand as an example of a contextualized and specified understanding of how the family can have influence in contemporary school-to-work transitions.

Several of the themes that have been raised in this first empirical chapter will be explored further from different angles in the subsequent chapters. Because of this, some of the the wider implications of the phenomena that have been described and discussed here will not be clear until all the chapters can be viewed together. This chapter only provides one part of the answer to the main research question in this project. It has been concentrated on these men's approaches to work and education only in a specific phase of their life course – their transition from school to work. The

next chapter addresses the different directions that their lives had taken after they had been well installed in the world of work.

Chapter 5: Approaches to work in the context of experience and action.

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the ways by which the men in this project started their working lives by acquiring a similar type of qualification. Their school-to-work transitions started them of in very similar positions in the labour market, as skilled workers in male-dominated manual trades. The current chapter is concerned with their experiences over time in these jobs, and with what types of labour market action their work experiences had motivated them towards. This is of interest because, after they had become skilled, their paths took widely different directions. Over time, variation and diversity increased between them. The type of *processes* by which this type of separation of paths takes place have not received much attention in previous research. Even research on mobility over the life course has been focused on outcomes, more than processes. This chapter will argue that the key to understanding the processes that lie behind the separation of paths over the life course for the men in this project lies not in inherent properties of the jobs, nor in inherent properties of the individuals, but in the relations between specific types of experience and (specific) types of action.

At the project onset, the term "work orientations" was used as a sensitizing concept. This concept has been well-known and much used since it was launched in the 1960s. As the research proceeded, however, it was abandoned. The notion that a *person*, or a group, has *one* type of work orientation, did not sit well with the data.[48] Rather, the data indicated that it was through specific types of *experience in work situations*[49]

[48] This observation is consistent with Daniel's criticism of the concept of *work orientations* (Daniel 1969, Daniel 1971).

[49] The concept of *work situation* is inspired by Lockwood (1958), who defined it as "the set of social relationships in which the individual is involved at work by virtue of his position in the division of labour." (1989[1958]:15). "every employee is precipitated, by virtue of a given division of labour, into unavoidable relationships with other employees, supervisors, managers or customers" (1989[1958]:205). In *The Blackcoated Worker*, Lockwood considered class position to be decided by *market situation* and *work situation* together (and thereby combined the work of Marx and Weber). As Newby (1977:119) points out, by the time Lockwood wrote

over the life course that these men continually came to know what kind of work they were most motivated to do, at specific times in their lives. At the concrete empirical level, there were a great number of different experiences. However, as the analysis proceeded, it was possible to specify a *smaller* number of *types* of experience and related *types* of action, and in this way, a four-fold typology was developed from the data. The chapter is devoted to description and discussion of this typology. The specific research question explored is: *How were the different types of labour market action that these men had taken related to different types of experience in work situations (and to different structural conditions)?*

Unlike the previous chapter, this chapter is not structured as a cohort comparison. This is because the analysis showed major *commonalities* between the cohorts with respect to the questions under discussion.[50] In both cohorts, few remained in the same company they started out in, and neither of the cohorts displayed a jobs-for-life pattern.[51] The general impression in both cohorts was that most of the job shifts had been to jobs *in the same occupation*, often with a somehow *different* work situation. Alternatively, the job shifts had been to highly *related* occupations. In short, the main points that turned out to distinguish the interviewees from one another (with respect to the questions under discussion) were not cohort specific.

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his highly influential 1966-article (1966) the concept of work situation had changed. It had been expanded to include "orientation to work" which entailed a shift towards more emphasis on "social psychological attributes of workers". This development away from work situations, towards orientations to work, continued in the Affluent Worker Studies (Goldthorpe et al. 1969, 1968a, 1968b) in which Lockwood himself was a key figure.

[50] An exception to this rule of cohort similarity is that the survey data revealed a cohort difference regarding the frequency of job shifts. The younger cohort seemed to have changed jobs more frequently than the older cohort. This could be taken to indicate an increasing rate of job-shifts for the men in this project. However, a sound analysis of this type of trends of *historical change* would require more precise measurement, as well as data from additional cohorts. Instead, the analysis focuses on what might be termed *a stabile turbulence*. Market fluctuations are not a new thing in these occupations.

[51] Many commentators, such as Beck (2000:2), have been keen to point out that the "job for life" has disappeared. This is however often done without specifying the time and place in which this pattern was presumably the norm. The present is thereby defined by comparison with a very vaguely defined past. Evidence suggests that this pattern disappeared very long ago, with the transition from agrarian to industrial society. Caplow noted already in 1954 that "life-time involvement in a job is rare". In a wide historical account, Hareven (1978:208) has pointed out that for working-class men a job-for-life pattern has been the exception rather than the rule.

The following table displays the four-fold typology which is central to this chapter. The typology has been developed from the data and is structured by four different *types of experience* and four related *types of action*. In addition, it specifies some *structural conditions* which are necessary for these actions to take place. It is important to point out that each individual case could have several of these experiences *simultaneously* and also that these different types of experience could be *replaced* by others over the life course. The typology is thereby not to be interpreted as four mutually exclusive *categories* into which cases can be neatly classified.

Type of EXPERIENCE **(in a given work situation)**	**Type of ACTION** **(related to given type of experience)**	**Structural CONDITIONs** **(necessary for given Type of Action)**
Motivation to **Take charge**	1. Starting up (Pursuing Entrepreneurship) 2. Climbing up (Upward mobility in existing command hierarchies)	Market timing + Capital + Time investment (see Chapter 6 for a separate discussion)
Motivation for **More autonomy**	Scaling down (Making a job-shift to smaller-scale work organisation, i.e. self-employment)	Market timing + Capital + Time investment
Becoming **BURNT OUT**	Finding shelter (Making transfer to public sector)	Absorbent public sector
Becoming **CONTENT**	Adapting in the present	Potentially positive features *available* in current work situation.

Table 2: Types of experience in work situations, related types of action and necessary structural conditions.

This typology has been developed based on analysis of *all* the cases under study in this project. For reasons already explained (see Chapter 3), a smaller number of cases (ten) have been selected for presentation in the following. The goal of presenting these cases is to describe and discuss the typology presented above. The chapter is therefore divided into four sections, according to the four rows in Table 2. At the end of each section there will be a separate section entitled “discussion”. These four discussion-sections will focus on the structural features necessary for the given types of action to take place. The chapter starts off with a description and discussion of the top row in the typology.

The experience of motivation to take charge and the action of pursuing entrepreneurship

Some of the cases had at some point in their lives experienced a motivation to *take charge*. They had then become motivated for a higher degree of command over the work process than they had previously enjoyed – to be more involved in *supervision and planning* work. Over time they had become motivated for a greater degree of *influence* on the objectives and procedures of the work processes they participated in.

With this type of experience, there were two relevant types of action. One was *pursuing entrepreneurship*. The other was pursuing *upward mobility in existing command hierarchies.* In other words, they had two options: starting up or climbing up. The changing structural conditions for *climbing up* will be subject to a separate discussion in the next chapter. The action of starting up (pursuing entrepreneurship) will be discussed in the following section. It is however interesting to briefly compare these two types of action, which were found related to the same type of experience. In comparison, the command gained through climbing up was more bureaucratic and cooperation based, and less personal (charismatic), than that gained through starting up. Both types of action were directed towards *greater* ownership of the production

process, but arguably, starting up (pursuing entrepreneurship) would involve a *higher degree* of this type of ownership.

As a channel of mobility, pursuing entrepreneurship (starting up) is not centred on education, but on property. As such, it resembles what was a main form of mobility in earlier historical periods, before the advent of mass education, when social mobility was more associated with increased property than with increased education (or skills).[52] For the men in this project, this "old" property based channel of social mobility was still operative. Here, especially in the trades, tertiary educational routes have historically *not* been the road to success. In comparison, pursuing entrepreneurship, as a channel of mobility, is more "open" – anyone is free to make an attempt. Indeed, its openness, seems important for understanding its generally high level of attractiveness for men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations, especially in the craft trades.

The following two cases, Harald and Arne, were cases of men who had experienced a motivation to take charge and acted on this experience by pursuing entrepreneurship. As their case descriptions will show, they had become motivated for non-bureaucratic (personal) power over the type of work processes in which they participated – to have *their* personal ideas be put into life.

Harald: skilled as an industrial plumber, born 1951

Harald was skilled as an industrial plumber in 1971 with a large shipbuilding company in Bergen. At the time of the interview he was the owner and manager of a medium size plumbing company. After being skilled he had quickly moved from working as an industrial plumber over to plumbing work in buildings. In the course of

[52] For instance, Tocqueville's (2004[1835]) emphasis on the democratic features of American democracy was premised firstly upon mobility through property/work, not on mobility through education. And, it might be added here that Mills (1951) argued in *White Collar* that in the 19th century American "world of small entrepreneurs", the road to success was "purely economic" (Mills 1951:7).

the late 1980s, he had become head of department in with a local dealer and producer of plumbing parts. The focus in the present context is on the experience that motivated him towards pursuing entrepreneurship when he was almost 40 years old (in 1990).

The act of pursuing entrepreneurship was triggered for Harald by a conflict about how the work in question was to be performed. He was head of department at the time, and felt that "I was constantly opposed by some of my colleagues. A few of them were constantly working against what I, as a head of department, had decided had to be done" As a result of this experience, he resigned in anger. The following section shows how this had motivated him to take charge, and that he found the type of action most fitting to this experience to be the pursuit of entrepreneurship.

Harald	I suddenly just got fed up with … well, I was going to say stuffing money up other people's backsides, but that wouldn't be quite right either. I suddenly just got fed up with being an employee, I had the notion that I could make a go of it with something *that was mine*. …I wouldn't have had any trouble getting a job, if I wanted to. But I was dead keen on the idea of starting for myself, I wanted to try out *my ideas*. I wanted to prove that my ideas and thoughts about how to run a business held water. So I was bit sort of … well, I don't know, not exactly hungry for revenge, I really didn't have anything to revenge, but it was a bit like that, I was determined to make it work. And the thought of becoming an employee again, it just never entered my head. I wanted to be free as a bird, I wanted to do things *the way I wanted them done*. …That's one of the many things I learnt from my father, that it is better to stuff money up your own backside than up others'.

The action of pursuing entrepreneurship enabled Harald to finally act in accordance with his father's scepticism against "stuffing money up other people's backsides". This corroborates the more general impression from all the cases, that economic motives have functioned in *combination* with other motives.[53] For Harald, the goal of

[53] The current data corroborate Bradley (et al 2000:170) when they assert that: "Like all good myths, there is a core of truth at the heart of the myth of the economic worker". Economic incentives constitute but a "tip of an

keeping the surplus value that his work generated, was only *one* aspect of his motivation to take charge. Indeed, the extract above suggests that his motivation to take charge – "to do things the way I wanted them done" – was at least as important. The action which he found most fitting to this experience – pursuing entrepreneurship – happened to harmonize with his recently deceased father's old, and more general, recommendation. In fact, it was money from his father's inheritance that got Harald started as an entrepreneur. He moved into his parent's old house with his family, and sold the house he had built on the lot beside it. This provided him with the start-up capital necessary to pursue entrepreneurship.

Arne: skilled as a bricklayer, born 1949

Arne was skilled as a bricklayer in 1973. He worked as a supervisor with a small company in Bergen for a few years, and then decided to pursue entrepreneurship himself. He had been successful in this endeavour and was at the time of the interview the manger and owner of a medium size bricklaying company. The following section shows how Arne's motivation to take charge "took shape" over time.

K	This notion that you wanted to run your own business – where did that come from?
Arne	Well to be honest I don't know where it came from, it just took shape really. But in a way it's always been a sort of driving force in me, the desire to create something. To start something. Right? And really that's still the driving force in me. To create something. Buy a house, renovate it, repair it, make something of it. Start a project and make something of it. Right? I've talked with other (entrepreneurs), that's always the thing that's driving them, the desire to create something. Not necessarily making a ton of money, that comes as a bonus, but to *create something, that's where the satisfaction comes from*. …Right? And that's how it works in business – right? – take Røkke (one of Norway's most prosperous entrepreneurs), what's driving Røkke? It's not the desire to

iceberg of motivations" and are alone clearly "insufficient to explain the range of workplace attitudes and behaviour".

	get rich, that's a bonus. It's to *create something*, that's what's driving him. Right? And I reckon it's the same with all of us.

Here it is interesting to note the high degree of identification with other entrepreneurs. When Arne said “us” in this section he seemed to be identifying with all other entrepreneurs. He argued that he and other entrepreneurs share what might be called an *entrepreneurial spirit*. They presumably had in common a strong motivation, almost an unstoppable urge, to “create something”. The projects that *he,* as a mason, worked towards realizing were physical building projects. Another section, later in his interview, showed that he traced the origins of this entrepreneurial spirit to his ancestors – and considered it to be embodied in him as a kind of genetic predisposition:

Arne	I was in charge of organising a large gathering of the family. And there we followed the trace back as far as 1513. It turned out that there were lots of craftsmen. Boatbuilders. Hunters. And farmers. People who had small businesses. We were good at running things, we were incredibly independent.
K	Yeah.
Arne	So it's in our genes. If you take a historical look at it, there have always been business genes in our family, …I could see that was the case when I took a look at our family tree. I'm convinced that the people in my family tree who were boatbuilders and ship's captains and the like, they were people of vision. People who wanted to get somewhere. I'm absolutely convinced about that.

According to Arne, he and his fore*fathers* (and other entrepreneurs) had been blessed with a very special kind of drive and vision. From his present position as a successful entrepreneur Arne felt he had been born to take charge. He was not *bred* to be in subordinated position – *that* would surely impinge and obstruct this very special type of *drive*. As a successful entrepreneur, his company could function as an extension of himself. It would thus be *driven* towards prosperity through his *visions* for the relevant production processes.

Discussion

Together, the cases of Harald and Arne serve to describe some central features of both the experience of motivation to take charge, and of the action of pursuing entrepreneurship. They were motivated to "make things happen" ("få ting til"), and "create some*thing"* (å skape nokke). Over time, they had become motivated to get into a work situation where it was *their* ideas that were materializing themselves as they worked.

Especially in the craft trades many of the cases had at some point in their lives had a faint dream pursuing entrepreneurship. Some had tried and failed. Those who succeed, like Harald and Arne (above) constituted a small minority. The dreamers and attempters and the succeeders had something in common, however. They were all keen to point out the challenging structural conditions necessary for this type of action to be successful.

The data suggest that pursuing entrepreneurship was more common for those skilled in the craft trades. It was however also possible from starting points in the industrial trades. This is testified by some of the cases from the older cohort. The younger cohort skilled in the industrial trades (7 out of 28 interviewees), in contrast, had not even considered the option. This could be related to heightened *boundaries of entry* (to starting up) in the industrial trades over the relevant historical period. The impression is that opportunities for pursuing entrepreneurship in the industrial trades were greater for the older cohort than for the younger cohort. This is likely related to the fact that the former had the opportunity of entering the oil industry while it was in its earliest stages, and the latter entered it when it was well established.

Like other capitalist endeavours, starting a business is dependent on the state of the market. The interviewees seemed well aware of this. For instance, the younger cohort in the craft trades realised that it would be very risky to pursue entrepreneurship with

the present economic recession in Europe (interviews conducted 2008-2010). Some felt they had failed to take advantage of the market boom(s) in the 2000s (up until 2008). It seemed clear that the open-ness of this channel of occupational mobility, was determined not by the state (to the same degree as opportunities in the Norwegian education system) but by the state of the market.[54]

As mentioned, many of those skilled in the craft trades had at some point entertained the thought of pursuing entrepreneurship. While the *boundaries of entry* might be low in these trades compared to the industrial trades, they were still an important constraint for many. None of the interviewees had any inherited capital to speak of. If they aspired to pursue entrepreneurship, they were faced with the prospect of *working* their way to the necessary capital, or lending it and thereby increasing the risk of an already *risky* endeavour. The crucial initial phase would often be highly time-consuming. This could be problematic if the timing over the life course coincided with family establishment, which it often did.

Another structural condition for starting up concerned what is (in Norway) called a master's certificate (mesterbrev). One does not *need* master's certificate to pursue entrepreneurship, but having one was widely believed to be good for business in the trades. On this point there was an important cohort difference. The amount of schooling required to obtain a master's certificate seems to have become much more extensive in the period between the two cohorts. Whereas the older cohort in some cases could get a master certificate simply by documenting a certain number of years of experience (fartstid) in the given trade, the younger cohort had to attend evening classes two evenings a week for two years in order to get a master's certificate.

[54] At a very general level, it seems that *which* of the two types of actions related to a motivation to take charge was pursued (climbing up or starting up) seems related to the state of the market: during a market bust fewer start up and more climb up by way of education. During a market boom more will start up, and fewer will climb up by way of education. This is not possible to determine with accuracy based on the current data.

The cases that had started up, had some interesting reflections on changes in the conditions for success as an entrepreneur in the relevant period. It was a widely shared contention among the interviewees in the craft trades that no one gets rich from "just working" in these occupations. In other words, that the considerable profits were contingent on ownership of the means of production, and thereby to be in a position in which one could reap rewards from other people's work (not only your own). However, those who had been successful in pursuing entrepreneurship, had soon discovered that not even this was enough. They discovered that the sizable profits were to be gained by buying and selling of property. That selling labour power would only get you so far, due to tough competition.[55] In sum, for the entrepreneurs in the craft trades, re-investing accumulated capital in real estate was conceived as a natural next step in order to further the growth of the business. Ownership in the *property* they worked on, in addition to the means of production, would secure them *even more* of the surplus value generated by workers below them in the organizational hierarchies. This seems related to wider developments in the relevant historical period (especially 1990s-2010) wherein real estate prices in Norway have increased immensely. This might have contributed towards a partial shift of attention for entrepreneurs in the trades towards financing and real estate speculation.

In sum, the structural conditions for pursuing entrepreneurship consist in a complex inter-relationship between several conditions mentioned above (Market timing, capital, time investments etc). The right constellation of structural conditions seemed decisive for whether those who had experienced a motivation to take charge had pursued entrepreneurship, and for whether they had succeeded. This meant that, although the rewards from this type of action could potentially be high – and it was in theory "open to all" to have a shot at it (relatively independent of educational background) – starting up was unpredictable and risky.

[55] For instance, the young skilled bricklayer Lars, who co-ran and co-owned a small bricklayer business, argued that you do not get rich from "running a business in a trade". He and his co-entrepreneurs where trying to get into real estate. Likewise, Birger (skilled builder) who ran a family owned roofing business, claimed that "you can earn more on financing than on the actual work in the trade". Obviously, "financing" would require the availability of sufficient funds.

The experience of motivation for more autonomy and the action of "scaling down"

Now we move on to describe and discuss the second type of experience (and related type of action) in the typology. Over time, some had become motivated for more control over *their own* work. As in the previous section, it was through experience in specific work situations that this motivation to be *their own boss* (to a higher degree) had developed.

The type of action most relevant with this type of experience was to make a *job-shift to a smaller-scale work organisation*. This type of action can be termed "scaling down". They would thus remain in the private sector, but move to smaller businesses with a less specialized internal division of labour. In these work situations, it seemed (based on these interviewee experiences and interpretations) that each worker would potentially experience more autonomy.

A common variety of this type of action was to work at the smallest organisational scale possible, through becoming self-employed. This was perhaps the primary *escape* route from work situations in which they experienced a low degree of *control*. This is very similar to a finding from Sennett and Cobb (1972). They noted that, for the blue-collar workers, self-employment had persisted as an image of freedom that would "remove the tensions they presently encounter" (1972:227).

The action of scaling down could be very similar to the initial phases of pursuing entrepreneurship. However, the data suggest that these two types of action should be kept analytically distinct, because the motivation behind them was very different. While pursuing entrepreneurship was related to a motivation to take charge (described in the section above), scaling down was related to a motivation for more autonomy. The difference between these motivations is one between becoming

motivated for more control of larger work processes (others) and more control of one's own work. In the following, the cases of Bjarte and Rune are used to describe the relation between the experience of motivation for more autonomy and the action of scaling down.

Bjarte: skilled as a builder, born 1950

Bjarte was skilled as a builder in 1970. During the first half of his working life he tried both starting up and climbing up. He was struck by bankruptcy twice, and foreclosure once, both during the economic recession that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990. After all this, he came to the conclusion that "climbing up the ladder wasn't so grand". He felt he had "tried it", and was no longer motivated to take charge. After the last bankruptcy, in 1992, of a business with 14 employees which he co-owned and co-ran with colleague, he decided to scale down and work by himself. He thus returned to working in the first line of production after a period of more administrative work. Bjarte claimed that that his bell-shaped trajectory in terms of organizational size was common for builders.

Bjarte	Many of my colleagues who I keep in touch with, they've all done the same thing. We have a saying for it: to hang up your hammer and then take it down again. Many of my colleagues have done like me, come back to doing manual work. I returned to where I'd begun, and have found satisfaction in that.

Bjarte was very satisfied with his current work situation. In contrast to his previous work situations as manager/owner, it involved a lower degree of command (since he had no employees) but higher degrees of control and autonomy in the performance of his work tasks. He was able to choose his work assignments carefully, and would thereby avoid very heavy assignments. These properties of his work situation were clearly important to understand how it was that Bjarte, who at the time of the interview was 58 years old, could keep working in the first line of production in the private sector. Bjarte planned to keep working like this until retirement at the age of 67 – provided his health would hold that long

When Bjarte was asked what was the best thing about his current job, he answered that it was that he got to come up with, and carry out, what he called “creative solutions”. His favourite assignments were those where the customers were not too worried about the costs and consulted his advice in finding “creative solutions”.

Bjarte	A lot of customers come to me for advice, and so I try and give them a few creative solutions. … I very rarely work from technical drawings. That's not the way I work at all. The customers will have an idea or two about how they want things done. And then I come into the picture, and then we discuss it, how they want it. So I try and listen to what they want, and then I draw it all together, so we… well we actually work it all out together. …that's one thing that makes it a bit special, my job. But at the same time very interesting. So if my customers say they want it done this way or that, well then they get it this way or that. We work it out along the way.

In other words, a characteristic trait of Bjarte’s work situation was that he planned his work himself, in cooperation with his customers. And, it is also significant to note that not only did he take place in *both* job planning and job performance – these seemed to take place as simultaneous processes. In his terms: “We work it out along the way”.

Rune: skilled as a plumber, born 1979

Rune was skilled as a plumber in 1999. He kept working in the large plumbing company in which he had trained until 2008. This company specialized in big construction projects (nybygg). In the course of his 9 years in this company, Rune began to experience a motivation for more autonomy. Finally, in 2008 he applied for a job in a small business that specialized in smaller service assignments. Here, he was the only employee. In the following section, Rune described both his experience of motivation for more autonomy and why he found scaling down to be the type of action most appropriate to this experience.

K	what were the reasons for you leaving that job?
Rune	When I was there I was pretty much always working on big construction sites, and in the end I'd just had enough. I felt I'd been doing that for a long time. Didn't' get any enjoyment out of it any more. So I was ready to try something, well something new, a small business with much better working conditions.
K	Ok. What were the working conditions like?
Rune	Well, I mean, I got more responsibility in a small business. Now, for much of the day I'm on my own. There's more freedom.

When Rune mentioned freedom, it is important to take note. Because, Rune's notion of freedom was similar to, but also different from, that of Harald (above). Both related it to an escape from subordination, but Harald related it to taking charge and pursuing entrepreneurship. Rune related it to deciding how to perform his *own* work tasks. For Harald, freedom had been associated with proving that *his "*ideas and thoughts about how to run a business" held water. Rune, in contrast, felt freedom just by getting to be his *own* boss, by deciding the course of his own days. In the following section, Rune was encouraged to elaborate on his remark about how his current job provided him with "more freedom".

K	Right. Tell me more about that,… what are you thinking of when you say "more freedom"?
Rune	Well, the way it works now is that I'm sort of part of the decision making and so on, I have a say in what we'll be doing in the coming week, like, I'm doing my bit in the planning of what we'll be doing, and that sort of thing. And then, well there's that part of it that you're your own boss most of the day … you call your customers, set up meetings, and that sort of thing. Right? So in the job I was at before, I would just meet up and be given a pile of job slips, and then, see ya! Right? That's a different kettle of fish. Cause where I am now, I'm more a part of it from scratch. Right? So if the boss is on holiday, well, then I run the place on my own. And answer phones, set up meetings with customers, you name it. So you've got the freedom to run your days as you wish. Though I don't know if you'd regard that as freedom (laughs).
K	Right right. See what you mean.
Rune	But you are more your own boss. …me, I like very much to know the day before what I'll be doing the next day. I don't like to come to work and

	then get told that I'm needed there and there and there. Right? I like to have things planned out a few days ahead.

For Rune, freedom was associated with control, autonomy and predictability. This was what Rune had become motivated for when he decided to scale down. He had not, like Bjarte (the case above) become self-employed, but he had scaled down by making a job shift to an already existing small business. This seemed to have had much the same effect for Rune, as becoming self-employed had had for Bjarte. In his current work situation he felt like he was "master of my own house" more than he had been in his previous work situation.

Discussion

The structural conditions for scaling down are in large part equivalent to those of pursuing entrepreneurship. The success of the endeavour is dependent on the state of the market, the availability of capital, the opportunity for great initial time investments. These issues were discussed above. Here, some other aspects of this type of action will be discussed.

It is interesting to discuss the motivation for more autonomy in light of some points from Braverman's classic study *Labour and monopoly capital* (1974). Braverman argued that a "degradation of work" was taking place in the 20th century through the spreading of what he called scientific management. According to Braverman these practices divested workers from time-consuming mental functions (as it assigned these functions elsewhere – with management). He associated this with the influence of Taylorism and argued that the central feature in Taylorism was the separation of conception and execution: "A necessary consequence of the separation of conception

and execution is that the labour process is divided between separate sites and separate bodies of workers" (1974:124).[56]

One might say that the small scale work organisations that Rune and Bjarte were so satisfied with (at the time of their interviews), had served as escape routes from the "degradation" that Braverman (1974) was concerned about. Scaling down can be interpreted as a counterplay against Taylorism. Bjarte and Rune (above) seem to have got into work situations with higher degrees of variation, control and predictability. Under these conditions they felt they could be creative. An important pre-requisite for their creativity to unfold itself, was that they could participate in contention and execution as *continuous* processes.

In sum, the types of work that Braverman assigned to the past seem to still exist well into the 21st century. For cases skilled in the craft trades, highly autonomous work situations (that entailed a combination of contention and execution) could still be pursued, by scaling down. But, it should also be mentioned, that scaling down could have some important drawbacks. Self-employment, especially, seemed to involve a higher degree of risk and uncertainty, compared with being on an employment contract with a larger company. More generally, smaller businesses might be more vulnerable to market fluctuations. Another drawback of self-employment (in Norway) is that it involves lesser entitlements with respect to worker insurance, sickness benefits etc. Self-employed workers have to rely on drawing private insurance contracts to match those they would get in an employment relationship.

[56] Based on the present data, it is difficult to decide exactly what kind of work organization the work places of the interviewees have had. Such organizational matters have not been the focus of the analysis. It does however seem that the larger companies mentioned have exhibited more classic Tayloristic features in the sense that the larger the company, the more difficult for each worker to perform a *combination* of conception and execution.

The experience of becoming burnt out and the action of finding shelter

Over time, some of the cases experienced *becoming burnt out*. In these manual occupations, bodily strength is necessary for skills to be developed, practiced and utilised. Here, the body plays the role of a tool, whose functioning is a fundamental prerequisite for the work tasks. This is why even minor injuries can be highly disruptive for employment trajectories. Physical labour can be hard on the body, for some people more so than for others. As will be discussed after the case presentations – the degree to which manual work was destructive for the body, seemed to depend on the context in which it was performed.

For those in the current data who had experienced becoming burnt out, there was one type of action that seemed to have been particularly relevant. In a catch phrase, this type of action can be termed *finding shelter*.[57] Those who had become burnt out set out to find a job with a 1) less arduous/strenuous work situation, where they could 2) still make use of their skills and 3) still exert a financial advantage from their formal qualifications. For the men in this project, the main place to find this type of job was the public sector.

In the following, two cases will be presented in order to describe the relation between the experience of becoming burnt out and the action of finding shelter.[58] Both these cases, Geir and Bjørn, had become burnt out by working in the first line of production in the private sector and had made horizontal moves to public sector jobs where they could continue to make use of their skills.

[57] Making a transfer to a relevant sales job could potentially also serve as a way of finding shelter after becoming burnt out. However, there were no cases of this in the data. It is not a point here to provide an exhaustive list over all the job opportunities that might be useful in this *type* of action.

[58] There were no cases of this type of experience among the interviewees in the younger cohort. This seems clearly related to the (still young) age of the younger cohort (30/31 at the time of the interview). It seems likely that some of the interviewees in the younger cohort will have this type of experience in the future.

Geir: skilled as a plumber, born 1950

Geir was skilled as a plumber in 1978, eleven years after he had started as an apprentice.[59] He continued to work in the small plumbing business in which he trained until 1980. During the early seventies he had entertained the thought of pursuing entrepreneurship, but did not take any action related to this experience. He lacked the necessary start-up capital and dreaded the great initial time investments. While he was busy entertaining the thought of pursuing entrepreneurship, in the course of the 1970s, he experienced *becoming burnt out*. He found the work tasks to be getting heavier and began to experience pains in his shoulders. This motivated him to get out of the first line of production in the private sector, and find work in the public sector. In 1980 he got a job as a janitor in a primary school (owned by the municipality), and later, in 1987 he got a job in a municipal water-service department. In this latter job he had worked as a plumber since then, but under less stressful and exhausting circumstances than he had experienced in the private sector during the 1970s.

When Geir is presented here as case of someone *finding shelter* in the public sector, it is useful to specify (as far as possible based on the current data) *what* he was finding shelter *from*. Geir himself related his experience of becoming burnt out to a structural change that he had observed in the craft trades in the course of the 70s: job intensification.[60] When he started in the plumbing trade in 1967, his impression was that “people would have time to chat, and to finish things they started, to do good work”. In contrast, in the late 70s, before he made his transfer to the public sector, Geir had found himself to be “tearing around like a maniac”:

Geir	I was tearing around like a maniac from one house to the next… I mean, the work rate was turned right up. And you carried on like this until, well until you were fed up to the back teeth. Because you never felt you were

[59] The reasons for this unusually long period of apprenticeship were not clear.

[60] Notably, Geir’s impression of a processs of work intensification in the craft trades, one intensifying around the late 1970s, was corroborated by other cases in the older cohort.

	doing your job properly. I mean, it was a case of: the more you did, the more was loaded onto you.

These were the circumstances under which Geir became burnt out. Over time, he had found the work as a plumber in the private sector to be both heavy and hectic, and migrated to the public sector. Reportedly, several of his colleagues in the municipal maintenance department had had similar experiences.

In 1980, when he made his transfer to the public sector, he felt it was too late to act on an old dream he had had, of pursuing entrepreneurship. He was entering his 40s and was not keen on the great initial time investments that he knew that starting up would require.

