



EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACE LEARNING IN SMES: LESSONS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from a research and development study (REALISE) which examined learning opportunities and experiences in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). It is part of the EU Objective 3 *Managing Progress Programme*. The study involved collaboration between the Centre for Research in Education, Inclusion and Diversity (CREID) at the University of Edinburgh, Glasgow South West Regeneration Agency (GSWRA) and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). It took place over a period of two and half years, starting in July 2005 and ending in December 2007. Its main aims were to:

- identify the learning opportunities and materials provided to SMEs by the two learning providers; and,
- examine the experiences of employers and employees when engaging with training providers and undertaking training.

GSWRA and the WEA were responsible for identifying the training needs of the SMEs and the delivery of appropriate training to meet these needs. CREID evaluated the training provided in terms of its contribution to the development of individual employees and organisations.

SECTION 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Policy

The EU's Lisbon strategy was published in 2000 with the aim of shaping 'the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better job and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment' (CEC, 2000). There was an emphasis on investment in human capital (Dion, 2005) and creating a more flexible and adaptable workforce (CEC, 2000). Member states were charged with producing action plans relating to growth and employment.

In 2004 the HM Treasury commissioned Lord Leitch to conduct a review of the UK's long-term skills needs. The Leitch Review of Skills, *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy- World Class Skills*, (HM Treasury, 2006) revealed that there are 5 million adults in the UK lacking functional literacy and 17 million adults lacking functional numeracy. Recommendations made in the Leitch report included increasing adults' skills across all levels and increasing employer engagement and investment in skills, and establishing a view of learning as something people undertake at all levels and at all ages in the work-force throughout their working lives. These targets would be attained through the sharing of responsibilities by all the beneficiaries including the Government, the employer and the individual (HM Treasury 2006).

The document *A Smart Successful Scotland: Ambitions for the Enterprise Networks* (Scottish Executive, 2001b) was the first comprehensive Scottish policy statement in which the Scottish Executive provided clear directions and priorities for local economic development in terms of extending skills development to include all levels of learners. It directed the Scottish Enterprise and Highland and Island Enterprise to support Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) in shaping partnerships for successful and sustainable local economic development. In order to accredit all assessed learning and assist employers, learners and the general public in understanding how qualifications can improve the knowledge and skills of Scotland's workforce the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) was launched in 2001.

Life Through Learning Through Life (Scottish Executive, 2003), the lifelong learning strategy for Scotland, was intended to promote 'a Scotland where people have the confidence, enterprise, knowledge, creativity and skills they need to participate in economic, social and civic life; through, for example, community learning and development in some of Scotland's most

deprived communities' (Scottish Executive, 2003). The lifelong learning strategy for Scotland specifically addressed 'the need for employers to recognise, use and develop the skills of those of their workforce' (Scottish Executive, 2003). The Scottish government's response to the Leitch Review, entitled *Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy* (Scottish Government, 2007), emphasised the need for the Scottish economy to shift away from low-skills employment towards higher value-added jobs. Workplace learning was given high priority and a need to balance the interests of the employer and the employee was stressed. It was recognised that employers, learning providers and awarding bodies needed more encouragement to use the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

1.2 Models of workplace learning

Drawing on psychological and sociological approaches Easterby-Smith and Arajou (1999) identified a distinction between technical and social processes of learning within organisations. Whereas technical learning is viewed in terms of the detection and correction of error (Argyris and Schön, 1974), social learning processes emphasise the importance of how people make sense of their experiences at work.

Drawing on Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory, Fuller and Unwin (2004) developed an expansive-restrictive framework that provides a conceptual and analytical tool for evaluating the quality of learning environments and for analysing an organisation's approach to workforce development. Organisations with a restrictive approach impose many limitations on learning, whereas those with an expansive approach foster a wide array of formal, non-formal and informal approaches to and opportunities for learning. Within organisations adopting an expansive approach, learning is likely to take place horizontally as well as vertically, and the culture is likely to be less hierarchical. Based on our data we identified a third category, the passive-restrictive approach. Managers with a passive-restrictive attitude to organisational learning were characterised by focusing on providing learning and training opportunities for employees involved in the production or service side of the business. The development of other employees was not seen as vital for the business and was therefore absent.

The importance of group-activities in learning new practices and gaining awareness of different kinds of knowledge and expertise was supported by research conducted by Eraut (2004). Earlier research showed that much learning at work occurs through doing things and being proactive in seeking learning opportunities but he emphasised that this requires confidence (Eraut, 2000). Confidence comes from successfully meeting challenges in one's work, while the confidence to take on such challenges depends on the extent to which workers feel supported in that endeavour. Thus there is a triangular relationship between challenge, support and confidence.

To summarise, organisations and individuals may be located along an expansive/restrictive continuum in relation to their approaches to learning and this continuum is also influenced by opportunities to develop confidence through learning from, and alongside, others. This conceptual framework is reflected in the research questions which follow and in the findings section.

1.3 Research Questions

The following questions were addressed:

- What is the relationship between the organisation's and the individual's orientation towards learning in relation to an expansive/restrictive continuum within a number of Scottish SMEs?
- What learning takes places within SMEs with a range of approaches to learning?
- What knowledge and skills do employees bring into the workplace and how are these utilised?

- How do employees view their own learning and what kinds of knowledge, skill and understanding are recognised and valued?
- How do employers view their own and their employees' learning and what kinds of knowledge, skill and understanding are recognised and valued?
- Is there a relationship between participation in learning activities in the workplace and participation in networks in the outside community?
- With regard to the training provided in the course of this project, what approaches seemed to be most effective in terms of moving individuals and organisations in the direction of an expansive approach to learning?
- What organisational features appear to promote an expansive learning culture?

1.4 Research Methods

The study used the following methods in order to address these research questions:

- A literature review of the Scottish, UK and international policy documents and academic writing was conducted.
- Case Studies were carried out with a total of 14 SMEs selected to participate in the qualitative research covering four geographical areas, a range of organisational sizes and structures, sectors and work and learning cultures. In each SME semi-structured interviews exploring past and current learning experiences were carried out with one owner/manager/supervisor and a number of employees prior to employees commencing on training. A second semi-structured interview was conducted with members of staff on completion of training that a) aimed to evaluate training or b) aimed to collect further information as to why the employee chose not to participate in training at this point.
- An audit of organisational and training need was carried out by the GSWRA and the WEA.
- Participant observation of the training sessions was carried out by the researcher.
- Documentary analysis was carried out of a sample of training materials used in a range of training courses offered to employees.
- Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two training providers.

1.5 Participants

80 employees and 13 managers from 14 Scottish SMEs participated in the study. Four of the SMEs were in the care sector, four in the service sector, four in the manufacturing sector and one in trade. The employees were a mixture of part-time and fulltime workers.

SECTION 2: TRAINING

Participants of the project underwent a variety of workplace training activities provided by the GSWRA or the WEA. These two training providers differed in organisational structure and offered a range of courses. The GSWRA works with local businesses and provided ICT and a personal development course as part of this project. Courses took place at a training centre in groups of up to eight participants apart from the ICT course which could be accessed online. The WEA is a voluntary organisation that provides learning opportunities for adults facing the greatest barriers to learning. The WEA provided literacy/IT, Equalities and ESOL training as part of this project.

Generally employees enjoyed the courses and felt that the knowledge gained was applicable in the workplace and outside work. Many reported enhanced soft skills such as confidence, increased communication and ability to work more independently.

Interviews with training providers revealed that employers varied greatly in their interest in their employees' learning and training. Some employers were enthusiastic whereas others were concerned that they would lose valuable employees as a result of the training or that it would be too detrimental to the business to release employees to attend the training. Because of the difficulty in moving resistant companies to a position where they were more willing to invest in training, both respondents felt that there was a need to work with managers to build trust over a sustained period of time.

SECTION 3: FINDINGS FROM THE COMPANY CASE STUDIES

Based on the interviews with employees and managers of 14 Scottish SMEs, three categories of organisational learning cultures were identified; expansive, restrictive and passive restrictive.

3.1 Expansive learning framework

Managers from eight SMEs in the study held an expansive attitude to workplace learning. The majority of these companies were in the care sector and were likely to be influenced by statutory equalities duties. The expansive approach was identified by:

- Opportunities for the whole workforce to develop and a belief in the employee as an asset to the company and that “everybody can learn”.
- Skills were widely distributed and all employees had access to qualifications involving reflection. Technical skills were valued and developed and new knowledge was considered applicable in the organisation and led to employees having increased confidence, understanding of their job and a professional attitude.
- Team work and informal learning was highly valued. Cross-boundary communication and a gradual transmission to become a full member of the community took place.
- Managers functioned as facilitators of workforce and individual development and employees' training needs were analysed.
- Employees learned for career and personal interest.

3.2 Restrictive learning framework

Managers of three SMEs, of which two were manufacturing companies, held a restrictive attitude to workplace learning. This approach was identified by:

- Managers arguing that employees were not interested in learning.
- A narrow view of learning. All training took place on the job and focused on job-related procedural knowledge. Informal learning was discouraged.
- Polarization of skills and limited access to qualifications. No possibility for employees to gain further knowledge or progress in their “careers”.
- No analysis of employees' training needs, instead training was used to tailor individual capability to organisational needs.
- Managers functioned as controllers of workforce and individual development.
- Managers felt it difficult to apply new knowledge in the workplace.

3.3 Passive-restrictive learning framework

Managers of three SMEs held a passive-restrictive attitude to workplace learning. Two of these SMEs were classified as “male” industries and the managers generally valued and encouraged employee learning and training supporting the production side of the organisation. Employees

viewed as working in the periphery of the organisation, often the female administrators, were not included in the training structure of the organisation. Characteristics included:

- Some mandatory courses, mostly in-house.
- Only part of the organisation had opportunities to develop and had shared cultural inheritance of development (apprenticeships).
- Informal learning highly valued.
- Training limited in terms of knowledge and time.
- Manager functioned as controller of workforce and individual development.

SECTION 4: EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVES ON TRAINING AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The employees' perspective on training and organisational culture was based on semi-structured interviews with around 80 employees. Most employees stated that they enjoyed learning, however the organisational learning culture set by the manager was reflected in the employees' attitudes to learning and training.

Employees in an expansive learning environment tended to view learning as part of working life, as a requirement and a responsibility. They were likely to value support and encouragement from colleagues. They were motivated by improved job prospects as well as a general interest in learning and deepening their knowledge. Many employees in organisations with an expansive learning framework held a broad definition of learning and identified formal as well as informal learning opportunities. Many were engaged in learning activities outwith work and the boundaries between organisational and personal interests were less clear.

Employees in a restrictive learning environment held a narrow view of learning and preferred formal learning over informal learning. There were clear boundaries between organisational and personal interests and employees were likely to prefer job-related learning to take place during work time. Many employees in organisations with a restrictive attitude to learning were motivated to learn as a means of improving their job prospects, and many were hoping to move into a different field of work.

Employees in a passive-restrictive learning environment held that their learning was focused on technical aspects of their job. Informal learning was highly valued and often their only means of learning new skills and knowledge. Many employees in this group of organisations felt they would benefit from more training but were not allowed sufficient time during work hours to engage in learning activities.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR A RANGE OF STAKEHOLDERS

Based on semi-structured interviews with employees and employers in Scottish SMEs from a variety of sectors, three types of organisational learning cultures were identified; expansive, restrictive and passive-restrictive. The organisational learning culture appeared closely linked to the sector of the company. Managers in the care sector appeared more likely to hold an expansive attitude towards learning and training. This is likely to be related to the statutory equalities duties in public sector organisations reinforcing employee learning and training. The general barrier to employee training among managers of manufacturing companies suggests an extension of these statutory duties to include the private sector. Table 1 provides an overview of the characteristics of expansive, restrictive and passive-restrictive learning frameworks and employee attitudes to learning.

Training providers mentioned funding restrictions putting limitations to length of training available to SMEs. Available funding is key to sustain ongoing training.