Geir	Well I mean, I was also getting on in years, and then you thought, damn, why didn't I start up when I was younger. It's no big deal when you're young and full of get-up-and-go – right? – so you can work during the day and in the evenings calculate tender prices. Cause, you've always got to be ahead of the game, and have work coming in. And that takes a lot of energy, you know. The older you get, the more you want to ease up. So you're not so keen to keep going like that. You lose your appetite for it, the older you get.

In other words, Geir’s experience as a worker in the first line of production in the private sector, in combination with his increasing age, was not only taking its toll on his body, it was also draining his energy – the energy that he considered would have been essential if he was going to pursue entrepreneurship. In this way, the case of Geir describes not only an experience of becoming burnt out and finding shelter in the public sector, but also corroborates the point made in the first section of chapter, that opportunities for pursuing entrepreneurship seemed to decrease with age.

Bjørn: skilled as a builder, born 1950

Bjørn was skilled as a builder in 1974. He continued to work in the large building company in which he was trained until 1990. Here he held a position as a low level working supervisor (bas). Over time, he experienced the work as getting harder on his body. He noticed it first in his shoulders, after several monotonous jobs on big construction sites, in the early 1980s?.

Bjørn	I damaged my shoulder early on, cause me and another teenager we had a lot of roofing jobs we took on. We took these roofing jobs and worked all hours. And back then there were none of those nail guns that you shoot up. It was all by hand, and it was then it began to bother me. Yeah, I've felt it ever since.

As it had for Geir, Bjørn's experience of becoming burnt out took place over time. It started early on, but got worse towards the end of the 1980s. He then started having trouble with his feet as well. At the height of the economic recession (in 1990), Bjørn was compelled to make a move. Like Geir (the case above) he found making a transfer to the public sector to be the most fitting type of action. Several workers in his company had already been laid off, he felt that he could be next. That was when he applied for a job in a municipal maintenance department.

Bjørn	It was advertised in the newspaper, so I dashed off a job application.
K	OK. What lay behind that?
Bjørn	Well, it was simply that we (the company) didn't have any orders. Otherwise I'd probably have stayed on a few more years, and *then* applied for something else. Cause as I said carpentry is no old man's game.

In Bjørn's case it seems that the type of experience was in place (latent), and the fitting type of action was triggered by the economic recession. Bjørn consistently spoke of himself as an "old builder", and repeated many times during the interview how hard the *process* of aging in the building trade could be.

Bjørn	Cause, as you know, getting old in the building trade is hard. It really is. Yeah. There are a lot who jump ship.

The expression to "jump ship" refers here to making a transfer from the private to the public sector. In Bjørn's case (as in Geir's above) this was perceived as a natural and common trajectory with increasing age, after having experienced becoming burnt out.

In his current work situation, still in the same municipal maintenance department, Bjørn could work at his own pace, and avoid heavy work tasks. He was bothered by aching joints both in his feet and in his shoulders, and asbestos had been discovered in his lungs. But at the time of the interview, he could do his job in spite of all this.

Discussion

Manual work can clearly take its toll over the body over time. The cases of Geir and Bjørn have served to highlight some features of the circumstances under which this process of exhaustion can take place. In the current data, becoming burnt out through manual work in the first line of production seems to be related to the aging of the body. This is clearly not a specifically Norwegian phenomenon. For instance, Egerton and Savage (2000) **(SIDE)** have shown in the British context, that manual labour is "predominantly a young man's game". And further, historical research indicates that many have long been faced with this type of experience in male-dominated manual occupations. Hareven (1978), for instance, noted the following about industrial workers in the late 19th century:

> "Industrial workers experienced their first 'retirement' or career change in their middle or late forties, as years of exhausting industrial labor started at an early age began to render them 'useless'… even highly skilled workers were forced into temporary jobs in unskilled occupations" (1978:208)

Geir and Bjørn (above) had had experienced a process of *exhaustion* very similar to this description, but their actions based on this experience had been different because the structural conditions were clearly different. They had been "forced into temporary jobs in unskilled occupations". They had found shelter in the public sector. This fits

well with one of the conclusions from a recent cross-national comparative project on career mobility: "The public sector has a history of protecting workers from the market forces of globalization". In most of the countries studied, the public sector "sheltered mid-career men against downward mobility" (Mills and Blossfeld 2006:462). Norway was not included in this study, but this image of the public sector providing "shelter" from downward mobility sits well with the current data. But what was the nature of the "downward mobility" from which they were sheltered here*?* In some cases, the alternative might have been unskilled labour (as in Hareven's historical account) although there were on cases of this in the current data. In other cases, the alternative to finding shelter might have been a disability pension – in other words – a termination of their employment trajectories and exclusion from the labour market altogether.

A historical development of work intensification might imply a development toward *greater* strain on the body in the first line of production. This would mean that jobs in the first line of production in the private sector would become less viable as a *long-term* work situation. The implication of such a development would be that *aging in itself* would become an increasing problem for men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations, and thereby, that the *need* for shelter would also be *increasing*. That would be troubling in light of the current tendency towards outsourcing and sub-contracting of municipal/state/public services to private enterprises. In Norway this development affected at first (in the 1990s) mostly work situations in *female*-dominated occupations, but more recently, also more male-dominated municipal services have been increasingly "privatised" as well. For instance, recently the maintenance of municipal parks in Oslo (Grønn Etat) was outsourced, and so were the janitor-services at schools in Bergen. In other words, while the *need* for shelter could be increasing (due to work intensification in the private sector), the shelter for those inflicted by this development could be slowly disappearing. In other words, not only may this type of privatization of public sector, through subcontracting and outsourcing etc., lead to *increased job instability*, as indeed hypothesized by Mills and Blossfeld (2006:464) it might also lead to an increase in pre-mature exclusion

from working life (disability pensions). Work situations like those in which Geir and Bjørn could continue to make use of their skills, could be slowly disappearing. Manual work has long become more difficult with increasing age, but as testified by the cases of Geir and Bjørn (and also by the case of Bjarte) above, this is highly dependent on the conditions under which manual work is performed. Geir and Bjørn were cases of men who had become burnt out, but could continue to make use of their acquired skills – provided they could do so under less hectic and stressful conditions than those under which they had become burnt out.

The experience of becoming content and the action of adapting in the present

The last type of experience in the typology is the experience of *becoming content*. As the other types of experience which have been considered, becoming content is analysed as a *process taking place over time in specific work situations*. Content is not something a person simply is, but as something one somehow *becomes*, and something one may quickly seize to be.

In the data from this project, the experience of becoming content was found related to the action of *adapting in the present*. In order to become content the cases seemed to perform a specific type of action: *adapting in the present*. The informal and private nature of this type of action is perhaps why it is rather un-orthodox to consider it here a form a labour market action. When someone stays put in their job, for instance, this might often be analysed as a type of *passiveness* in terms of labour market action. However, the current data suggest that the action of adapting in the present required (like any other type of action) specific *resources* to be available. There were limits within the action of adapting in the present would take place.

The complexity (and unorthodoxy) of analysing adapting in the present as a form of labour market action, has required that the following description and discussion make

use of four case presentations. The cases of Jon, Steinar, Rolf and Jan are presented. These are not analysed as cases who simply *were* content. They are analysed as cases who had at some point in their lives been successful in making use of specific resources in their work situations to adapt in the present, and thereby, *become* content.

Jon: skilled as a plater, born 1951

Jon was skilled as a plater in 1971 after an apprenticeship with a large ship building company in Bergen. At the time of his interview, almost 40 years later, he was employed with at a large contractor in the oil industry and worked with mechanical maintenance of sub-sea equipment. His position was Team leader (bas).[61] This meant that his job was to oversee that his team (himself and two others) executed the maintenance orders from higher up in the work organization in accordance with the instructions. Before he got his current job as an industrial mechanic, Jon had had a richly varied employment trajectory including, industrial mechanic, bus-driver, truck-driver, janitor for an oil-related company.

When someone has tried out this many different jobs and occupations, one might suspect them to be highly selective, or easily discontented – constantly on the lookout for something else. This was not the case with Jon. He did not seem at all selective (picky). On the contrary, he insisted that he was very open to many kinds of work. This was clear from the following section of his interview:

K	As far as different types of work are concerned, have you ever considered what kind of work you prefer?
Jon	No.
K	No?
Jon	I haven't. No, I'm just like the potato. I can be put to many different uses. A bit of a jack of all trades. I can turn my hand to most things. I'm pretty handy with most jobs. Without wanting to boast. No, I've no trouble

[61] This aspect of the case of Jon is subject to more detailed description and discussion in Chapter 8.

	there.
I	Are there any types of work you definitely wouldn't want to do?
Jon	No… I don't know. No. … Can't really think of any.

In other words, based on his experience, Jon asserted that he could adapt to (almost) any job. Just like potatoes can be prepared to accompany a wide variety of dishes, Jon could adapt to a wide variety of work situations. He had been struck by bankruptcy twice, but had got work again right away. He seemed to have become content with many different jobs.

K	…Would you say you've been motivated for different kinds of work at different times of life?
Jon	No. All the types of jobs I've tried, I've enjoyed. Both at home and at work. Everything I've turned my hand to.

In connection with the two aforementioned bankruptcies, however, he had clearly been worried. In the one instance he had got another job through a friend, in the most recent instance he had "begged" on his knees ("eg knegikk de") to be employed with his current employer. This history could explain why the most important resource for Jon when he adapted in the present, was the employment features of his current job. This *bottom-line* aspect of his current approach to work was clear from the following section.

K	Would you say you're content with the choices you've made when it comes to education and work?
Jon	Yeah. Things are going, and have gone, pretty well for me. So that's not a problem. I'm not fussed about titles and education, as long as I've got food on the table. Of course there are people who put great store in titles and awards. But it's… as long as you can afford to pay for food and the cottage and the car and…holidays, well you haven't got a lot to complain about. You haven't.

When Jon was not concerned about what kind of work tasks he performed, as long as he had a job that could finance his home, cottage and car, this is reminiscent of a finding from Willis (1977). Willis contended that "So far as the lads are concerned, all jobs are basically the same" (1977:161). One of the "lads" said about his job: "It's

just a… fucking way to earn money" (1977:100). Jon was obviously not as extreme in his language as this lad was, but he did share an emphasis on the employment features of his job (the job as a way to earn money). And he was not concerned about the specific nature of the work tasks he performed.

The cases that are presented here as becoming content through adapting in the present, seemed to be *open* to many kinds of work. However, it was clear that in order for the action of adapting in the present to be successful, some specific features – which they considered to be positive – needed to be present in their current work situations. Jon emphasized the most basic, what can be termed employment features – that in order for him to adapt, he needed job to adapt to. The following case, Steinar, mobilized other features of his work situation in his action of adapting in the present.

Steinar: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1979

Steinar was skilled as an industrial mechanic in 1999. After his apprenticeship test he was offered a job with the large sub-contractor in the oil industry with which he had trained. He declined in order to go live with his girlfriend, who lived three hours travel away. In that area he could not get a job as an industrial mechanic. He however got a job at an industrial bakery, working with machine maintenance. Like Jon (above). Steinar was very open to many types of work. This was clear from the following section.

K	Have you given any thought to different lines of work and to what you like and so forth?
Steinar	…No, not really. As long as I've got a job, I'm pretty happy. I'm not fussy, as far as work is concerned. I've got a pretty open mind. I'm a…how should I put it, I've got a positive attitude, so if I'm put to a task, I get it done, and when I'm done with it, I'll find another. I don't like idling about. Cause I like to keep busy. That's best. Yeah. I've always been like that.

Steinar’s formulation in the passage above “if I'm put to a task, I get it done” is similar to Jon (above), who said “I'm just like the potato. I can be put to many different uses”. Another similarity was that this openness was not unlimited. It was evident in Steinar’s case too that certain resources were required for him to be able to adapt in the present. An important job feature for Steinar was short-term temporal predictability. This was clear from the following section, in which he described why he had found himself unable to adapt in the present in his previous job (at the industrial bakery).

Steinar	And then one thing led to another. First I was given more responsibility. Then suddenly a lot more responsibility (for the well-functioning of all the machines). On top of this I was on call 24 hours a day all year round. So I rarely had a whole weekend off, I was pretty much always at work. And as for my leisure time, that was cut short. There wasn't much time left over for the family. Our son was at school around then. And I thought that now I'm really going to have to find a job with normal hours, so I know what is what, and when I clock on and when I clock off and so on. The market at that time was opening up again, so I applied to X (another large sub-contractor in the oil industry). And when I got the job there, we moved out here.

This shows how Steinar’s experience of becoming content in his *current* job was foiled upon his previous experiences. Based on his experience of temporal un-predictability, he appreciated the predictability in his current job. Also, it seems that Steinar in his previous job had experienced more command responsibility than he was keen on having. He had gotten more command responsibility without having been motivated to take charge. With a background in this experience, he valued what can be termed freedom *from* command in his current job. Or put differently, he used this job feature as a resource for adapting in the present. This was clear from the following section.

K	What are your thoughts about possibly taking steps up the ladder? Or do you sort of see yourself more as one of the guys on the shop floor?
Steinar	Well…I'm not sure what to say to that. When I worked at the bakery I was stand-in for the manager from time to time. And that side of it…well

	it has its good and bad points. If you get a management position, well you lose a little freedom. You're landed with much more responsibility. You can be called up at any time of the day or night… No, being a manager isn't always a walk in the park. At times it can be pretty stressful.

These two features of his current job (freedom from command and short-term temporal predictability) were so valuable to Steinar that they were worth a reduced pay-check.

Steinar	I mean, before I left the bakery they made me an offer of better pay. Better than I have now.
K	Oh really?
Steinar	So I've actually taken a cut in wages.
K	Right.
Steinar	But I'm working normal hours now. I know which days of the week I'm working.

Steinar seemed to associate temporal predictability with a type of control. But notably, this type of control is different than the one discussed above. For Bjarte and Rune (above) the type of control in question was control over their own *work tasks*. That was not the issue for Steinar. He was generally "not fussy" about the nature of work tasks, was not (like Bjarte and Rune) especially motivated for more autonomy. His notion of control was related more to temporal predictability. This was made clear again in the following section.

K	What's the best part of the job you're doing now, to put it that way?
Steinar	Well, in contrast to the job I had before, I now have, I mean, how should I put it, things are more well-ordered. I mean, I've got, I feel as if I've got more freedom to choose, if I'm up for some overtime, then I do some overtime, and if I don't want to do overtime, I don't have to. And then there's the time off. And of course the working hours which I'm on which are pretty, well, let me put it this way, when I'm working day and night shifts, OK, I know that's what I'm doing. If I'm only on day shift, I know it's seven to three and then done. You know when you clock on and when you clock off. Right? And you have time off this weekend and that weekend. …Yeah, it's really worked well for me, the way it is now. I always know now what my working hours are…yeah.

The way in which he answered this question is notable. When he was asked here to describe positive features of his current job, he performed a *comparison* of his *experiences* in his current job and his previous job. This comparison revealed that what he valued the most about his current job was *short term* temporal predictability. This is interesting in light of the following section, which shows that he was not especially concerned with *long term* temporal predictability although he seemed to have good reason to be. Job insecurity was a rather hot topic in Steinar's life at the time of the interview. Several colleagues at the plant at which he worked had been laid off due to a current market bust in the oil industry and Steinar feared he could be one of the ones to go next.

K	Are your worried that there may be a third round (of layoffs), if I can put it that way?
Steinar	Yeah, you feel the uncertainty, but I've never had any bother getting work, to be honest, so I've always landed on my feet, found something, I'm not too fussy as long as I've got enough to keep me occupied. So, in that way, well I'm not losing too much sleep over it.

In other words, Steinar was not especially worried about losing his current job. As long as he could get some other job, he was confident he could become content again. In terms from the typology, he was confident he could adapt to another job, because, as he said: "I'm not too fussy". In sum, the impression is that Steinar managed *long-term insecurity* by emphasizing *short-term temporal predictability*. This indicates how *adapting in the present* might be *especially* valuable for people who work in the parts of the private sector most subject to market fluctuations: building and industry.

The following section is helpful in specifying the context in which Steinar's action of adapting in the present took place.

K	But have you ever considered that it might be nice to have a job where that uncertainty was never present?
Steinar	Yeah, that would've been good. But you know, there are ups and downs in most areas, in building, certainly. There are ups and downs in pretty much every line of work, so for me, no, I mean I've just got a bit

	accustomed to taking the rough with the smooth.

The significant point is the taken-for-granted frame of reference. Steinar seemed to be comparing his insecure situation only with other male-dominated manual occupations, who were also highly dependent on the state of the market. Within this frame of reference, market fluctuations were taken for granted – something to which one *had to* adapt – or, put differently, to learn to live with. This leaves the impression that Steinar had come to terms with the perils of market fluctuations a long time ago, and that he, at the time of the interview, saw them as a fact of life, no use worrying about. From this perspective, job insecurity was a given that no parties could affect.

Steinar's taken-for-granted comparison with other male-dominated manual occupations has a wider significance. Because, it indicates that the act of adapting how the present was not limit-less and transferable to all types of work. When Jon and Steinar talked in general terms about their approaches to work, they appeared to be almost astonishingly open. However, there is much to suggest that there were some taken-for-granted *limits* to their openness – that there were some un-stated limits to what kind of work tasks they would be comfortable with. The nature of these limits were in most cases difficult to specify clearly because they were seldom clearly formulated. The general impression is, however, these limits to the openness of approaches to work run in parallel with the boundaries of male-dominated types of work (Or more precisely, what will be termed *object based work* in chapter 8). This limitation normally presents itself in the form of *silent discourse*, because the alternatives appear to be literally out-of-the-question. For instance, although Jon (the case above), had tried out a great number of occupations (plater, bus-driver, truck-driver, janitor, industrial mechanic) – these were notably all male-dominated occupations. And, it might also be mentioned that when he formulated his openness to "any" kind of work, he did say: "I can turn my *hand* to most *things*" (emphasis added). What kind of work is it that typically involves turning *hands* to *things*? This might be taken to indicate some limitations to Jon's openness, although he himself was highly reluctant to admit any such limitation.

Steinar, on the other hand, *was* specific about some types of work he would not have liked to do. In the following section he made *explicit* what kind of jobs that were out of the question for him.

K	But, if I understand you correctly, your attitude is that you're not fussy about what sort of work you're doing, but I mean there must be some jobs you wouldn't want?
Steinar	Yeah, well, nothing as a cleaner or anything like that. That's not my cup of tea.
K	A cleaner?
Steinar	Yeah, no I don't think I'd want to be a cleaning *lady* or something like that.
K	No.
Steinar	And I don't think I'm suited for any office job.
K	No?
Steinar	No. Not sitting at a computer.
K	No?
Steinar	I think I have to have a bit of, you know, a bit of action.
K	A bit of action?
Steinar	Right.
K	Right.
Steinar	Not sit there staring at computer screens. Nothing in IT and…no office job. No, I'm don't think I'm suited for that.
K	No? What makes you say that, can you say a bit more?
Steinar	Well, I've got to have a job that keeps me in movement. If I have to sit and stare at a screen all day, well, I don't think it's my cup of tea. I mean, there's not enough happening. You have to use your body, you have to move around a bit. I mean if I had to sit still for a whole day, well I don't think so, I really don't see that as an option for me. I think I'm best suited to work where something's going on, where I can move about. Yeah.

When Steinar was pushed on the issue of the limits to his openness, he first made explicit a point which is clearly gendered. A job as a cleaner was conceived as firstly, a woman's job, and secondly, out of the question for Steinar. And these two points seemed to be highly related. He also mentioned not wanting an "office job". This point did not seem to be gendered in the same way. His justification for this limitation

was related to his felt need for spatial and bodily movement. These were features of his current job that he can be interpreted to have used (like those mentioned above) as resources for adapting in the present. A very similar emphasis of spatial movement was evident in the following case, the case of Rolf.

Rolf: skilled as a plumber, born 1979

Rolf was skilled as a plumber in 1999 after training in a large plumbing company specializing in big construction projects. He worked in this company until he changed to another company in 2004. [62] Since 2005 Rolf's position had been one of low level working supervisor (bas) in this company (which *also* specialized in big construction projects). His case provides a description of what seemed to be a structural drive *into* positions as low-level working supervisors (bas). Rolf did however not appreciate the type of command authority that this position involved. This was *not* because his command in this position was *limited* (to overseeing the execution of plans that someone else has made). On the contrary, it was because what he liked most, was "working", not "organizing". Unlike Harald and Arne (the entrepreneurs above), Rolf said nothing to indicate that he had experienced a motivation to take charge. Quite opposite to them, he had become motivated for a work situation with *less* command authority.

K	If we consider the actual work, do you like the actual work involved in being a plumber?
Rolf	Well…really you can say that what I like most is *working*. I mean, instead of organizing all sorts of things. I mean, I like a job where you are actually doing the job, instead of keeping tabs on everything. But that's part of being a supervisor (bas), keeping customer orders, paperwork, and all that, in order.
K	Yeah, ok. Today, how much of your time goes to paperwork and the like, organizing others etc.?
Rolf	Well, paperwork can take a really large amount of time, it really does.
K	So the plumbers who are under you, the ones that have been employed

[62] He and a number of his colleagues changed from one company to another in 2004 due to what he termed "severe mismanagement". The nature of this mismanagement was not clear from his descriptions.

	more recently, they are actually doing *more* of the sort of work you prefer doing, than you do?
Rolf	Yeah. Yeah. You can put it like that.
K	Would you consider just taking a job that wasn't a supervisor's job, since you find the paperwork tiresome…?
Rolf	I mean, I can see that it sort of has to be like that. I mean, it's those who have most experience that have to do the supervisor's job. It's only natural. It wouldn't be right if I had to work under someone who had less experience than I have.

In this situation, Rolf could not, like Steinar (above), with any legitimacy use *freedom from command* as a resource upon adapting in the present. It is however clear that he agreed with Steinar that this type of freedom was positive. This was an opinion he had made up based on personal experience. For him, freedom from command was something he wished for, but felt he could not have. He viewed his own trajectory to be only "natural" – and hence as there being nothing to be done about it.

However, if Rolf could not with any legitimacy emphasize the freedom from command authority in his current job, he could make use of another resource in his act of adapting in the present. He emphasized the freedom of *spatial and bodily movement* that he was awarded in his current job. Rolf mentioned this type of freedom first in the following section:

K	In what sort of situation are you glad that you became a plumber?
Rolf	…Well, I'd have to repeat what I said earlier…that at least it's a job where you can use your body. Right? Freedom and so forth…but there's no doubt other jobs you can say that about.

This indicates that Rolf, like Steinar, considered *bodily movement* to be a positive feature of his job, and that he related this to freedom. When probed further about the notion of freedom to which he had referred, he attempted to illustrate it by selecting for comparison certain other typically male-dominated manual work situations that involved less *spatial movement*.

K	When you talk about the freedom of your job, what are you thinking

	about, more specifically?
Rolf	…I mean, in comparison with other jobs, where you're stuck to the same spot every day. I also have more freedom to move around, what with having my own car, and that sort of thing. …So in comparison with a factory worker and that sort of job, to compare my job with that…well I'd say I have more freedom. … And also in comparison with an industrial worker and that sort of job.
K	So it's not something you could see yourself doing, working at the same place every day?
Rolf	Yeah, for example at a shipyard or something like that. Or a factory job. No that's not for me.
K	What's the reason for that?
Rolf	Well, it's just that you're tied up.

Rolf would not have liked a job at a ship yard or a factory because he anticipated that the lack of spatial movement in such a job would make him feel "stuck" or "tied up". *Compared* with such jobs, he found his current job to be characterized by freedom. This was due to the fact that he here had at his disposal a company-owned lorry and enjoyed a frequent change of work-sites.

In sum, when Rolf's current job did not involve the freedom from command that he ideally would have liked, he used other types of freedom in order to adapt in the present work situation: freedom of *bodily* and *spatial movement.* As in the cases above, his taken-for-granted frame of comparison seemed to have been other male-dominated manual occupations.

Jan: skilled as a plater, born 1950)

Jan was skilled as a plater in 1971. He had worked since then with the same company: an engine factory a few hours from Bergen. This made him one of very few in the data from this project who had remained in the same *work place* his whole working life. His work tasks in this job consisted in boat engine repair and service.

Like the three cases above, Jan is presented here to describe the action of adapting in the present. But before inspecting how Jan went about adapting in the present, it is useful to bring attention to another experience he seems to have had. Over time, Jan had experienced a motivation to take charge. However, this experience occurred at a late stage in life, when he considered it impossible to take the appropriate type of action (which likely would have been “climbing up”, see Chapter 6). At the time of the interview he had come to regret not taking the type of action appropriate to his motivation to take charge. His case indicates, like the cases of Harald, Arne and Geir above (and also all the cases presented in the next chapter), that a motivation to take charge is more likely to be acted upon, the earlier in the life course it occurs.

In hindsight, Jan harboured feelings of regret for not trying to “climb up” earlier. This first came up in his answer to a question about advice to his children

K	Have you ever given your kids advice about what sort of education or career they should choose?
Jan	Yeah. I've told them many times. That they mustn't follow in their father's footsteps (laughs).
K	Really?
Jan	Yeah, they've got to get a good education and do well at school. And so far I'm glad to say they've followed my advice. We'll see.
K	What you said about not following in your footsteps, what did you mean by that?
Jan	Well, I think today's young generation ought to get a solid education, so that they'll have better prospects in the job market, and won't end up sooner or later as a dustbin man somewhere or other – right? – so I think it's important they get themselves a decent education. Anyway, I think that's really important. All parents want the same for their kids, that they get a decent education. …There's a little part of me that regrets not making a bit more of an effort when I was at school. Right? I really do. And that little part maybe isn't so little, it's pretty big.

The roots of Jan’s regret seemed to lie in not having acted when he had the chance. He lived with his parents until he was around 30 years old (when he met his wife). During this period he had few economic responsibilities (compared with those he

would assume later in life). In retrospect, he thinks that *this* was when he should have acted. However, during this period of his life, he had *not* yet experienced a motivation to take charge. Rather, back then, in his twenties, he recalled having contemplated making a *change* of occupations, through becoming an electrician or builder.

Jan	Once I'd done my apprenticeship and after a few years at (the boat engine factory), I sort of realised that either electrician or carpenter, that was the sort of thing I fancied doing. That perhaps I should've been doing that all along.
K	How did it come about that you didn't go for those alternatives?
Jan	Well, I suppose I couldn't be bothered. Mostly that. I had it cushy there at (the boat engine factory) – right? – it was sort of safe, secure – right? – I knew what I had, but I didn't know what I would end up with if I packed it in and started over, at something else.

It seems that Jan had considered starting from scratch in a different occupation to be associated with risk/uncertainty, and that this is why he had not acted on this impulse. With time, his wish for an alternative path seems to have changed. At the time of the interview, electrician or builder was not what he would have chosen had he had the chance to choose again.

K	If you could go back and start again, you would have chosen carpenter or electrician?
Jan	Yeah, maybe, but it all depends really, if I'd done better at school I could have landed some job or other in the oil industry or in an office job. I could have been sitting in front of a computer screen, perhaps, who knows. True enough, I dare say there's plenty of jobs to choose from, an engineer, for example, a mechanical engineer, sitting and constructing this and that. Yeah, something like that…

At the time of the interview, an office job which involved participation in the planning ("constructing") stages of a production process was what Jan envisioned as a positive alternative to his current situation. When he was in his 20s, this had not been on his mind.

Jan	No, I didn't think about *that* back then, when I *should* have tried to make

	it happen. But now I'd say it's a bit late in the day. When you're knocking 60, I reckon you haven't got much hope in the job market anymore.

In other words, Jan perceived his chances of climbing up – of getting a job where he could participate in the planning stages of a production process – as being severely limited by age.

With this background knowledge of Jan's case, we can turn to what makes him a case of someone who had practiced the action of adapting in the present. In the situation where he viewed upward mobility as out of the question, he did his best to adapt in the present. He seemed to have be relatively successful at it, considering his *simultaneous* feeling of regret. When asked what the most positive aspects of his job were, it became clear that he had reflected on positive features that his job had, and that other (male-dominated) jobs in the factory did not have. In this frame of comparison, his job was "the best job in the place".

Jan	Well, I don't know. I mean if you're the sort like me who's going to be on the shop floor or maybe in the workshop, like I've been for donkey's years, well, I'd say the job I have is the best job you can get.
K	Really?
Jan	Yeah yeah yeah. No doubt about it. I wouldn't swap my job with some machine operator or one of the other jobs in the workshop. I've got the best job in the place, hundred percent guaranteed, without a shadow of a doubt.
K	What makes you so sure you have the best job?
Jan	Well, mostly cause it's interesting work. Most others around there are doing the same thing all the time. Right? If your job is to spray-paint the engines – right ? – that's all you ever do. You do that every day. And you can't exactly call it fascinating work. Now the work I'm doing is more interesting. And take for example the workers in the warehouse – right? – who are looking out parts, putting them in a cardboard box, and sending them off to some customer or other. Or those who are assembling the engines, that's not especially interesting work either. You're not *learning* very much doing that. I repair, when all's said and done, every gear that comes in, and keep all the parts we use in order, and make sure that all

	the parts we need are ordered well in advance…and that we have them when we need them…

Here Jan compared his job with other thinkable (male-dominated) jobs in the factory. He emphasized that *he* had interesting work tasks, that he could *learn* something from doing. When asked *another* place in the interview what was the best thing about the work he did, he emphasized the high degree of *control over his own work*. He felt his job involved a high degree of independence. This was perhaps one reason why he had *not* become motivated for more autonomy (like Bjarte and Rune above). Jan’s job as an engine repair man was highly specialized. He had been doing it for many years and was *the* expert at it in the factory. The autonomy that this exclusiveness awarded him was a useful resource for him. It helped him adapt in the present, and thereby become content, despite his old feelings of regret.

K	What do you like best about the work tasks in your current job?
Jan	That I'm completely independent. There's no one looking over my shoulder saying I ought to do this or ought to do that. Nothing like that. …So I'm really sort of on my own, there's no one else poking their nose into what I'm doing and, well, they wouldn't have a clue anyway.

Discussion

The four case presentations above demonstrate that certain *conditions* need to be in place for adapting in the present to be successful. Like the other types of action distinguished in the typology, this type of action requires making use of certain resources, namely, certain positive resources that were available in a given work situation. However, the conditions that needed to be in place for adapting in the present to be successful were highly varied and un-standardized. As the four cases above testify, a wide variety of different features of a given work situation could be used for this purpose. The following list is a sample of some of the features that were used as resources for adapting in the present in the current data. All needed not to be used at once, and others, not mentioned here, could be used as well.

- Employment features (having a job vs. not having a job)
- Short term temporal predictability
- Freedom from command
- Freedom of bodily movement
- Freedom of spatial movement

These were some of the main positive job features that were drawn attention to in a procedure of comparison. The first feature (employment features) derives from comparing with a hypothetical situation where on did not have a job at all. The other features were deduced from comparison with other conceivable jobs. The jobs within their frame of reference (comparison) seemed to be predominantly male-dominated manual jobs (this will be discussed further in Chapter 8).