Finally, a few case studies showed examples of employees putting pressure on employers to introduce training in SMEs. As highlighted by Eraut (2000) confidence and support, by employer, employees or a trade union, are important for employees to be proactive in seeking knowledge. Trade union membership among employees in SMEs is lower than in larger or public sector organisations. This is likely to affect employee representation within these organisations.

5.1 Implications for stakeholders

Training providers/policy makers

- Employers require more readily available information about locally available training relevant to their individual organisational needs.
- Some managers, particularly in the manufacturing industries, need to be made more aware of the benefits of workplace learning and how enhanced and new knowledge can be applied in the workplace and how to take learning forward.
- Continuous funding of workplace training is key to sustaining ongoing training.
- A system where the employee is replaced by an unemployed person is a good way of keeping production maintained while developing employees.
- Training providers found that the manufacturing industries provided the greatest challenges when it comes to introduce workplace learning. The strong relationship between sector and engagement in learning and training activities suggests that equalities statutory duties should be extended to include the private sector.
- More research on the long-term effect of equalities training on organisational learning culture and employees attitudes towards equal opportunities issues is required.

Employers

- Need to provide a challenging and supportive organisational learning environment that stimulates reflection on own practice in order to build employees' confidence and encourages employees' to seek learning opportunities.
- Need to take a more proactive role in finding information about available training for the whole workforce and available funding.

Employees

- Need to be aware of their rights as several case studies show that a proactive attitude towards workplace learning can result in increased training opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from a research and development study (REALISE) which examined learning opportunities and experiences in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). It is part of the EU Objective 3 *Managing Progress Programme* (for further details see <http://www.adamsmithcollege.ac.uk/relations/development/projects/details.aspx?project=MAN>).

The study involved collaboration between the Centre for Research in Education, Inclusion and Diversity (CREID) at the University of Edinburgh, Glasgow South West Regeneration Agency (GSWRA) and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). It took place over a period of two and half years, starting in July 2005 and ending in December 2007.

The study provided an opportunity for an innovative collaboration between a research centre and two training providers. Its main aims were to:

- identify the learning opportunities and materials provided to SMEs by the two learning providers; and,
- examine the experiences of employers and employees when engaging with training providers and undertaking training.

An additional aim was to raise employer awareness of need for a workforce that is literate in the broadest sense as this is of importance for organisational sustainability and also for personal development of the individual employee. GSWRA and the WEA were responsible for identifying the training needs of the SMEs and the delivery of appropriate training to meet these needs. CREID evaluated the training provided in terms of its contribution to the development of individual employees and organisations.

The report is structured as follows:

- Section 1 reviews current policy in relation to workplace learning and the academic literature on learning in organisations
- Section 2 provides an overview of the training providers participating in the project and the training offered to companies
- Section 3 presents the findings of the company case studies and focuses on the organisational learning cultures of each SME
- Section 4 examines the learning experiences and views of the employees
- Section 5 summarises the findings, draws conclusions and considers implications for a range of stakeholders.

SECTION 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Policy

The EU's Lisbon strategy was published in 2000 with the aim of shaping 'the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better job and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment' (CEC, 2000). In addition to tackling the problems of social exclusion and an ageing population, there was an emphasis on investment in human capital (Dion, 2005), creating a more flexible and adaptable workforce (CEC, 2000) and a focus on achieving microeconomic rather than macroeconomic changes (Acemoglu and Aghon, 2002). Member states were charged with producing action plans relating to growth and employment. It was envisaged that more knowledge-intensive production would require a more highly-skilled workforce. It was argued that investment in education and training would benefit individuals, families, firms, the economy and society (Dion, 2005). Critics of the approach advocated by the Lisbon strategy suggested that a distinction tended to be drawn between low-skilled workers and economically inactive people, who were viewed as essentially deficient and in need of remediation, and high-skilled knowledge economy workers, who were regarded as meritorious and worthy of additional high-level investment (Brine, 2006).

In 2004 the HM Treasury commissioned Lord Leitch to conduct a review of the UK's long-term skills needs. The Leitch Review of Skills, *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy- World Class Skills*, (HM Treasury, 2006) revealed that there are 5 million adults in the UK lacking functional literacy and 17 million adults lacking functional numeracy. The adult literacy and numeracy curriculum framework for Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2001a) defines literacy and numeracy as follows:

The ability to read, write and use numbers, to handle information, express ideas and opinions, make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners (Scottish Executive, 2001a).

Additionally, the ALNIS curriculum emphasises the need to use ICT in order to learn and practise skills as well as to manage and communicate information (Scottish Executive, 2001a). The Leitch Review argued that with increasing competition from emerging economies such as India and China, in order to retain its position as a major economic power, the UK needed to strengthen its skill base. Furthermore, without greater social inclusion the UK risked creating a sub-section of society which was permanently detached from labour market opportunity (HM Treasury 2006). Across the developed world, the salience of social background in determining opportunities for human capital development is supported by the OECD's PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) which examines the competencies of 15 year olds in OECD countries. Findings from the 2003 round showed that students from the poorest backgrounds were 3.5 times more likely to score poorly in PISA's maths test compared with those from wealthier backgrounds. Even in adulthood lower-paid workers undergo less training than their better-off counterparts (OECD, 2005).

In order for the UK to become a world leader in skills by 2020, a number of recommendations were made. These included:

- increasing adults skills across all levels, with 95% of working age adults achieving functional literacy and numeracy and more than 90% of the workforce qualified to at least Level 2 where feasible.
- strengthening employer voice and increasing employer engagement and investment in skills through the development of Sector Skills Councils.
- developing a relevant qualifications structure, as many qualifications, particularly at low levels, are little valued by individuals or employers.

- establishing a view of learning as something people undertake at all levels and at all ages in the work-force throughout their working lives.

It was suggested that these targets would be attained through commitment and the sharing of responsibilities by all the beneficiaries including the Government, the employer and the individual (HM Treasury 2006).

Scotland is below the UK average in productivity, entrepreneurship and the proportion of employees undertaking job related training. An additional challenge is posed by the reduction in the working age population (Scottish Executive, 2001b). The document *A Smart Successful Scotland: Ambitions for the Enterprise Networks* (Scottish Executive, 2001b) was the first comprehensive Scottish policy statement in which the Scottish Executive provided clear directions and priorities for local economic development in terms of extending skills development not only to more highly skilled workers, but also to those at the opposite end of the skills spectrum. Scottish Enterprise and Highland and Island Enterprise were directed to support Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) as critical catalysts in shaping partnerships for successful and sustainable local economic development. It was proposed that Careers Scotland would provide services to workers of all ages, Learndirect Scotland would extend learning opportunities and Futureskills Scotland would be instrumental in developing a more competitive labour market. Private, public and voluntary organisations were encouraged to provide training for people in their workplace, with employers' demands for skills identified by Sector Skills Councils (Scottish Executive, 2001b).

It was envisaged that Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise would continue to fund a number of work-based training programmes, such as Modern Apprenticeships, an initiative which offers paid employment combined with the opportunity to train for jobs at craft, technician and management levels and Skillseekers, a training programme aimed at 16 year olds and run by Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) leading to a recognised workplace qualification. Training for Work was intended to provide job specific training to help unemployed adults improve their chances of getting into work, and also included opportunities to work towards an SVQ or other job related qualification, often combined with work experience. New Deal programmes, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and with GB coverage, were intended to help jobless people of working age gain skills and experience and find work (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Work-based-Training>). In order to bring Scottish qualifications into a single unified framework, the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) was launched in 2001. It was intended to accredit all assessed learning, signpost people of all ages and circumstances to appropriate education and training over their lifetime and help employers, learners and the general public understand how qualifications can improve the knowledge and skills of Scotland's workforce.

Life Through Learning Through Life (Scottish Executive, 2003), the lifelong learning strategy for Scotland, was intended to promote 'a Scotland where people have the confidence, enterprise, knowledge, creativity and skills they need to participate in economic, social and civic life; through, for example, community learning and development in some of Scotland's most deprived communities' (Scottish Executive, 2003). It was recognised that people's participation in lifelong learning is determined by a range of factors including individual disposition and attitude towards learning, social environment, economic and financial context, and institutional factors. The Scottish strategy emphasised economic return and social goals stating that 'lifelong learning policy in Scotland is about personal fulfilment and enterprise; employment and adaptability; active citizenship and social inclusion' (Scottish Executive, 2003). A key aim of the strategy was to stimulate both the supply of learning and the demand for learning by individuals and employers. Since economic growth and productivity were limited by the skills of the workforce, the lifelong learning strategy for Scotland specifically addressed 'the need for employers to recognise, use and develop the skills of those of their workforce' (Scottish Executive, 2003).

The Scottish government's response to the Leitch Review, entitled *Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy* (Scottish Government, 2007), emphasised the need for the Scottish economy to shift away from low-skills employment towards higher value-added jobs. Amongst other things, the strategy stressed the need to balance the interests of the employer and the individual employee, develop a coherent funding support system, reduce the proportion of economically inactive individuals and ensure greater equality in access to employment and training. The need for a better fit between school-level education and vocational training was also stressed, and the Curriculum for Excellence was seen as playing a key role here. In addition, workplace learning was given high priority, and it was recognised that employers, learning providers and awarding bodies needed more encouragement to use the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

The strategy identified both the strengths and weaknesses in the Scottish skills profile. On the positive side, investment in education in Scotland over the last 30 years has been relatively high compared with the rest of the UK and the proportion of the Scottish workforce with a degree-level qualification exceeds the proportion of people with a basic school leaving qualification, unlike other parts of the UK. However, economic growth in Scotland still lags behind that of the rest of the UK. A recent survey carried out by Futureskills Scotland entitled *Skills in Scotland 2006* (Futureskills, 2007) revealed significant skills gaps, with many employees lacking key proficiencies and 'soft skills' such as communication, team working and customer handling. Skills deficiencies were most common in lower-skilled jobs. Furthermore, there were likely to be extensive 'latent' skills gaps where employers failed to recognise that more investment in their workforce could yield improvements in performance, since organisations reporting skills problems were more likely than average to have been growing and providing training for their staff. The National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) 2005 Scotland report showed that learning was strongly related to work (74%) and there was a substantial minority not involved in any form of learning activity (18%). Learning declined substantially with age, something that might cause concern in a knowledge society with an ageing population. The majority of learners and non-learners viewed learning as something that was important for success at work and which should continue throughout life. However, non-learners expressed concerns about their personal skills and ability to learn, about returning to the classroom and about being too old.

Having reviewed the skills and lifelong learning policy context in Scotland, we now provide a brief overview of the literature on organisational learning, which provides some suggestions for conceptualising cultures of learning within Scottish SMEs.

1.2 Models of workplace learning

Drawing on psychological and sociological approaches Easterby-Smith and Arajou (1999) identified a distinction between technical and social processes of learning within organisations. Technical learning is viewed in terms of the detection and correction of error (Argyris and Schön, 1974). Most companies when faced with a problem, invent an action strategy or strategies, and focus on the effectiveness of their production/service techniques. This is referred to as single-loop learning, in that a simple problem is met with a simple solution and the process is controlled by managers rather than including employees. Double-loop learning involves a more complex response. Once a problem has been identified and a remedy has been implemented, the problem is then reviewed to consider the accuracy of the initial diagnosis and 'cure'. Further remedial action is taken if necessary, and employees are involved at all stages in the identification of the problem and the search for a solution. Theories are thus made explicit and are tested. An ongoing dialogue between employees and managers takes place and organisations are likely to have a sense of partnership and shared leadership (Argyris et al, 1985). Argyris and Schön (1978) argued that, by looking at the way in which people identify problems and construct solutions, it is possible to develop a better understanding of how organisations learn and develop. For organisational learning to occur, 'learning agents', discoveries, interventions, and evaluations must be embedded in organisational memory.

Single-loop learning ‘...may give rise to mistrust, defensiveness and a self-fulfilling prophecy’ (Edmondson and Moingeon, 1999:161).

Social learning processes emphasise the importance of how people make sense of their experiences at work. Lave and Wenger (1991) developed a theory of situated learning, which describes how people learn at work as they progress within the organisational culture from being the ‘newcomer’ to acquiring the status of ‘old-timer’, thus becoming a full member of a community of practice. Learning is seen as a collective, social activity and the team is essential for effective learning to occur. It is argued that organisational learning depends on the extent to which organisations afford employees opportunities to participate and interact with colleagues (Billett, 2001). It is argued that people place different value on different types of knowledge, e.g. tacit (intuitive, embedded in taken-for-granted activities), codified (public) and personal knowledge (Eraut, 2000) and recently, a focus has been placed on bringing intuition and reflective thinking into organisational learning, a process described as triple-loop or ‘third way’ learning (Elkjaer, 2004).

The notion of communities of practice has been criticised for not discussing *how* learning takes place and *what* is being learned (Elkjaer, 2004) and for failing to take account of the role of formal education (Fuller and Unwin, 2004). Fuller and Unwin (2004) drew on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory when developing their expansive-restrictive framework. This framework provides a conceptual and analytical tool for evaluating the quality of learning environments and for analysing an organisation’s approach to workforce development. They identified three participatory dimensions: i) opportunities for engaging in multiple (and overlapping) communities of practice at and beyond the workplace; ii) access to a multidimensional approach to the acquisition of expertise through the organisation of work and job design; iii) the opportunity to pursue knowledge-based courses related to work. Organisations with a restrictive approach impose many limitations on learning, whereas those with an expansive approach foster a wide array of formal, non-formal and informal approaches to and opportunities for learning. Within organisations adopting an expansive approach, learning is likely to take place horizontally as well as vertically, and the culture is likely to be less hierarchical. Based on the data presented in this report a third category was identified, the passive-restrictive approach. Managers with a passive-restrictive attitude to organisational learning were characterised by focusing on providing learning and training opportunities for employees involved in the production or service side of the business. The development of other employees was not seen as vital for the business and therefore absent.

Parallels can be drawn between single-loop learning and a restrictive learning framework and double-loop learning and an expansive learning framework, as Table 1 below demonstrates.

Table 1 The restrictive-expansive framework compared to single- and double loop learning

Single-loop learning	Restrictive framework
Operationalise within existing theories-in-use	Bounded communication, uni-dimensional top-down view of expertise
Focuses on efficiency	Limited opportunities for reflection
Focuses on techniques	Vision of workplace learning: static for job workplace learning is used to tailor individual capability to organizational needs
Leads to mistrust	Technical skills taken for granted
Leads to defensiveness	Lack of support from colleagues No possibility for employees to gain further knowledge or progress in their “careers”
Leads to self-fulfilling prophesy	Managers as controllers of workforce and individual development Polarized distribution of skills Restricted participation in multiple communities of practice Little or no access to qualifications

Table 1 cont'd...	
Double loop learning	Expansive framework
Examines governing variables that may lead to alterations	Planned time off-the-job including for knowledge-based courses and for reflection
Makes inferences with theories-in-use	Workforce development is used as a vehicle for aligning the goals of developing the individual and organizational capability
Values view/experience of employees	Organizational recognition of, and support for employees as learners
	Widely distributed skills
	Technical skills valued
	Knowledge and skills of whole workforce developed and valued
	Breadth: access to learning fostered by cross-company experiences
Theories are explicit and tested	Primary community of practice has shared "participative memory": cultural inheritance of workforce development
	Innovation important
	Team work valued
	Cross-boundary communication encouraged
Dialogue	Multidimensional view of expertise
	Access to range of qualifications including knowledge-based SVQ
	Vision of workplace learning: progression for career
Likely to have shared leadership	Managers as facilitators of workforce and individual development
	Chances to learn new skills/jobs

Individual employees are also likely to vary as to whether their approach to learning is expansive or restrictive, and their attitudes may be in harmony with or in opposition to the culture of the organisation in which they work. Fuller and Unwin (2004) and Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003) stress the importance of an individual's learning biography in shaping their approach to workplace learning.

The opportunities offered by organisations for employees to learn have been investigated by Eraut (2004) who found that participation in group-activities and working alongside others regularly gave rise to learning. The types of group activities that were found to be helpful included team-working towards a common outcome, groups set up for a special purpose such as development or review of policy/practice and groups that were responding to external changes. Working alongside others was found to allow people to observe and listen to others at work and to participate in activities. This enables the learning of new practices and new perspectives, the awareness of different kinds of knowledge and expertise and the gaining of some sense of other people's tacit knowledge. Their research also showed that working with clients/participants is an important source of learning. This is because practitioners learn 'firstly about the client, secondly from any novel aspects of the client's problem or request and thirdly from any new ideas that arose from their joint consultation' (p250).

Earlier research from Eraut (2000) also showed that much learning at work occurs through doing things and being proactive in seeking learning opportunities but he emphasised that this requires confidence. Confidence comes from successfully meeting challenges in one's work, while the confidence to take on such challenges depends on the extent to which workers feel supported in that endeavour. Thus there is a triangular relationship between challenge, support and confidence. The evidence from his research shows that both confidence in one's ability to do the work and commitment to the importance of that work are primary factors that affect individual learning. Confidence depends on the successful completion of challenging work to which one is committed. This in turn may depend on informal support from colleagues, either while doing the job or as back up when working independently. Indeed the willingness to

attempt challenging tasks on one's own depends on such confidence. If there is neither challenge nor sufficient support to encourage staff to seek out, or respond to, a challenge, then confidence declines and with it the motivation to learn.

To summarise, organisations and individuals may be located along an expansive/restrictive continuum in relation to their approaches to learning and this continuum is also influenced by opportunities to develop confidence through learning from, and alongside, others. This conceptual framework is reflected in the research questions which follow and in the findings section.

1.3 Research questions

The research project described below addressed the following questions:

- What is the relationship between the organisation's and the individual's orientation towards learning in relation to an expansive/restrictive continuum within a number of Scottish SMEs?
- What learning takes place within SMEs with a range of approaches to learning?
- What knowledge and skills do employees bring into the workplace and how are these utilised?
- How do employees view their own learning and what kinds of knowledge, skill and understanding are recognised and valued?
- How do employers view their own and their employees' learning and what kinds of knowledge, skill and understanding are recognised and valued?
- Is there a relationship between participation in learning activities in the workplace and participation in networks in the outside community?
- With regard to the training provided in the course of this project, what approaches seemed to be most effective in terms of moving individuals and organisations in the direction of an expansive approach to learning?
- What organisational features appear to promote an expansive learning culture?

1.4 Research Methods

The study used the following methods in order to address these research questions:

- A literature review of the Scottish, UK and international policy documents and academic writing was conducted. This review aimed to identify models of workplace learning and the role different types of knowledge, individual learning biographies and social capital play in the formations of organisational learning cultures.
- Case Studies were carried out with a total of 14 SMEs selected to participate in the qualitative research covering four geographical areas, a range of organisational sizes and structures, sectors and work and learning cultures (see Table 2). In each SME semi-structured interviews exploring past and current learning experiences were carried out with one owner/manager/supervisor and a number of employees prior to employees commencing on training. A second semi-structured interview was carried out with members of staff on completion of training that a) aimed to evaluate training or b) aimed to collect further information as to why the employee chose not to participate in training

at this point. Interviews were carried out face to face in the workplaces or, on a few occasions, over the telephone.

- An audit of organisational and training needs was undertaken by the two training providers. This covered each SMEs' organisational and individual training needs and led to arrangements for training with each SME.
- Participant observations of training sessions were carried out by the researcher.
- Documentary analysis was carried out of a sample of training material used in a range of training courses offered to employees.
- Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two training providers in order to provide a commentary on their experiences of negotiating and providing training to SMEs in Scotland.

1.5 Participants

An overview of all the companies is given in the following table and the names of the companies are removed to protect their anonymity.

Table 2

Company	Training provider	Company profile	No of employees	Type of contract	Number of interviews	
					Employer/ Manager	Employees
Care A	WEA	Residential elderly care home	Around 50	30 full-time 17 part-time	1	10
Care B	WEA	Support people with dementia in their own homes	Around 10	2FT male 9FT female	1	2
Care C	WEA	Crèche	Around 15	Fulltime and part-time	1	9
Care D	GSWRA	Mobile Crèche	Around 20	Fulltime and part-time large reliance on sessional	2	11
Service A	WEA	Depot part of major supermarket chain	Around 650	Fulltime (80%) and part-time (20%)	1	2
Service B	GSWRA	Stone cleaning service	Around 10	Fulltime and part-time, additional staff hired on short-term contracts for bigger projects	1	2
Service C	GSWRA	Credit control management specialist	Around 5	Fulltime + part-time (4 investors)	1	1
Service D	GSWRA	Garage	Around 10	Fulltime + part-time	0	1
Manufacturing A	WEA	Garden centre	Around 10	Fulltime and part-time (5 FTE + sessional workers)	1	5
Manufacturing B	WEA	Manufacturer	Around 200	Fulltime and part-time	1	4
Agriculture A	WEA	Farm	Around 15	Fulltime and part-time	1	2
Manufacturing C	GSWRA	Manufacturer	Around 15	Fulltime and part-time	1	5
Import A	GSWRA	Importer	Around 5	Fulltime	1	2
Manufacturing D	GSWRA	Manufacturer	Around 100	Fulltime and part-time	1	9

SECTION 2: TRAINING AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

Participants of the project underwent a variety of workplace learning and training activities provided either by the GSWRA or the WEA. These two training providers differed in organisational structure and offered a different range of courses. This section describes the training providers and offers an account from two training providers about the nature of their work with SMEs. Finally an overview of four of the training courses is provided with an evaluation by employers and employees of the usefulness of the training.

2.1 The training providers

2.1.1 *Glasgow South West Regeneration Agency (GSWRA)*

This project started in 2005 and the training provider partner then was Greater Pollok Development Company. The company changed its name to Equip in 2006 and in the spring of 2007 Equip merged with Govan Initiative to become the Glasgow South West Regeneration Agency (GSWRA). For the remainder of the report the name GSWRA will be used. It is one of eight publicly funded local development companies in Glasgow and is funded primarily through European funding additionally to core grants from Glasgow City Council and Scottish Enterprise Glasgow (<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/Business/Businesssupport/LocalInitiatives/communityeconomicdevelopmentcompanies.htm>, accessed on 12/09/2007).

Its resources were focused on improving people's reading and writing and it offered ESOL ICT and personal development courses. These courses were provided on a one-to-one or group basis at times that suited the learner and some courses led to a qualification. The ICT courses were delivered in groups with up to eight participants mixing local unemployed, employed and business people. The mix of participants made the courses relevant as unemployed learners were given an opportunity to meet people in employment.

Additionally the GSWRA offered businesses recruitment support, training, IT and e-Business advice, business growth advice, support and funding, childcare for employees, and new office space (<http://www.equipyourself.co.uk>, accessed 19/06/2007). According to one training coordinator, the GSWRA business team had such a good and open relationship with the businesses that these frequent name and organisational changes did not impact on the training delivery. After the merger the GSWRA ceased to offer ICT courses (see Table 3 for training provided by GSWRA).

A key role for the GSWRA was to develop relationships with enterprises and to offer a wide range of training for all those working in the enterprise. Participants from local businesses were recruited through the business team that contacted local business to discuss their training needs and requirements. In addition to working with local companies the training provider also offered training for unemployed people who were referred to the courses internally, from Job Centre Plus or by word of mouth.

The training provider kept extensive records of all learners. This included a skills audit, the learner's own rating of IT and personal development, customer service and employability skills, a customer action plan, individual training plans, mock tests and tests and trainee records. The learner's progress was recorded in order to be accessible by different trainers and also checked regularly by a customer support officer who would contact the learner if he or she was falling behind.