The main point in the current context is *not* to produce a complete list of job features that were used as resources in the action of adapting in the present. The point is to sum up and thereby specify *some* of these features and thereby demonstrate that adapting in the present was limited by *actual* properties of work situations. The case descriptions above showed that adapting in the present was, like the other types of action, performed in *dialogue with one's environment*. It was thereby not only a product of a reflexive "internal conversation" (Archer 2003), but intimately related to specific experiences. For instance, Steinar, who worked in a factory, did not emphasize freedom of *spatial* movement when he adapted in the present, because his job did not involve much such movement. He did however emphasize freedom of *bodily* movement, which his job *did* involve. Rolf, on the other hand, did emphasize freedom of *spatial* movement, which *he* enjoyed by driving his lorry from work-site to work site. Likewise, Steinar emphasized short-term predictability as a positive feature of his job (when long term predictability was not available due to the current cutbacks). The impression is that if something positive could be said about a job, this

something was a resource that could *potentially* be mobilized in the action of adapting in the present.

The first three types of experience and action in the typology all involved a kind of *evaluating* between *past* and *future* work situations. For instance, Harald and Arne became motivated to take charge – for a *higher* degree of ownership of the production process. Bjarte and Rune became motivated for *more* autonomy – work situations where they were *more* in control of their *own* work. And, Geir and Bjørn became burnt out – and found themselves *less* exhausting jobs in the public sector. In contrast to all these cases, the cases who had become content through adapting in the present seem to have been more *present oriented.* This present orientation might make this an especially useful (valuable) type of action in occupations that are subject to great market fluctuations. In turbulent labour markets, where one *has to* deal with insecurity, in one way or another, it would seem an advantage to think "I live in the present, and deal with things as they come along" ("eg lever i nuet, så får vi ta det som det kommer").[63] The cases that had become content did so through different ways of appreciating what they had in the present.

In his classic book, Willis (1977) argued that "even a meaningless job can be made a 'success' if it were carried out with pride and honesty" (1977:129). This is interesting to discuss in relation to the action of adapting in the present. At first glance, this might seem nice and generous thing to say about low level jobs[64], but upon closer inspection, a certain paternalism is revealed. There is good reason to question Willis' use of the term "meaningless job". At least in the data from this project, there appeared to be *no such thing*. This is because, a feature of a work situation (which might seem insignificant to an outsider, such as freedom of spatial or bodily movement), may in fact be an important resource enabling people to become content

[63] This quote is from Terje, a case of adapting in the present which (for reasons of space) has not been presented in this chapter.

[64] When Willis used this term it was likely with the best of intentions. He might for instance have *meant* to say that dignity can be found in jobs that are commonly considered meaningless.

by adapting in the present. In the current data, it was *not* inherent properties of the different jobs in themselves that determined their attractiveness or unattractiveness. For this reason, attempting to assert meaning and attractiveness of jobs at a general level (as Willis did above) seems impossible, because meaning is determined in context.

Concluding discussion

This chapter had its origin in an interest in the processes by which a *separation of paths* over the life course had taken place among the men under study. How had it come about that men with very similar starting points in the labour market would gradually spread into a wide variety of different positions? Throughout the chapter it has been argued that the key to understanding this separation of paths in the current data lies in the relations between four different types of experiences in work situations and four different types of action. As the analysis explored the nature of these experiences, and the conditions for the relevant types of action, the importance of *context* became clear. The following discussion will summarize the main points from the analysis, and attempt to clarify, as far as possible, the historical specificity of the context that has been found relevant for understanding the process of separation of paths over the life course.

In the first section, the relation between an experience of motivation to *take charge* and the action of *starting up* were described and discussed. This was accomplished through the presentation of the cases of Harald and Arne. They were both among those who had become motivated, through experience in specific work situations, to have a greater say in the supervision and planning stages of the work processes. In comparison with "climbing up" (or, upward mobility in existing work organizations, which will be discussed in the next chapter) the action of starting up seemed to be associated with a fairly individualized, one might say non-bureaucratic form of power. The *basis* of the type of command that Harald and Arne had become

motivated for was *their* highly personal *vision* and *drive* concerning the work processes in question – in other words, their individual entrepreneurial spirit. They had become motivated not only to make a greater contribution to the planning and supervision stages of the work process, but to have the final word.

From his present position as a successful entrepreneur it was almost as if Arne felt he had been *born* to pursue entrepreneurship. Paradoxically, this is precisely the kind of notion which this chapter, as a whole, has made a case against. One might say that a main point of the four-fold typology (which was developed from the data) is that different cases have *not* been "born" to fill different positions in the labour market. They have ended up where they have through an interplay of experiences, actions and structural conditions. And, indeed, as Arne's case presentation in the previous chapter showed, when he was younger he "didn't have the faintest notion" that he "would become a bricklayer, become a master bricklayer".

Another point in this section was that, the *later* in the life course a motivation to take charge was experienced, the less likely it was to be acted upon. Jan, for instance, experienced a motivation to take charge at a stage in life which he perceived as "too late" to act accordingly. On the other hand, Harald pursued entrepreneurship relatively late, as he was entering his forties. That came about when an experience of motivation to take charge happened to coincide with an inheritance (which he used as start-up capital).

The most decisive structural conditions that had an influence on whether the action of pursuing entrepreneurship was successful or not, seemed to be market timing, availability of capital, and opportunity for great initial time investments. Especially because of the importance of market timing, the conditions for starting up were clearly historically specific. The *experience* of motivation to take charge, on the other

hand, did not seem particularly historically specific. At least, the nature of its historical specificity was not possible to determine based on the current data.

The second section examined the relation between the experience of motivation for *more autonomy* and the action of *scaling down*. This was accomplished through description and discussion of the cases Bjarte and Rune. They had both, over time, become motivated to decide more over their own work. Bjarte had found becoming self-employed to be the action fitting to this experience, and Rune had sought employment in an already existing smaller-scale work organization. These two different ways of scaling down had enabled them to participate in *both* the contention and the execution stages of the relevant production process. The same degree of combination seemed to be more difficult within larger-scale work organizations characterized by a more specialized division of labour. On this background it was suggested that scaling down could be interpreted as a counter-action to practices of Taylorism.[65] On the other hand, it was also noted that self-employment could be associated with increased insecurity (lesser insurances, sickness benefits etc.), which could serve to decrease the attractiveness of this type of action.

The third section of the chapter examined the relation between the experience of *becoming burnt out* and the action of *finding shelter*. This was accomplished by description and discussion of the cases of Geir and Bjørn. Here, historical research (Hareven 1978) served as a useful reminder that manual work has *long* taken its toll over the bodies of those who have performed it. Processes of work intensification over time, which several in the older cohort had taken notice of, might have served to amplify these consequences. But on the other hand, strain on the body would be likely to be *reduced* as a result of technological improvements and HLS-initiatives. In other words, the nature of historical *developments* over time with respect to the

[65] If it could be determined that the relevant work organizations increasingly were exhibiting Tayloristic features this would suggest that the experience of motivation for more autonomy was historically specific. This has not been possible based on the current data.

experience of becoming burnt out was not possible to determine based on the current data.

The *action* relevant to the experience of becoming burnt out was, however, more easily contextualized in historical terms. When Geir and Bjørn over time had become burnt out, they had sought out alternative jobs in which they could continue to use their skills, but do so in ways that did not do further harm to their bodies. This type of shelter was clearly difficult for them to find in the first line of production in the private sector. They *had* however found such jobs in the public sector. Here, they had continued to make use of their skills, but in ways that that they found less heavy and less hectic – in short, less exhausting.

It should be mentioned here that the experience of becoming burnt out also seemed to have some less bodily, more general, properties. Part of the reason why Geir, for instance, became burnt out during the 1970s was that he never felt he was allowed to do his job properly. He became *frustrated* that he did not have time to do what he called "good work" – and this frustration seems to have played a part in his more general process of exhaustion.

The last section examined the relation between the experience of *becoming content* and the action of *adapting in the present*. This was accomplished by description and discussion of four cases: Jon, Steinar, Rolf and Jan. Four cases were found necessary for this purpose because adapting in the present is not normally viewed as a type of labour market action – likely because of its informal and private character. The result of this type of action was, unlike those discussed above, to stay put in one's current job – until something changed so as to make the action of adapting in the present difficult.

As with the other types of actions, specific resources were required for adapting in the present to be successful. There were limits within which this action was carried out. The cases that were presented in this section did not adapt in the present by virtue of having "adaptability" as a feature of their "personality". Adapting was not something they found themselves able to do in any situation. Steinar, for instance, did *not* adapt to the un-predictable job at the bakery, and Rolf did *not* adapt to his previous job in the "mismanaged" plumbing company. In general, adapting in the present required specific features to be present in the current work situation. Exactly *which* features which were mobilized in the action of adapting in the present seemed to vary from case to case. Therefore, no attempt was made to produce an *exhaustive* list of these features. The point in this section was to specify the *type of action* (adapting in the present), not the whole range of resources that could be mobilized in this type of action.

Adapting in the present was distinguished from the other types of action by its distinct present-orientation. It was a type of action that could produce for the cases that performed it, an *appreciation* of what they had in their current jobs. By a kind of *comparison* with other thinkable jobs, positive features of their current jobs were *discovered*. In other words, their approaches to work were continually *constituted* through comparison of their jobs to other thinkable jobs. Notably, the taken-for-granted frame of reference for these comparisons was other male-dominated manual occupations (this latter point will be explored further in Chapter 8).

In sum, the data from this project show that the men under study had come to know *through experience* what kind of work tasks they were most motivated for. Therefore, since their approaches to work were found so to be so intimately related to experiences in specific work situations, it would not make sense to categorize each individual case as *having* one type of approach to work. Because, these men's *approaches to work* were liable for great changes if their work situations changed. The typology which has been central to the chapter should therefore not be read as a

categorization of types of *individuals* (or, as four different groups of people). This is because the specifics of their approaches to work were *constituted* in an interplay between experiences, actions and structural conditions. Their actions were not end-products of reflexive "internal conversations" (Archer 2003). Their actions were extracts from a dialogue with their environments, a dialogue which took place over the entire life course.

Chapter 6: Upward mobility over the life course

Introduction

This chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter. But whereas the previous chapter had a more over-arching goal – to describe and discuss these men's *four* main types of experience in work situations and the related types of labour market action – the current chapter is more focused and specific. Here the focus is on the conditions for the action of "climbing up" (pursuing upward mobility in existing work organizations). In other words, where the previous chapter discussed more generally, how to understand the question of separation of paths over the life course, this chapter explores, more specifically, *one* of the paths that could potentially lead these men "upwards" in occupational hierarchies over the life course. The main reason for devoting a separate chapter to this purpose is that the analysis on this point revealed some significant cohort differences. For this reason, the current chapter is structured as a cohort comparison. A more general justification for devoting attention to questions that concern conditions for upward mobility over the life course is that this can provide valuable knowledge on what may be termed the "openness" of society, or what Weber would term "life chances".

Upward social mobility over the life course is, arguably, mostly associated with occupations that require tertiary education. It is people with tertiary (or "higher") education that are expected to have the most prosperous careers. In contrast, occupations that require qualifications at the secondary level are more associated with stability (*not* mobility) over the life course. Conditions are not, and are not expected to be, favourable towards careers in the same sense.

In the current data, upward mobility was related to an experience of *motivation to take charge*. And, as was evident in the previous chapter, far from all the cases had experienced this type of motivation to take charge. This is important to point out again, because it shows that the general attractiveness of upward mobility cannot be taken for granted (*assumed* a priori). For the cases that *did* at some point experience a motivation to take charge, however, two types of action were particularly relevant: "starting up" (pursuing entrepreneurship) and "climbing up" (upward mobility in existing work organizations). The former type of action has already been described and discussed (in the previous chapter), and the latter is in focus here. In this chapter, the following question is addressed: *What were the circumstances and conditions under which "climbing up" took place in the two cohorts, and what can this tell us about continuity and change over the relevant period?*

In order to answer this question, all the cases under study were analysed. However, only six cases were selected for presentation in this chapter. These are subject to detailed description and discussion. The goal of this is to *specify* the conditions for "climbing up" for the two cohorts. On this point, the analysis revealed both cohort similarities and differences. These were found to have their background in relevant features of the education system and the labour market in the relevant periods. In other words, the conditions for upward mobility were found to be related to institutional context (and were thereby period-specific). In this chapter, the cohort *differences* have been devoted most attention because these can be taken to indicate some important features of the social change that has taken place in the period between the cohorts.

The chapter starts with a brief outline of the main types of further education that have been considered and pursued among the men in this project. This is important to establish because questions regarding education were, in different ways, an important part of the conditions for "climbing up" in both cohorts. After this follows the main part of the chapter, where the six selected cases are described and discussed. The

three cases that are presented from the older cohort (Helge Knut and Johan) show (among other things) how “climbing up” could be possible for cases from the older cohort without further *tertiary* education. Additional education at the secondary level, or short (often employer financed) courses could be sufficient. These cases also show how educational qualifications seem to have been assessed in the relevant labour market context of the 1970s and 80s. These assessments appear to have involved a high degree of what is termed *credential flexibility*. The three cases that are presented from the younger cohort (Roger, Thomas and Tor) show how, by the early 2000s, tertiary education was not only an *advantage* in the pursuit of upward mobility in existing work organizations, it seemed to have become *required* to a greater extent. When cases from the younger cohort had experienced a motivation to take charge, they did not seem to have enjoyed much *credential flexibility* but, on the contrary, quickly encountered what could be termed *credential barriers*.

In the closing discussion, these and other cohort similarities and differences are discussed with emphasis on their wider implications for understanding of social continuity and change in the relevant period. For instance, it is argued that the cohort differences can be taken to suggest heightened barriers to upward mobility over the life course over the period in question. In the discussion this is related to what Collins (2000:232) has referred to as the post-war “triumph of the modern university-centred credentialing sequence” and what Sennett (2006:127) has referred to as a process of “erosion in the value of accumulated experience”. Arguably, the findings imply that what Bell (1973:426) called “educated talent” has been given even *greater* “priority” in the course the period in question. Some problematic aspects of social changes to this effect (for men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway) are discussed.

Types of further education: an overview

In order to understand the circumstances and conditions for upward mobility for these men, some context specific information on the relevant types of education is necessary. The *types* of education considered and/or pursued by the upwardly mobile cases in this project were all related to their previous work experience. Education was conceived as an extension to previous vocational training, not as a "break" with what they were doing. The kind of work that they were motivated to use further education to get in to, was closely *related* to the work they had already been skilled to do. "Starting over" (å rykke tilbake til start) was just as unthinkable for the younger cohort as it was for the older cohort. The types of further education that had been seriously considered were all of a kind that would enable them to make use of their already acquired skills and experience. This is important because it indicates general, and strong degree of, what could be termed *track adherence* over the life course in both cohorts.

The following table lists the main types of further education that had been considered and pursued by the men in this project.

Table 3: Main types of education (considered and pursued)

Type	Example
a) a master's certificate	Murermester, Tømrermester osv
b) short courses	Sertifikater, godkjenningsbevis
c) technical trade school	Teknisk fagskole
d) engineering college	Ingeniørhøyskole

Each of these types of education have specific institutional arrangements, each with their own history. It is necessary for the current purpose to note a few points in relation to these four types of education. Because, although this four-fold repertoire is

very similar in both cohorts, the requirements and content in some of these types of education changed in the period between the cohorts.

The first type of further education, a **master's certificate**, is associated with the craft trades (more than the industrial trades). As noted in the previous chapter, it was considered preferable (but not strictly necessary) to obtain this certificate before pursuing entrepreneurship or becoming self-employed. And, as was also noted in the previous chapter, the requirements for obtaining a master's certificate seemed to have *increased* in the period between the cohorts. Some in the older cohort could get it just by documenting a specific number of years in the trade (dokumentere fartstid). The younger cohort, in contrast, reported that they had to attend (typically) evening classes two nights a week for two years to get it.[66]

The second type of further education, **short courses**, could make valuable additions to a trade certificate (fagbrev) in both cohorts. And like the master's certificate, this type of credential was normally taught in evening classes or by correspondence. It could therefore normally be pursued without reducing a normal work load. As will be noted in the following this type of courses seemed to have provided *greater* opportunity for upward mobility for the older cohort than for the younger. In other words, the value of short courses (in terms of providing opportunity for upward mobility) seemed to have decreased in the relevant period.

The third type of further education, **technical trade school**, seems to have been more equally valuable for upward mobility in both cohorts. The main point regarding this type of education is that it had has gone from secondary level to tertiary level in the period between the two cohorts. In both periods it has been a full-time endeavour for two years. But for the older cohort, it would typically take place at the age of 15/16,

[66] The exact nature of these changes was trade specific and not possible to determine with accuracy based on the current data.

whereas for the younger cohort, it would take place when they were older than 19 (and had completed vocational education and training).

The fourth type of further education, **engineering college** was clearly the most valuable for bringing about upward mobility in existing work organizations. However, among the respondents to the survey, having pursued engineering college was *uncommon* in both cohorts.[67] In other words, only a small minority of these men (who had been skilled in male-dominated manual occupations) had proceeded to acquire this type of education. This type of education was for both cohorts, three years and tertiary. Until the late 70s, admission to these types of education could be gained based on vocational training (fagbrev) and a short start-up course (forkurs).[68] During the 70s and 80s, however, admission requirements increased. Gradually, having completed schooling equivalent to an *academic track of upper-secondary* became necessary (which these men did not have). Notably, this development was typical of the period. This is related to a wider process through which many educations at the secondary level were made into college educations. For instance, educations such as nursing, social work, teaching all gained tertiary status in the 1970s.

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[67] Engineering college had been pursued by 10% of the survey respondents from the older cohort and 3,7 % of the survey respondents from the younger cohort. In other words, the proportion of survey respondents who had pursued engineering college was lower in the younger cohort than in the older cohort. It was not possible based on the current data to shed light on what might have been the background for this slight discrepancy.

[68] At the most prestigious engineering college in Norway (NTH/NTNU in Trondheim) admission required an academic type of upper secondary school (gymnas) in both periods. However, *none* of the survey respondents had attended this college.

Upward mobility in the older cohort

In the following, three cases are used to describe and discuss main tendencies with respect to conditions for climbing up (upward mobility in existing work organizations) in the older cohort. The cases of Helge, Knut and Johan are presented for this purpose.

Helge: skilled as an industrial plumber, born 1952

At the time of his interview, Helge was 57 years old. He was employed as a Senior engineer in a large company in the oil industry. He had had gotten into this position by a number of employer-financed short courses relevant to his work tasks.

Helge started his life in employment as an apprentice in a large shipbuilding company in Bergen. He took his apprenticeship test (and thereby became skilled) as an industrial plumber in 1969. After his military service in 1970, he continued to work with the same company. In 1975 he quit and crossed over into the oil industry. This kind of transition from the old shipbuilding industry to the new oil industry seems to have been fairly common at the time. The conditions for this kind of horizontal mobility seemed to have been favourable. As Helge put it: “Around that time it was really easy to get work in the oil industry. When I applied, I got several offers”. However, he also explained how some colleagues at his old workplace, had considered this type of transition to the oil industry to be risky. “Many people saw it as a taking a chance. To quit (the old shipbuilding company) and start in the oil industry… When you worked at (the old shipbuilding company) you thought it was a company that was going to last for ever (laughs)”

When Helge made the shift to the oil industry, he was clear about *not* wanting a job offshore. The reason for this was that, at the time, he was in the midst of family-establishment. He got a land-based job as an industrial plumber for a sub-contractor

in the oil industry. The following quote shows how he here quickly climbed upwards in the command hierarchies of this company. His trajectory bears witness to mobility, first horizontally from the shipbuilding to the oil industry, and then vertically, upwards in the organisational hierarchies of the oil industry.

Helge	Then I started in a company called X. May 2nd, '75. … started there as an industrial pipefitter, doing oil rig repairs. And then that company went more and more over to doing so-called prefabrication for the offshore industry, pipe units for the rigs, involved a great deal of refitting. And then I began as team leader. We had tons of jobs for many different companies. And for a while I was Project Manager for these sorts of projects on rigs, you know, repair projects on rigs. …you know, pretty big projects. And this was in 1976 to '79.

When Helge could so quickly ascend to positions as team leader and project manager positions like this, without credentials past the point of his apprenticeship test, this indicates promotion opportunities a high degree of *credential flexibility*. The decisions that he was the right man for these different tasks, seem to have been based more on interaction and observation than formal application. Helge's upward mobility continued to take place in the same way. In the following section he described his job-shifts during the 1980s.

Helge	In '81 I was doing a lot of rig repairs for the oil industry. And at that time my job description was Technical Leader. That's to say I was responsible for the completion of tasks with everything from a few men up to 40 men. … And in that connection I came *in contact with* a person in Y, the company that was putting these contracts our way. So in '83, August or around then, I started in a company called Z. And this was an inspection company. Which had contracts with Y. So then I worked for a while for Y as an inspector. And in '87 I was offered a job in Y. And so I left Z to start in Y. And I suppose I got that job because I had been hired by Y before. I mean, we'd done some work for them, and when they were looking to fill some permanent positions, I moved straight into the same job, but now employed by them, … as a Section Engineer.

Again, as in the 70s, Helge's job shifts during the 80s seem to have resulted from interaction- and observation-based assessment of how he carried out his work tasks.

Here, his upward mobility, that had begun in the late 70s, continued, still without him pursuing any tertiary education. His qualifications seem to have been evaluated and judged based on some short courses that he had taken (financed by his employers), and his relevant work experience.

In sum, after Helge entered the young and booming oil industry in 1975, he was quickly upwardly mobile. He *presented* this as something that simply happened, without much previous contemplation. This was evident for instance when he said "and then I became team leader". Because of this, his motivation behind it was not quite clear. It was however clear that his subsequent job shifts were characterized by a high degree of credential flexibility. The large company in which he got a position as Section engineer (avdelingsingeniør)(in 1987) seemed to have followed a strategy *at the time* of investing in its employees. Rather than recruiting someone with the tertiary engineering college externally, Helge, a skilled worker, was hired as "section engineer", it seems – by virtue of his long and relevant work experience and his short courses. In the early 90s he was approved by company-internal assessment as being qualified for a position as "senior engineer", still without any further tertiary education.

Knut: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1951

At the time of his interview, Knut was 58 years old. He was co-manager and co-owner of a medium size company in the oil industry. The activity of the company was import and sales of type of equipment necessary for oil production. He had co-founded the company in the mid-1990s. Prior to pursuing entrepreneurship Knut had "climbed up" in existing work work organizations and become head of department. He had done all this without any further education after being skilled. However, it is important to note here that Knut had more schooling than most at the secondary level. Prior to his apprenticeship he had gone to academic lower secondary school (realskole)(2 years) and then to technical trade school (teknisk fagskole)(2 years)

which at the time was at the secondary level.[69] After *this* he got an apprenticeship at one of the shipbuilding companies in Bergen, and his two years from Technical trade school was accredited to his apprenticeship period. So when he took his apprenticeship test in 1971, he was still only 20 years old. This fact – that Knut had a level of formal qualification higher than average for men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations during this period – is important to note before the following description of his upward mobility over the life course.

After his military service he applied for a job at a mechanical manufacturing plant closer to his home than the old shipbuilding company in which he had trained. As they had been for Helge (above), Knut's work tasks in this new job were different than what he was trained for. This corroborates the impression of credential flexibility in recruitment procedures. He was trained as an industrial mechanic, but did work very different from this. This was clear from the following section.

Knut	The new job was as a Fabricator Welder working with steel, cutting and welding steel. And this wasn't really what I was interested in, or qualified for. … But back then if you had been skilled in mechanics, there was nothing stopping you from doing all sorts of jobs. …It was just a case of finding yourself an employer, and you worked alongside others who gave you the training you needed. It was much more informal. Not like it is today. You can hardly lift a finger outside the area where you've been skilled. Not only is it not allowed, but nobody will offer you a job, so…once a carpenter, always a carpenter. Right? You're more restricted, you're sort of more limited.

The historical development Knut outlined here is what is described in this chapter as a change from credential flexibility (older cohort) to credential barriers (younger cohort). In this extract, however, Knut concentrated on credential flexibility regarding *horizontal* mobility in the labour market. The emphasis in this chapter as a whole is on the role of credential flexibility in relation to *upward* mobility in existing work

[69] Chapter 4 described the more typical pattern of transition from school to work for the older cohort. The "norm" was 8 or 9 years of schooling prior to apprenticeship..

organizations. This was evident from Knut's further trajectory. In the following extract, he explained why he was not content in jobs equivalent to his starting position in the first line of production. Over time, he had become motivated to take charge.

K	Right. So you didn't think much of it, working on the production line?
Knut	Well, I mean, you quickly got pretty fed up with it. … But of course mentally it's a pretty cushy number (det er jo mer sytalaust), just having a mechanical job where you're perfoming a set task, working with outboard motors or valves or whatever. …But you see, I was too restless, to be quite honest, to sit doing that kind of job, I wanted to *find out how things worked* and, instead of sitting there assembling those two valves – right? – I was better suited to getting hold of more valves and *get others to do the assembly work and help organise them*. And get things rolling. Not just sit there with my screwdriver. (….) So I suppose I was a bit inventive and a bit impatient… perhaps I felt I could be more creative, over and above the actual manual labour.

Here Knut first took care to recognize the value of freedom from command (which was discussed in Chapter 5). Remaining in a low-level "cushy" job was however not an option for Knut. Because, *he* had quickly experienced a motivation to take charge. This had taken the form of an impatience to engage with questions that were more fundamental (bakenforliggende) in the production process. He had become motivated to "get others to do the assembly work and help organize them".

In the context of the mid 70s young and booming oil industry, Knut quickly got a job that matched this motivation. Much like Helge (above), he got a position as a Project manager (prosjektleder). The degree to which his credentials from teknisk fagskole played into this is not clear. It does however seem likely that they did. Because, as Knut said: "technical trade school was rated quite highly". Through this position as Project Manager he came into contact with representatives from a company based in another city in Norway. He was frequently in "dialogue" and "cooperation" with representatives from this company. And they must have liked what they observed, because, in 1979, Knut was offered to head up a new department of their company in

Bergen. “The end of it was that I was employed with them. My job was to build up a new service-department here in Bergen”.

In other words, in accordance with his experience of motivation to take charge, Knut first became Project Manager in one company, and then Head of Department in another. He had his atypical, and likely valuable, background from Technical trade school, but as for Helge, his upward mobility was accomplished without any further *tertiary* education.

Knut held this job as Head of Department for over a decade. However, in 1990, the company in which he worked was bought by a large corporation. As a result, the work process was gradually reorganised. This caused some important changes to Knut’s work situation, and consequently, his approach to work changed. He had been content with the degree of ownership over the production process he had enjoyed as head of department, but after the reorganization from above, once again he experienced a motivation to take charge. However, unlike the first time he had this type of experience, this time he found pursuing entrepreneurship to be the appropriate type of action:

Knut	Well, I mean, until the company was bought up, we ran the place the way we thought it ought to be run. …But after we got taken over things became very regimented – right? – and that was intensely frustrating. …The new business model was foisted on the whole organisation, and you got the impression that everything had become very ponderous and governed by inflexible bureaucracy. I felt I had to do something about it. …So the more work that was shoved in your face, and the frustration just grew and grew, the more I looked around for other opportunities where I could capitalise on the contacts and resources I had. I began to think that I could take these resources with me and *start up on my own*.

In other words, the re-organization process that followed from the change of ownership seems to have entailed a loss of *influence* for Knut as head of department. The result was that he, together with a colleague in another company, pursued

entrepreneurship in the mid 1990s. They started up their own company dealing with import/sales in the oil industry. In sum, then, Knut is a case of both types of action found relevant to the experience of motivation to take charge. The first time he had this type of experience, in the late 70s, he was upwardly mobile in an existing work organization. The second time, in the mid-90s, the circumstances and conditions were different, and he pursued entrepreneurship. This time, after years of experience in the oil industry, he had “contacts and resources” he could capitalize on in pursuing entrepreneurship.

Johan: skilled as a plater, born 1949

At the time of his interview, Johan was 61 years old. He was currently a co-owner and Project manager in a large engineering company. Johan was one of the few cases that had pursued upward mobility by the help of tertiary education. He had done so based on an *early* experience of motivation to take charge**.**

After Johan had been skilled as a plater with a large shipbuilding company in Bergen in 1969, he did a year of military service. When this was completed, he felt he needed to “stop up and think” and took a job at a mechanical manufacturer close to his childhood home.

Johan	But while I was there I started to think to myself: What are you going to be when you grow up? (laughs) So it was then I decided that I would go back to school. I felt I had to *get on in life*. Right? Find something to do that was perhaps a little more interesting, and had more of a future to it…
K	And you didn't want to go out and work?
Johan	No, I realised that it was simply not, well, I mean it was OK to work, but there was so much hard, physical work involved. Right? Swinging a sledgehammer all the time, so you really had to have a pretty muscular physique. So…well, it's quite simply damned hard work. Of course we had plenty of hydraulic equipment, but there were many operations you had to do by hand, for example the fine adjustments you made to how hard you were hitting the steel. … And then there was all the noise, a

	colossal din all the time, you know. And, well, I decided there was too much hard physical work. … it was simply too much of a strain.
K	As early as 19-20 years old you knew that you were…
Johan	Yeah, I decided that, should I stay for 40 years hitting steel with a sledgehammer, or should I try and find something else. …I decided that, summing everything up, I decided that I think I am best suited to an office job (laughs) and in the end I became an engineer.

The expression "to get on in life" is important to take note of. Because, for Johan, "to get on in life" meant, in effect, upward mobility over the life course. He associated this with getting an "office job" with becoming an "engineer". In sum, this can be taken to indicate that Johan had experienced a motivation to take charge. In addition, he seems to have had an early fear of becoming burnt out. In a future-oriented manner, Johan had quickly become certain that he could not last a life-time in manual labour – that he would be very likely to become burnt out. On this basis, he found the pursuit of further tertiary education to be the type of action most fitting. He applied and got into an Engineering college in Sweden.[70] Johan was 22 years old, single and without children at the time. In other words he had no economical responsibilities towards anyone other than himself. This is very typical for those who *did* pursue further education in both cohorts; they did so before pursuing other goals, such as home-ownership or family establishment. A precondition for this type of *early* action seemed to be an *early* experience of motivation to take charge.

The three-year engineering college degree which Johan obtained in Sweden seems to have been of great value in the labour market at the time. Upon graduating, he got several job offers and accepted one for a Norwegian sub-contractor to the oil industry. Within five years (in 1975) he was made head of department in this company, of a 100-employee unit. Shortly after this, in 1979, he and a few colleagues pursued entrepreneurship (and were very successful). Johan thereby, like Knut above,

[70] He explained that at the time, it was easier to be admitted to engineering college in Sweden than in Norway. "it was easier for skilled workers to get in there". He financed the three years at this college by student loans from the Norwegian state (Statens Lånekasse). He did without much financial help from his parents due to beneficial exchange rate of Swedish and Norwegian kroner at the time.

pursued entrepreneurship *after* pursuing upward mobility in existing command hierarchies. He is a case of both climbing up and starting up. He was first upwardly mobile by way of his early-acquired tertiary education, and then pursued entrepreneurship, after he was well-established at the management level of the oil industry.