2.1.2 *The WEA Scotland*

The WEA is a national voluntary sector provider of adult education in the community and in the workplace. It gives priority to creating learning opportunities for those adults who face the

greatest barriers to learning. During 2006 the WEA provided 1160 courses, delivered in over 360 localities across Scotland, with 14,000 enrolments. Nearly 50% of student enrolment came from workplace education. The WEA mainly receives its funding through European Grants and Educational projects. Learning is supported by the social practice of adult literacy and the WEA values the life experience which adults bring into their learning. Workplace initiatives targeting SMEs includes: Return to Learn and Job Rotation where the SME takes on an unemployed person in exchange for free training for current members of staff (see Table 4 for training provided by WEA).

The WEA provides accredited and non-accredited courses that are shaped around the individual training needs of the SME. As well as building skills, they aim to develop wider knowledge and understanding. The learner is encouraged to make choices about what he or she is learning and to have responsibility for their learning, to develop their understanding for literacies and the wide range of ways people communicate. The course content is discussed with the learner and an Individual Learning Plan is used throughout to discuss, evaluate and record the learners' individual goals and progress. Courses are flexible and may include 1:1 tuition, small groups, drop-in sessions, short and longer term learning. Resources are student centred and ICT is used where appropriate and possible (WEA, 2006).

2.2 Interviews with training providers

Interviews were conducted with representatives of the two training providers (WEA and GSWRA), who were involved in liaising with companies, delivering some training components and putting employees in touch with other providers, such as FE colleges, if necessary. They both agreed on the diversity of the companies they worked with in relation to their training culture. Whilst some were very enthusiastic about developing their employees, a significant minority were deeply opposed to investing in worker development. This was often as a result of fear of losing a valuable member of staff to a rival organisation if they enhanced their skills. In addition, production pressures in some companies meant that managers believed it would simply be too detrimental to business to release a member of staff to attend training sessions. There was also some degree of scepticism as to whether some courses were sufficiently relevant to the company core business, for example those which focused on developing soft skills such as confidence building. Companies contracted to deliver services to the public sector, such as nurseries and playgroups, were much more open to a wide variety of training programmes, since they were much more tightly regulated than companies whose business was entirely in the private sector. On some occasions, trainers had been brought in to defuse situations where serious problems had emerged in organisational ethos, for example, the macho culture in one particular workplace was clearly at variance with equalities legislation and the manager recognised that intervention was necessary to avoid a breakdown in staff relationships with potentially violent consequences. Because of the difficulty in moving resistant companies to a position where they were more willing to invest in training, both respondents felt that there was a need to work with managers to build trust over a sustained period of time. It was essential that funding regimes were in place to enable this to happen, and there was some anxiety that the reorganisation of Scottish Enterprise might result in less commitment to workplace development within SMEs.

2.3 Evaluation of training provided as part of this project

Employees undertook a variety of courses as part of this project; these are outlined in the following Tables 3 and 4. A brief overview of four of the courses and the learners' views on the value and relevance follows to provide an insight into the type of provision offered.

Table 3. Training provided by the GSWRA (formerly Equip)

Company	Course	Course provider	Course Content		Mode of Delivery	Accreditation/ acc. Body	No. participants		Duration of Course
							From company	On course	
Import A	ECDL (European Computer Driving License)	GSWRA	Concepts of information technology (IT), using the computer and managing files, word processing, spread sheet, database, presentation, information and communication	Part of standard package	Workshop/self-study	Yes/ British Computer Society	1	8 max	1 afternoon a week
Service B	Sage Accountancy	Local training provider		Individually customised	Workshop/self-study	Yes/ professional standard	2	2	10 weeks
Service C	Diploma in training practice	FE college		Part of standard package	Workshop/self-study	Yes/CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development)	1		14 weeks, 1 day/week
Care D	Manual handling	H & S training		Part of standard package	Workshop	Yes	2	10 max	1 day
	STEPS	GSWRA	Personal development	Part of standard package	Workshop	Yes/ The Pacific Institute	7	7 (+ others)	1 day
	Team Building	GSWRA	Personal development	Individually customised	Workshop	No	7	7	1 day
Service D	Office 1	GSWRA	Internet and Email, Word@Work , Outlook	Part of standard package	Workshop	No	1	8 max	1 day, 6 hrs
Manufacturing C	MOS- WORD (Microsoft Office Specialist)	GSWRA	Working with text, working with documents, managing files, using tables, working with pictures and charts	Part of standard package	Workshop/self-study	Yes	1	8 max	23 weeks, 1 afternoon/week

Table 4. Training provided by the WEA

Company	Course	Course Content		Mode of Delivery	Accreditation/ acc. Body	No. participants		Duration of Course
						From company	On course	
Service A	Literacy/ IT	Basic IT	Individually customised	Workshop/ Self-study	No	6	6	10 weeks, 2 hrs/week
Care C	Literacy/ IT	Report writing	Individually customised	Workshop/ Self-study	No/ towards SVQ2	2	1-2	8 Weeks, 1-1.5 hrs/week
Care B	Literacy/ IT	Report writing	Individually customised	Workshop/ Self-study	No	2	1-2	8 Weeks, 3 hrs/week
Manufacturing A	Web design	Place an advert on web page	Individually customised	Workshop/ Self-study	No	2	2	18 hours spread over 2-3 days
Agriculture A	ESOL		Individually customised	Workshop/ Self-study	No	1-2	1-2	10 weeks, 2 hrs/week
Manufacturing B	Literacy/ IT	Basic IT	Individually customised	Workshops	No	4		10 weeks, 1 evening a week
Care A	Equalities		Individually customised	Lecture to group	No	3		1 day, 4 hours
	Preparation for SVQ		Individually customised	Workshop/ Self-study	No	2	1-2	10 Weeks
	Mixture of Prep for SVQ Health & Social Care & ESOL Literacies for Care		Individually customised	Workshop/ Self-study	No	1		16 weeks

2.3.1 ECDL (GSWRA)

The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) is an internationally recognised qualification that enables people to demonstrate their competence in computer skills. The online course consisted of seven modules including word processing, spreadsheets, presentations and databases. Learners could access the course at the training centre or online from home or the business. Trainers were available in the training centre on certain days in case the learners preferred to have a more structured learning environment or had questions. A training coordinator at the GSWRA reported that employees in businesses tended to attend structured sessions, as well as back up with practice from home, as it provided an opportunity to get away from distractions in the office. In order to sit the exam, learners first had to complete two mock tests. Employees from three SMEs in this study undertook ECDL training. Two employees took the opportunity to attend the training sessions and one employee took the online course. Only one employee was given time off work to study. Employees that attended the training sessions appreciated the relaxed atmosphere and found the trainers friendly and helpful. Small groups made it easy to ask questions:

*The set up is just fantastic, I mean for anybody in my position with a child and working, you can go for two hours on a Monday, you can go for an hour on a Wednesday... whenever it is suitable for you... The staff are very laid back, very low key, very familiar with you so that you don't feel as if they are the teacher and you are... especially if you are older and you don't know what you are doing it's horrible to feel vulnerable like that, you know, and feel silly.
(Administrator – Female – Service D)*

All employees that underwent the ECDL course worked in office environments and felt that the course was relevant and made their job more efficient. One learner stated that she had been offered a new job as a result of completing the course. Another interviewee mentioned that she found the prospect of sitting a test again after a long period out of education very daunting but learned not to panic and to take her time. Additionally to IT skills and increased job prospects, soft skills such as confidence and interest in learning and training were also mentioned as training outcomes. One interviewee felt encouraged to buy a home PC and another was looking into further management training.

Aspects about the training that could be improved include some of the participants found the course too rigid and failed to take prior knowledge sufficiently into account. One participant described how a misunderstanding of the exam rules caused her to fail the exam and as a result she had to redo the entire course.

2.3.2 STEPS (GSWRA)

STEPS (Steps to Excellence for Personal Success) was a non-accredited personal development course that aimed to increase confidence and self-esteem and increase willingness to try new things. The course was offered by a local development company and lasted one full day. Employees at one SME, a nursery, undertook this course as part of this project although another company, in the service industry, had completed the course previously. Employees at both SMEs were given time off work to attend the training. Although not entirely related to their job as care assistants, all employees emphasised the benefits of undertaking the training as part of a team. Additionally many felt that they learned to listen more to other people, and to take other people's ideas into account:

*Just taking into account other people's feelings and stuff, they have maybe been going through a bad day or... and then you can say to yourself, "Right they are feeling a wee bit down or whatever, so that's why they are maybe not in a good mood today", or whatever. So it was good that way.
(Employee 4 – Female – Care D)*

However, the company had requested a team building course and did not feel that the course focused sufficiently on the team. Many were disappointed there was not more group work involved. Many employees were also unhappy that members of the public participated in the course. Whilst the employees appreciated this course, there was a sense that it was less appropriate to their work and also that the course had not delivered what the employer and several of the employees had expected.

2.3.3 Literacy/IT (WEA)

The literacy/ IT course was a non-accredited course where employees revised their literacy skills, report writing, English grammar and spelling, through the means of computers. Course material included an example of a report from the BBC Skillwise website, a daily activity sheet and a self-study pack on writing skills for care assistance developed by Suffolk council, entitled *Training Matters*. The course was usually located in the workplace, a couple of hours a week over a ten-week period. In total employees from four SMEs undertook the literacy/IT course as part of this project: 2 SMEs from the care sector, 1 manufacturing company and 1 in the service industry. All employees apart from those from the manufacturing company were allowed to attend classes during work-time. Many employees described how they initially felt they were facing a great challenge when embarking on the course, but that the supportive, patient and thorough trainers and the relaxed atmosphere during the training sessions helped them enjoy it. Most employees felt they were able to apply their IT skills in their job; the employees from the care sector felt more confident when writing and structuring their report and some workers from the manufacturing company felt they had a greater understanding of the computers used in their workplace. All of the employees at the manufacturing company felt that they were more confident when using their home PC. Many mentioned a sense of general empowerment from not being frightened of the technology or not having to ask colleagues for help:

My report writing, as I say, is much better than what it was, the structure of it, where I start, paragraph, and where I put a full stop, and the commas – I mean it's better now than what it was. (Support worker – Female – Care B)

Well where I work... it's computerised, it's an acoustic board, so I am able to read that a wee bit better now as well. Sometimes if I put that on in the morning, see if something come up I would be "Oh I need to go and get somebody to help me"; now I know what buttons to press and you know if I have to shut it down I can shut it down and restart it myself. I wasn't able to do that before, I had go and get an engineer or one of the girls, but now I know how to re boot it and how to print off it, Oh I can do nearly everything now. (Operator – Female – Manufacturing B)

I still make mistakes doing the computer but I am not frightened to correct myself. (Driver 1– Male – Service A)

Aspects about the training that could be improved include that although enjoying the training, many participants felt that the course was too short. There was a general wish for more in-depth training on specific topics such as word processing, or the internet. One participant thought that the training course was not quite what he had expected, but received information from the training provider about how to take the learning further at a local FE college:

A little bit more advanced, maybe a bit more on the Excel side of things, spreadsheets which is initially what I thought the IT course was about but it worked out it wasn't that at all. It's in the pipeline but not sort of finalised yet. The girl at the IT course gave me a lot of information to go to the local college and do more advanced stuff on it there. (Driver 2– Male – Service A)

2.3.4 *Equalities training (WEA)*

The equalities training course was a non-accredited course lasting from three hours to a full day. The course is tailored for the needs and requirement of the company focusing on topics such as: the use of restraint in care homes, discrimination and harassment and ensuring equal opportunities for people with dementia. A mixture of training styles were used including trainer led information session, group discussion and case studies. For example, the session on discrimination deals with definition of discrimination, direct and in-direct discrimination, discriminatory language, making assumptions, rituals and routines, reasonable adjustments, age discriminations, stereotyping, what is harassment and attitudes.

Three SMEs in the care sector had initially arranged equalities training for employees as part of their statutory equalities duties. In addition one of these SMEs was in particular need of equalities training after a number of incidents in the workplace had impacted on customer/staff relations. However, a number of factors contributed to prevention of equalities training taking place within the timeframe of this project and is thus absent from this evaluation. The training provider explained that despite constant renegotiation of date of training, the managers frequently cancelled the training, often in the last minute due to staff being off sick and not enough employees being able to attend the session. One SME was struggling financially and employees were under the constant threat of redundancy. These precarious circumstances led to equalities training not being a priority for management. The training provider described the equalities taking place as positive albeit often challenging provoking discussions about equalities issues.