Some clues as to what motivated Johan in all this upward mobility was indicated in the extract above, when he said that he had become motivated for something more "interesting" and to "get on in life". From other sections it was clear that Johan greatly appreciated the participation in the contention part of the work process. The following section took place when Johan mentioned how "seeing results" was one of the things he appreciated most with his work as an engineer. It was then remarked that this was perhaps not so different from the work he had done earlier (as a plater). This spurred an interesting response. Johans participation at the earliest stages of the production process seems to have provided him with a sense of ownership of the *whole* production process.

K	In that sense, I suppose it's not so very different…what you were doing before and the job you have now.
Johan	No, not really, but now I'm in at the *planning stage and putting the ideas together* for the project that I can watch as it grows. Right? That's how I work today. Right? I'm involved in the process from the word go. From the drawing-board to seeing the finished product or building. That's pretty satisfying. Right? You can see, and feel, that you're developing your society, and that you're making a contribution. Right? Being able to see buildings going up, that's pretty exciting, cause you've been a part of it. Making things that…become part of the landscape.

Even though Johan was no longer in daily physical contact with the objects being produced, the physical end result of the production process was clearly important to him. Although he worked in an office, the meaning of the work he did was hinged upon making, or creating, *things* ("å skape *ting*"). Somehow, participation in the planning (contention) stage of the work process provided Johan with a sense of

ownership of the *whole* production process. It enabled him to take *pride* in the end product. In terms which will be explained more closely in Chapter 8, one could say that this type of pride in the end product is something which people in *object based work* seem to have in common.

In sum, both Helge, Knut and Johan had pursued upward mobility in existing work place hierarchies. They had got into work situations where they could enjoy the degree of command that they had developed a motivation for. Their cases will be summarized and discussed further in the closing discussion of this chapter. For now it will only be noted that they had all made use of additional qualifications in their actions of "climbing up". Helge had taken short courses, Knut had completed technical trade school at the secondary level prior to his apprenticeship, and Johan had gone to a three-year full-time engineering college.

Upward mobility in the younger cohort

After experience over time in work situations, some cases in the younger cohort became motivated for a higher degree of ownership over the production process – to cross over from manual work to supervisory/managerial work. For the younger cohort, as for the older cohort, this type of upward mobility was related to an experience of motivation to *take charge*. The main *difference* was that this type of upward mobility seemed to have been more difficult for the younger cohort. In recruitment to management positions, the younger cohort seemed to have met a context with less credential flexibility and higher credential barriers.

Roger: skilled as a plumber, born 1979

Roger was 31 years old at the time of the interview. He was employed as a low level working supervisor (bas) in a large plumbing company and was quite discontent with his current work situation. He was motivated to take charge, and prepared to pursue

full-time tertiary education (such as technical trade school or engineering college) in order to "climb up". He had however settled for a different way of building on to his acquired competence – a way that was more reconcilable with his economic responsibilities: a short course which he was financing himself.

Roger had started working as a plumber in 2001. During his first five years of working, he and his wife were very focused on building their own house which was finished in 2006. [71] In 2008, Roger had a job which he enjoyed in a small plumbing company. When the financial crisis hit the country of the foreign owners of the company, they sold it to one of the largest plumbing companies in the area. This brought about a significant re-organization of the work process. The old work teams were split up into smaller and more efficient units. As a result of this re-organization, due to increased profit-expectations from the new owners, Roger found his work becoming more monotonous, and more stressful,. The change he described was one of work intensification, much like that described by Geir (in Chapter 5). Geir had felt that this process prevented him from doing "good work". Roger had a similar experience:

Roger	…you're put under a lot of pressure. Right? And all the focus is on time and very little on quality – right? – and you just aren't able to do the job up to the standard you'd like to do it, in the time you're given.

Roger disagreed with the measures taken to re-organize the work process, but had little (if any) influence from his position as a low level working supervisor. As a result of this change to his work situation, Roger experienced a motivation to take charge. This is evident in the following extract from his interview. He had become motivated to "move on" (komme litt videre). This was very similar to the notion of "getting on in life", mentioned by Johan (above). Roger explicitly related this to a motivation for using his "head".

[71] He did almost "everything" himself (flooring, painting, wiring and plumbing). With the wiring he had some help from his brother who was an electrician, and with the flooring he got some help from his father, who was in the flooring trade (see Chapter 7 for more description and discussion of such practices).

Roger	Yeah, I mean, what it boils down to is that I feel – not that I know everything there is to know about the job, that would be wrong to say in every way – but just that I feel that I've covered that ground, I mean, I've been pipefitting for 12 years now. I've been there, done that. So now I want to move on, simply to…well yeah, I mean, in order to give myself a challenge, *to use my head*. Yeah, some work where I can use my head, to put it simply. That's what's behind it all, to be honest.

In addition, he wanted out of the first line of production as a precautionary measure. As for Johan (above), experience in the first line of production had lead Roger to believe that the chances of becoming burnt out over the life course were alarmingly high.

Roger	I mean, it's not because my health is failing, but rather because I don't want it to.
K	No, right.
Roger	Right?
K	OK, could you say a bit more about that, your reasons.
Roger	Well, the main reason is that it's physical work. …And all the lifting and carrying, there will be repercussions sooner or later. Right? Bad back and weak knees. And that sort of thing. And add to that the fact that we work with quite a lot of risky chemicals, solvents and the like. And things like that, which aren't exactly good news either. So…

In sum, Roger had experienced a motivation to take charge, and a fear of becoming burnt out. When Johan (above) had a very similar experience (and fear) he had acted by entering Engineering college. However, Johan had been 21 years when he had this experience, and free of economic responsibilities to anyone but himself. This was very different for Roger. He was 31, had a wife, two children and a mortgage. He had considered starting up (pursuing entrepreneurship), or scaling down (by becoming self-employed) but concluded that he was not the type.[72] It was especially the prospect of great initial time investments that deterred him from these types of action.

K	Have you ever thought of starting your own business?

[72] Roger's reasons for not pursuing entrepreneurship or self-employment relate to the more general conditions for this type of action (which were discussed in Chapter 5).

Roger	Yeah. I've thought a bit about that, yeah. … I came to the conclusion that I'm…well, I just don't think I'm the type. And it all boils down to my attitude to work and family. I put family before work. And in a situation like that you can't do that…You have to pretty much work all hours of the day. You never have any time off.

In other words, starting up was out of the question for Roger. The other type of action relevant to his motivation to take charge was climbing up (pursuing upward mobility in existing work organizations). This was an option he had given a lot of thought. He had come to the conclusion that climbing up was "impossible" without any further education. This was because, he explained, positions equivalent to the old "foreman" position in the plumbing trade had come to require tertiary education. He had also observed more generally, that fewer and fewer supervisors and managers were recruited from the ranks of the skilled workers, and more were recruited externally. In his answer to a question about his thoughts on the future, Roger explained the institutional structure in which he planned to act. This section also shows how the job he had, was very different from the kind of job he wanted.

K	Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
Roger	Oh right. Bald and recently divorced.
K	(laughs) OK, right.
Roger	Well, it's a bit difficult to say, but I hope of course that perhaps I'm sitting in an office, designing projects, I mean more on the project planning side of things. The way the construction business works is that you have a team of project planners – right? – of project engineers, or consulting engineers is the proper term. And then, on the other hand there's the construction companies who will be doing the job. So as of today I'm right at the bottom of the ladder, doing the physical part of the job. Right? And when I say I'd like to get in on the project planning side, so what I'd really like is to be in on the part we call consulting. …Then I'd be doing more of the technical drawings and, well, planning projects.

The impression gained from this is one of a construction business with a highly specialized division of labour. In Braverman's (1974) terms, contention and execution seem to have been performed here by separate bodies of workers. And in

this context, for Roger to get a job that involved planning, drawing and consulting – the kind of work he had become motivated for – *required* further education.

Because of his economic responsibilities (with two children and a mortgage) considered that he couldn't pursue full-time education. Even if he were to take up state sponsored student loans, this would only bring in about a third of what he earned at the time. Technical trade school and engineering college were in other words out of the questions.

Roger	But if for example I'd won the lottery, well then I wouldn't have been in any doubt, I mean, I would have taken further education straight away.

In this situation Roger had settled for a way of building on to his acquired competence which was more reconcilable with his economic responsibilities – a way that was possible to pull off, given the *conditions* under which he had to act. At the time of the interview he was taking a part time evening course (a short course). This was a course in Insurance approvals (forsikrings-godkjenning). In the following section he explained the rationale behind pursuing exactly this type of education, and simultaneously outlined a more general phenomenon, which one might term *track adherence over the life course*.

Roger	It's a way of expanding on what I'm doing now. A qualification building on what I'm doing now. For I've picked up a few things along the way. Right?
K	Yeah I'm sure. So…you're building on what you're already done?
Roger	Yeah, …never say never. But, that is the logical thing to do. I've got financial responsibilities. Right? In the end there's no way round that fact. Right? You've got to have a job.

The short course he was taking was mainly financed by himself. His employer only *lent* him the course fee. He studied in the evenings after the kids had gone to bed, and had great faith that the educational credential he was about to obtain would help him into a job that involved more planning and supervision work. Roger's high degree of motivation (and the absence of *easier* ways of pursuing upward mobility) is indicated

in this last section from his interview. The short course he was taking had a failure rate of 90%. The odds were in other words against him. He was very motivated for the change that passing the course exam could bring about:

Roger	So there'll be changes made, as soon as I get that exam under my belt. When I know whether I've passed it or not, I'll review the situation. I can't go on the way it is now.

Thomas: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1978

At the time of the interview, Thomas was employed as a Project engineer with a large sub-contractor to the oil industry. He had gotten into this position by way of a two-year full-time tertiary education at a technical trade school. Since he was one of the very few cases who had pursued this type of education, it is interesting to explore how this came about.

Thomas had done his apprenticeship for a large company in the oil industry, at an offshore oil rig. After a year of military service (in 1999), he continued directly into further education. He went two years to year technical trade school (Teknisk fagskole). This was the same type of education as Knut (in the older cohort) had gone to, only *now* it was at the tertiary level. Thomas had been admitted based on his previous vocational education and training (at the secondary level). As it had been for Johan (above), Thomas' act of pursuing further tertiary education was founded on an *early* experience of motivation to take charge, and also, a future-oriented fear of becoming burnt out. This was evident in the following section, where Thomas reconstructed some thoughts he had had as an apprentice.

Thomas	…then it struck me that, damn it to hell, I can't work out here for 20 years,… (…) And as for getting myself some other job, at a factory, or something like that. That was not an option. So I suppose I thought that, OK, I want to *get on in life*, and to do that I'll need some more education.
K	Can you say a bit more, was it something about the work you were doing that you considered…?
Thomas	No it wasn't the work itself, I was prepared to do my bit, but…you get to

	a point where it's just not doing anything for you anymore – right? – you were treading water, … I wanted to sort of get on in life, wanted to maybe do a little on the planning side of things – right? – to be in on the planning.

Like both Johan and Roger (above) Thomas had become motivated to "get on in life" and related this explicitly to getting into a work situation where he would be more "in on the planning". Like Johan, he had this experience early in life (during his apprenticeship) and his considerations at the time were future-oriented. He explained how he had taken "a look ahead":

Thomas	…when I came back from military service, well I took a bit of a look ahead and reckoned that, if you're going to make anything of yourself, well then you're going to have to have some qualifications to build on. So that's the main reason that I applied (for technical trade school).

In other words, Thomas associated "making" something of himself with upward mobility in existing work organizations, and was certain about the fact that he had to have some further qualifications in order for that to happen. In other words, *experience* in a specific work situation had not only *changed* his thoughts on what type of work he was motivated for ("planning"), but also provided him with knowledge of how to get into this line of work: further education. In the following section Thomas' was explicit about how his approach to work had changed over his life course.

Thomas	Cause I can remember, you know, from when I was younger, I used to say that…work overalls, that's all I wanted. Right? But of course that picture has completely changed. I can't imagine going back to that life now.

In financial terms, Thomas' two years in technical trade school was a joint venture between his parents and state sponsored student loans. He still lived with his parents at the time and thus had few/no economic responsibilities. The point here is that when he was a skilled worker, no one but himself, his parents and the state (loans) seemed to have been willing to invest in his further education or training. This is interesting

to note, because, this seems to have changed when his tertiary education was in place. His current employer seems to have been very willing to invest *further* in Thomas. This came up when Thomas was asked about what he liked best about his current job.

K	What do you like best about the job you have now?
Thomas	The best thing is that it challenges you. I've got a free rein, pretty well. If you want to develop further …the opportunities are there. To take some more courses. The company's paying. So the possibility is definitely there in this company to… well, it's possible to climb the ladder. If that's what you want. …So now I'm in my last year of bachelor studies in Project Management at X (a private tertiary educational institution). I might even go on to take further qualifications. Psychology, perhaps. Psychology and Leadership Skills, something along those lines. So, it seems obvious to me that if the company is willing to pay, I ought to make full use of the opportunity.

It seems that Thomas had climbed over a kind of threshold, above which he was experiencing an accumulating growth of credentials. The contrast with what would seem to be an un-willingness of employers to invest in workers with secondary level education (skilled workers) is striking. Facilitated by his tertiary education, Thomas seemed to have entered a segment of the labour market in which employers were willing to invest in their employees. Here, employers would both "bait" and keep prospective employees with promises of financing further education etc.[73]

Tor: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1979

At the time of the interview Tor was 31 years old. He was in the same position as he had started out in ten years earlier, as an industrial mechanic at an offshore oil rig. He is thus *not* a case that had "climbed up" (pursued upward mobility in existing work organizations). His case is nonetheless presented here, because it shows the presence of the credential barriers to upward mobility. Like the cases above, Tor had experienced a motivation to take charge and encountered credential barriers. But

[73] Johan (the case above) reported that the engineering company which he co-managed and -owned had financed Ph.d's in engineering for a number of its employees.

unlike the cases above, he had not (yet) taken the action fitting to this experience He had developed a motivation to take charge, but not a motivation for pursuing tertiary education, and hence, his position was unchanged.

Tor had worked in the same company, in the same position, since his apprenticeship test. Over time, however, he had experienced a motivation to take charge. This was clear in the following extract.

Tor	To be honest I arrived at a point several years ago when I felt there were no real challenges left. Right? In the job I'm in now, I feel more or less I know everything there is to know. (…) I'd like to do more of the planning and project work and that sort of thing. You know, more solving of problems. Cause there isn't much of that in my work at present, it's mostly doing repairs, replacing defect parts. There's not much considering of what lies behind it all.

When Tor had developed an interest in considering "what lies behind it all" this is similar to Knut (above), who had become motivated to "find out how things worked". When Tor had become motivated for "more of the planning and project work" (mer prosjektering og planlegging) this is very similar to both Roger and Thomas. In other words, like the cases above, Tor had, in a specific work situation as a skilled worker, experienced a motivation to take charge. Also, like Johan, Roger and Thomas above, he had experienced a similar *fear* of becoming burnt out. This was clear from the following extract:

K	So, in relation to the job being physically demanding, what are your thoughts on that?
Tor	Well, when I'm out there on the job, the thought strikes me that I can't be doing this when I'm 60, if you follow me. Carry on doing the same job. Nor do I think I'd have the constitution for it.

However, as in the other cases from the younger cohort, the opportunities for getting such a job were restricted by credential barriers. Tor *needed* some additional credentials if he were to land the kind of job he wanted.

In sum, Tors case is very clear when it comes to showing both an experience of motivation to take charge, a future-oriented fear of becoming burnt out, and the existence of credential barriers. However, Tors case is not so clear when it came to *what were the constraints* to *overcoming* the credential barriers (pursuing the types of further education which were now necessary in order to get more command over the production process). He seemed to be suffering from indecision in the question of whether or not to pursue further education. This was evident at the end of his interview, when he was asked questions about the future.

K	Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?
Tor	Well, I really wouldn't like to say. To be perfectly honest I'll probably be doing the same job (laughs).
K	Right (laughs).
Tor	There's certainly a risk of that, I suppose.

Concluding discussion

In this chapter, six case presentations have been used to describe and discuss the circumstances and conditions under which the two cohorts could pursue upward mobility in existing work organisations. These were cases that had experienced a motivation to take charge, and had considered “climbing up” to be a fitting type of action.

The first two case presentations (Helge, Knut) showed how tertiary educational qualifications seemed to be an advantage to the older cohort, but not to be strictly required, in the action of “climbing up”. Non-tertiary types of education, like technical trade school (which was secondary at the time), or short courses, could be sufficient. The cases of Helge and Knut also indicated something significant about how qualifications seem to have been assessed in the relevant labour market. In the young and booming oil industry there seems to have been a high degree of *credential*

flexibility. Helge and Knut, for instance, were both set to perform work tasks outside and beyond what they had been skilled to do. And, the procedures by which they were promoted seemed to have been non-formalized and interaction-based. The last case from the older cohort, Johan, was one of few cases (in both cohorts) who had pursued further education in the form of tertiary education (engineering college). He had done so before pursuing other goals, such as home-ownership and family establishment. And, like Helge and Knut, Johan seemed to have been in the right place at the right time. This is testified by the fact that with his three year tertiary college engineering degree he quickly became manager over 100 other employees, and later a successful entrepreneur, in the oil industry.

The three cases from the younger cohort Roger, Thomas and Tor were used to describe the main impression concerning the conditions for "climbing up" for the younger cohort. The impression was that by the early 2000s, tertiary education was required for "climbing up" to take place. The younger cohort did not seem to have enjoyed the same kind of credential flexibility as the older cohort. On the contrary, if they experienced a motivation to take charge, they quickly encountered *credential barriers*. Roger, was one of these cases. After his work situation as a plumber had changed (due to a bancrupcy/buyout in late 2008), he had experienced a motivation to take charge. Because of his economic responsibilities, the opportunity for pursuing tertiary education was, at this stage of his life course, limited. Instead, he was aiming to pass a short course which he *hoped* would secure him a job that would involve him more in planning work.

Like Johan (in the older cohort), Thomas was one of the few cases that had pursued further tertiary education. And the similarity did not end there. He too had pursued tertiary education before pursuing family establishment or home-ownership. And for him too, the background for this action was an *early* experience of motivation to take charge (and a fear of becoming burnt out). Also, the case of Thomas indicated the existence of a type of threshold, above which he was experiencing an *accumulating*

growth of education credentials. Facilitated by his tertiary education, Thomas seemed to have entered a segment of the labour market in which employers were willing to invest in their employees. The last case presented above, Tor, had experienced both a motivation to take charge and credential barriers to upward mobility. However, at the time of the interview, he had not taken any action relevant to these experiences, and still worked as an industrial mechanic.

The most evident cohort *similarity* in the case descriptions above concerned the way in which the action of "climbing up" was related to an experience of motivation to take charge, and sometimes also, a *fear* of becoming burnt out in the future. Here it should be noted that even for the cases who *had* pursued further education it is more in accordance with the data to say that they were motivated to take charge than to say that they were motivated "for further education". This is because it was not the education itself that they had experienced a motivation for, but rather, the kind of work tasks which further education could get them into. Education was not something any of these men seemed to have lingered in, or enjoyed particularly. In their accounts, education came up as a means directed towards a change in work situation. This is evident from the case descriptions above. Experience in work situations was the background from which they were motivated to make use of the education system. Because of this, their interest lay with types of further education which were highly *related* to the qualifications (skills) they had already acquired. When the question of tertiary education came up, there was no mention of for instance social sciences, humanities, the professions but, first and foremost, they would be talking about technical trade school or engineering college.

Another cohort *similarity* was the impression that a motivation to take charge was less likely to be acted upon, the later in the life course it was experienced. For instance, it seemed similarly unthinkable in both cohorts to pursue *tertiary* education (such as engineering college) after family establishment had taken place. The cases who *had* pursued tertiary education (among them, Johan and Thomas above), had

done so *before* pursuing home ownership or family establishment. The background for this action had been an *early* experience of motivation to take charge (in combination with an *early* fear of becoming burnt out). In fact, both Johan and Thomas had these experiences already during their apprenticeships, and had pursued upward mobility (by way of tertiary education) *in direct succession* of their apprenticeships. In contrast, the cases who had *not* pursued tertiary education, despite having similar motivations (such as Roger and Tor), where characterized by the fact that they had become motivated to take charge *later* in life. Part of the reason for this could be that they, after having pursued family establishment and home-ownership, had taken on economic responsibilities which student loans and stipends could not match up to. Inspired by Collins (1971), this might be taken to indicate a general privileging of the young in the education system – or more specifically, a privileging of young people who follow educational trajectories of direct succession between secondary and tertiary education. The rates of state sponsored student loans *might* be sufficient for 20-year olds to pursue tertiary education, but they did not seem to be sufficient for these men – who tended to be main breadwinners and to have wives who worked part time. In sum, in both cohorts there were cases for whom further education *became* relevant (through experience in specific work situations) while at the same time, their opportunities for tertiary education became *more restricted over the life course*.

An important cohort *difference* concerned the role of further education in upward mobility over the life course. For the older cohort, qualifications at the tertiary level were clearly *beneficial* for upward mobility. The older cohort *could* however get positions as supervisors/managers based on some further short courses (like Helge), or with technical trade school at the *secondary* level (like Knut). In contrast, the younger cohort seemed to a greater degree to have required *tertiary* education in order to "climb up". This cohort difference can be taken to indicate that full-time tertiary education has become increasingly required for upward mobility over the life course in the course of the period between 1970 and 2010. Routes for upward mobility that were open to the older cohort seemed to have closed down for the

younger cohort. This seems to be related to what Collins (2000:232) has termed the post-war "triumph of the modern university-centred credentialing sequence". Given that there has been such a more general "triumph" of tertiary education pursued in direct succession of secondary education (over other types of education), this triumph seemed to be more evident in the life stories of the younger cohort than in the older cohort. In terms from Illich (1995[1971]:50) one could say that both cohorts had to enter into a "race for certificates" in order to be upwardly mobile, but that by the time it was the younger cohorts turn to start the race, the race had gotten longer in duration – it was taking place at the tertiary level. Because of this, the above mentioned issue of timing over the life course (which was similar in both cohorts), had been a greater *problem* for the younger cohort, or more precisely, for those in younger cohort who had experienced a motivation to take charge.

Another cohort *difference* concerned how qualifications seemed to have been assessed in the labour market. Here, the terms credential flexibility and credential barriers were used to describe the situation in the two cohorts. When the cohorts were compared, promotion opportunities for the older cohort seemed to have involved a *higher degree* of credential flexibility, and promotion opportunities for the younger cohort seemed to have involved *stronger* credential barriers. This indicates that the variety of ways in which workers could prove their worth for upward mobility had become *more narrow* over the period in question. In terms from Lister (2006) one could say that that the *definitions of merit* had become more narrow. Thereby, the cohort difference corroborates Sennett's (2006:127) more general observation concerning a process of *erosion* in the value of accumulated experience.

The impression that credential flexibility seems to have decreased over the period in question, is interesting to discuss with reference to some relevant labour market changes. Such a development could be related to the fact that it was in the young and booming Norwegian oil industry that several of the cases from the older cohort were successful in "climbing up". Their cases suggest that the early oil industry produced a

high local demand for workers with many types of qualifications – from skilled workers (such as Helge and Knut) to college-educated engineers (such as Johan). This seems related to a specific set of policies of the Norwegian government in the early phases of the oil industry which gave *priority* to Norwegian sub-contractors (Sejersted 1999). These could have contributed in bringing about not only a high level of credential flexibility, but also a high level of willingness to invest in workers – by financing of training, short courses etc. This is notable in light of more recent changes at the international level. Specifically, free-trade policies from the IMF (International Monetary Fund) effectively discourage developing countries that discover oil from enacting similar policies. Hence, a discovery of oil does *not* necessarily lead to a high *local* demand for workers with many types of qualifications (as it did in Norway in the 70s). This policy has since changed in Norway as well, most markedly by the 1993 EEA treaty, in which free movement of labour was a key feature. More wide-ranging changes, such as increased import of labour and increased outsourcing to foreign producers, can also be assumed to discourage both credential flexibility and employer willingness to invest in workers.

One might conclude that opportunities for upward mobility over the life course seem to have been constrained in both cohorts, but constrained *to a greater degree* for the younger cohort. The chapter thereby indicates a historical development which has *not* been enabling with respect to conditions for "climbing up" for men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway. This is important to note because it has been a general expectation in the post-war period that younger generations will have "greater opportunities" than the previous cohorts, and that this will come about by an expansion in the tertiary education system (see Chapter 2). The current chapter suggests that while the post-war story of "more opportunities" might have been true for the post-war (baby boom) cohorts of men skilled in these occupations, it was not true for the cohort skilled 30 years later (born in 1978/79).

In sum, this suggests that the occupations in which these men had been skilled were increasingly becoming what could be termed “blind alleys” – jobs without opportunity for advancement (Mills 1951:276). This was not a problem for all the cases – because not all had experienced a motivation to take charge. But for those who had, and found “climbing up” to be the action most relevant to this experience, social changes to the effect indicated in this chapter could be problematic. The cohort differences suggest a direction of social change over the period in question in which the value of accumulated experience has decreased (cf. Sennett 2006:127), and the “priority of educated talent” (Bell 1973:426) has increased. Such a development *could* be viewed as progress, a sign that meritocracy is becoming more and more education based (see Chapter 2). However, an often not considered implication of changes to this effect is that what one may term *un-educated* talent – forms of talent which are provable through work, but not certified by an education credential – become degraded, devalued, or simply just neglected, to a greater degree. The current chapter suggests that, for men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway, “educated talent” increasingly means “talent certified by tertiary education”. At least, it seems fair to assert that the duration of education required for a talent to be sufficiently “educated” to be given “priority” – that is, to justify upward mobility – has increased over the relevant period. The cohort comparison indicates a social change towards a society where *more* opportunities for upward mobility over the life course are awarded to individuals *with* tertiary education and less are awarded to those without.

Chapter 7: In dialogue with objects over the life course and in everyday life

Introduction

The previous three empirical chapters have all been focused on different implications of approaches to work in *labour market and education system contexts*. In the course of the research process, however, it became evident that an inquiry into these men's approaches to work and education would be at a loss without also considering practices of work performed *outside* employment. In all the previous chapters, the term "work" has been used primarily with reference to paid work. This is different in the current chapter. Here, non-employment work is in focus and the *relationship* between paid and un-paid work in the lives of the cases is explored. The themes analysed in this chapter were not intended to be a central part of the research project (They were for instance not mentioned in the research proposal). But in the course of the analysis they turned out to be significant for a wider understanding of these men's approaches to work.

As already mentioned (in Chapter 3), in life course research, *biographical time* is often seen as constituted at two different *levels* of temporality: *life course* time and *everyday* time. This very general distinction became useful in the analysis of these men's non-employment work. Significant continuities between employment work and household work were discovered at both these levels of temporality.[74] Their household work – which was practiced from childhood – was very similar (and related) to what they did in their jobs. Because of this temporal blending, a dichotomous either/or analysis on where they found the most meaning – work or leisure – would not make much sense for these men.[75] Their approaches to work

[74] The concept of *household work* is inspired by Pahl (1984), particularly his concept of "household work strategies" (Pahl 1984:30).

[75] Researchers have tended to presume a gradual historical sliding of people's commitments, from work to leisure, from production to consumption. Much sociological research seems to have been fixed in this

transcended the employment-home boundary, and partly because of this, they also transcended the boundaries of specific occupational categories or trades. The analysis presented in this chapter explores the overarching question: *How did these men perceive and spend their non-employment time, and what are the wider implications of these thoughts and practices?*

In order to explore these questions, all the cases under study were analysed. However, only eight cases were selected for presentation in this chapter. These are subject to detailed description and discussion. Together, these eight cases demonstrate different *ways in which non-employment work was important for the men under study.* They have been selected to indicate the relevant *range of variation* in this regard. Since the main impression in the analysis was one of affinity between the cohorts, the chapter is not *structured* as a cohort comparison.

In the first section, two cases (Birger and Stig) are used to describe and discuss the distinctly *un-specialized* and *transcending* features of the approaches to work of the men in this project. They both performed a wide variety of work tasks in a family context. However, upon closer analysis, this variety was quite clearly specified. Their household work seemed to be specified to what is termed entering into *dialogue with objects* (making and manipulating things).[76] This activity transcended temporal boundaries both in everyday life and over the life course.

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dichotomous, "modern", pattern of thought: *either* workers are fulfilled in wage work *or* they are fulfilled outside it. A general shift from work to leisure was claimed in various theories of the "leisure society" (from the 50s and onwards). Some even claimed that for manual workers *in particular*, work had lost its former position as "the central life interest" to leisure (Blauner 1964:183). A similar argument was presented in the theory of the "instrumental worker" (Goldthorpe et al. 1968a), where it was held that: "workers' lives are sharply dichotomised between work and non-work." (1968:39). More recent examples of this type of claim are found in the theories of work put forward by authors such as Offe (1985) Baumann (1998) and Beck (2000).

[76] The concept of dialogue with objects is inspired by Sennett (2008:270). He argues that "the dialogue the craftsman conducts with materials". An implication of this perspective is that the differences between making and repairing "are not so great" (Sennett 2012:199).

In the second section of the chapter, three cases (Harald, Tor and Lars) are used to describe and discuss how household work was performed through *cooperation across generations,* and how this was facilitated by what is termed an *inclusive approach to household work*. Household work had clearly constituted an important context for father-son interaction and cooperation. This seemed related the gendered division of labour in the household. It was through inclusion in specific types of household work (and in some cases, through specific types of play) that these men had *first* experienced a sense of mastery at entering into dialogue with objects.

In the third section, two cases (Trond and Steinar) are used to describe and discuss what is termed a *strong drive to work* and an aversion against *non-productive use of time*. The strong drive to work was typically expressed by an "itching" to keep busy at various creative and productive work tasks, and the aversion against non-productive use of time was expressed by a dislike for "idling about" or "sitting around". And, notably, the strong drive to work was matched by a seemingly constant demand for this type of household work. This is termed the *equilibrium* between drive and demand.

Finally, in the last section, one case (Rune) is described and discussed in order to briefly point out some potentially more economic features of non-employment work. Through practices of *lending a hand* and *exchanging favours* with friends and colleagues, household work could not only be an important source of meaning, but also, an important source of capital. The closing discussion is concentrated on wider implications of the analysis presented in this chapter.

Transcending and un-specialized approaches to work

In this first section, the cases of Birger and Stig are used to describe and discuss the *un-specialized* and *transcending* features of the approaches to work of the men in this project. The competence that these men made use of in household work was highly un-specialized – it extended far beyond their specific formal skilling. They performed a wide variety of work tasks in a family context. However, upon closer analysis, this variety was clearly specified. Their unpaid work was specified to entering into *dialogue with objects* (making and manipulating things). This activity transcended temporal boundaries both in everyday life and over the life course.[77] In other words, the work they did in a family context was similar and related to the work they did in employment (although it was less specialized), and the work they did in their present lives was similar and related to work they had done earlier in the life course.