2.4 Summary

In summary, the majority of employees undertaking ECDL training found the course useful for their job and some were encouraged to take up further training. The main criticism was that the course was too rigid and failed to sufficiently take prior knowledge into account. Employees undertaking the Steps course found it useful for work, although a misunderstanding with the training provider had led to them not receiving the team building course they had expected. Many employees described that literacy/IT course led to greatly enhanced soft skills such as confidence and empowerment. The course appeared to encourage learning and many employees felt they wanted more in depth knowledge of some aspect of the course as a result. Although a major part of the statutory equalities duties, it was apparent that equalities training was not a priority for many managers in the care sector. Training providers were often forced to engage in a time consuming process of renegotiating training dates for the training to take place.

SECTION 3: FINDINGS OF THE COMPANY CASE STUDIES

The research findings presented in section 3 and 4 are based on semi-structured interviews with around 80 employees distributed over 14 SMEs and one manager at each company. Section 3 presents an analysis of employers' perspectives on training. We also present case studies of four companies and three employees to explore in greater detail the factors which contribute to the development of expansive or restrictive orientations towards training.

3.1 Employers' perspectives

Based on interviews with managers from 13 of the 14 SMEs participating in this project, three categories of management approaches to organisational learning and training were identified that mapped onto the expansive-restrictive continuum (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) outlined above; expansive, restrictive and passive-restrictive. These approaches are described and illustrated below.

3.2 Overall distribution of managers on the expansive/restrictive continuum

In our study just over half (n=8) of the SMEs fell within the expansive learning framework, three within the restrictive learning framework and three within the passive-restrictive framework. An overview of the companies is provided in Appendix 1.

Four of the eight SMEs that provided an expansive learning environment for employees were private sector organisations whose services were largely contracted to the public sector providing elder- and child care. Three of the companies were in the service/trade sector and one company was a manufacturing company. Two of the three companies providing employees a restrictive learning environment were manufacturing companies, the third was an agricultural business. Two of the three organisations in the passive-restrictive group were in the service sector, both in male dominated industries such as car repair and stone cleaning and the third was a firm importing goods.

It is worth noting that the four care sector companies all had an expansive framework. This may well be due to these companies having to adhere to public sector equalities duties and quality standards under the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care (SCRC). The manufacturing company characterised as expansive had an established apprenticeship system in place, informal and social learning was encouraged. This was not the case in the manufacturing companies defined as restrictive. Whereas the two manufacturing companies (Manufacturing A and D) in which the managers had an expansive attitude to organisational learning were local Scottish companies, the two manufacturing companies identified as restrictive were international companies with headquarters abroad. The remote location of the headquarters seemed to have a detrimental effect on training. Both managers described the relationship and level of communication with head office as poor. Two of the three organisations in the passive-restrictive group were in the service sector, both in male dominated industries such as car repair and stone cleaning. In both companies the female administrators appeared to work in the periphery of the organisation. Table 5 provides an overview of the companies and their placement on the expansive/restrictive continuum. A detailed analysis of the three approaches to organisational learning follows.

Table 5 Overview of SME placement on the expansive/restrictive continuum

Company/ Sector	Company profile	Company learning characteristics	Placement on the expansive/ restrictive continuum
Care A	Residential elderly care home	Opportunities for whole workforce to develop, learning for career and personal interest, access to qualifications and reflection, informal learning highly valued	Expansive
Care B	Support people with dementia in their own homes	Opportunities for whole workforce to develop, learning for career and personal interest, access to qualifications and reflection, informal learning valued	Expansive
Care C	Crèche	Opportunities for whole workforce to develop, training needs analyses, access to qualifications, informal learning highly valued	Expansive
Care D	Mobile Crèche	Opportunities for whole workforce to develop for career and personal interest, access to qualifications and reflection, social and informal learning highly valued	Expansive
Service A	Supermarket depot	Opportunities for whole workforce to develop for career and personal interest, employee development plan, access to qualifications, informal learning encouraged	Expansive
Service B	Stone cleaning service	Some mandatory courses, initial in-house training, informal learning highly valued, not all employees receive development opportunities	Passive – restrictive
Service C	Credit control management specialist	Opportunities for whole workforce to develop, learning is job-focused, access to qualifications, gradual transition to full member, informal learning highly valued, innovation important, technical skills valued	Expansive
Service D	Garage	Only part of organisation had opportunity to develop and shared cultural inheritance of development (apprenticeships), and access to qualifications	Passive – restrictive
Manufacturing A	Garden centre	Opportunities for whole workforce to develop for career and personal interest, skills widely distributed, innovation important, qualifications encouraged, some allowances made, informal learning highly valued	Expansive
Manufacturing B	Manufacturer	All training on-the-job, narrow view of learning, polarization of skills, informal learning discouraged	Restrictive
Agriculture A	Farm	Training used to tailor individual capability to organisation's need, little access to qualifications, informal learning valued, all training on-the-job	Restrictive
Manufacturing C	Manufacturer	Narrow view of learning, learning informal - some mandatory courses, training focused on procedural knowledge	Restrictive
Import A	Importer	Limited access to learning, technical skills taken for granted, informal learning highly valued	Passive – restrictive
Manufacturing D	Manufacturer	Opportunities for whole workforce to develop, apprenticeship system, cross-boundary communication encouraged, technical skills valued, social/informal learning valued	Expansive

3.2.1 Managers with an expansive attitude to workplace learning

Eight of the managers of the SMEs in this study held attitudes favouring an expansive learning framework. As will become clear, the extent to which the manager's views were transferred into the organisational learning culture varied greatly.

As mentioned, most of the organisations identified with an expansive learning framework were delivering services on behalf of the public sector and were working in the field of care for older adults or childcare. Employee learning and training was highly valued and employees were given the opportunity to learn through a variety of methods such as shadowing colleagues, experiential on-the-job learning, an emphasis on the team and the positive effects of informal learning. However, there was also evidence for an expansive framework in some of the manufacturing companies as this extract from a Scottish company indicates:

[Name of employee] is a very effective teacher so in terms of tasks, horticultural tasks, she will direct them. She gives them very full explanations... so that they understand the botanical element. Practical demonstrations so they see what to do. We expect them to learn from each other as a team. The team passes on information. I work a lot on computer and the few people on the sales side get very close supervision, direction, demonstrations, reinforcing on the computer
(Manager – Female – Manufacturing A)

There were also ongoing training courses such as working with children with special needs and equalities training, many which were unaccredited but linked to the public sector statutory equalities duties. There was an emphasis on respecting the employees' choices in terms of learning and training, but also a recognition that sending people on courses they are not interested in is a waste of time and money:

You do go to things where people say well I was sent, and ... that's not always good either, OK they aren't not doing training but is that what they wanted to do, and are you wasting your money by sending them, especially if you are paying for training. So It's about what they want to do as well, but what's a value to the company as well, well if we are paying for it obviously we have to make sure that it's of some value. (Manager – Female – Care A)

Knowledge and skills of the whole workforce, including management, were valued and developed. The majority of managers in SMEs with expansive learning environments had benefited from workplace learning. There was a sense among the management that "everybody can learn" and the organisation would benefit from employees bringing what they had learned in courses back to the workplace. They emphasised that employees should be given the opportunity to develop in order to progress in their career:

I have been given the opportunity in the past to learn through work bases and do various courses, whether it be something that I have sourced myself and I have always had that support in my last two jobs, and I would certainly support ... any of our workers in here to really do what they want. I feel that [the] Council is an equal opportunities employer and really regardless whether it's directly relevant to their job or not, I think everybody should get the opportunity to learn with a view to moving on...I think its really important and I think that if one day you are a support worker and you want to be either in my job or higher, then why not, I don't see it as a barrier, I think that everybody is capable if they want to put the effort in. (Manager – Female – Care B)

if they have been to a study day or they have been to something about any particular subject and they have picked up something, and they think there is something we could change, its encouraging them also there and then the opportunity to say could we not try

that, and saying well yeah why not, because they are just as capable... (Manager – Female – Care A)

The Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care (SCRC) ensures standards of care and puts pressure on organisations and employees to obtain qualifications such as SVQs. The recognition of the statutory requirement to train employees to meet care standards was evident in all companies providing care, either to older adults or to children. The record keeping required by the SCRC, for example, required enhanced skills in reading and writing. One manager emphasised that legislation helped her to introduce training in the company which would benefit employees as well as the company. Once continuous learning had become the norm within the organisation, managers described a snowball effect, with colleagues helping and encouraging each other with the training.

Obviously it came into the fact that staff had to be qualified that was good for me cause it meant I didn't have to do the hard sell. Because there was still the point where you were having to convince staff of the benefits for them and the benefits of the project. (Manager – Female – Care D)

When the level two came in and everybody had to have it, everybody was a bit, what's this and why do we have to do it after we've done the job for so many years and things like that. But when it was explained to them and they had went out and done the level two they then realised themselves how much they were getting out of it. And when it came up like level three they were quite willing to go and do it because they knew what the benefits were. So it started off, once one block had started then they would give some feedback to the next lot. So then they were prepared to move in and do their level two. And then they didn't all have to have their level three. But when they seen that it was available quite a lot of them stepped in and said 'yeah I want to do it'. (Manager – Female – Care D)

One manager of an elderly care home pointed out as a manager of a small organisation, it was difficult to keep up with changes to legislation and the maintenance of up-to-date policies. Additionally, because of legislative requirements of increased documentation she felt that she did no longer have the time to spend enough time with the residents or be as involved in the daily running of the care home as she would have liked to:

What's happened now in the last few years is with the new legislation... we have to be seen to be fair employers and all the rest of it. That really is the major change, I certainly feel personally I used to be able to go round most of the residents and have a chat with them in the morning. I used to give the papers out ..., and I don't do that now. That's because there is so much more paper work on the desk, there's so much reading to be done, it's impossible to keep up with it. (Manager – Female – Care A)

Employees' training needs were generally assessed during regular supervision sessions where the developmental goals of each employee were discussed. Many managers worked closely with the employees and operated an "open-door policy" where employees were free to approach the manager with additional training or learning needs.

A couple of organisations mentioned the training of older workers was a challenge, particularly when they had been out of learning and training for many years and as a result felt intimidated at the thought of going 'back to school'. The managers with an expansive approach to learning showed however that a flexible approach often led to finding solutions and an ability to engage all members of staff in training. When employees were struggling, assistance was sought, for example by providing extra training in literacy and report writing. Less formal learning opportunities, such as courses held at community education centres and delivered by the WEA, were considered less intimidating than more formal courses leading to a qualification. Informal learning often acted as a stepping stone into more formal workplace learning.

Some people had been older and just hadn't been to school for years. And the thought of going through a qualification just terrified them. And they had moved on, a couple of staff left. Not too many cause I think the rest of them, they managed to convince that the support would be here for the project. They were doing it as a group and that's why we wanted in-house type training. We didn't want them to go to a college cause it would be too scary for them. You know, so we thought if they are all together and they are doing their training then it's going to be a support mechanism there as well. (Manager – Female – Care D)

Well some are keener than others; we have got quite a lot of ladies that work for us at the moment that are a bit older and looking towards retirement, and aren't really that keen to take on, you know learning new skills, but our younger employees are fairly keen and with a wee bit of encouragement are fine. (Manager – Female – Care B)

When I came in I had good links with the community education centre and I contacted them and asked could they run some modules for the staff, SVQ modules. Not obviously a whole qualification but just particular modules and they put on child development, planning curriculum. And that's where we started in our training programme. And the staff were great with that because although, they never seen it as a whole qualification, you know, the SVQ 2. It was just, we are doing the training course and at the end of the day we are getting, you know, it was a module that was recognised. So you are bought into that, the fact that you were getting something that wasn't too scary. (Manager – Female – Care D)

Advantages of training identified by managers with an expansive attitude

The managers with an expansive approach to workplace learning and training often felt that knowledge gained from courses was applicable in the workplace. Additionally workplace training such as the SVQs had resulted in employees having an increased understanding and awareness of their job and employees were able to see their role in the bigger picture. It was also pointed out that gaining qualifications provides a back-up for employees in case of redundancy.

I always say to them it's about improving your own knowledge. And it's a fact that you have a qualification and that's yours and nobody can take that away from you. And the fact we are a voluntary organisation, we are a funded body. And if that funding goes it gives you something that you can say 'well I've got this' and it's really going to improve your chances for moving on to another job. (Manager – Female – Care D)

Other training benefits frequently mentioned by managers included the enhancement of soft skills such as employees exercising initiative and communicating more effectively in the workplace. Increased confidence as a result of training often led to improved efficiency and professionalism among staff:

I think everybody who usually goes on a course like that comes back to the Nursery saying "guess what I learnt". So that's good. I think they also enjoy that. I think also in their SVQ's they are coming more and more confident and they are acting more like a Nursery Nurse and not a Nursery Assistant. (Manager –Female – Care C)

Disadvantages of training identified by managers with an expansive attitude

Despite emphasising the importance of team work and learning on the job, some of the managers felt that by encouraging learning in the workplace, they risked losing control over

what was taught. For example, the promotion of informal learning through employees helping each other might lead to the proliferation of bad habits from previous workplaces. Similarly external training providers might not provide the training required by the firm. A manager of a mobile crèche described how the SVQ training provided by a local college was perceived as rigid and not tailored to the specific needs and conditions of the firm. A mobile crèche differs from a nursery in various ways; it provides child care for children in a temporary location while their parents are participating in a community meeting or an adult education class. The child care workers bring the equipment to the location of the temporary crèche which involves planning activities for children, of various ages, they only see for a brief period. Additionally this community crèche organised specialised crèches for children with autism, and a respite crèche. However, open communication between the employees and the managers that negotiated with the training provider rectified the problem.

That the first time they came to do the SVQ's they never had a good understanding of what a mobile crèche was. And obviously I don't think it was her on the whole. I think it was the way the SVQ obviously was set, was for people working in a nursery. So I think once they'd got, they'd got to grips with the differences between mobile crèche and nurseries then they managed to kind of tweak it a bit and adapt it to suit the staff. Cause like at the beginning we had staff coming back and saying 'oh that's not really suitable for us'. And we just kind of bear with it until they, you know, we speak to them and make sure they understand what our service is about. I think that's really the main difficulty.
(Manager – Female – Care D)

Many employers argued that workplace training involves a certain commitment both in terms of cost of the training, but also in terms of the cost of releasing staff to go on courses. One manager for a private nursery mentioned that they did not receive any Scottish funding and that European funding was available but difficult to obtain. A care home explained that it had become increasingly difficult to fund SVQ training for employees over the age of 25. On the other hand, one manager of a company providing an outreach service for people with dementia stated that receiving its funding through the Council's Social Work department ensured an available training fund and access to training courses run by the Council such as SVQs, HNC and note writing.

Well we get training bulletins through [the] Council, they are displayed on the notice board for everybody, but if anybody had a specific need or whether it be sort of HNC, SVQs, the council again run SVQ programmes which most of the support workers have accessed, albeit some of the newer ones haven't done that and they are maybe starting at the moment, but if there was any specific needs, anything at all even just sort of literature things then we would discuss that with the workers at supervision, or even just picking up through, you know note writing and things like that, so that would be something that we would also take forward.
(Manager – Female – Care D)

Many employers mentioned difficulties in releasing staff for training as an issue. One manager of a nursery described how long hours and having young families made it difficult for the employees to fit learning into their life outwith work. At this particular company the problem was solved by allowing members of staff study-time during the working day which also allowed for colleagues to offer help, support and encouragement.

A couple of managers mentioned problems with qualified employees leaving, particularly because the public sector pays their staff higher salaries than the private. One manager pointed out that the benefits of training might be long-term and therefore not necessarily of benefit to the company, but rather the employee and his or her career. She felt that a system whereby an unemployed worker was paid to cover for the employee on training would decrease the burden on the company, ensuring that there would be no loss of productivity. This is very like the 'job rotation' scheme run by the WEA:

*That is quite difficult because you don't see immediate payback. They go on a training course and what you see is the hassle you have because someone is not there for the day. The long term benefit might not appear for some time or may not benefit you... I sent (name) on a course it has been of enormous benefit to his career but it has not benefited me... The short term effect is they are not there and I need them. So to loose staff is very difficult indeed. That is why job rotation is so good because you have got someone else in. The cost of it when you are on a tight budget ... that is a very significant element. **Without** job rotation I wouldn't have done it at all. You haven't got the time, you haven't got the money so you just get on with the job.*
(Manager – Female – Manufacturing A)

It is evident that even where managers are generally expansive in their orientation towards workplace learning, they still have certain misgivings about the short-term losses for their company compared with the long-term gains which may ensue.

3.2.2 Managers with a restrictive attitude to workplace learning

Two of the SMEs in the study could be defined as having a highly restrictive approach to training, discouraging formal, non-formal and informal learning. The two most restrictive SMEs were manufacturing companies. The managers did not believe employees were interested in learning. One manager expressed the view that *“too much learning results in employees losing interest”* (Manager – Male – Manufacturing C) the other manager argued that not all employees were able to learn indicating a degree of self-fulfilling prophecy.

As we change products there are some people who cannot, don't have the ability to learn the new products. There are some people who have maybe been with the company a long time and they could build the products we used to make ten years ago, 15 years ago but they don't have the ability, I believe, to do the job to make the more modern aids. That's always a difficulty.
(Manager – Male – Manufacturing B)

Both managers pointed out that most employees had been with the company a long time, and they were therefore too set in their ways to embrace new methods. Additionally the geographical areas the companies were located in provided a surplus of available workers *“queuing to get in”* (Manager – Male – Manufacturer C) and the managers did not feel that they needed to encourage employees to stay with the company. Apart from compulsory training essential for the job, such as health and safety and forklift training, little money was invested in learning and training activities. Most learning was informal and took place on-the-job but the managers did not seem to value learning as essential for the maintenance of production. One manager noted:

There's not much you can learn in here on the shop floor.
(Manager – Male – Manufacturing C)

Both companies formed part of larger organisations, the head office, located in different countries, would provide initial training on new technology to be introduced in the company. A representative from the head office would visit the factory and provide an induction of the new equipment. Both managers argued that this training was insufficient. They found communication between the head office and the management at the factory weak and irregular and it was difficult to get answers to any questions that might arise later down the process line. The managers were not enthusiastic about the training, and seemed therefore unable to make the employees interested in learning.

[Communication] doesn't work very well with the head office [in England]. You never see any of them. The owner used to come up once a year, haven't been for two years.
(Manager – Male – Manufacturing C)

One complication is [that the trainer comes from the head office in] Denmark so there is always this translation of ideas thing that goes on. We get trained on how to build a hearing aid, there is a lot of skills goes into building a hearing aid, but we get trained by one person in Denmark, from a department in Denmark but that might not be exactly the way that everybody else is building it in Denmark. So sometimes you get differences that cause problems. (Manager – Male – Manufacturing B)

Communication between managers and staff was mainly informal. None of the companies had regular supervision or provided formal feedback to employees and there were no formal assessments of the employees' training needs. None of the managers felt that there was any need for company meetings, but argued that employees had opportunities to approach the managers with any issues or concerns as they visited the shop floor on a daily basis.

Advantages of training identified by managers with a restrictive attitude

In order to insert formal structure and verification to workplace training, one of the companies had invested in in-house training instructors and developed a workplace curriculum in form of information sheets providing procedural information about the technical aspects of the job that were available throughout the factory. Despite having organised training, this company was considered restrictive in its approach to organisational learning and training since the learning that took place merely reinforced procedural compliance and did not provide any opportunities for reflective thinking. In both companies, employee learning and training was rather used as a means to tailor individual capability to organizational needs, increase efficiency, and introduce new technology or to facilitate the work carried out by the manager. Employees had little or no choice whether to participate in training activities.

For starters, for engineers and supervisors for example it [training] lets us move on in the way we manage people or the way that we improve the business. For the operators it is really tied to processes and products. It is very necessary to introduce those new technologies and products, which as I said is the life blood of the company. (Manager – Male – Manufacturing B)

[Employee training focuses on] how to take things out of stock and back into stock, it helps me really. (Manager - Male – Manufacturing C)

Well, primarily the way we do it is say “you are going to be on this piece of equipment or this process therefore you have to learn” so it is... because the learning is more focused towards a particular goal or piece of machinery people are basically told that they have to learn about that and one of the trainers would get involved with them. (Manager – Male – Manufacturing B)

The reason we have trainers is that they are doing it all the time and they are trying to put some formal structure to that training and some verification that somebody has learned what they were taught properly. (Manager – Male – Manufacturing B)

It was also argued that formalised learning and discouragement of informal learning prevented the reinforcement of “bad habits”. One of the managers was however hesitant to introduce training courses since these might lead to employees demanding more responsibility and higher wages.

Disadvantages of training identified by managers with a restrictive attitude

Both managers felt that loss of employees' working time was a major issue in relation to workplace training. None of the companies made any adjustments to facilitate the employees' learning and the company that organised basic IT training arranged it outwith working hours. Additionally, one manager pointed out that he found it difficult to take learning forward and make full use of the knowledge and learning once employees had been on training.

We have also tried a general empowerment scheme a year and a half ago. The problem with that is you get everybody fired up and empowered but unless you have the support to then do something with that energy it falls back to base which is what happened.
(Manager – Male - Manufacturing B)

3.2.3 Managers with a passive-restrictive attitude to workplace learning

Three managers in our study fell within what can be defined as a passive-restrictive approach to organisational learning and development. A passive-restrictive learning environment was characterised by an attitude that did not overtly oppose learning, and might even include some level of organised in-house training in the form of apprenticeships.

When they start it is coaching them on what to do and how to do it. There are certain courses that they have to go on to drive cherry pickers. ... They have to go on a course to construct those. First aid. And then we do appraisals and we look at what other skills they might need. Risk assessments. A lot of it is job based but now that we have done STEPS [personal development course, Ed] I think STEPS is something that I would want to continue throughout the company.
(Manager – Female – Service B)

Well everything that I know or I knew I obviously try to pass it further. They have some courses as well. The, the course I went to, the SAGE course, my employee also had the same course. So they probably know if not more than me, the same on access.
(Manager - Female – Import A)

However, there was likely to be marked inequalities in access to learning opportunities, with particular groups excluded. In the majority of these companies, the secretaries felt that they were not full members of the team. Work remit and training opportunities differed and they did not tend to participate in workplace outings. It was apparent that this group of workers received little support in terms of learning and training activities, few adjustments were made to accommodate and facilitate learning in terms of time and space and there was no formal assessment of their training needs. Training was mainly in-house and focused on technical skills, one example being training on the internal administrative system delivered by the previous administrator one week before she left. However the majority of managers in this group believed that training and knowledge were important, but it was clear that the immediate needs of the businesses were a priority and some employees were excluded from the development opportunities enjoyed by other members of staff. Two of the companies were of similar organisational size and structure; both companies dealt in a predominantly “male” industry, car repair and stone cleaning, and there was a clear focus on the production side of the organisation also in terms of continuous training and support. In both companies the female administrators were working independently from the rest of the team, in their work as much as socially as they did not participate in workplace outings. Both administrators felt that they and the company would benefit from administrative training, which they were both offered by a local development company.

Advantages of training identified by managers with a passive-restrictive attitude

Technical skills leading to increased efficiency was mentioned as a benefit of workplace training.

The obvious one [benefit] is that they can do their job more efficiently.
(Manager – Female – Service B)

Additionally, the managers mentioned an increase in soft skills such as confidence and self-esteem, company trust and a sense of satisfaction when receiving certificates as results of

workplace learning. One manager argued that training was used as a means of showing appreciation of members of staff, however, clearly this did not apply to all members of staff.