Birger: skilled as a builder, born 1948

Birger had first been skilled as a builder, and then as a roofer – in order to enter into the family-owned roofing company which his father ran. When his father retired, Birger took over as manager of the company. At the time of the interview, he was a co-owner and Project manager.

Most of the men in the older cohort had met their partners when they were around twenty years of age, and built their own houses in their mid-twenties. Birger was one of the exceptions to this rule. He lived with his parents until he was 33 years old, and met his wife at 35. During this longer-than-average period of bachelorhood, he helped his parents with a great variety of work tasks in the domestic sphere. The following section demonstrates how this household work was highly un-specialized. A question

[77] A similar "frequent overlap between work and non-work roles" was observed by Newby among agricultural workers in Britain in the 1970s (Newby 1977:279).

about whether he had been single until he met his wife, spurred him to tell about a number of household work tasks he had performed during this period of his life.

K	…until you met your wife, were you single?
Birger	I was single, yeah. And while I was living with my parents I built them the boathouse. Then I built the garage. As young as 10-12 years old I was used to working. At that time there was no sewer up to the house, so we dug a ditch across the marsh…must have been 150 metres down to the main sewer. …And when I was in my twenties I made a sort of road up to the house. And put up walls, and replaced windows for them, and did the kitchen extension, and yeah, plenty of stuff like that at home. And built the extension on to the boathouse we had out there, it was eight metres, so we added on to it until it was 12 metres, I think it's probably 12 metres long today. And then I made a new jetty, with a new boat winch, etc. And I had my own job at the same time. But then, when I was approaching 30, I decided that, well, it was about time I got my own flat. …And it turned out my father knew the man who owned this house. He was a mason. … And so I got to buy this house, and haven't regretted it one second. So since I moved in I've been kept busy here, replacing the windows, and the pipes and everything, so the house is pretty much totally renovated. Yeah.

This long and detailed description – spurred by a question about bachelorship – indicates the great variety of household work tasks that Birger had performed. The account is structured as a list of end-products in which he clearly took a certain pride. The account did not indicate how it felt to do all this work. However, the level of detail in the descriptions of work tasks (remember, this work took place over 40 years prior to the interview) certainly indicates that it had been *meaningful* to him.

Later in the interview it was made more explicit that Birger took pleasure from this type of household work. He had mentioned that building-work was in his blood. When this was probed, he specified the kind of work he enjoyed the *most*, and gave another example from household work.

K	Ok. But regarding what you said about house-building, being in your blood…
Birger	Yeah.

K	About that…
Birger	Yeah, well, the thing I enjoy doing most is building *things*, – right? – take this staircase for example, (a stone staircase in his home), I did all the moulds and formwork and built the lot myself. So, that sort of thing. I've always enjoyed working, working with my *hands*.

Here we see again how, when Birger was about to describe how it *felt* to do the work he enjoyed the most, he stopped short, and pointed to specific features of a given end-product. He did however indicate clearly that he enjoyed the process of "building things". This has a wider significance because it outlines the *limits* to the great variety of household work tasks that Birger had been involved in. In fact, all the work tasks that Birger mentioned involved precisely making or manipulating *things*. This was a characteristic – a kind of common denominator – of all the work he mentioned. However, the variety within this limitation was great, and clearly transcended the limits of any specific occupation or trade. In the two extracts above alone, he mentioned work that involved plumbing, formwork, bricklaying, and road-building. In other words, when Birger found meaning in work outside employment, he did so not only through the practice of his specific trades as a builder and a roofer, but through the more general activity of making and manipulating *things*. His case thereby shows household work of a highly un-specialized nature, but which is specified in one important way – to *entering into dialogue with objects*. He had been engaged in this type of work ever since childhood. As he said in the first extract: "As young as 10-12 years old I was used to working." In sum, the practice of making and manipulating things transcended temporal boundaries both in Birger's everyday life and over his life course.

Stig: skilled as a plater, born 1978

Stig was employed as a plater/welder with a large sub-contractor in the oil industry. He had cohabitated with a woman for a few years, but they had separated a year prior to the interview. He had recently met a new girl, but lived alone in the new house he had bought with his previous partner. Just as in the previous case, there were clear

continuities between Stig's paid work and his unpaid work, and, the work he did in the domestic sphere was much less specialized than the work he did in his job. In his employment time Stig's work tasks were limited to plating/welding – in his non-employment time he would make or repair "all sorts of things". This was clear already from the opening section of his interview.

K	I can kick off by asking a sort of general question about whether there's anything in particular that's keeping you occupied at the moment, or something that keeps you busy in your free time…that you think about a lot…
Stig	No, it's much the same as usual. Small things that need to be repaired, something or other to keep me out of mischief, to put it like that.
K	Repairs to…?
Stig	Well, maybe I have to make a part or fix a part.
K	In your free time?
Stig	In my free time.
K	Parts for what?
Stig	All sorts of things.
K	What sorts of things?
Stig	All sorts of things.
K	Metal parts?
Stig	Metal, plastic, wood… If it's possible to make it by hand, I can make it.
K	Oh really? So you can make all sorts of things. Do you have a workshop at home?
Stig	Me and my dad have a sort of workshop. I bought a veteran motorbike in '97. I've still not finished it. We've had trouble getting some of the parts. But if there any parts we can make, we make them.

It seems that Stig perceived himself as highly competent at a very un-specialized activity; the activity of making and repairing "things". In other terms, he felt a great sense of mastery at entering into dialogue with objects. He could make and repair "all sorts of things" and stated that "If it's possible to make it by hand, I can make it".

Stig's sense of mastery at dialogue with objects seemed to have developed over his life course. The extract above showed a continuity in Stig's everyday life. He would

make and repair things at home, just like he did in his job. The following section showed a continuity of this type of activity over Stig's life course.

K	When you were at secondary school, what were you interested in?
Stig	It was repairing things and making things. That's pretty much what I've done all my life, to be honest, taking things apart, fixing them.
K	Who were you with when you were fixing things?
Stig	With my dad. As is usually the case.
K	Did he have a workshop at home at that time?
Stig	Yeah, he used to repair cars, and still does.

This section indicates not only continuity over Stig's life course, but also continuity in his father's everyday life. His father was an unskilled worker at a local mechanical-factory, but repaired cars in his non-employment time. The following section indicates that this type of un-specialised household work went as far back as Stig's father's father. This section is also significant because it shows how Stig's extensive experience with making and manipulating things had begun by taking *toys* apart.

K	What's your earliest memory of work?
Stig	Unscrewing things. Taking things apart.
K	What sort of things?
Stig	All sorts of things. Toys, toy cars, anything at all. Actually, everyone in the family is good with their hands, right back to my grandad (father's father).
K	Right. What…?
Stig	My grandad used to work with, well for a while with electricity, but for most part as a woodcarver and that sort of thing. But if he wanted to make a lamp, or something like that, he did all the electrics for it himself. Right? And he made furniture and that sort of thing.

Taking toys apart seems to have been the activity through which Stig first experienced his sense of mastery at dialogue with objects.

Cooperation across generations and the inclusive approach to household work

In the following section, three cases (Harald, Tor and Lars) are used to describe and discuss how household work was performed through *cooperation across generations*. This is related to what is termed an *inclusive approach to household work*. The household work that was mentioned in the interviews had, as a rule, been performed *for* family, often *with* other family members. And children, above the infancy/toddler age, had been widely included. The impression is that in this household work, social interaction and labour have been "intermingled" (in terms borrowed from Thompson 1967). Because of this, this work did not only show concrete results, but seemed to have contributed to create and maintain social relationships. Especially, household work seems to have constituted an important context for father-son interaction and cooperation. *All* the interviewees mentioned having worked with their fathers during childhood, some had continued to work with their fathers well into adulthood. Their household work seemed to be related to a wider gendered division of labour in their households.[78] These men, who were skilled in male-dominated occupations, seemed to do mostly male-dominated household work as well. Many of the interviewees had, like Stig (above), *first* experienced a sense of mastery at entering into dialogue with objects through inclusion in specific types of household work. This seems to have been facilitated by what is termed an *inclusive approach to household work* – a type of mixing of purposive activity, childcare and learning.

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[78] The gendered division of labour in the home is not a main topic of this chapter, or this project. A focus on this would require a different research design. However, through its investigation into these men's approaches to work and education over the life course, this project has touched upon this theme. The general tendency *indicated* by the data is that the cases in this project had worked full time continuously and taken no more parental leave than was mandatory in the relevant historical period. In contrast, their partners/wives had mostly worked part time and had longer spells out of employment in relation with child-rearing phase. The most notable cohort difference here is that the wives of the older cohort had *longer* spells out of employment than the wives of the younger cohort. As is evident from the Interview guide (Appendix 2), they were asked some questions about gender roles in the household. They did however mostly not seem comfortable articulating the gendered aspects of their household work in the interview situation. When they were asked general question about work, the work tasks that were mentioned were almost all practical, male-dominated, manual activities. Although the data quality concerning the household work of the wives is of low quality (because this was not a main focus of this project), the *impression* on this point corroborates Pahl's observation (from his fieldwork in Kent in the 1980s) that: "In short, in the informal economy, women were more likely to do caring work and men to do practical, manual work" (Pahl 1987:43). But one might add that this kind of dichotomy between practical work and caring work seems in some ways to have been *defied* by the *inclusive approach to household work* (which, as will be noted shortly, blended purposive activity with care work and learning).

Harald: skilled as an industrial plumber, born 1951

At the time of the interview, Harald was the owner and manager of a medium size plumbing company. This job was highly time-consuming. In the following section it was noted that Harald seemed to have spent a large portion of his time working in his various jobs. This spurred Harald to enter into a long description of his fathers' approach to work. He illustrated his father's approach to work with examples from household work which he had done in cooperation with his father.

K	It sounds as if the various jobs you have had through the years have taken up a large portion of your time.
Harald	Yeah. I suppose they have, yeah. I was brought up to believe that it was important to work. "Work!" That's what my father used to say. "Work! Show what you're good for!" Even when I was doing my apprenticeship in town and came home, and the old man was in his late thirties and had a heart attack, he'd be standing on the veranda. He'd spent the day figuring out what I could do when I came home. Cause he couldn't lift a shovel, what with his heart problems. Just looking at a shovel was almost enough to get his heart racing. And he'd just built his house. There was a lot needed doing on the outside, lawns had to be laid, grass cut. Walls had to be put up. And all day he would sit at home in his armchair thinking about this, down to the last detail. From the moment I got out of bed in the morning. And then when I came home, the old man is standing out on the veranda. "Harald! As soon as you've eaten, then get started on that, and you can begin over there, and then you do this, and then you can spread fertilizer on the earth there, and move those stones over there", and so on and so forth. Even after I was married. He'd still be standing on the veranda. Cause I'd built my house right next to his. So working, yeah, I've learnt that at my father's knee, so to speak.

The very typical point here is that this household work took place in cooperation across generations – it served as a venue for interaction between father and son. The a-typical thing is that Harald's father had fallen ill at a young age (his late thirties),

and could no longer participate *physically* in this work himself. He therefore *needed* to include Harald in order to get any of his own household work done.

The following section shows how Harald continued at this type of household work throughout his life course. As most of the cases in the older cohort, Harald went directly from living with his parents to moving into a house he had built largely by himself.[79] The house was built in 1977, when Harald was 26 years old. Up until then he had lived in a basement flat in his parent's house, with his wife and two children (aged 1 and 3 when the house was built). In the following extract it is especially interesting to note the un-specialized nature of the work tasks that Harald had done himself, and that he did all this work in addition to his ordinary full time job as a plumber.

K	Your house, did you say you built it on the lot beside your parents' house?
Harald	Yeah. I bought about half of my father's property, and a bit of the neighbours'. I did the excavation and drilling work, then got a blasting contractor in to remove the rock and level the plot. And then I layed the foundation slab, built the foundation wall and installed the plumbing, and helped a mate of mine who did the electrics, and painted and…yeah, I did pretty much everything on my own. Then we moved in in November the same year. That was a tough year. Started in a new job as well in '77, at the same time as I was building the house. But, we got by somehow.

This indicates that Harald's father had been successful in getting him into the habit of working a great deal. Another interesting point was that Harald's approach to work, which had developed through cooperation with his father in household work, seemed to be just as valid in wage work as it was in household work. In other words, his approach to work transcended the employment-home boundary. This was evident in the following section. After his apprenticeship test as an industrial plumber in 1971,

[79] Whereas the older cohort mostly found cheap property and commenced to build a (mostly) self-built house from the foundation and up, like Harald, the younger cohort mostly bought *new* houses and put in a great amount of "do-it-yourself efforts" (egeninnsats) in the last stages of the building process

Harald had worked for a half a year at the shipyard where he trained, but resigned voluntarily after a half a year (after having secured another job). The large shipbuilding company he worked for kept its staff on the job, despite a shortage of assignments, and the “hanging around” that this entailed did not suit Harald very well:

Harald	I resigned because working there had become a bit difficult, cause there were days when there was no work coming in at all. Me, I can’t sit around scratching my arse …. So I handed in my notice, and that was unheard of. So I said (to the personnel manager) that there was too little work. It’s not for me, that, sitting around and not working. I’ve got to be busy.

In sum, it seems that Harald fully internalized his father’s message about the virtues of “work!”, and that this message was equally valid in paid work and unpaid work. This message (that work was the most meaningful activity in life) had been instilled in him through cooperation with his father in his childhood/youth, and still had an influence in Harald’s everyday life.

Tor: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1979

At the time of his interview, Tor was 31 years old and employed with a large company in the oil industry, in an offshore job as an industrial mechanic. He had been in a long term relationship but was single at the time of the interview. Like Stig (above) he now lived alone in a house he had sought out together with his girlfriend. His job on an offshore oil rig meant that he worked two weeks intensively, and then had four weeks off. As the cases above, during this non-employment time he did work which was less specialized than his employed work. He had been introduced to this non-employment work by his father during childhood, and still did it in cooperation with his father.

Most of Tor’s non-employment work was voluntary work at a local tram club, where he worked with maintenance and operation of old trams. Tor had been included by

his father in this *organized* unpaid work as a young boy, and they would still work together at the club:

K	Oh, really? Is that a hobby you've had since you were young?
Tor	Yeah, you could say I was born and bred into it, I tagged along as soon as I was able to walk. Through my dad, of course, so he's there as well.

According to his own records, Tor spent around 15 hours a week volunteering at the tram club (those weeks when he was not at his offshore job). When it was noted that this unpaid work resembled his paid work, he added that he did not *only* do mechanical work in his non-employment time.

Tor	Take what I'm doing now, for instance, I've been working with a digger on the outside of my house. That's fun. And I've always enjoyed that, to be honest. …*work where you see the results*, that sort of thing. So, moving earth around, that's great stuff. So that's what occupies me for the time being. And a bit of carpentry and building…so you see I don't actually *have to* be working with *mechanical* things all the time.

Arguably, the great variety of work that Tor did in his non-employment time can all be termed entering into dialogue with objects (making and manipulating things). This was the type of work that enabled Tor to see the type of results he liked. For instance, he appreciated the concrete results he could bring about with his digger outside his house. He liked the large scale (clear) response from the objects that the digger could put him in dialogue with. When he was probed about this, he contrasted work where you see results with work done in front of a computer:

K	Right. So what you like doing best when you're at home, is work where can see you can see concrete results?
Tor	Mm. No doubt about that. So you can say that, sitting in front of a computer screen, fiddling away at some document or other, I don't get as much pleasure out of that as sitting at the controls of some machine or other (laughs). Cause then I can see things happening – I see that I'm making a difference.

As already indicated, Tor's interest and competence for entering into dialogue with objects had its background in early father-son cooperation. As he said in the first

extract: “I tagged along as soon as I was able to walk.” This was evident in the following section as well. This indicates how Tor had been included in a wide range of household work as a young boy. Tor’s father was employed as an electrician, but seems to have been more un-specialized in his non-employment work.

K	…what’s your earliest memory of work?
Tor	(laughs) Well, I wouldn’t like to say. Well, it would have to be down at the Tram Society, tagging along with my dad and getting stuck into something. And going along with him wherever he was working. For example, we built the house in those years, and the cottage. So there was plenty of work like that to help out with. Sawing and hammering and…in addition to everything we did at the Tram Society, both the mechanical repairs and maintenance of the buildings and so on.

Tor’s father was not only still active in the same club as Tor; they still worked together in a family context as well. The last extract showed how, when he was younger, Tor had helped his father build both a house and a cottage. More recently, he was helping his father build a garage, and the two of them were helping Tor’s sister by building an addition to her house.

Tor	The garage, we built that ourselves. I helped with that. And now it’s my sister and her boyfriend turn to build their house, so it’s all hand to the pumps there now. They’ve got in builders to put the house up, but we’re all doing our bit on the inside… Yeah, my dad is very active there now. He’s there all the time, and I’m there a bit less (laughs).

Lars: skilled as a bricklayer, born 1979

At the time of the interview, Lars was 31 years old and co-owned and co-managed a small bricklaying company. During childhood, his parents ran a small farm on a part time basis. They used to have cows, sheep and horses. Now only the horses were left. Lars and his wife had recently bought a semi-detached house close to his parents’ old farm, and he and his father shared the job of tending to the two horses. Lars’ case demonstrates cooperation across generations, like the two above. But his case is of greatest value in the current context because *he* formulated an explicit rationale for

practices which were evident in many other cases. He *formulated* a rationale for what is termed *an inclusive approach to household work*.

Lars had two children at the time of the interview (4 and 7 years old). The following extract shows a remark he made concerning why he included his children in the work he did in the stables with his father. This work was time-consuming, and for *that* reason, Lars tried to include "the whole family".

K	How much time do you use on that (tending to the horses)?
Lars	Well, when I'm in the stables, I'm in there a couple of hours, at least. But me and my dad divide it up between is, so I'm not there every day. Say three or four times a week. *And I take the kids along. I try to get everyone involved, you see. Since it's so time-consuming it's important that the whole family is included.*

These last remarks have a wider significance for understanding the questions discussed in this chapter. Because, in addition to describing Lars' thoughts, they provide an *explicit* rationale for a practices which were more widespread. Whereas all the cases could have been presented as cases that involved children being included in the father's household work, Lars was the only one to provide an explicit rationale for these practices. He formulated a rationale behind what is termed an *inclusive approach to household work*. The core of this approach is that it is necessary, or at least desirable, to include children in household work because it consumes much of the parents' non-employment time.

When Lars was young his mother had a part time job in addition to the work on the small farm. His father had worked first as an unskilled shuttering carpenter and then as an unskilled window-framer. In the following section Lars was asked a very open question about what his *father* had typically done when he wasn't at his job. Like several other cases he replied that the father "did some work outside". Then, a spontaneous probe (unique to this interview) about whether his father would watch much television, yielded information on *Lars*' approach to work.

K	What did your father do when he wasn't at work?
Lars	Well, he did some work outside on the house.
K	Not the type to sit and watch television?
Lars	No. And neither am I to be honest. It drives me nuts. I mean, I like to relax of course if I'm worn out but…
K	Yeah, tell me about that…
Lars	…it's not for me. Every day when I knock off work at four, I can't just go home and…sit in a corner of the sofa. I have to keep myself occupied. …There's always something that needs doing. The stables always need a bit of work doing to them, of course, maintenance and that sort of thing. And if I look around here, I've put in a new kitchen, and I've repaired the veranda and… There's always something to be keeping you busy.

In this section Lars drew attention to the similarity between himself and his father. It seems that Lars had become very much like his father. He confessed that he liked to "relax" whenever he was "worn out", but normally – in everyday life – that was not how he spent his non-employment time. It seemed that Lars and his un-specialized competence for entering into dialogue with objects were in great demand around the clock: "there's always something that needs doing". However, a significant point here is that Lars viewed this positively. Others might have viewed such an endless workload as a tiring and hopeless. But, incidentally, Lars had a strong drive to do exactly the type of work that he felt was constantly asked of him. The work that needed doing was exactly the work Lars needed to do. He was the right man in the right place.

The strong drive to work and the distaste for non-productive use of time

In the following section, two cases (Trond and Steinar) are used to describe and discuss what is termed the *strong drive to work* and the *distaste for non-productive use of time*.[80] These two phenomena were often expressed in the same breath – as if

[80] Both these terms have their parallels in the work of Veblen. Veblen (1898) wrote about what he termed an "Instinct for workmanship". Because of the complicated implications of the term "instinct", this term is not used in the current analysis. Rather, the term "strong drive to work" is used. In another work, Veblen

the one defined the other. The strong drive to work was typically expressed by an "itching" to keep busy at various creative and productive work tasks, and the distaste for non-productive use of time was presented as an aversion against "idling about" or "sitting around".

Trond: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1978

Trond worked as an industrial mechanic at an oil refinery. He lived with his wife and two small children (aged 1 and 3) in a house on the farm he had grown up. His parents ran the farm – but Trond helped out a great deal. This was clear already from the opening section of the interview.

K	Is there anything in particular that occupies you in your free time, or that keeps you busy right now?
Trond	Well, there are the kids of course and so on, that takes up a large portion of my time. And I live on a farm, so there's always plenty of farm chores to keep you busy.
K	So you work the farm?
Trond	No, it's my parents who work the farm. But I help them with it when I can.
K	What sort of things do you help them with?
Trond	Well, right now it's time for harvesting.
K	So when you come home it's right out again to work?
Trond	Yeah. Grab a bite to eat, spend a bit of time with the kids, and then out to work again.

This indicates the type of household work that Trond did in his everyday life at the time of the interview. This work seemed to take up a lot of his non-employment time. The following section indicates an important aspect of the background for spending so much time at this activity. Trond seemed to have a strong drive to work and a distaste for non-productive use of time.

(2007[1899]) used the term "non-productive use of time". He argued that this was considered ennobling for the financial-capitalist upper classes in late 19th century America. The specific meaning that Veblen gave to both these term needs to be interpreted in light of the historical context in 1890s American society, and as a part of Veblen's wider (critical) theoretical project. For instance, he argued that the (natural) instinct for workmanship had become obscured over the course of history, including his own historical period.

K	How would you describe your approach to work?
Trond	My approach to work?
K	Yeah.
Trond	I'd say I enjoy working. I've never known it any other way. And I get very restless if I have to just sit around for a while … with nothing to keep me occupied. Yeah, I get bored very quickly. I feel I always need something to keep me busy. Doesn't matter what, just as long as I can keep myself occupied with something or other. Just sitting around and staring with nothing to do… to me, that stinks.

Trond not only enjoyed working, he felt he "needed" to work. Sitting around – which to *him* represented the opposite of working – made him restless and bored. As in the previous (Lars), Trond's strong drive to work and his distaste for non-productive use of time seemed related to the temporal continuity over the life course. This was indicated in the expression: "I've never known it any other way".

The impression gained from the two extracts above is that work had been established as a *routine* early in Trond's life course. This is also evident in the following section. Here Trond elaborated on the nature of his early work experiences. Like Stig (above) the first *things* Trond had manipulated were toys. Later he had accumulated a wider experience. He had gone on to repair "anything and everything".

K	I'd like to ask you a bit more about work, when you were younger, what's your earliest memory of work?
Trond	No, I can't say. Well, it would have to be something on the farm, I've done that pretty much since I could walk.
K	Right.
Trond	I grew up on a farm, so there's been enough work to go round as long as I can remember. I've always lent a hand with something or other. …I've always been interested in taking things apart and putting them together again, to see how they worked. Right back to toy cars and that sort of thing. Dismantle them to see what they looked like inside. I guess it's a kind of curiosity.
K	What sort of things have you worked on and repaired?
Trond	Anything and everything. Bikes, mopeds…as well as the farm machinery.

	I've done a lot of work on the farm machines, everything from diggers and tractors to the farming equipment and all that sort of thing. There's always something or other breaking down.

As in the cases above, we see once again the significance of the temporal continuity over the life course. Trond's approach to work had been shaped through specific kinds of play, and through early inclusion in household work. In the extract above he also mentioned an early "curiosity" for taking things apart to see how they worked. He had acted on this *curiosity* first with toys in the context of play. However, this curiosity was not something Trond had left behind in childhood. It was not only a "childish" curiosity. He had continued to act on this same type of curiosity later in life, after he had turned to other objects than toys. In the extract above he mentioned bikes, mopeds and farm machinery. He had continued to enter into dialogue with objects in a *playful* way.

Steinar: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1979

Steinar worked as an industrial mechanic with a large contractor to the oil industry. He lived with his wife and two children (aged 4 and 7). In his spare time he kept active with various types of household work. As with the cases above, the work he did in a family context seemed far less specialized than the work he did in his job. He had "all sorts of projects going" around the house. When probed, he gave some examples of these different activities.

K	Right, what sort of projects?
Steinar	Well, there are some fences that need doing outside, and some brick walls that need plastering, so I'll get around to those. And of course there's my two sisters and brothers. I give them a helping hand now and again. Cut down trees…
K	OK?
Steinar	Oh yeah. There's always something to keep you busy.
K	Right.
Steinar	Yeah. So the days fly past, but if I have any time left over, I try and give others a helping hand, if there's something I can help with.

Here, we see again a variety of household work tasks are mentioned (cutting trees, building fences, bricklaying). And, we see again – the common denominator – that these work tasks all involve entering into a type of dialogue with objects. And as in the previous cases (Trond) we see that Steinar's household work was not performed only for his strict nuclear family, but also as help to other family members (such as his sisters and brothers).

The main point in the current context, however, is that like Lars and Trond above, Steinar viewed the prospect of an endless workload positively. When he said that "There's always something to keep you busy" this was not a complaint on his part. On the contrary, he seemed very content and pleased to be in a constant demand. The background for this was, arguably, that he had a strong drive to work. As it had been for Lars and Trond above, the work that needed doing was precisely the work that Steinar needed to do. In other words, there was a type of *equilibrium* between his strong drive to work and a constant demand of the type of work he was driven to do. And, significantly, he had the opportunity to perform this type of work. This was clear in the following section. The first part of this section was also used in Chapter 5. There, it was used to describe and discuss Steinar's approach to different jobs. In the current context it is used to describe and discuss the nature of Steinar's approach to household work. It thereby demonstrates explicitly, like the case of Harald (above) did, an approach to work which was equally valid and relevant both within and outside of employment – an approach to work that transcended the home-employment boundary.

K	Have you given any thought to different types of work and to what you like and so forth?
Steinar	…No, not really. As long as I've got a job, I'm pretty happy. I'm not fussy, as far as work is concerned. I've got a pretty open mind. I'm a…how should I put it, I've got a positive attitude, so if I'm put to a task, I get it done, and when I'm done with it, I'll find another. I don't like idling about. I've got to have something to do. That's best. Yeah. I've always been like that.

K	You have?
Steinar	Yeah …(ler) I get itchy fingers. I have to keep busy. If I sit around too long. That's awful. The days go so slowly. No, I don't like that much. I need to have something to keep me occupied.

This section is, arguably, a very clear expression of a strong drive to work, and a distaste for non-productive use of time.

Exchanging favours

In this last section, the case of Rune is described and discussed in order to briefly point out some more economic implications of non-employment work.[81] The cases above show that household work could be an important source of meaning for these men. The following case of Rune indicates how it could also be an important source of capital, through practices of *exchanging favours* with friends and colleagues. This type of exchanging favours was indicated in several of the cases above as well – but Rune was the one who explained in greatest detail how this had taken place.

Rune: skilled as a plumber, born 1979

Rune was employed as a plumber in a small pluming business. He lived with his wife and two children (aged 5 and 8) in a three year old house. The following section shows the variety of household work Rune was occupied with at the time of the interview.

K	At the weekends, what do you do then?
Rune	Well, I'll find something to potter about with. Building a garage at the moment … (laughs) so there's quite a few hours gone into that. You see, the house we bought is three years old, so there's always something needs doing, in the garden for instance. That was little more than a pile of rocks

[81] This is an old theme in studies of the Norwegian working class. A an ethnographical study of urban working class life, Gullestad (1979:137) observed "networks of owing favours" (nettverk av utestående fordringer). This was also touched on by Kjeldstadli (1989:101), who argued that before the welfare state was developed, "unity was the social policy of the working class" (samholdet var arbeiderklassens egen sosialforsikring).

	when we bought the place. So there's always, you know, well most of my summer went to transporting earth…earth and stone so that we can landscape it a bit. Put up some walls….around the property. So there's been quite a few lorry loads of gravel and earth and stone edging, yeah (laughs).

It is also worth presenting the following section from Rune's interview. Because, when Rune was asked to sum up his approach to work, this spurred an account which included almost *all* the aspects highlighted in the analysis above. The following section indicates un-specialized household work, cooperation across generations, an inclusive approach to household work, a strong drive to work, and also, a distaste for non-productive use of time.

K	How would you sum up, so to speak, how would you describe your approach to work?
Rune	I like working. I like to keep busy. And I can't sit around for long before I get bored, get itchy fingers. I like to keep busy.
K	Right. But has your attitude to work changed during your life?
Rune	No. I've always, always liked working. Before I was old enough to work I used to help my dad in the house and garden and that sort of thing, so I've sort of grown up with that attitude.
K	OK, and what sort of things did you do with him?
Rune	In winter I helped him clear the snow on the road, and in the summer, we'd mow the lawn or fell some trees and, well, you were always there to lend a hand. You just got used to it, being active. …You lent a hand and…well, if there were any sunny weekends and so forth, I always helped with mowing the lawn and…generally lent a helping hand. It was a pretty large property, an acre of land that had to be mown. So yeah (laughs) there were quite a lot of hours spent sitting on that mower. We've always helped each other out.
K	OK, that's still the case is it?
Rune	Yeah yeah yeah. Me and my dad are in contact pretty much every day.

Rune's strong drive to work seemed to have developed during childhood through *routines* of father-son work-activities in a family context. In adult life it manifested itself as a bodily "itching" to work (det klør i fingrene), just as it had for Steinar (the case above). In other words, Rune's case shows temporal continuity both over the life

course, and in everyday life. He felt as if he had "always" practiced the same type of household work, presumably with the same type of positive drive.

At one point Rune mentioned that he would often "lend a hand" in his present life too, much like he had done since childhood. It seemed that for the most part this was performed as "help" in a family context. But in the following section it became clear that Rune had also "exchanged favours" with friends and colleagues. Rune and his wife had bought a half-finished house three years prior to the interview. He mentioned getting friends to help in the building process. When this was probed, it became clear that Rune had made good use of both his own skills and those of his social contacts.

K	So you and your friends help each other out with favours?
Rune	Yeah, when I was building the house a bricklayer and I helped each other out. He did the tiles in both bathrooms, laundry room, and the kitchen, and built the fireplace in my house, and I re-did all the plumbing in his parents' house. We exchanged hour for hour. If he had called in a plumber to do the job, well, it would have been very expensive. And likewise, if I'd hired a bricklayer to do all that, it would have been very, very expensive. And since we just helped each other out, one favour for another, no money exchanged hands, and it can't be regarded as moonlighting. It's a barter of favours, pure and simple.