I think from an esteem point of view it improves confidence and a more positive attitude when they've had training....Sometimes it is difficult to find the time to release the men. To release anyone. [the administrator] has had the least training and part of that was because she didn't have anyone helping her in the office. So it is getting your head round the fact that you need to make the time. And bear the costs. Whether it is the cost of releasing the person from the job, because you have also the cost that they are not making money for you that day. So it is not just their wages, it is the fact they are not earning.

(Manager – Female – Service B)

Disadvantages of training identified by managers with a passive-restrictive attitude

Although managers recognised that the company would benefit from employee development, cost and loss of income when the employees were away on training were issues considered problematic in relation to workplace learning. It was clear that unless the training was considered essential for the running of the business, training was not a priority or staff development viewed as an investment:

I don't think we would, I don't think we would take courses which would be expensive or we would want to spend money on going on courses like that because we would be thinking that the money would be spent somewhere else rather to go on courses. It's not something we are in a terrible terrible need, we absolutely have to have it to continue our work, no.

(Manager – Female – Import A)

One manager pointed out that she found it difficult to find information about relevant training and to apply available training in the workplace. Conversely the manager only discussed the development of a group of workers, excluding some employees from the learning and development discourse altogether.

But next year for the boys it might be more difficult to find out exactly what is going to be relevant for them. Because once they have got the basic health and safety and everything. Where are they going next? What do they need to get them there? I am not quite sure. It will be more difficult in the future. You don't want to waste money. Just training for training sake. That will be more difficult.

(Manager – Female – Service B)

3.3 Case studies of organisational learning culture and its influence on employees

Four case studies presented here provide in-depth descriptions of different learning cultures and their influence on employees. These case studies were based on interviews with a manager and members of staff in four SMEs in different geographical areas of Scotland. Case study 1 provides an example of an expansive learning environment, encouraging different types of learning for all members of staff. Case study 2 provides an example of a restrictive learning environment. Case study 3 provides an example of a restrictive-passive learning environment in which the manager does not encourage formal learning but encourages employees to collaborate and learn from each other. Case study 4 provides an example of an expansive learning framework where not all employees are allowed the same learning affordances.

3.3.1 Case Study 1 – Care A

Care A was a residential nursing home located in a purpose built building situated in a residential area in a new town in the west of Scotland. The company formed part of an organisation established 15 years ago consisting of three nursing homes; each run as an

individual business. They mainly provided services to the local authority. The company had a long and rich tradition of workplace learning and training; compulsory training courses such as SVQs were offered to employees and additionally student nurses regularly came in on work placements. The manager argued that this would encourage different types of learning, including informal learning, among all members of staff suggesting that knowledge and skills of the whole workforce was developed and valued. The nursing home had collaborated previously with the WEA such as involvement in Job Rotation. The manager was pleased to assist in the research.

Organisational learning culture

External pressures as well as intrinsic motivation reinforced continuous training. In Scotland, legislation ensured standards of care, e.g. Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001, and the manager had to keep rigid records of all training undertaken at the company. Furthermore it was argued that staff development motivates staff to stay with the company despite the relatively low pay. Most employees were perceived to be enthusiastic about learning and training, and employees encouraged each other to participate in training e.g. the SVQs. However, the matron recognised that people had different priorities when it came to workplace training, and emphasised the importance of respecting people's choices.

The company offered employees at all levels access to a range of qualifications that included planned off-the-job learning for knowledge based course and time for reflection. Employees felt they had developed in their working roles and many mentioned the SVQs as an opportunity to learn new skills and validate existing knowledge. The process of achieving the SVQ gained employees an understanding of and confidence in their job. There was a multidimensional view of expertise; cross boundary communication was encouraged and there was a reciprocal sharing of knowledge between senior and junior members of staff. Senior members of staff frequently sought the advice of junior employees that spent more time with the residents”:

Like a couple of weeks ago there was someone choking and I managed to help him just through in here ... outside I would probably have froze. Years ago I wouldn't have had a clue what to do. The nurse had tried the manoeuvre, tried to punch him and get it out and it wasn't working. I just grabbed him put him upside down and whack and out the meat came. Loads of things. You get to see things. ... Watching nurses, because you work closely with the nurses. ... in here the staff nurses will ask us because we are the ones that are working more closely with the residents so we can tell the staff nurse if we feel that they are a wee bit off colour today or they are not quite themselves. You feed off each other.

(Senior care assistant – Female –Care A)

Impact of organisational learning culture on individual employees

Many female members of staff had experienced changes in their learning biographies. One care assistant described how after leaving school she worked fulltime in a factory until she got married. After she had her first child she continued working part-time. She showed great skills overlap between her private and work spheres. Before joining the care home she was looking after elderly relatives and neighbours. She did not enjoy school, but the learning and training environment in the company had reintroduced learning in adult life. By offering extended job roles and encouraging staff to take on further responsibilities employees were now enjoying tasks they had not considered when still in school. Many employees were enthusiastic about learning and about their job. One interviewee described how writing a life story book about one of the residents added another dimension to her work, as she described it, getting to know the individual behind the disease. She was involving other colleagues in the project and spent time outwith work hours researching the life story books.

The care home provided an example of an expansive learning framework. There was a clear emphasis on the team and the social aspects of learning. Employees viewed learning as a

continuous process and recognised different types of learning. Knowledge transfer between communities inside and outside the workplace occurred. Employees had developed learning identities, focusing on competence as well as knowledge, and were given opportunities to develop within the workplace.

3.3.2 Case Study 2 – Manufacturing B

Manufacturing Company B was a manufacturer located in a town near a major Scottish city. The company had been located in the same traditional factory building on an industrial site, which was fairly run down, around 25 years. The company formed part of an organisation of four manufacturing sites distributed over the world with the head office in Scandinavia. Many of the employees had been with the company for up to 20 years and there was a constant pool of new workers. The manager, who had only been with the company around one and a half years, felt that many employees took the company for granted, were reluctant to develop and did not appreciate the commercial pressures for more cost effective production. This was symptomatic of the apparent tension between the management and employees. The manager argued that the unionisation of the workers was the cause and suspected that the company had a reputation of being a relaxed employer. He felt further that employees abused the system of flexitime. The training provider on the other hand perceived the manager to be controlling towards employees. The manager was reluctant to release employees for the duration of the interviews.

Organisational learning culture

A manufacturing company had not the same legislative pressure to ensure the basic training of staff as a care home and this was evident in the level of training offered to employees. The operators at the manufacturing company circulated between various processes on the production line. Since the interviewees joined the factory the technology had changed. From mainly building and repairing products, many operators now tested hearing aids on PCs. Training was mainly provided by two full-time in-house training instructors and occasionally external trainers were brought in. The company offered narrow access to training and limited access to qualifications. The focus of the training was procedural compliance rather than understanding, and the management actively discouraged informal learning in the workplace. Training offered was short-term and goal focused and was considered part of work requirements, members of staff had therefore no choice whether to participate. There seemed to be a lack of dialogue; the manager's fear of unionisation and the employees' lack of choice in participating in learning and training activities indicated unilateral control of the environment and deeply defensive routines.

Impact of organisational learning culture on individual employees

Employees at the company did not feel that the company offered development opportunities nor did they particularly enjoy their job. Many stayed out of convenience often because of its proximity to their homes. None of the interviewees felt they had had an opportunity to apply prior knowledge in their job. Many employees were hoping that an IT course would enable them to move into a completely different field of work, e.g. childcare, rather than deepening their knowledge in their field of work. However, despite the formal company policy in regards to informal learning, there was evidence of peer-learning taking place:

I said [to one of the ladies] 'Well do you want me to show you how to do this because I have done loads and loads of them. I'll show you how to do this.' I'll be going away shortly anyway so I showed her how to do this part of my job and she can be doing that while she is waiting on her own work coming in.

(Operator – female – Manufacturing B)

The manufacturing company provided an example of a restrictive learning framework; although the manager recognised that employees were interested in learning and training, he argued that not all were able to learn. Learning was short-term for immediate work-related pay-back. There

was an emphasis on technique acquisition rather than on team work or the strengthening of the learning identities of employees. However, this case study indicated that even in cases in which the management is reinforcing an organisational learning culture emphasising technical aspects, employees sought social learning strategies and built on team work to deal with everyday problems.

3.3.3 Case Study 3 –Import A

Import company A was an importer of fancy goods. The small office and warehouse was located on an industrial estate near a major Scottish town. The company was established by the Polish owner/manager 10 years ago and has currently less than five members of staff. The company underwent a period with a very high turnover which has since slowed down and the emphasis at the company was now to increase sales.

Organisational learning structure

The company provided employees limited access to learning and training was mainly in-house with the manager attempting to pass her knowledge onto employees. Only compulsory courses such as health and safety and the current account package was available to employees. There was a lack of organisational recognition of and support of employees as learners. Although the manager and employees argued that the company would benefit from various IT training, to increase sales but also to be able to work more independently, employee development and training was not a priority at the company. Cost was seen as the main obstacle:

I don't think we would take courses which would be expensive or we would want to spend money .. somewhere else. It's not something we are in a terrible terrible need (of), we absolutely have to have it to continue our work, no.

(Manager – Female –Import A)

The workplace seemed to be a closed environment with few possibilities of participation in multiple communities of practice allowing for innovative learning to take place. Communication within the company was informal with employees frequently sharing knowledge and helping each other.

Impact of organisational learning culture on individual employees

The administrator explained that she did not enjoy school where she found teachers unhelpful. She later took an evening course in word processing but again was disappointed by the training. Despite completing the course and achieving the certificate, she did not feel that she gained a full understanding of the course and was lacking confidence in her ability. At the time of the interview she had not been involved in learning for a long time and felt that she was lacking vision and identity as a learner. Since the manager regularly travelled to Poland on business, the administrator was often left to take responsibility for company administration and finance. She felt that her extended job role had led to an increased ability to take responsibility and make decisions. She now saw workplace learning as an opportunity to awaken an interest in learning that she might take further:

I mean possibly if I started in here and then I really enjoyed it I would then look to go outwith. (Administrator –Female –Import A)

The fact that formal learning was discouraged at the company seemed to result in a lost training opportunity for an employee that despite several disappointing experiences in formal training was curious about lifelong learning and in developing her skills. Although the manager and employees argued that the company would benefit from fundamental training, the company focus was elsewhere. Cost was argued to be the main obstacle.

3.3.4 Case study 4 – Service B

Service company B provided stone cleaning and graffiti removal services of modern, historic and listed buildings. It was located in a socially deprived area in the west of Scotland. Its premises were old and run down and the manager was looking for new office spaces. The company was established ten years ago, and for the past three years had been a family owned business with around ten members of staff. The HR manager was highly interested in learning and training and undertook regular training courses at a training centre run by the local development company. All employees had undertaken a personal development course, it was however clear that not all employees were allowed the same learning opportunities.

Organisational learning culture

The HR manager was keen for her staff to develop and recognised benefits to the organisation, e.g. increased skills and efficiency, as well as for the individual, e.g. increased trust and confidence. Training needs were identified in supervision and the manager argued that it was important for employees to have an understanding of the company structure and follow regulations.

Apart from compulsory training such as health and safety, most learning was informal. The stone cleaners worked in teams and communicated daily with the manager. In addition there were regular meetings and workplace outings. However, despite the emphasis on soft skills such as increased confidence, it was clear that the main aim of training was to tailor individual capability to organisational needs. Only essential training was provided and staff hired on short-term basis for larger projects were forced to leave at the end of the contract due to limited skills, rather than providing the essential training for the employees to stay with the company. Furthermore, the company had an incident with a member of staff that was not willing to participate in the training and therefore was forced to leave as he did not participate fully as a member of the workplace community. The female administrators on the other hand worked independently from the rest of the team and did not participate in workplace outings. They did not receive regular training, although a training need had been identified by the HR manager and training was organised with the local development company. Employees that were difficult to release did not receive the training support enjoyed by staff on the “production” line.