This kind of "exchanging services" was evident in several other cases, but Rune was very specific about how this had taken place. They had exchanged "hour for hour". Notably, the bricklayer with whom he "exchanged hour for hour" when he had his house built, did not want him to help in his *own* house, but in his parent's house. This indicates that this exchange of favours took place in a kinship context, just like practices of "lending a hand". This impression is supported when it is considered that the likely reason for this exchange of services was to save money for the households in question. For Rune's part, his work on his own house, and his work on the bricklayers parent's house, helped decrease the necessary mortgage, which made it possible for his wife to work part time (50%) in her job as a nursing assistant.

Concluding discussion

This chapter has made use of eight cases to describe and discuss how the men under inquiry *perceived and spent their non-employment time.* The following will discuss some wider implications of the analysis presented above.

One of the many typologies that Weber developed in Economy and Society was the distinction between "the cultivated man" and "the specialist". Weber contended that out of these two, the specialist was the one that would profit and procreate over time, because of his close relation to the "irresistibly expanding bureaucratization" (Weber 1978:1002). Based on this typology, one might say that the men in the current project performed as "specialists" in their jobs, skilled as they were in each their trades, but as "cultivated men" when they engaged in household work. They were not, and could not possibly be, experts at the variety of tasks they performed in a family context. They did so based on a more general and transferable competence, which may be termed a *competence for entering into dialogue with objects*. This competence seemed to translate into a special type of confidence – a confidence that they would know how to enter into dialogue with a wide variety of objects. This was evident in the current chapter when Stig said he could repair "anything" and Trond had tinkered with "anything and everything". In Chapter 5 it was evident when Jon said "I can turn my hands to most things". In Chapter 4 it was evident when Terje said: "If it's possible to tinker with something, it's possible to repair it as well. I've always said that." Arguably, a fitting precondition for this kind of confidence would be a broad competence at entering into dialogue with objects. Because, what they seemed to be confident in, was that they would be able to assess what was wrong with any given object and be able to repair it. In order to tend to an object in need of repair one has to enter into dialogue with that object – one has to "take in" or "listen to" the signs that it communicates, in order to respond appropriately. And, as pointed out by Sennett (2012), "taking in" and "listening" are central features of all dialogue.

So, based on the analysis above, and inspired by Weber and Sennett, it can be asserted that these men were not only experts in the trades they had been skilled in, they were *cultivated* in a broader and more general sense. The question then is: How had they become cultivated in this way? The answer is that this had happened through a process of *cultivation over the life course.* It was thanks to an extensive process of cultivation that they were able to do the great variety of tasks that were asked of them in their non-employment time. It was this *process* of cultivation which seemed to have brought about the *sense of mastery* at dialogue with objects which some of them expressed. Their broad competence (and mastery) at dialogue with objects was practiced and rehearsed in everyday life, but seemed also to have been nurtured and developed already in childhood.

In terms from Hareven (1982), one might say that *work time* and *family time* were blended together in the household work of these men. This blending seemed to have had wider implications for the socialization of children. Within *employment* work there has been a historical development in which work has been segregated by age. With reference to late 19th century United States, Hareven (2000) noted that whereas socialization and work-socialization used to be interwoven in *the same* process in domestic settings, this gradually changed: "Except for farm families and working-class families, children's activities became gradually disengaged from adult activities and from interaction with mixed age groups" (2000:120). "This segregation by age occurred first among the middle class and was only later extended to the rest of society" (2000:231). In this context it is interesting to note that, in the household work of the men in this chapter, there was little evidence of adult-child segregation. On the contrary, there was much evidence of cooperation across generations. And, arguably, an inclusive approach to household work, like that Lars formulated, would effectively *discourage* age-segregation by its aim of including "the whole family" in household work (because it was highly time-consuming). As a result of this lack of age-segregation in household work, the process of "general" socialization of children

and the more specific process of work-socialization seemed to *still* have been partly interwoven in the lives of the cases in this project. Household work still constituted an effective context for work-socialisation in the home.

In this way, the practice of household work contributed to *create and maintain social relationships*. Especially, household work constituted the context for much father-son interaction. This type of interaction was not only important in the early stages of life, but tended to continue into adulthood. It is likely that this cooperation across generations in practices of household work has contributed to create and maintain strong father-son relationships. Here it is important to point out that the sociability involved in this practice were bi-products – that this father-son interaction had a purpose beyond being social – namely, making or repairing things. In the household work of the men in this project, social interaction and labour were intermingled.[82] Household work was a context in which purposive activity, care work and learning seemed to be blended together.

As already indicated, the gendered division of labour has not been a main topic of this investigation. However, a clearly gender-typed division of labour in the household was *implicit* in many of the accounts presented above is. Household work in the homes of the cases seemed to have been (to some degree) gender segregated. And it seems likely that practices of household work, like those examined in this chapter (taking place in cooperation across generations), could introduce children to the gendered division of labour, and thereby, contribute to maintaining it over time.

It can be added that these fathers likely had a life-long experience at the type of household work they were performing with their sons (because of a persistent continuity over the life course). They had likely entered into dialogue with objects

[82] This observation is inspired by Thompson (1967:60), who noted with reference to pre-industrial farmers and workers in Britain that "social intercourse and labour are intermingled".

with a sense of mastery and confidence (as discussed above). It is not hard to imagine that an adults' mastery and confidence at a task can be inspiring to a child. If a father is to construct a wall, whether it is done with strain, reluctance and uncertainty, or with mastery, skill and pride, will influence what this action communicates to those who might observe or participate in it. The *way* in which an act (in this case a household work task) is performed, is important for its social meaning.

Several of the cases formulated what was termed a strong drive to work. Sometimes this was expressed in terms of an "itching to work", and was foiled upon an explicit distaste for non-productive use of time – an *intolerance* with being non-productive ("idling about" or "sitting around"). When they were encouraged to elaborate on the nature of this strong drive to work the interviewees emphasized habits. They had "always" worked a lot, as long as they could remember. This too, pointed to the significance of continuities over the life course.

In both sociology and social psychology it is often noted that practices of play can have significant social functions. George Herbert Mead (1925), for instance, was among the first to point out how play can be an important venue for practice at role-taking – for rehearsing different roles in society.[83] This is relevant in the current context because here too, the types of play that were mentioned seem to have some wider social implications. Some of the cases traced the roots of their approaches to work to specific types of play. Toys were the first objects that they had entered into dialogue with. In other words, introduction to work seems in the current data not only to have taken place through household work in cooperation across generations (as discussed above), but also through *specific* types of play. This was also noted in chapter 4, when Terje traced the origins of his sense of mastery in his current mechanical job to how he had started by taking toys apart in childhood. These observations resonate with Sennett, who has noted (inspired by Erikson 1977) that

[83] For example, Mead noted that "In play in this sense, the child is continually acting as a parent, a teacher, a preacher, a grocery man, a policeman, a pirate, or as an Indian" (Mead 1925:269).

“Craftsmanship draws on what children learn in play’s dialogue with physical materials” (2008:273). The current data support Sennett’s claim that play is “the origin of the dialogue the craftsman conducts with materials” (2008:270). In other words, the roles that *these* cases mentioned having practiced in the context of play, were not social roles (such as mother, father, baby, big sister etc). They had rehearsed roles in dialogue with objects. This type of role-play is perhaps somewhat different than most socialization role-play (such as that described by Mead) but in these cases too, *imitation* might have been important. Play involving dialogue with objects might have been practiced as *imitation* of someone observed to be cultivated and confident at this type of activity.

The possible origin of approaches to work in specific types of play seems relevant for understanding the strong drive to work. Because, the positive attitude with which these men approached their household work might be related to what Mills termed a lack of “split between work and play”. On this point, the men under study resemble Mills’ (1951) ideal type of “The Craftsman”:

> “In the craftsman pattern there is no split between work and play… Play is something you do to be happily occupied, but if work occupies you happily, it is also play, although it is also serious, just as play is to the child” (Mills 1951:222)

Or as Gerth and Mills write:

> “Craftsmanship … refers to the joyful experience of mastering the resistance of the materials with which one works, or the solution of self-imposed tasks” (Gerth and Mills 1963[1954]:397).

Much like the ideal type of “the Craftsman”, the cases did *not* “flee from work into a separate sphere of leisure” (Mills 1951:223). On the contrary, they went home from their jobs to do work which was similar and related to what they did in their jobs. For this reason, a dichotomous analytical perspective on where they found meaning and purpose in life – either in employment or at home, either in work *or* in leisure – would not make sense for these cases. The analysis above suggests that their lives

would not easily lend themselves to compartmentalization into work on the one hand, and leisure on the other. In several of the cases above there was evidence of a strong drive to work, which seemed to transcend the home-employment boundary.

The final case, Rune was presented in order to outline some more economic functions of the unpaid household work. In the current data, the impression was that “help” or “lending a hand” took place predominantly within the context of kinship networks. Very likely, these practices would have helped both create and maintain these networks. When unpaid work was performed *outside* the family it was negotiated *individually* at a fairly high level of detail, as an “exchange of favours”. Then, the social contract involved seemed not *general* (with the “community”), but rather, specific and between two individuals. If you do the plumbing in my house, I’ll do the bricklaying in yours, and so on. Through practices both of “lending a hand” and of “exchanging services” the cases could make use of both their competence as specialists and cultivated men. They seemed to have pursued homeownership in ways that enabled them to mobilise both their own competence, the competence of family member, and to exchange favours with friends and colleagues. They could thereby avoid paying with money for types of work which many others would have had to pay for. The surplus from these practices could be spent over the entire child-rearing phase. It seemed to be an important part of the economic background that had enabled their wives to have longer-than-average spells out of employment and/or to work part time. In other words, household work constituted a context in which skills could be converted into money *outside* employment.

In sum, this chapter has shown that a defining characteristic of these men’s approaches to work is that they had their basis *not* only in labour market, but were also firmly based in household work – both in everyday life and over the life course. This chapter’s focus on how the cases spent their non-employment time has brought attention to certain transcending features of their approaches to work. Their household work transcended any specific occupational category. There was more to

these men's approaches to work than what would meet the eye in a workplace setting. Their household work was similar and related to their employment work, although it was less specialized. This was something the cases had in common. In the following chapter, this commonality is explored further and related to the fact that they did what is termed *object based work* within employment.

Chapter 8: Object based work in relation to other types of work

Introduction

The previous chapter explored properties of the non-employment work practiced by the men in this project. Their household work, both in the everyday and over the life course, had been concentrated on entering into dialogue with objects. In the current chapter the emphasis is back to employment work (bearing in mind the continuities discussed in the previous chapter). The analysis presented in this chapter is in many ways the most overarching of the analyses emanating from this project. It took time to develop. It started with an impression early on in the process of data collection, that the data generated provided information which was relevant for understanding the relations between the cases and society more widely. Sometimes acts of social position-taking seemed woven into the interviewee accounts, particularly when they talked about work and education.[84] In some instances this was expressed quite directly, but mostly, the way in they perceived and experienced their work in relation to other types of work, was implicit in the way they expressed themselves. This was especially the case when they touched on themes concerning the value of different types of work, knowledge and talent in society. The impression gained throughout the data collection was one that corroborated Hughes (1958:48) old and general observation "a man's work is one of the things by which he is judged, and certainly one of the more significant things by which he judges himself".

After the data collection was determined, the analysis was concerned with how to interpret these expressions. For instance, how were images of office worker sitting on their "arse" to be interpreted? And, what were the wider implications when one of the

[84] The term *acts of social position-taking* is inspired on the one hand by Sorokin, who considered social position (Sorokin 1998 [1927]) as fundamentally determined by *social distance*, and on the other hand by Sennett and Cobb's contention that "Society forces people to translate social position into social worth" (1972:141).

interviewees divided the world into “theoretically minded” and “practically minded” people? And, not least, how was the interpretation of this type of expressions to be conducted in accordance with the perspective and approach of the research project (outlined in Chapter 3), that is, in a way that emphasized the context relevant to the cases (rather than a theoretical apparatus of the researcher’s choosing). The current chapter presents the products of an analysis that began with this type of questions. The following question is explored: How did these men perceive and experience the work that they did in relation to other types of work in society? And what are the wider implications of these perceptions and experiences?

In order to provide a set of answers to these questions it was necessary to conceptualize in some way, what was characteristic of the work that these men did (as they perceived and experienced it) in contrast to other types of work. Existing conceptualizations of types of work in society were only partly useful for this purpose.[85] For instance, the mental/manual division, which had been found relevant in the interpretation of similar phenomena in earlier research, was found to not be nuanced enough to be of assistance in the description. The solution to this predicament came through the development of a three-fold typology of types of work. This typology was developed from the data. More specifically, its basis lies in data that provide information on how these men perceived and experienced their work in relation to other types of work. In this typology, the work that these men did is termed object based work (work directly or indirectly focused on things). In addition, the typology distinguishes two other types of work, analysis based work (work focused on text/ideas/symbols) and relation based work (work focused on people).

[85] The terms more commonly used to differentiate types of work in social science (*Production work, Service work, Knowledge work, mental vs. manual work etc.*) were found to be of limited usefulness for the present purposes. In general, the background for the insufficiency of these common terms/typologies for the present purposes is that they were developed for *other* analytical purposes. For example Poulantzas’ (1978) scheme of manual vs. non-manual and productive vs. unproductive work was developed in order to delimit who was to be considered the (true) proletariat. Other terms were found to be associated with conceptual problems. For instance, the terms *productive work* and *knowledge work* were in each their ways found to be evaluative. The term service work did not have the same kind of social bias problem, but was on the other hand so wide that it says next to nothing about the focus of the work being performed: for instance, the term service work does not distinguish between fixing a broken toilet and comforting a child.

This is a descriptive typology (Elman 2005). In other words, its purpose is not to explain or classify, but to assist in the description. The typology is presented and discussed at greater length towards the end of the chapter.

In order to explore the questions under discussion in this chapter, all the cases were subject to analysis. However, only six cases were selected for presentation here. These cases are subjected to detailed description and discussion. Exactly these six cases were selected because together, they provide a description which corresponds to the findings from the analysis of all the cases. They were found to be the most useful for presenting the analysis of how the men in this project perceived and experienced their work in relation to other types of work.

The first two cases (Knut and Stig) show two different examples of how opposition to office was evident in the data. Some of the interviewees in the current project subscribed to old images of people in offices "sitting on their arses", and "not *doing* anything". This kind of comment on office work has been shown in much previous research on men in male-dominated manual occupations (for instance in Sennett and Cobb 1972, Willis 1977, Young and Willmott 1956). It is clear that this is a phenomenon with old historical roots, but with a persistent influence.

The next two cases (Jon and Karsten) continue the exploration of how to interpret these acts of social position-taking in a contemporary Norwegian context. For instance, Jon's interpretations suggested that the level of antagonism between workers and management – who were both engaged in what is termed object based work – was at a low level. Similarly, Karsten's interpretations of *his* experiences suggested that antagonism across occupational hierarchies was lessened by a type of mutual respect *within* object based work. It has been useful to interpret this in light of some classic post-war research such as Lockwood (1989[1958]),. Although neither of

these studies focused on individuals and their life courses, they have been found useful in the capacity of providing a historical background for the current analysis.[86]

The two final cases (Geir and Arne) indicate some more difficult and problematic relations. In the same period as conflicts within object based work seem to have decreased, expansions of the welfare state and of the education system have entailed vast changes in the Norwegian employment structure. This has resulted in a situation where an unprecedented proportion of the population now do analysis based work. The cases of Geir and Arne indicate that this might have given new meaning to, and perhaps even re-fuelled, the old opposition to office work. For instance, Geir and Arne formulated an *oppositional* conception of talent – talent for object based work.

In the concluding discussion it is argued that managers (and other people in indirect object based work) did not seem to be at the receiving end of remarks about office workers. These, and other acts of social position-taking, seemed directed more at analysis based work. In light of this, the closing discussion considers for instance interviewee remarks about the school system. Because, while talent for *analysis based work* seems to be rewarded in schools, talent for *object based work* might suffer from a lack of equivalent institutional backing.

The opposition to office work

Opposition towards office work on the part of men in manual work is somewhat of a classic in the research literature. For instance, the interviewee Frank Rissaro in Sennett and Cobb (1972:21) said about office work “These jobs aren’t real work where you make something – it’s just pushing papers”. In Britain, an entire strand of education research has been dedicated to boys (or young men) with similar

[86] As elsewhere in the project, concepts from these studies have been used in a sensitizing way (see Chapter 3). Thereby, they can be useful despite the fact that they were conducted in different historical and institutional contexts, and with research interests and research designs different from the current project.

convictions (Delamont 2000). In the last three decades, a key reference for much research into such matters has been Willis (1977), who related such sentiments to particular conceptions of masculinity. Opposition between manual workers and office workers was however evident already in early post-war research, for instance in the work of Lysgaard in Norway, and in the work of Lockwood in Britain. Lysgaard's (1961) *The Worker Collective,* a study of Norwegian industrial workers, showed how workers would distance themselves from foremen and managers in different ways. Lockwood's (1958) *The Blackcoated Worker* argued that this type of *antagonism* could be effectively fuelled by institutionalized separateness between manual workers and managers. The first case to be presented in this chapter, Stig, shows a textbook expression of opposition against office work.

Stig: skilled as a plater, born 1978

Stig was employed as a plater with a large sub-contractor to the oil industry. As shown in the previous chapter, Stig's devotion to object based work transcended beyond his employment work, like it seemed to have done for his father and grandfather before him. The point in the current context is that his devotion to object based work seemed somehow to be constructed in opposition to office work. The following section shows how the act of attributing value to the one type of work, involved devaluing another.

K	Would you recommend young people today to follow the same educational and vocational choices you took?
Stig	Yeah. But they have to find out for themselves what's what. Whether they like physical work or whether they would rather sit on their arses all day.

Office work was clearly undesirable for Stig at the time of the interview. But it would be misleading to interpret this statement simply as an expression of personal preference. Because of the way in which it was expressed, the statement arguably

constitutes an act of social position-taking. And, as many others before him, Stig found the image of the arse useful for this purpose. Stig contrasted two stylised work situations. One was devalued by the use of the negative word "arse" and the other was praised by a word which had a distinct positive ring in this context; "physical". A very similar construction was clear from the interviews with the young apprentices in Vogt (2007). They too wanted to "produce something" and "see results" from what they produced. They dreaded the prospect of "rotting in an office", "rattling away at a computer" or, like Stig, "sitting on their arses".

This would seem to fit well with Willis' argument that: "Manual labouring comes to take on, somehow, a significance and critical expression for its owner's social position and identity" (1977:146). However, as already mentioned, the this chapter is dedicated (among other things) to demonstrating that the acts of social position-taking evident in the present data, require a more refined interpretation than that provided by the old manual vs. mental distinction.

Knut: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1951

Knut's employment trajectory was discussed in Chapter 6. He started as a skilled industrial mechanic and became first a manager, and later in life, a successful entrepreneur in the oil industry. From his current position (in which he did *indirect* object based work), Knut reflected back on how his father had viewed this type of work, and on experiences in work situations which might have influenced his father's views.

Knut's father had worked on a small fishing boat as an unskilled machine-room assistant. In the following section, Knut summarized his father's perspective on different types of work and, thereby, his perspective on different social positions.

Knut	Well, my parents and the circles they moved in, they didn't perhaps regard academic types as actually, well, as people who contributed

	anything. My parents and the people they knew were skilled in trades and made things and manufactured things and repaired things. …My father didn't have any respect for the workers up in the Drawing Office. They just sort of sat there pushing their pencils about. The people he respected welded steel, repaired machines, and manufactured things. He had no time, to be honest, with people who worked in admin. Sometimes, they would put in to one of these shipyards (when the fishing boat had to be repaired or certified). The skilled tradesmen in those yards were the ones that enjoyed his respect. And he pushed that idea at us at every opportunity.

This quote invokes images of a specific type of work-place structure, in which the degree of separation between workers and management was high. This is indicated by the expression "up in the drawing office". In the type of work-place structure alluded to by this reference, office workers were physically located *above* the workers on the shop floor, enabling them to "look down" on the workers, presumably in several different ways. As far as Knut's father was concerned, they just "sat there pushing their pencils around". The significance of social separateness was also indicated in the following section, which followed from the last one.

Knut	…that someone would be happy to sit on an office chair and, well, push a pencil around, so to speak, well he never understood that. What they were doing.
K	Right. But he perhaps never knew any engineers.
Knut	He never knew any, and he never had any notion of what they did, or … what the point of them was.

The work situation which, according to Knut, was important for his father's disregard for office work, resembles descriptions of work organizations from the early post war research literature (for instance the aforementioned Lockwood 1958 and Lysgaard

1961). These studies were conducted at approximately the time when Knut's father was "pushing" his perspective on types of work to his sons. The main point in the current context is that this old type of scepticism towards office workers, seems to have been against higher-ranking people who *also* did object based work, and that this seemed rooted in a specific work situation of institutionalised separateness (de der oppe, vi her nede).

In sum, these two cases, together with previous research, suggest that opposition to office work is an old construction, but notably one which can *still* be effective in acts of social position-taking. However, although it is old, its meaning is certainly not historically constant. In the following sections it will be argued that the nature and the reach of the opposition seems to have changed over time.

Relations within object based work

In the now "classic" early post-war studies of worker-management relations, the impression is that the managers were the one's concerned with company profits and growth, while the workers "minded their jobs". A low degree of responsibility was related to a low degree of command authority. Lysgaard's (1961) classic study "The worker collective" was subtitled: "a study in the sociology of the subordinated". Among the interviewees in that study, "we, the workers" was synonymous with "we, who don't have any influence" (vi som ikke har noe å si)(Lysgaard 1985[1961]:63). This low degree of authority among industrial workers seems to have been a phenomenon that spanned far beyond the borders of Norway. In fact, in 1973 Giddens argued that manual workers in all the capitalist societies were "subject to directive commands, without themselves being part of a command hierarchy …even those blue-collar workers with the most favourable market capacity, skilled manual workers, do not … participate in the delegation of authority" (Giddens 1973:183).

Although the structure of work organizations has not been a topic in this project, the data do provide some information on such matters. The experiences and interpretations of the cases suggest that both authority and responsibility for making a profit were *distributed* throughout the work organisations to a greater degree than that indicated in the early post-war studies. Rather than *institutionalized separateness* (to use Lockwood's term), the situation indicated by the interviewees perceptions on these matters was one of *interaction, co-operation and a sense of common interests* between workers and management within object based work.[87] This is relevant for understanding *in what way* the opposition to office work could constitute an act of social-position-taking (described above). The impression from the current data was that, *within* object based work, there existed a type of *mutual respect* which transcended occupational hierarchies. Here, hands-on practical *competence with objects* seemed to hold an indisputable value across occupational hierarchies.

Jon: skilled as a plater, born 1951

Jon's employment trajectory was discussed in chapter 5. At the time of the interview, he worked as an industrial mechanic with a large sub-contractor in the oil industry. He had recently been promoted from industrial mechanic to low level working supervisor (Team manager). As mentioned in Chapter 5, movement into this type of position was quite common, but Jon was older than average (over 50 years old) when it happened to him. This meant that he had been made responsible for the daily supervision of a team of two other workers. Although this was not something he had strived for, he quickly adapted to the role. His way of talking about this change of position was interesting. The central point in the following section is that it had made him feel more responsible for the earnings/profit of the firm.

K	Now about you being a team manager …
Jon	That's to do with the economy of the company. Now I have to

[87] This point is similar to an observation made by Brown and Brannen in their research on shipbuilding workers in the late 1960s. They observed "involvement with the product" to be a unifying force amongst the workforce (in shipbuilding), and, notably, that this involvement was shared by workers and management (Brown and Brannen 1970b:206).

	ensure we make a profit. Yeah.
K	So you've been given more responsibility for production. I mean, that it's as efficient as possible?
Jon	Mm. Yeah.
K	So, you sort of took on a new role when you started in that job?
Jon	Yeah, I did. I've got workers under me now, and I give out instructions, or tasks…

In an organisational structure like the one described by Lysgaard (1961), where *separateness* between workers and management was a pervasive feature, there were not many low level supervisors (bas'er). Indeed, one of the interviewees in that study, who was worried about the state of the *worker collective*, felt that "Too many supervisors are not a good thing. Once you become a supervisor, you're not a worker anymore" (1985[1961]:96). This was the context in which what Lysgaard famously termed "the worker collective" developed. In *that* context, someone with Jon's trajectory and profit orientation would likely have been socially sanctioned by the worker collective as an "errand boy" (visergutt) for management (1985[1961]:101). We cannot know from the present data whether Jon had been sanctioned in this way. The point here is that moving many workers into this type of positions could have the effect of *blurring* worker-management conflicts. Jon's situation is certainly very different from what Lockwood described when summarizing the work situation of manual workers in Britain in the 1950s: "This type of work situation clearly maximises a sense of class separation and antagonism" (1989[1958]:206). Rather, the situation here seems quite the opposite. Jon's work situation as low level supervisor (bas) would be likely to *minimize* antagonism towards management. Because, the work of management was parcelled out to low level supervisors like himself, who seemed to accept their management functions without much protest.[88]

From a management perspective, one could envisage several positive effects of moving Jon one step up in the hierarchy of command authority (from the lowest to

[88] Notably, some of the cases were ambivalent about promotion to "bas", like the young plumber Rolf (presented in Chapter 5).

the second lowest level of the work organisation). Not only did it have the effect of making him feel more responsible for the earnings of the company. He would now not only discipline himself, but also formally participate in discipline of the workers below him in rank. And more generally, this type of small-team work organization could have the effect of blurring not only authority hierarchies, but also potential *conflicts of interest* between workers and management. From previous research, it could be argued that a work organization in which many workers function as low level supervisors, can serve as an institutional arrangement for both "internalising of class conflict" (Sennett and Cobb 1972) and "manufacturing consent" (Burawoy 1979).

Jon's job as an team leader (arbeidsleder) was concerned with maintenance of machinery for the offshore oil industry. He described the chain of command relevant to his work situation as follows.

Jon	First we get an order from a Project Engineer. And then you have a Planner, he prints out the order for me. …And then I distribute the work. Order parts. And open orders and close orders and… yeah.
K	If I understand correctly, you print out an order from a computer and then you take that out to the workshop?
Jon	Yeah. To different sections, and hand out the order and tell them what they should do.

This illustrates a more general impression that positions as low level working supervisors entailed only a very limited degree of participation in planning (or contention) work. As such, there is a similarity with moving workers into these positions and what Braverman called "job enrichment schemes". Braverman (1974) was highly critical of this management strategy. He argued that they "represent a style of management rather than a genuine change in the position of the worker. They are characterized by a studied pretence of worker 'participation', a gracious liberality in allowing the worker to adjust the machine, replace a light bulb, move from one fractional job to another, and to have the illusion of making decisions by choosing among fixed and limited alternatives designed by management which deliberately

leaves insignificant matters open to choice" (1974:39). This quote from Braverman can serve as a reminder that, although the cases reported to participate in the delegation of authority, there were limits to this participation, and these limits were not always clear. These are interesting considerations, although these questions cannot be explored based on the current data.

In the following section, Jon was probed for more information on his superiors. He mentioned that they looked like apprentices:

K	The engineers who sit and give *you* orders…
Jon	Yeah. They're sort of …well, they look like apprentices (laughs).
K	(laughs) Right.
Jon	Cause, you see, they're in their twenties. It's not ideal. But it's difficult to get the right people.
K	Is it?
Jon	Yeah, it is. They've really got their work cut out trying to find people with a bit of experience behind them. Yeah. I think it's pretty much the same story wherever you look. So, as a rule it's *them* who have to come and ask *me* for advice.
K	Right.
Jon	Yeah. So it's important to remember we've all been a bit wet behind the ears. So, well, everyone's got to start somewhere.

Here, Jon draws attention to two ways in which his superiors were inferior to him. Age and experience. They were young, and had little experience. Jon hereby hinted at a form of generational conflict that might follow from an increased emphasis on education credentials in recruitment to management positions (see Chapter 6).[89] In the last sentence, when he says that they "everyone's got to start somewhere" he takes a paternal role. He avoids mention of the fact that the "somewhere" where *they* "start", is one step above him in the work organization (likely by virtue of their tertiary education credentials). The term experience is central here. It required practice over a long period of *time* to acquire the specific kind of competence with objects that Jon

[89] A remark similar to Jon's was made by a steel worker interviewed by Terkel: "This one foreman I've got, he's a kid. He's a college graduate" (Terkel 1972:xxxiii).

was talking about here. The agreed-upon value of this type of competence was what made him feel recognized by his superiors – it was the reason they would come to him for advice. [90]

Jon's reflections suggest an impression of a certain degree of co-operation, interaction and sense of common interests between people who do direct and indirect object based work. Those in indirect object based work are thought to have respect for the experience based (hands-on) competence with objects possessed by those who do it directly. This is also indicated in Karsten's account.

Karsten: skilled as an industrial mechanic, born 1949

Karsten was skilled as an industrial mechanic in 1970, after an apprenticeship at an engine factory in Bergen. He quickly changed over to the public sector, where he became a fireman. After having completed many different courses relevant to firemen (all organized and financed by his employer), he got a job in the fire prevention department, where he did various types of planning work. This required much co-operation with *other* people who also did indirect object based work. In the following quote he tells of how he felt "small" in a work situation where he found himself to have the lowest level of educational credentials. He was participating in a work group who were making new guidelines for fire procedures:

Karsten	All the people I was teamed up with on this were either engineers with degrees from one or the other engineering college, or civil engineers. Or architects, project architects. Most of the meetings I attended were with people with that sort of background. And the same could be said of the courses I took as well.
K	Ok.

[90] When Jon said that they often solicited his advice, this was likely meant to indicate that they valued his experience. That may well have been the case, but on a more cynical note it could be noted that Jon's role seemed only advisory, the decision-making power resided with his superiors. In other words, his relevant experience did not put him in a position where he would call the shots, but only in one where he got to provide advice. It might be mentioned here that Korsnes (1997:518) concluded that the space of qualifications in Norwegian industry in the period between 1970 and 1990 was characterized by a "generally positive valuation of knowledge based on practical experience" (my translation).

Karsten	So, when it came to introducing ourselves, and you heard what sort of backgrounds all the others had, and then my background in comparison, well it made me feel small. I mean, of course, as far as that expertise is concerned.
K	Right.
Karsten	But, as far as skills at the specific tasks were concerned, I felt I had a very much better background, yeah, compared with them.
K	When you say that it made you feel small, what are you thinking of in particular?
Karsten	Well, I mean of course that when we're going around the table introducing ourselves, then of course it's "civil engineer in this and that". Right? Most of them were graduate engineers (sivilingeniører), if they weren't project architects. And then suddenly it was my turn, and I say that "well, I only have a background in fire safety". I've not taken any advanced education. "Okay, is that right?" (laughs). In that sort of gathering, well I have to admit that *I can feel pretty small*. But when it came to the things that were my area of competence, well *then* I was… I mean, this was after I had worked in fire prevention for a good number of years. And…I felt my background in my area was pretty solid. …So when we got down to working on the project there would be instances when I, *on the strength of my experience*, would advise the others.

This work situation somehow made Karsten feel inferior to the others. But his "feeling small" was certainly not all-pervasive, it was highly context determined. When they introduced each other around the table, it was clear that his qualifications did not match up to the average, he "only" had his skills. However, when they proceeded beyond introductions and commenced on the work tasks, he was no longer inferior. At the actual object level of the work tasks, his competence with the objects in question was considered valuable – and his sense of worth was restored. On the strength of his experience he could advise the others. Arguably, this restoration of worth occurred because within object based work, hands-on skills at dealing with physical materiality of objects can be a source of a type of *status honour* (Weber 1978:932). People who do indirect object based work with high-level credentials do not *necessarily* enjoy higher status. Here, competence with objects (acquired through experience) seemed to have been considered valuable and honourable regardless of

the level of one's credentials. This was also indicated in the case of Jon (above), when Jon emphasized how his superiors were inferior to him in terms of *experience.* In sum, the impression is that, but Jon and Karsten had an experience-based competence for entering into dialogue with objects, which was valued by their higher-credentialed co-workers.

This indicates that in some respects, *within* object based work, the hierarchy of positions runs both ways. However, it should then be recognized that the competence of those at the indirect, and most credentialed, end of the internal scale, is likely more easily transferable between different contexts/situations. Experience based competence with objects, which is presumably often possessed by workers at the lower end in terms of credentials, has to be *demonstrated* in specific situations. Recognition of the value of this competence is to a greater extent determined by the opportunity to demonstrate it. When the men in the meeting (described by Karsten) introduced themselves and stated their titles, Karsten felt inferior, when they commenced on doing object based work together, he felt valued. In *this* situation, where he had the whole ideology of education based meritocracy (see Chapter 2) stacked against him, Karsten was able to demonstrate his competence, and this dispelled his feeling of inferiority. In terms from Sennett and Cobb (1972), one might say that Karsten's sense of inferiority was a case of a "hidden injury of class". Sennett and Cobb used this term to describe a kind of subtle humbling of inferiors which has its source in the belief that power and superiority and are both earned. Their book was written in a historical context of general material affluence, and massive educational expansion (much like the current Norwegian context), but they took care to note that feelings of subordination and powerlessness were *not* necessarily reduced in contexts of material abundance (1972:159).

In relation to the case of Jon (above) it was pointed out that there seemed to be a high degree of *interaction, cooperation and sense of common interests* across occupational hierarchies within object based work. This impression is corroborated by the case of

Karsten. In addition, his case suggests the importance two types of *circulation*. The first type of circulation concerns the fact that some of those in indirect object based work will have started out in direct object based work. In addition, there is a second type of circulation; that which takes place across generations. For instance, young men with fathers who have done direct object based work, might tend to pursue *those types* of higher education leading to indirect object based work (such as an engineering college). Both these types of circulation could potentially contribute in bringing about a context that discourages *antagonism* between people in direct and indirect object based work. And both types of circulation have (likely) increased with the general increase in level of education – the structural mobility – which has taken place in the post-war period in Norway (see Chapter 2).

Relations towards analysis based work

The previous section explored relations across occupational hierarchies within object based work as they were experienced and interpreted by the cases. However, in order to address the questions under discussion, it was necessary to consider other types of work in society as well. The following section will argue that it is useful to consider what is termed *analysis based work* in this context. As stated in the chapter introduction, analysis based work is defined here as work focused on text/ideas/symbols. The concept of *analysis based work* is especially useful for understanding the ways in which acts of social position-taking were woven into the interviewee's accounts concerning work.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the employment structure has been subject to great changes in the post-war period. In Norway, as in a number of other countries, these changes have been related to the development of the welfare state and to a process of educational expansion. In terms from the typology, these changes can be said to have increased the proportion of the population that perform *analysis based work*. The following section will argue that these changes have influenced the meaning of the

old opposition to office work. Two cases are presented (Geir and Arne) which indicate that this type of changes in the employment structure are relevant to how the men in this project perceived and experienced their work in relation to other types of work in society. Much analytical attention is devoted to these two cases, due to their capacity of providing insight relevant to the questions explored in this chapter. Geir and Arne *formulated* perspectives on work, knowledge and talent in society which were found to have a wider relevance.

Geir: skilled as a plumber, born 1950

Geir's employment trajectory was discussed in Chapter 2. As a result of work intensification in the building industry in the 70s he became burnt out and found shelter in the public sector. He got a job as a janitor in a lower-secondary school in 1981. In the context of this chapter, his work situation in this new job as a janitor is interesting because it was atypical. That is, it was rare for the men in this project to be in work situations which required interaction and cooperation with people who did analysis based work. In Geir's case, his job as a school janitor in the 1980s had required cooperation and interaction with teachers.[91] This unusual aspect of his work situation produced what Hughes would likely have called "social drama of work". Hughes used this term to describe how encounters between different groups in work situations would often cause one group to have to yield. The social drama of work could thereby be a chronic source of ego-wound and even antagonism (Hughes 1958:53).

In his job as a janitor, Geir felt lonely because it wasn't possible discuss his trade (å snakke fag) with the teachers. When this was probed, it became evident that he had felt that the teachers would sometimes talk to him as if he was somehow inferior to them, like a child. He was especially distressed one time when he was not listened to when the school kitchen was going to be rebuilt:

[91] Work as a teacher might be conceived (described) as a combination of analysis based and relation based work.

K	You said that you found it difficult to talk with a teacher about your trade. Could you say a bit more about that?
Geir	Ok, teachers, they're very sort of…well, they have a theoretical bent. I mean, when they talk to you, it's as if you were a two year-old or a seven year-old at school.
K	Really?
Geir	Yeah, a lot of them are like that. (…) They talked to you as if you were a piece of dirt or, you know, shit. I mean, I'm used to discussing my trade, I do it every day, about this and that. Right? My job. And I remember once, for instance, the school kitchen was going to be rebuilt. It was a pretty big project this, and it was an old building, with lots of old pipes moulded into concrete and that sort of thing. And I had an overview of how one could do the job both as cheaply as possible, and as efficiently as possible. But there sat the teachers, and I mean they were called in to "meetings", and proposed plans and threw out plans, and so on. They hadn't got a clue what they were talking about. They wanted to dig up the playground and lay the pipes out of the building and then back in again. But the pipes were already laid in the building! So I got pretty hot under the collar and took myself off to the chairman of the school governors, drew for him a plan and said "this is what you ought to do with the school kitchen". And then he said "yes, why haven't you discussed this with the teachers?" And then I answered that "Well, I'm not very good at talking to teachers. But my opinion as a tradesman is as outlined here, you ought to do this and that, and it will work out as the least costly way". And that's how we did it. But they (the teachers) couldn't talk to me about things to do with my work. …I don't know why, it's as if they don't think I know what I'm doing. Anyway, that was just one instance. Teachers have a habit of…well, they don't talk to you as an adult. I don't know. It's all a bit odd.

It seems that when Geir had valuable input to a discussion among the teachers, he did not speak up, but only approached the head (rektor) in confidence. Why did he not speak up at the meeting? Geir's answer was: "well, I'm not very good at talking to teachers". This notion resembles one noticed by Young and Willmott (1956:341) in their study of manual workers in 1950s Britain. One of the workers they had interviewed said "If I was an educated man I would know how to speak and everything".

In Geir's case we see again the relevance of skills for understanding social position. And here it is useful to compare his case with Karsten's (above). In the work situation where Karsten felt inferior, his sense of worth was *restored*. This was not the case here. In Geir's work situation as a janitor, the value of his competence with objects was not recognized by his colleagues. Indeed, it was a felt *disregard* of his skills upon rebuilding the school kitchen – a situation where this competence was so clearly relevant – that so provoked him. When he felt that the teachers did not recognise his competence with objects, it struck his sense of worth "It's as if they don't think I know what I'm doing".

In the section above Geir argued that teachers did not have a "practical bent", and that they were thereby fundamentally unlike him. In the following section Geir described another *incident* from his work situation as a janitor as evidence supporting this case. Here Geir ridiculed one particular teacher's estrangement from objects. Notably this teacher was a philosopher –skilled at the perhaps most abstract, least task oriented, type of analysis based work: philosophy.

Geir	I remember this one time, a teacher calls down to me in the janitor's office. (Imitates voice:) "Janitor, could you come up to my office?" Ok. He was one of those…he was a philosopher. Well, I went up to his office. "Well here's the thing." He was from Bergen. "You see, I was at a shopping centre yesterday, and there I bought a box of coffee." And? "Well, I seem to have left it in the carpentry room. So I wondered if you would be so kind as to go down and fetch it for me and bring it up here." So, my office is down there, and he'd called me up to his office …(laughs)…Just to send me back down to the carpentry room, to pick up his box of coffee, and then back up again. So I said to him: "When you called me in my office, why didn't you tell me over the phone?" "Oh, well, that didn't occur to me, I'm a philosopher you know." He was always saying that. Anyway that's just one example (laughs.) Not thinking things through, right? Instead of calling and saying "the box of coffee that's downstairs near you, could you bring it up, I haven't got time to go down myself just at the moment." But I had to go all the way

	up just so he could tell me…(laughs). Well, I suppose it depends on whether you're practically minded or not, that sort of thing.

Clearly, the degree of mutual respect and understanding between co-workers was a great deal lower in this work situation than in those of Jon and Karsten above.

The interaction with teachers that came with Geir's job as a janitor provided him with experience-based knowledge of teachers. This is a significant point, because, Geir was not one to talk about things of which he had little knowledge. This is clear from his answer to the following probe about whether he felt his observations of teachers were valid more generally for "people with higher education".

K	Right, but do you mean that not being practically minded is something that's especially true of teachers, or is it true of people with a higher education…?
Geir	Well, it's mostly with teachers that I can see the difference (between them and me), cause they're the only ones I've worked with. And it really is an extreme difference. It is. But I could also mention a teacher who taught maths and science and that sort of thing. He was easier to talk to. *Him* I could talk with. More than with one of those history types or something like that…(laughs). They were on their own planet. They'd leave me gasping for air sometimes.
K	Right (laughs).
Geir	It used to really tickle me… They didn't have a practical bone in their bodies! (laughs)

When he was invited here to expand the reach of his argument, he was very careful not to confirm the question. On the contrary, he explained that he could only speak about teachers, because – "they're the only ones I've worked with". Geir clearly preferred to ground his claims in first-hand experience. It is also interesting to note that the only teacher he "could talk with" (kunne snakke med) was a natural science teacher. This might be related to the fact that among the teachers, the natural science teacher was the one with whom he said he had the most in common.

Geir ended up quitting his job as a janitor after six years because he missed "talking about my trade" (eg savnet å snakke fag). He got *another* job in the public sector, as a plumber in a municipal maintenance department. From *this* position he made some interesting reflections on the fundamental differences between practical work and office work.

K	But about this, that you're interested in doing practical work…
Geir	That's because I'm practically minded. You'll never find me in a corner reading a book. Just haven't got the patience for it.
K	So, you never read books?
Geir	I read the paper. That's enough. It's not for me, to sit down with a book and enjoy a good read. Like many others do. No, I can't be bothered with it. But I can sit at a workshop bench to repair something, or just sit and think about something I'm planning on making or something like that. That's more interesting. So I mean, if you're more practically minded, then you…well, you want to be making things. I don't quite know how to explain it, but… Well, for me to be cooped up in an office, for example, if I had to sit all day rattling away at a computer keyboard…on some project or other, I'd have gone mad the first week. I couldn't have coped. I had an office job once. Down where work (the municipal maintenance department), for a year. One of our men had sick leave so I had to step in and cover various things that were his responsibility. I felt, I felt I'd been put in prison, pure and simple…
K	(laughs)
Geir	…I had to get out. I had to be able to breathe. I have to be able to work with my hands, doing something where I can go and fix something and say to myself, well that's up and running again, and then leave and shut the door behind me. I don't know how else to explain it.

Here we see again an expression of a personal dislike for office work, expressed by negative image of "rattling away at a computer keyboard". And again it seems reasonable to interpret this as an act of social position-taking. Geir was "practically minded", the teachers were not. In the following section (later in the interview) he expanded on this notion of a difference between being theoretically minded and practically minded. He constructed what can be termed a two-fold conception of talent. After being asked the question "What kind of person is fit to become

plumber?" Geir commenced on an ambitious task of outlining a wider conception of talent.

Geir	Well, that's a pretty big question as well. You've got to be interested in fixing things. You've got to have itchy fingers, and it gives you a kick making something with your own hands. You have to like hammering and screwing and, well that sort of thing. If you're all thumbs, it's not on. We've had to tell apprentices from time to time that…well, it's just not going to work out.
K	Really?
Geir	Yeah, it happens. Both in the private sector and here with municipal jobs you'll get apprentices who just can't cut the mustard. They're not able to *visualise* what the job entails. …You have to be able to *visualise* what's demanded. You have to be able to see it in your head that "if I'm going to avoid getting in a tangle with this and colliding with that, then I have to go about it in this way." You have to sort of have an eye for the things you're doing. At the same time you have to like making things with your hands. If you don't have those qualities, you should keep away from plumbing, at the very least. And carpentry. …Some people are just more theoretically minded. They might like to rattle away at a keyboard, with numbers and things, and get things done that way. But others have a more practical disposition, and like to use their hands to get results. I think that pretty much explains it. And of course, you have to enjoy doing it. (…) if you like taking things apart and putting them back together. And if you've ruined a few clocks in your time, and things like that, from when you were small and up through the years, the desire to work with your hands will just keep growing. If you're going to work in a skilled trade you've got to be able to visualise the job in hand before you get down to it. If you haven't got that talent, then you can forget it.

Here Geir arguing that competence at entering into dialogue with objects is dependent on a type of talent that is not equally distributed in the general population. In other words, what may be termed *talent for object based work* has exclusiveness about it. He thereby argues *contrary* to anyone who might think that the type of work in question can be performed by those who are not suited for other types of work. Geir's position in this matter is highly reminiscent of Willis conclusion about the young lads

he studied: “The human world is divided up into those who are ‘good with their hands’ and those who are ‘good with their heads’” (Willis 1977:146).

In the section above, Geir emphasized how you had to “like” making things. In the following section (which followed the one above) he continued to de-politicize and individualize the opposition he had so carefully outlined. He defused the oppositional potential in his own previous account by saying that both types of work are “just as useful” and that the selection to each type was a matter of preference of each individual.[92] This however changed some way into the following section when he started to talk about the role of the school.

K	Yeah, I see. But it’s interesting what you say about the differences between office-work and manual work…
Geir	Yeah. Yeah.
K	And…
Geir	They’re both as useful in their own way. I mean, don’t get me wrong…
K	Yeah.
Geir	…but some people are content to sit and make something of the numbers and words they move around. And let me tell you, you can see it at school as well. There are many bright kids today who drop out because they don’t get to exploit the talents they have. And are forced to read history books when they would rather be sitting with a saw and a plank. To put it plainly. They’ve almost been ruined before they get out in the workplace and get to develop their skills a little. They’re forced to sit… I’m almost inclined to call it abuse. (…) I mean, we’re all put together differently. And some are bookworms and devour everything they read and are happy enough. And some have practical talents at their fingertips and…well, they’d prefer to give that book a miss and all the other crap and get down to doing something practical with their hands instead. That’s just how it is. And thank God for that. And *those* kids ought to be identified at an earlier stage. At school.

[92] This de-politization by a retreat into personalism might be related to social difference between interviewer and interviewee (see Chapter 2). The message might have been adjusted after an assessment of the audience.

Geir considered the school system as a context in which the two conceptions of talent he had outlined were in conflict. In terms from the current chapter, he argued that the talent for object based work was being overrun and subordinated to talent for analysis based in schools. And this infuriated him. He used the terms “abuse” and “ruined” to underline the seriousness of the situation. As was discussed in Chapter 4, the school system has increasingly become the main instrument of selection to different occupational positions, and the duration of compulsory schooling (both in the everyday and over the life course) has increased. As a consequence, an institutional neglect of talent for object based in the school context, as Geir argued was taking place, could have becoming a more pressing social issue.

However, what practical implications did Geir’s protest against the subordination of talent for object based work in schools have, beyond being expressed in the interview? How did it translate into other types of action than the action of putting it forward in the interview situation? This was indicated in the following section (later in the interview), when Geir talked about his sons’ talents. Like several others in the older cohort, Geir had come to realize that his son did not have the same type of embodied talent for object based work as he. When asked to recall any advice he might have given to his son in matters of educational choice, he recalled:

Geir	I said to him “you’ll never make a plumber” cause he was…he was a bit…how should I put it, he didn’t have it in his fingers. If he brought home a motorbike or something, it would be me who had to work on it.
K	Really? You had to repair it for him?
Geir	Yeah yeah. Cause he, well, he just wasn’t very good with that sort of thing. Right?

This is consistent with the exclusiveness that Geir had constructed around the talent for object based work (in the extracts above). However, shortly afterwards, a significant break occurred. Geir had talked about how his son did not know what to do when he was in his mid-twenties – the son had tried a number of jobs with which he had been discontent (in the armed forces, and as an unskilled worker at an engine factory). The following section shows Geir’s advice in this situation

Geir	Don't want to boast, but he was far from being the dumbest kid at school. He was clever. He did really well at school. So I said to him that he "must develop his…what's the word…talents and go and train to be a teacher", I said.

Based on his own ambivalent experiences with teachers, it is interesting that Geir advised his son to become a teacher. Despite Geir's hesitations regarding the school system, he was clearly proud that his son had been good at school. In the situation of giving advice to his son – when push came to shove – he could not but support and recognize the legitimacy of school-grades, and gave his advice which can be paraphrased along the lines: go for it, since you can. This can be related to what has been termed "a generality of commitment to education" (Irwin and Elley 2011:492) and will be discussed further in the closing discussion of this chapter.

Arne: skilled as a bricklayer, born 1948

As shown in Chapter 5, Arne was a successful entrepreneur. He had managed his own bricklaying business for over three decades and had approximately 10 employees at the time of the interview. Where Geir (above) retreated into personalism when his remarks were potent with wider (political) implications, Arne was more unyielding. He expressed an even clearer outline and defence of a talent for object based work.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the local mason with whom Arne trained had spotted his talent for object based work as soon as he started as an apprentice at age 17.

Arne	I really loved the trade. And I took to it quickly. He never said as much to me, but he'd told my mum. That he'd never seen anyone who took to it so easily, as if it was in my bones.
K	Oh?
Arne	Yeah, that's what he said. He'd said that to my mum, but he never said it to me. But I had a talent for it.

When Arne's talent was discovered, it was discovered in his *hands*. In other words, the type of talent in question was embodied. Notably, in his case, this talent was

discovered at a fairly mature age (seventeen). This was related this to course of Arne's transition from school to work (see Chapter 4). In the following section he contrasted the late discovery of *his* talent to the early discovery of his son's talent.

Arne	I didn't have the faintest notion, when I was a teenager, that I would turn out be a bricklayer and a master bricklayer. It's crazy. Happened purely by chance. But if I think of my son, well that wasn't by chance. That was planned. Cause I saw the talent he had for it almost from the day he was born.
K	Really?
Arne	Yeah, or from when he was three, at least.
K	In what way?
Arne	I could see it in the way he, well, in what sort of things interested him, and how he would treat things.

Arne spotted his son's talent for object based work through the way he treated objects. In a way very similar to Geir (above), Arne argued for a type of exclusiveness around this talent. This was most evident when he talked about the differences between his three sons. Because, not all his sons were so fortunate as to be in possession of "the gift".

Arne	I've got three boys. And specially him, number two. He had the gift.
K	Really?
Arne	Yeah. He's a master bricklayer now. He'll take over the business. But his eldest, he didn't have any of that feeling for it at all.
K	OK. What did he…?
Arne	He's an estate agent.
K	Right. OK.
Arne	Yeah. …Yeah. And number two, he had it in his veins, he became a cook, but came back eventually, so he, yeah now he's in the same business as us.

Arne had taken the acknowledgment of the fact that his sons possessed different degrees of "the talent" into account upon giving them advice:

K	Have you tried to influence your kids in the education and career choices they've made?

Arne	Yeah, I've tried. Not so much with my eldest. For he didn't show any interest in it, but my second son, he had a talent for it, so he's become part of the business, and I have tried to *direct him towards being a bricklayer*. I don't know whether he felt he was under any pressure to follow in my footsteps, but it seemed just to naturally work out that way. That he became a builder. And a master builder. Yeah.

And just like Geir, Arne saw the talent as something which transcended the level of specific occupations:

K	About the gift. Do you think that's something peculiar to builders?
Arne	No, it's a gift you have to have in any skilled trade. If I'd become a carpenter, I might have turned out exactly (the same), I mean, I might have been just as good at that.

Arne also elaborated on what kind of advantages this type of talent could provide. In doing this he emphasised the same type of creative envisioning as Geir.

Arne	It came naturally to me, the ability to read a house building plan. If you've got that gift, it comes naturally to you. You understand straight away how things are meant to be, how the house is to be built. But if you haven't got that ability, you're not going to have a clue how to build a house. Or a fireplace. Or even how to begin on a wall. It's that sort of thing – right? – the way you handle your tools. You see it pretty quickly.
K	You can do that?
Arne	Yeah, it's much the same as with a football player.
K	Right.
Arne	I mean, you can see whether or not a football player has a gift for it. If I watch a kid at training, I can see it straight away that, him there, he's got talent. Now we've got to do what we can to develop that talent.

Here, Arne explained how understanding a house building plan felt "natural" to him. This shows how how understanding is a term which can have many meanings. The type of "understanding" Arne was talking about was *not* interpretation of text/ideas/symbols. Rather, it was understanding the material implications suggested by building plans that he would understand in such an effortless way. This paragraph

is also interesting because of the way Arne again argues for the exclusiveness of the talent for object based work. This time, by an analogy to a highly competitive sport.

It seems clear that conception of talent that Geir and Arne outline with a high degree of consistency, is somehow *oppositional*. For Geir, this was indicated in his remarks about the abuse (overgrep) taking place in schools. In Arne's case the oppositional position of this talent was indicated in the following section. Here, he made some general commentary on types of work in society. Arne felt that today, there was an exaggerated concern for getting more and more people to do office-work, and that the value of physical work was not sufficiently recognized.

Arne	…it seems that the only thing that matters is getting people into a school, into an office, or an education. Don't get me wrong, knowledge is incredibly important. It's the way we develop. But we mustn't take it so far that we have trouble getting people to do manual work. Cause working as a builder, or a carpenter, or a cleaner, that's all manual work. Take for instance a hospital, a nurse who goes there will have three of four years nursing school behind her. But before long you won't find her on the wards any more, she'll be stuck in some hospital office filling out forms and documents. Everyone's got a ton of paperwork. It almost seems that the main point of a profession is to get people to sit in their offices where they can spend time on paperwork. Right? And filling out forms. Take the Janitor Service in Bergen Municipality, it's absolutely ruined! There are no janitors left in the schools. They're all down town filling out forms and playing cards. And sending paperwork round to the schools.
K	(laughs) Oh really?

Arne	The schools are having a hard time of it, getting anything done. I mean, I can't get bricks to jump up and make a wall merely by filling out a form. I need people to do the manual work. And it's this I think we should focus on. Just think how healthy it is for the human body! Think how positive it is to be able to get up in the morning, go out, and *do* something! Instead people are intent on *doing as little as possible*! And obviously this goes some way to explaining why we have so many on sickness benefits, so many sick people. Cause people are out of shape, they don't look after themselves, and their bodies wither. The human body is a muscle, and it needs work!

The fervour with which Arne delivered this message can hardly be exaggerated. These matters were clearly of great importance to him. In this section we see again that the opposition to office-work. In this more elaborated version it is evident that this is not a question of worker antagonism against management. Indeed, Arne was *himself* a highly successful manager and company owner at the time of the interview. A clue to what the opposition to office-work signifies in this context is provided by the frequent mention of the word "forms". In Arne's account, office-workers do not only "push papers", they make and fill in *forms*. In other words, they do a task oriented variety of *analysis based work*. This emphasis on forms signifies that Arne was criticizing the formalization of society. His described a society suffering from an invasion of forms. In the following section (which followed the previous one) he underlined his previous points about papers and forms and, in addition, he *explicitly* related this to a process of bureaucratization.

Arne	…*our society has become so bureaucratic* that the only thing that matters is getting people into an office. Everybody seems intent on, how should I put it, filling out forms, printing out documents. Instead of getting more people to use their bodies. It's incredibly important for your physical wellbeing. And it has so many social spinoffs, because we are *building* something, we are creating something! Physical work, that's creative work! In contrast, if you've spent your days in an office filling out forms, what can you say when you look back and ask yourself what you have made?

Again we see the emphasis on a type of creativity which is performed *only* in object based work.[93] The proof of this creativity is found in concrete results, and this is also where Arne places the source of the great *social contribution* of object based work.

In sum, it should be safe to assert that the way Arne talked about different types of work amounted to an act of social position-taking. Specifically, he positioned himself in allegiance with those who did "physical work", and was strongly opposed to what he saw as tendencies in society towards a situation where "the only thing that matters is getting people into an office". Arne argued that a condition he saw as destructive for human beings, "doing as little as possible" (å ikkje-gjøre-nokke), was becoming more and more common, as office-work became more common.

In sum, Arne's view is remarkably similar to a sub-group in Young and Willmott's (1956) study on *social grading by manual workers*. Arne resembles the sub-group of manual workers who were termed "the upside-downers". These put manual workers (themselves) at the top of prestige rankings and like Arne they contended about office-workers that "They're not doing anything" (1956:342).[94] And like Arne they emphasized the "social contribution" of manual work.[95]

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[93] If it seems strange to term this creativity, this is likely due to the old bifurcation of work and art (perceiving work and art in dichotomous terms). This has been criticized by a number of authors, but perhaps first and foremost by Dewey, who wrote that "The intelligent mechanic engaged in his job, interested in doing well and finding satisfaction in his handiwork, caring for his materials and tools with genuine affection, is artistically engaged. The difference between such a worker and the inept and careless bungler is as great in the shop as in the studio" (Dewey 2005[1934]:6)

[94] Ehrenreich's father made a similar remark with reference to the U.S. in the 1940s. According to him, "everyone could see that doctors, lawyers and white-collar managers 'didn't do a goddamn thing'" (Ehrenreich 1989:137).

[95] It is interesting to note here, that Arne's perspective on different types of work in society is quite similar to that of Saint-Simon, who famously coined the term "industrial society". In his theory of industrial society, written in 1817, Saint-Simon emphasized the natural harmony of interests that linked the members of all producing classes against the idlers and parasites who lived off their productive enterprise (Kumar 1978:39) Saint-Simon was firmly convinced that "The producers of useful things (are) the only useful people in society" (Saint-Simon quoted in Durkheim 2009:86).

A significant point here is that Arne, who made the most elaborated case for the value of manual work among all the interviewees, did not actually do much manual work himself anymore. He managed the manual work of his employees. The fact that an interviewee not himself engaged in manual work was the one who most fervently argue for its worth, testifies (again) to the presence of a sense of *common interests* within object based work. Arne's insisting argument for the value of manual work can be read as a pledge of allegiance to object based work – he disregards the internal differentiation between direct and indirect object based work. Like Geir, he was sceptical of a *societal situation* in which object based work and analysis based work were not in the balance that they should have been. In his opinion, analysis based work was too much emphasised and attributed too much value.

A typology of types of work

With a basis in data on how the interviewees *perceived and experienced their work in relation to other types of work in society*, a three-fold typology was developed from the data. The typology was put to use in the analysis above. In this section it will be subject to a slightly more elaborate presentation. As mentioned in the introduction, the typology takes its departure point from what is the *focus* of different types of work.

Table 4: Typology of types of work (and focus of the work tasks)

Object based work	**Analysis based work**	**Relation based work**
Things	Texts/ideas/symbols	People

In accordance with the more general approach to typologization in this project (see Chapter 3), the point of this typology has been to assist in *description* of how these men have perceived and experienced their work in relation to other types of work. It is *not* to presented as set of *categories* into which one can neatly *classify* different people or groups of people (occupations). Because the typology is descriptive in

nature, any given work situation or work task can potentially be described a combination of two or more types of work.[96] In sum, the typology has been useful because it has enhanced the accuracy of the descriptions relevant to the discussion in this chapter.

Object based work is conceived here as work which is focused on things, or put differently, work focused on (and thereby dependent on) manipulation of things. The four previous chapters (as well as the current chapter) contain many descriptions of this type of work, both in its direct and indirect forms, both within and outside of employment.

Analysis based work is conceived here as work which is focused on text/ideas/symbols, or put differently, work focused on (and thereby dependent on) engagement with text/ideas/symbols. It has not been possible to establish based on the current data the nature of patterns of circulation and interaction between people in object based work and people in analysis based work. An investigation into such patterns would be interesting, but would require a research design more appropriate for mapping of social networks.

Relation based work is conceived here as work which is focused on people, or put differently, work focused on (and thereby dependent on) involvement in people's lives. In the current project the interviews were concentrated around the *interviewee's* experiences and thoughts concerning work and education over the life course. With this focus, relation based work was only very rarely mentioned. Consequently, not much data was generated which could provide information how these men perceived and experienced *their* work in relation to this type of work. However, one *might* infer

[96] For instance, a job as a bus driver (like Jon had been for a while) could be *described* as a combination of object based work (the bus as an object) and relation based work (the relations with the passengers). And a job as a teacher might be described as a combination of analysis based work and relation based work. But as hinted at above (when Geir mentioned how he "could talk" to the natural science teacher) the work tasks of teachers can also be object based in various ways.

from this silence that they did not consider relation based work relevant to the focus of the interview – that relation based work existed for them as a *taken-for-granted* point of reference against which they felt little need to position themselves (in the interview situation).[97] The value of adding relation based work to the typology lies primarily in the way it contributes to the description of the two other types of work. Most importantly, it contributes to define what is *not* typically the focus in object based work: people.

Concluding discussion

When images of people in offices sitting on their "arses", "not *doing* anything" have been evident in previous research they have mostly been interpreted as tensions between workers and managers. If they have been interpreted in wider contexts, they have been seen as a symptom of tension between people in manual and mental labour. The first case which was presented in this chapter, the case of Stig, was useful because it provided a concise example of how opposition to office-work was expressed in the current data. The second case, the case of Knut, was useful in this context because of the way in which Knut contextualized his father's opposition to office-work with reference to his father's work experiences in the early post-war decades. This account suggested that Knut's father had experienced similar institutional settings as those described in the now classic early post-war research on such matters. When Knut's account of his father was held together with this research, the impression was that the opposition to office-work had some important roots in institutional settings characterized by what has been termed *institutionalized separateness* (Lockwood 1958) between workers and managers.

[97] Smeby and Mausethagen (2011) recently summarized some central features of the female-dominated welfare state occupations in Norway on assignment from Statistics Norway. "The relational aspect, that is, relations between people, are central to the practice of these occupations" (Smeby and Mausethagen 2011:149). It might also be mentioned that occupations at the professional end of welfare state occupations have previously been termed *relation professions* (Moos, Krejsler and Laursen 2004) and *care professions* (Barnett, Becher and Cork 1987).

On this background the exploration of how to interpret the opposition to office-work (and other acts of social position-taking) in a contemporary Norwegian context, continued in the second section of the chapter. Whereas the early post-war research had found that skilled workers *hardly* participated in the delegation of authority, the case of Jon was presented in order to discuss the main impression from the *current* data on this point. In the work organizations which were reflected in the current data participation in delegation of authority seemed to be quite widespread. As in the case of Jon, it often took place through positions as low level working supervisors ("bas", or "Team leader"). This participation seemed quite limited (to overseeing the execution of plans someone higher up in the occupational hierarchies had made) but nonetheless seemed to have some implications relevant in the current context. Because, rather than *institutionalized separateness*, the data indicated *interaction, co-operation and even, a sense of common interests,* between workers and management within object based work. However, that is *not* to say that occupational hierarchies were not important within object based work. In fact, the next case, the case of Karsten, suggested how differences in education credentials within object based work could bring about feelings of inferiority. In a meeting with highly credentialed co-workers Karsten felt "small" due to his lack of credentials. However, his sense of worth was restored as soon as he was given opportunity to *demonstrate* an experience-based competence with objects (which was relevant to the work tasks in question). In sum, it seemed to exist a kind of mutual respect within object based work, which to some degree transcended occupational hierarchies.[98]

The third section of the chapter moved on to consider some more difficult and problematic aspects of how these men perceived and experienced their work in relation to other types of work. The case of Geir was useful in this context because of his experiences in an a-typical work situation. His job as school-janitor in the 1980s had required much interaction and cooperation with people who did analysis based

[98] It could be noted here that neither was there any sign of "antagonism between trades" within object based work, as was observed by Brown and Brannen among shipbuilding workers in Wallsend, Britain in the late 1960s (Brown and Brannen 1970b:200).

work – teachers. He described two concrete incidents, one in which he felt dis-respected (by a philosophy-teacher) and another where he felt he was not good at "talking to teachers" (upon rebuilding the school kitchen). Notably, these to feelings may have been related. His feeling of not being able to talk may have been related to his feeling of not being respected.

From Geir's perspective, teachers were "theoretically minded" while *he* was "practically minded". This too can be interpreted as an act of social position-taking, because arguably, Geir here positioned himself in a wider societal context by the use of an old two-fold classification. A very similar type of dividing the world into two groups had been evident in in previous research (for instance in Willis 1977 and Lysgaard 1961). However, when Geir did it, he was not referring to tensions between people in manual work people in mental work (as Willis' interviewees), or to tensions between workers and managers (as Lysgaard's interviewees). Geir was, arguably, referring to the difference between object based work and analysis based work. He continued this argument by constructing a two-fold conception talent. This can be paraphrased to the effect that some people have a talent for analysis based work, others have a talent for object based work. Central to the talent for object based work was a particular type of creative envisioning, which was deemed necessary for entering into dialogue with objects (at anything above a very basic level).

The notion that a distinct type of talent existed for object based work was corroborated and elaborated by Arne. Arne had spotted his one son's talent for object based work at a very young age, from observation of "how he would treat things", while one of his other sons was reported to not have the talent "at all".

Geir's remarks about the school are interesting to discuss in some further depth, because they have several significant wider implications. His argument was that school system was biased as to which types of talent it valued and rewarded. And,

given this two-fold conception of talent, it does seem safe to assert that the school/education system does provide most *institutional backing* for talent for analysis based work. In Geir's opinion, talent for object based work *can* be said to be in a subordinated/inferior position in the school system. This impression about the difference in institutional backing for the two types of talent is supported by Collins, who has argued that non-credentialist forms of learning are *generally* less recognized as valuable than their credentialist counterparts (Collins 2002:26).

In light of Geir's outrage at how children in possession of the talent for object based work could be "abused" in schools, it was interesting that he advised his son to become a teacher. As already noted, this advice seems related to what Irwin and Elley have called a "generality of commitment to education" (2011:492). It seems reasonable to interpret this generality of commitment as follows: Part of the reason why education credentials are valuable is the way they can make a given competence easy to *transfer* between different context. In the case of Karsten, for instance, the competence of his co-workers, which was backed by tertiary level education-credentials, seemed more easily transferable between different institutional contexts than his more un-credentialed competence. Unlike Karsten's experience-based competence with objects, the highly credentialed competence of the other participants in the meeting did not seem dependent on being *demonstrated* in order to be valued. On this background, a *generality of commitment to education* would be quite understandable. Because, it is difficult *not* to recognize the fact that the school/education system *is* the main context for sorting people into different positions in society (see Chapter 4). Parents who say to their children "never mind putting in any effort at school" will not be doing them any favours. There was no evidence of such advice in either cohort.

The very idea of a talent for object based work, and certainly the idea that this talent is quite exclusive, might seem strange and somehow foreign in contemporary public discourse. On the other hand, influential epochal terms, such as "post-industrial

society”, “knowledge society”, are frequently used without much contemplation, discussion or critical comment. These terms carry ideas about work, education and talent quite opposite to Geir and Arne’s, and their implications do not, in most instances, seem to be considered at all problematic. This might be related to Marx and Engels’ famous dictum that “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (1970[1846]:64). The taken-for-granted way in which the terms “post-industrial society” and “knowledge society” are used, might be taken to suggest that they somehow represent “ruling ideas” about work, knowledge and talent in contemporary society. In the context of these epochal terms, “knowledge” does not refer to the type of knowledge that Geir and Arne were talking about. On the contrary, these epochal terms effectively devalue such knowledge by conceptualizing knowledge *as* theoretical knowledge, and locating object based work in its direct form as the work of the past, and analysis based work as the work of the future.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This project has demonstrated the transferability, or usefulness, of much previous research. The products from this research project can potentially be subject to a similar usage. The project stands as an example of a very specific perspective and approach. Its research design might in itself be transferable to future research projects in other contexts. However, the greatest value of the current project is likely related to its empirical descriptions and discussions. These can have relevance and value to several different debates in the research literature and in society more widely. In part, this question of transferability has been discussed already, in the concluding discussions that have ended each empirical chapter. This concluding chapter will not fully summarize the specific conclusions from these previous chapters. Rather it will discuss a selection of recurrent themes from these chapters. When central points from the previous chapters are held together, some more over-arching contributions of this research project become evident.

This study set out to empirically explore two main research questions. In Chapter 1 it was asked: *In what ways have the approaches to work and education of men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations in Norway 1) changed over historical time and 2) developed over the life course.* These questions have been explored by making use of a very specific research design (explained in Chapter 3). In accordance with this design, empirical specifications of these overarching questions have been addressed in each of the empirical chapter. The two main research questions have been explored in a *parallel* and contextualized way throughout the chapters, and will also be approached in this way in this concluding discussion. It is precisely the dual and inter-twined attention to these two main research questions that has enabled the current project to take note of several different types of relations between history and biography (Mills 2000[1959]). The different chapters have emphasized historical

changes as these had manifested themselves in the biographies and thoughts of the cases. The following will discuss some recurrent themes from these chapters.

The background of approaches to work and education in contextualized practice and action

One of the main points from Chapter 5 was that these men's approaches to work and education seemed to have been constituted in interplay between specific types of experiences, actions and structural conditions – in continual dialogue with their environments. The cases had come to know through work experience what kind of work tasks they were motivated for. Because of this, their approaches to work and education were highly liable to change over the life course. These points were noted specifically in Chapter 5, but could have just as well have been noted in the other empirical chapters. A recurrent theme in *all* these chapters is how the answers to the questions asked, to a great extent, were found in analysis of *practice* and *actions* in context. The following section will provide some examples of this central point.

Chapter 4 argued that the context of school-to-work transitions (for men entering into male-dominated manual occupations in Norway) seemed to have changed over the historical period in question. The comparative cohort design brought attention to how changes at the *institutional* level were central for understanding how the cases had *acted*. For instance, when the younger cohort couched their stories in individualist terms, this was related to the fact that by the time they had to make their school-to-work transitions, these had been *institutionalized* as a matter of individual choice. While for the older cohort, the transition seemed to have been conceived as a family concern, the younger cohort insisted that "It was entirely my own choice" and so on. However, a sociological analysis which stopped at that and concluded that the younger cohort made choices in accordance with their individual preferences would only have been half finished. Such an analysis would have overlooked central features of the relevant historical and institutional context. Upon closer inspection, a

specific type of contextualized *practice* had been central for the educational choices of the younger cohort. Because, they had relied primarily on one specific type of knowledge in making their *secure* choices: *experience based knowledge.* This type of knowledge had been especially valuable to them because it provided knowledge not only of opportunities, but also of themselves. More than other forms of knowledge, it could indicate for them what type of work *they* were talented at. In addition, *observation based knowledge* seemed to have been valuable to them in this context. This knowledge was also linked to concrete work practices, but notably, to the practices of others. For the older cohort, older men had involved themselves directly in the school-to-work transitions, often by arranging apprenticeships etc. For the younger cohort, older men had been important more as facilitators of experience based knowledge, and as *examples in context* (providers of observation based knowledge). In this way the comparative cohort design effectively brought out how the school-to-work transitions of the cases had their background in practices and actions in specific institutional contexts, and were thereby historically contextualized.

The understanding of these points from chapter 4 was expanded in Chapter 7. In light of Chapter 7 it seems likely that this experience based knowledge had its background in a process of cultivation. Over the life course, the cases seemed to have become cultivated at entering into dialogue with objects. This process of cultivation took place in a specific kind of household work *practices*. The cases had been introduced to this type of household work by cooperation across generations, and still engaged in it in their everyday lives. Thereby, while in Chapter 4 it was noted *that* the influence of the family in school-to-work transitions had persisted (but become more subtle over the relevant period), Chapter 7 indicated why and how this was so. Together, these chapters suggest that these men's approaches to work and education had their earliest background in practices of household work, and often also, in specific practices of play (taking toys apart).

In previous research, men in male-dominated manual occupations have been assumed to have "low educational aspirations". The analysis in chapter 7 amounts to partly question this assumption. On a general basis one could ask how useful it is to compare, rank or measure the educational aspirations of different groups without considering what kind of work they are motivated for. The current project amounts to a more specific questioning. When this project has analysed approaches to work and education in a way sensitive towards development over the life course, it does *not* seem accurate to say that these men were characterized by "low" educational aspirations. Aspirations for further education were found to be related to a specific type of work experience – the experience of *motivation to take charge*. It was on the basis of *this* type of experience that the pursuit of further education became relevant (interesting) for *some* of the cases. In addition, further education could become relevant based on a future-oriented fear of becoming burnt out. Because of this central role of contextualized experience, timing over the life course was central. If one had to place these cases in terms of a ranking of aspirations, it would be most correct to say the following: for some of the cases, their educational aspirations *increased* over the life course, as they experienced, through *practice* in specific work situations, a motivation for the kind of job that further education could get them into. It was not the *education* in itself these cases became motivated for, but the specific jobs that further education could enable them to get. One last point can be made here which concerns those who had *not* experienced a motivation to take charge (and thereby not found "climbing up" and further education to be relevant or interesting). Rather than to say that these cases had *low* educational aspirations, it would be more correct to say that they had *no* educational aspirations. Further education was not necessary for them to get the jobs they were motivated to do.

Types of work, not specific occupations

Based on previous research, varieties between cases in different *occupations* were expected to be important in the current project. This potential significance of occupational differences was part of the reason why men skilled in seven *different*

occupations were selected to be studied in this project. An implicit expectation of this sampling was that whether the cases were skilled as platers or builders (for example) *could* turn out to be significant for understanding their approaches to work and education. However, when the chapters are held together, the impression is *not* that differences between specific *occupations* have been central for understanding these men's approaches to work and education. Because, in some central respects, their approaches to work and education transcended the boundaries of the specific occupations. The typology of types of work, which was developed from the data and presented in Chapter 8, served to conceptualize these transcending (and surprising) qualities of these men's approaches to work and education. The following will discuss some ways in which this was evident in the other empirical chapters as well.

In chapter 4 both cohorts were found to be characterized by an *openness within limits* in their transitions from school to work. For example Arvid, in the older cohort, had planned to become a truck driver but had no objections against becoming a bricklayer's apprentice. Geir wanted some kind of job where he could make use of his hands. Thomas, in the younger cohort, was open for any work that would involve making use of an overall. This echoed previous research, which had observed that young men entering into these occupations have tended to want "something practical" (see Olsen 2008). In light of Chapter 8 the understanding of this phenomenon can be refined. In terms from Chapter 8 one could say that the openness within limits (noted in Chapter 4) was an openness within *object based work*. One might also note that they did *not* seem to have been open for *analysis based work* or *relation based work*. At least, these other types of work did not seem to have been considered relevant for them in their school-to-work transitions.

The transcending features of these men's approaches to work were also evident in chapter 7. When they entered into dialogue with objects in household work, these activities were similar and related to the object based work they did in their jobs. Similar transcending features were also evident in Chapter 5 and 6. In light of

Chapter 8, the great majority of job shifts described and discussed in these chapters appear to have been shifts within *object based work*. Likewise, the upward mobility that was described and discussed in these chapters took place *within* object based work –often from direct to indirect object based work over the life course. This was evident, for example, in the case of Johan, who had become an engineer through a three year college education. Although Johan no longer had much (if any) physical contact with the objects upon which his work was focused, the making and manipulation of *objects* was still what gave his work meaning.

In short, what turned out to distinguish the cases from one another in the analysis of their approaches to work and education did not seem hinged at the level of specific occupations. Based on the interviews, which were focused on the interviewee's approaches to work and education, occupational differences seem secondary to the fact that they did the same *type of work*: object based work. This point could have some relevance to a current discussion in the field of class analysis, for instance the debate around the role of occupations and "occupational inheritance" in class analysis (see Devine 2010).

Exclusionary consequences of formalization and increased focus on formal education

When held together, several of the empirical chapters indicate historical changes which might have certain exclusionary consequences. What might be termed a process of formalization seems to have taken hold over the historical period in question (between the late 1960s and the early 2000s). When chapter 4 and 6 are held together, one might say that meritocracy has become more education based. However, both chapters indicate that this process has had some potentially exclusionary implications of a kind that is seldom noted in the research literature (perhaps because of the close relations between notions of societal progress and processes of educational expansion, discussed in Chapter 2).

In Chapter 4 it was noted that the more non-formalized and un-standardized transition context of the older cohort had several enabling features. Perhaps the most important was that this transition context allowed for the cases to *prove their talents by work practice* at an early age. For example, Arne tried out several types of unskilled labour widely available to young boys/men at the time (sweeping chippings, the fisheries, a freight-ship) until his talent for object based work was finally “discovered” by a local mason. In contrast, the younger cohort had to endure for a longer time-period in school, before they, based on school performance and attendance, could finally be given opportunity to demonstrate any talents they might have (*for other types of work than analysis based work)*. During this prolonged period of schooling some developed what was termed a *sentencing approach to school.* When this was more augmented in the younger cohort, this is likely related to the fact that the length of the sentence had increased in the period between the cohorts.

These points are important to restate here because they have some implications for a hot topic on the current political agenda in Norway: drop-out from upper secondary education. Although the cases in the younger cohort in *this* project had *successfully managed* the contemporary type of prolonged, formalised, standardized and individualized transition context, many others have failed in their attempts to become skilled in this same type of context. This warrants a questioning of whether this type of highly age-standardized transition context in itself might have some exclusionary consequences.

The changing role of the education system was also a topic in Chapter 6, which analysed the circumstances and conditions for “climbing up” (upward mobility in existing work organizations). Here too, the cohort comparison indicated some significant social changes. What was termed *credential flexibility* seemed to have decreased over the period in question (late 1960s to early 2000s), while *credential barriers* seemed to have increased. A central point in this argument was that the ways

in which workers could prove their worth for upward mobility appeared to have been *narrowed.* In other words, what Sennett (2006) termed "the value of accumulated experience" had decreased, and what Bell (1973) termed "educated talent" had been given greater "priority", with respect to upward mobility. For those who had experienced a motivation to take charge, and found "climbing up" to be the action most relevant to this experience, social changes to this effect could be problematic (constraining). Old issues concerning the *life course timing* of further education had become *more of a problem* over the period in question, partly due to an increased focus on *tertiary* level education. This type of contextual changes can be interpreted not only as a problem for the individuals whom they directly concern. They might also be considered as a problem for society more widely. Because, a wider implication of social changes to this effect would be that a highly motivated and much demanded *talent reserve* could be left increasingly underspent.[99]

The themes of formalization and education are also relevant to a wider interpretation of chapter 7. The competence at entering into dialogue with objects could clearly be valuable in a number of different contexts. Its key strength was, arguably, its breadth. Stig and Terje, for instance, felt certain that they could repair "anything". However, in this strength lies also the "weakness" of this competence. The same lack of specialization which can be a great advantage in many contexts, is also what makes this competence for entering into dialogue with objects difficult to pin down and certify. Consequently, this type of competence cannot easily be "codified" and verified by a credential. It needs to be proven by practice. In this way, it is at dissonance with modern (that is, more formalized, centralized, standardized) ways of evaluating competence. Inspired by the case of Karsten in Chapter 8, one could say that if a venue for proving this competence through practice is not provided, it will not be discovered or recognized, and consequently, it will not be valued. Again, this

[99] Hansen (2011) pointed out recently how peculiar it is that the idea of an under-spent *talent reserve* in the population seems to be outdated. This was a major topic in education policy debates of the 50s and 60s but is seldom referred to anymore. The findings in this chapter suggest that there could be a great talent reserve among men skilled in male-dominated manual occupations that have experienced a motivation to take charge. The specific motivations of these men correspond perfectly with the current high demand for engineers in Norway.

was not a great problem for the cases in the current study. After all, *they* were "specialists" (skilled workers) in the labour market context, and gained both recognition and remuneration on *that* basis. For them, the broadly cultivated competence at entering into dialogue with objects was more of a bonus. Had they *only* been "cultivated men" they would likely have been worse off in the labour market. In other words, Weber was not at fault when he anticipated that "the cultivated man" (in ideal typical form) was an endangered species. The kind of broad cultivation at entering into dialogue with objects which was described and discussed in Chapter 7 is in some ways at odds with the credentialist logic of the education system.

The type of formalization process in question here is *not* a romantic concern with the "disenchantment of the world" (Weber 1946:155, inspired by the romanticism of Shiller on this point). Rather, the issue concerning formalization in this context has to do with its influence on the balance between types of work in society. This is important because it relates to changes in the landscape of opportunities. When Chapter 8 is held together with that of Chapter 2, 4 and 6, it would seem that the concept of talent underlying the idea of *education based meritocracy* is socially skewed. That is, not only does the idea of education based meritocracy rely on "narrow" definitions of merit (as pointed out by Lister 2006) but these definitions might be *increasingly* narrow *to the disadvantage of those talented at object based work*. Performance in the education system seems to be becoming more and more important in deciding people's position in society. In overview, the analysis in this project suggests that more and more opportunities and privileges have been turned into rewards for school performance over the period in question (between the late 60s and early 2000s). Opportunities in the labour market seem to become increasingly contingent on performance in the education system. And, most importantly, social changes to this effect seem to be predominantly to the advantage of those who are either already well-credentialed, or have talents for analysis based work.

As already indicated (in Chapter 8) terms such as “Post-industrial society” and “knowledge society” serve to legitimize this development with their implications that society no longer needs people in manual work, and that manual work requires little, if any, knowledge. Sociologists have widely embraced these terms, often quite uncritically, and thereby taken part in what one may call (borrowing a term from Mills) “The Great Celebration” of education based meritocracy. In this context, it would be welcome if sociologists would, to a greater extent, challenge and question these terms to a greater extent. This is important because they currently shape our understanding of work and education in society.

Reflections on concepts in research on work and education

Most theses conclude with some ideas and suggestions for future research. This thesis is no exception to this rule, but rather than suggest specific research topics, it will present some reflections on some concepts commonly used in research on work and education.

A recent Ph.D. thesis concluded that we must “encourage the youth with low educational levels in their family-background to participate in higher education”. The author is not alone in this way of thinking. Implicitly value-laden and perspective-laden conclusions are an issue in much research, but have been specifically noted to be a problem in educational research (Foster, Gomm and Hammersley 1996, Foster, Gomm and Hammersley 2000). Within the sociology of work a similar warning was issued over 50 years ago, by Hughes (1958), who remarked that “since the language about work is so loaded with value and prestige judgements, and with defensive choice of symbols, we should not be astonished that the concepts of social scientists who study work should carry a similar load.” And he added that “…in scientific discourse the value-loaded concept may be a blinder” (Hughes 1958:43).

Based on these warnings the last section of this thesis will briefly provide some examples of concepts that should be treated with special caution in research on education and work.[100] One example is when it is argued that some groups in society are *"better"* educated than others, or that some kinds of education are quite simply "better" than others. A reasonable question (seldom asked) to such a statement would be: better educated *for what type of work tasks*? Can one never become over-qualified, or mis-qualified, only better and better educated? Another example is the notion that some jobs are more "interesting" than others. Longer educations might for instance be assumed to lead to *"more interesting jobs"*. The implication of this is that some jobs are less interesting, and others again, quite un-interesting. The distinct impression from chapter 5 was that it was *not* inherent properties of the different jobs in themselves that determined their attractiveness or unattractiveness. The same remark can be made about the concept of a *"meaningless job"* (discussed in Chapter 5). Yet another term which can have condescending implications is the term *"knowledge work"*. The implication of this term is that some types of work simply involve or require *more* knowledge than other. In other words, it relies on a questionable *quantification* of knowledge – rather than typologization of knowledge. A consideration of different *types* of knowledge would likely be both more precise and less evaluative. Further, the term *"creative work*" does not refer to the type of *creativity* that for instance Bjarte (in Chapter 5), and Geir and Arne (in Chapter 8) were talking about. Theirs is *not* the type of creativity alluded to in discussions of "the creative class". Not only is their type of creativity not included, it is not granted status *as* creativity, and thereby devalued as such. In contrast to being creative, the work of many of the men in this project would be more likely to be termed *"routine"*. But, based on what type of investigation and what type of analysis is this label assigned? Further, some homes are often described as *"lacking resources"* (ressurssvak) because they have few school-relevant resources. In this way, homes that lack school-relevant resources are effectively portrayed as empty (only as

[100] The examples here are from the research literature which has been used in the current project. The following paragraph does however not specify the works where these terms have been used. This is because the naming of names in this context would be likely to distract attention away from the main point. It is the *general* position of researchers in relation to work and education, and the perspective-laden *concepts* in themselves that are put into question here. Which terms have been used by which researchers (etc.) is not the issue here.

lacking). This is reminiscent of long-standing traditions for seeing people with low levels of formal qualifications simply as *deprived* of knowledge. The terms *privilege* and *advantage* are also relevant in this context. These are often used without specifying exactly what is considered to be a privilege, and in what way (when, where, how) the given type of attributes/resources constitute a privilege. The distinct impression from the current project is that what is conceived as privilege depends on *context*. For instance, Thomas in Chapter 4 considered his father's garage and tools to have been a great privilege to him during childhood. This project certainly amounts to suggest that yardsticks for measuring privilege (and lack of such) are highly context sensitive.

As was noted in Chapter 2, Young (2001) pointed out that seals of approval and disapproval on different groups of people in society are assisted by "an amazing battery of certificates and degrees". Based on the examples above, one might add that a battery of social science research *concepts*, whose value-laden and perspective-laden content is mostly not recognized, can readily serve the same function. As Hughes (1952:139) suggested 60 years ago: It is an underrated but central task of sociology to constantly ask: "What do these words mean?" and "Why do we use them?"

Appendix 1: The survey (translated version)

Please tick the box that is most correct for you:

1 Are you currently active in the labour market?

Yes

Yes, but I'm on leave

Yes, but I'm on sick leave

No (if no, proceed to question 7)

2 What is your current occupation?

Occupation:……………………………

Title:……………………………...

3 Do you work full-time or part-time?

Full-time

Part-time

4 What kind of employment relationship are you in?

A permanent position

Self-employed

A temporary position

5 Are you a co-owner in the company you work in

Yes

No

6 How long have you worked for the company you currently work for?

(how many years)…………….

7 Have you taken further education of more than 6 months duration since you took your apprenticeship test?

No (proceed to question 9)

Yes, I have taken ……………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………

I did this on the side.

I took a break from working in order to do this.

8 If you have taken further education of more than 6 months duration, how did you finance this:

Student loans

A bank loan

Personal funds

Employer financed

Other……………………………….

9 How many different companies have you worked for since you were skilled?

……… (antall firma)

(If a company has only changed name or owners you can count it as one company).

10 What was the (main) occupation of your mother and father when you were 14 years old?

Mother:…………………………………

Father:…………………………………

11 Has your father worked in the same occupation, or the same line of business/industry as you?

Yes

No

12 What is your current marital status?

Single

Cohabitating

Married

Divorced/separated/used to be cohabitating

Widower

13 Do you have children? (or grown children)?

No

Yes

If yes, how many?............

14 Are you willing to be interviewed at a time and place of your choosing?

Yes

No

(You can withdraw you consent at any time even if you answer yes)

Your contact information:

Phone: ………………………

E-mail:…………………………………

Appendix 2: The interview guide (translated version)

Introduction about the research project and about the interview

> Extract: "The interview is about *your* experiences and thoughts in relation to work and education. So you're the expert here. Feel free to bring up things that come to mind along the way." Etc.

Present life:

- I'd like to start by asking you if there is anything special that preoccupies you in your current life, something you think a lot about, or takes a lot of time?
- Could you tell about your current job? (probes: where do you work, how long have you worked there, what kind of work tasks do you do, what kind of position)
- Is there anything special going on at your job these days?

Work-life history:

- The best thing is maybe if we go back in time now, if you could tell me how you got to where you are today (probe: perhaps you could start from when you were an apprentice?)(probes: about the timing and background for the different job shifts and further education).

Current work and job

- What was the background for your starting in your current job?
- How are the relations between different groups of workers at your workplace?
- What is your title?
- Is there a union? Are you a member – why/why not?
- Could you describe the work you do?
- What would you say is the best thing about the work/your job? (what is it you enjoy the most?)
- What would you say is the worst thing about it?
- What kind of people are right/fit (suited) for this kind of work? (probe: who is *not*?)
- Mostly men do this kind of work: why do you think there are so few women?
- Do you know of any women in your kind of work? What are they like?
- Has the kind of work you do changed since you started doing it?
- How are the relations between older and younger workers?
- Have there been great technological changes?

Work and education in childhood/youth

- Now, if you keep thinking about work, and but go further back in time: What's your earliest memory of work? (probes: what kind of work, where was this, who did you do it with?)
- What kind of work did your parents do? (what kind of education did they have?)
- How would you describe your father's approach to work?
- What did he do when he was not at his job?

- If you think back to when you were in lower secondary school, when you were around 15 years old: where did you live? Did you have sisters and brothers? What were they doing?
- What was important for *you* at that time? (probe: what kept you busy?)
- What kind of relationship did you have with school?
- What kind of relationship did your parents have with the school?
- When you decided what to do after lower secondary school: what were your thoughts?
- What were the alternatives? (and what was out of the question?)
- Who did you talk to about these questions, and what kind of advice did you get?
- What came to be decisive for you? (what did you end up doing?)
- How was it to become an apprentice?
- What were your thoughts on the future back then? (what were your dreams/goals?)
- What preoccupied you in your spare time, back then?

Present perspectives on work and education

- What have you thought about your vocational/educational choices later in life? (probes: have you considered alternatives?)
- Would you recommend young people today to make similar choices?
- What kind of work do your friends do? (do any of them do a completely different type of work?)
- What do you do when you get together?
- What do you do on the weekends?

Family

- Your wife/partner, how long have you been together?
- What does she do? What kind of job does she have? (full time/part time)
- Do you have children? How old are they?
- **Older cohort**: Children's work and education? Have you influence their educational choices in any way? How did you organize their care when they were small? (who was at home? For how long?)
- **Younger cohort**: How do you organize the child care? (nursery/kindergarten, school)? How do you divide work tasks between you at home? What kind of advice do you plan to give them in relation to work and education when they grow older?
- Have you made yourself any thoughts about your own balance between your job and your family?
- Your sisters and brothers: what have they been doing in terms of work and education?
- Is there anything that preoccupies you in your spare time that we haven't talked about?
- How would you describe your approach to work?

The future

- Where do you see yourself in ten years?
- Do you have any goals for the future?
- Do you have any worries about the future? (probe: what are your thoughts when it comes to consequences of work immigration when it comes to your occupations/you?

Appendix 3: Overview of cases

Overview of cases (older cohort)

“Name”	**Born in year**	**Skilled in year**	**Skilled as**	**Current position**	**Presented in chapter(s)**
Atle	1949	1969	Bricklayer	Fireman	4
Arvid	1950	1970	Bricklayer	Lagersjef	4
Arne	1948	1973	Bricklayer	Manager/owner	4,5,8
Bjarte	1950	1970	Builder	Self-employed builder	5
Birger	1948	1970	Builder	Manager/owner	7
Bjørn	1950	1971	Builder	Builder in municipal maintenance dep.	5
Geir	1950	1978	Plumber	Plumber in municipal maintenance dep.	4,5,8
Helge	1952	1970	Industrial plumber	Senior engineer in the oil industry	4,6
Harald	1951	1971	Plumber	Manager/owner	5,7
Johan	1949	1969	Plater	Mid-level manager and co-owner of engineering company	6
Jan	1950	1971	Plater	Industrial mechanic (engine repair and service)	5
Jon	1951	1971	Plater	Mechanic and team supervisor in the oil industry	5,8
Karsten	1949	1970	Industrial mechanic	Fireman	4,8
Knut	1951	1971	Industrial mechanic	Manager/Co-owner of company in the oil industry.	6,8

Overview of cases (younger cohort)

"Name"	**Born in year**	**Skilled in year**	**Skilled as**	**Current position**	**Presented in chapter(s)**
Lars	1979	1999	Bricklayer	Bricklayer/Co-owner	7
Magne	1978	1998	Builder	Carpenter in a municipal department	4
Morten	1978	1998	Builder	Self-employed carpenter/appraiser	
Martin	1978	1998	Builder	Carpenter	
Rune	1979	1998	Plumber	Plumber	4,5,7
Roger	1979	1999	Plumber	Plumber	4,6
Rolf	1979	1999	Plumber	Plumber	5
Svein	1979	1999	Plater	Engineer	
Stig	1978	1999	Plater	Plater and welder	7,8
Steinar	1979	1999	Plater	Plater	4,5,7
Trond	1978	1999	Industrial mechanic	Industrial mechanic and team supervisor	7
Thomas	1978	1998	Industrial mechanic	Engineer	4,6
Terje	1979	1999	Industrial mechanic	Industrial mechanic (maintenance)	4
Tor	1979	1999	Industrial mechanic	Industrial mechanic	6,7

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