The HR manager had an interest in staff development but felt that she lacked knowledge of how to take learning further and how to make best use of it in the workplace.

Impact of organisational learning culture on individual employees

The administrator felt that she was denied learning opportunities at the company, a point reinforced by the HR manager. She was repeatedly offered opportunities to go on training, and had even started a course, but was forced to leave the course because of the work load in the office. The polarized distribution of skills and division of workers between the stone cleaners, or “the boys”, and the admin staff indicated that some employees were exposed to a restrictive learning environment, and did not enjoy the same learning opportunities afforded other members of staff.

3.4 Summary

Managers with an expansive approach to organisational learning allowed for a certain amount of risk taking in relation to informal and peer-learning and qualified staff leaving the company. They felt that that the benefits associated with staff development outweighed the risks of losing trained staff. On the other hand, it appeared that managers of SMEs with a restrictive approach to organisational learning adopted a defensive approach and sought to minimise risk, attempting to hang on to their staff by limiting their opportunities for development. The third group showed some level of interest in learning and had some learning structures in place in the organisation, however not all employees were benefiting from the learning opportunities enjoyed

by their colleagues. Many managers in organisations with a passive-restrictive environment, as well as one manager in the restrictive group, recognised however that they lacked knowledge of how to make the employees and the company benefit from workplace learning. It was hypothesised that the managers' attitudes towards workplace learning and training would be reflected in those of the employees and this is discussed below.

The four case studies provided in-depth descriptions of different learning cultures and its influence on employees. Case study 1 provided an example of an expansive learning environment, encouraging different types of learning for all members of staff. Employees were enthusiastic about learning and deepening their knowledge and enjoyed working at the company. Employees showed a great degree of knowledge transfer and were taking ownership over their learning. Case study 2 provided an example of a restrictive learning environment. Organisational learning was focusing on developing techniques and improving efficiency, but employees did not feel that the company offered any opportunities to develop. When given the opportunity to take a short course, most employees were hoping they would gain skills that would enable them to move somewhere else. Case study 3 and 4 provided examples of restrictive-passive learning environments. The manager in case study 3 was highly critical of formal courses and encouraged informal in-house training. However, both employees provide examples of companies in which the manager, despite realising the benefits of learning, failed to provide essential training opportunities to members of staff keen to develop.

SECTION 4: LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF EMPLOYEES

Based on informal interviews with around 80 employees in SMEs in Scotland, we provide a broad overview of their attitudes to training, discuss factors influencing engagement with training and the employees' view of the training provided as part of this project.

4.1 Broad attitudes to training from the employee's perspective

Most employees appeared to enjoy workplace learning. With the exception of a small minority, the majority of employees emphasised the importance of informal and peer-learning. Many highlighted the workplace as the place where "the real learning" occurs and emphasised the importance of support and encouragement from colleagues. However the level of enthusiasm appeared to be linked to the extent to which the company promoted an expansive approach to learning. The more developed and established the organisational learning culture, the greater awareness employees seemed to have of workplace learning and its benefits. Employees in expansive learning environments often saw learning as part of working life, as a requirement and a responsibility:

I think really because you want to be the best you can be. I mean there's, I don't feel there's any point in sort of, I mean especially taking on a job like this if you are not willing to further yourself. Because it changes constantly. You know, there's different things come up, different laws, different regulations, you know. So you really have got to make the best of like yourself. And as long as the training is there then you really have to take it up. So I think that's what motivates me. You know, you've got to get in there and just be the best person to convey and do the job to the best of your ability. (Care Assistant 5 – Female – Care D)

An expansive learning environment appeared to lead to employees engaging in more learning activities outwith the workplace, irrespective of the extent to which these were related to their job. These learners were more likely to have a broad definition of learning and, compared with employees in restrictive learning environments, were more likely to speak about informal learning such as acquiring the skills to change a light bulb or repair a washing machine.

Employees with a narrow view of learning, emphasising formal learning over informal learning, tended to work in companies with restrictive learning frameworks.

*They showed you – that's not learning to me.
(Administrator – Female – Manufacturing C)*

Rather than discussing workplace learning as part of working life, there was a distant approach to learning. One employee described workplace learning as "a good idea", and another said, "I'm for it. I don't mind". They would prefer to learn during working hours, unhappy to give up free time or family time for work related learning. However, one case study provided an example of a restrictive learning environment where one employee contacted a training provider and arranged IT/literacy training for employees. The course was provided on the company premises but outwith working hours. Many employees reported that they felt empowered by the course, and they were now confident using their home PC, writing letters and looking up and printing information off the internet. Some employees reported that they found the course useful for work.

*All I wanted was to be able to use a computer. Now my wee girl can't get on it [laughs] handy having one, printing party invitations – it was her birthday not long ago, printed all the invitations and all the thank you letters, everything... printing off, you know maybe going on to sites. You would think I was doing this for years. So I took to it quite well.
(Operator – Female – Manufacturing B)*

4.2 Factors influencing engagement with training

The majority of employees engaging in IT training were motivated by improved job prospects. Many had low confidence and reiterated that they “knew nothing”, that their children were more IT literate than they were and that they would like to gain technical knowledge in order to be able to work more independently either in their workplaces or at home. Many mentioned that they wanted to learn in order to improve their job prospects or move into a completely different field. In expansive learning environments, on the other hand, many employees wanted to deepen their knowledge in their profession. Furthermore, many stated that they were engaging in learning activities outside work that would benefit them in their workplace but that was also a personal interest. Few employees studying for national qualifications such as SVQs in care argued that they did it because it was a legal requirement. Learning had become part of their working life and the boundaries between learning for work or personal interest were less clear.

Personal interest but also to help with my job. (Staff nurse – Female – Care A)

The only courses I go on is to do with my work. Some of them are out with work. .. You learn something new every day. Your training doesn't stop...
(Senior care assistant – Female – Care A)

When I did the KOJAC training [the trainer] was telling us about kids that have got autism and Aspergers and stuff. And there was kids in the after school care [where the interviewee volunteers] who had it. And I learned a lot of things. Like I couldn't understand why this wee boy could throw all the cups away until he got an orange one. And I never knew until I went to that training and a lot of things were explained and I found it really interesting. It was like letting you see things from those kids point of view... that was a lot of help because my boss in the after school care, she didn't know anything about that. (Child care worker – Female – Care D)

When discussing barriers to learning, many felt that they were not given enough time during working hours to engage in learning activities. Many female workers argued that having young families made it difficult to juggle family commitment with learning even in cases where they were given a lot of social support from family and friends, solutions that were considered short-term. Some employees mentioned low confidence as a barrier preventing them from participating in learning even when it was available in the workplace.

4.3 Employee case studies

The three employee case studies presented here provide in-depth descriptions of the employees within the three organisational learning cultures discussed above. Anne was a senior care assistant working in an expansive learning environment that has allowed her to thrive on her learning and increased confidence. This led to an increased interest in her job and she was willing to give up time outwith her work to learn for her job. Lily was a secretary in a manufacturing company with a restrictive learning framework. Being denied learning opportunities despite having a great interest in learning appeared to lead to jealousy and resentment towards colleagues. Finally Pamela provides an example of an employee that despite not being encouraged to engage in learning or develop her role within the company, underwent work related learning.

4.3.1 Employee case study 1 - Anne

Anne was a senior care assistant between 45 and 54 years old. She was responsible for personal care of residents in an elderly care home and responsible for a team of employees. She attended her local primary and secondary school, showing a preference for practical over theoretical subjects, and achieved three o-levels. After leaving school she started working at the local factory, returning on a part-time basis after having had her children. While working in the

factory she looked after ill and elderly family members and neighbours and realised that she enjoyed working with people. She therefore decided to apply for a job in the care sector.

Anne explained that she enjoyed the many social and emotional rewards her job brought and felt that the care home had a strong sense of community. She felt that the company offered many opportunities to develop and had been promoted from care assistant to senior care assistant. She argued further that she was given freedom and responsibility over her own learning and to grow with the task at hand. She particularly appreciated the informal learning opportunities in the workplace and learning from her colleagues. She felt that her own knowledge and experiences were appreciated in the workplace since senior colleagues often sought her advice. This supportive network within the company was extended to her personal life:

You learn something new every day. Your training doesn't stop. It just continually keeps going. And it is not military run. It is not like "that is the staff nurse and we are the carers". everybody is very approachable. So any problems out with the home people here will stand by you. (Anne – Senior Care Assistant – Female – Care A)

Since joining the company, Anne had achieved an SVQ 2 and 3. Additionally she had been given extended job roles and had taken on administrative duties, something she would not have enjoyed earlier. She commented that she had attended many work related courses outwith working hours, e.g. a course in palliative care. She was particularly enthusiastic about a course in writing life story books about the residents. She had involved colleagues in the project and carried out research outside work.

Anne provided an example of a woman from a traditional background that did not consider herself a "learner". The expansive learning environment at the company had made her thrive on her learning and the increased confidence she gained as a result.

4.3.2 Employee case study 2 - Lily

Lily was a 45-54 year-old secretary at a manufacturing company. As a secretary, Lily worked mainly on the Computer keeping personnel records, filing, letter writing, and other jobs the manager needed to have done.

Lily attended an all-girls convent school. She said that she enjoyed learning and left school with 4 O-levels and 2 Highers. After leaving school she worked in a car hire company until she was made redundant after nearly 20 years. She got this job through an agency and had been with the company for nearly 20 years. Lily described herself as a "learner" and had attended many night classes, including short-hand.

She felt, however, that the management in the company failed to encourage learning and did not offer any training courses. Apart from a two-day introductory IT course, she described most learning as experiential and informal. She attended a second IT course through a local development company, lasting about one hour a week over one year. She was not given time off work to attend the training and believed that if the company had been obliged to pay, she would not have been able to attend. Lily had used Computers a lot in her work and started a Microsoft course through the local development company in order to validate existing knowledge. She felt however that the course failed to take her existing knowledge into account and a misunderstanding of the exam rules caused her to fail the exam. Having to redo the entire course, she was put off completing the training, but felt that she was able to apply the knowledge gained in her work.

What I enjoyed about it was if nothing else, even if I never got a certificate at the end of it, it's keeping the brain going which I felt is important in any kind of training. It's not necessarily what you are achieving at the end of it, it's during the time you are at least getting something out of it. (Lily – Secretary – Female – Manufacturing C)

Contrary to Lily, one of her colleagues was given the opportunity to attend the classes and do self-study during work hours. As Lily felt that she and the company would have benefited from her undertaking the course, she appeared to show jealousy and resentment towards the girl who did get the opportunity to learn.

Whereas I feel that if I had been doing all these certificates I probably would have been coming back and using them, like in my job I could have made things, I could have done charts... because I am secretary; whereas for [colleague] she will get all these certificates and unless she backs that up with the history of a job where she is using, because people aren't interested in certificates... I mean because I have been very interested in the people that I have met when I have gone on the training thing. And most people are there doing it because they need it for their job, Kirsty doesn't, Kirsty has been given the opportunity to do this and it's not for her job.

(Lily – Secretary – Female – Manufacturing C)

Despite admitting to having gained the knowledge from the course, although not the accreditation, Lily felt mistreated as she did not have equal development opportunities to her colleague. Lily's colleague was to be made redundant and she underwent the training course in order to secure a job; however it became clear that in a company with a poor history of workplace learning, employees were competing over development opportunities and there was little room for encouragement of each others learning.

4.3.3 Employee case study 3 - Pamela

Pamela was a woman in her early forties who worked as a part-time administrator at a car repair garage. She dealt with the company accounts, salaries and customer service.

Pamela attended local school, which she did not enjoy, and achieved 3 O-levels. After several work experiences she joined the police, aged 18, where she worked in the control room for 20 years. She attended several in-house workplace courses such as typing, customer service/communication skills, and the police database. Pamela described how workplace training gave her a sense of accomplishment. Passing the newly acquired knowledge on to her colleagues made her feel good about herself. Around ten years ago, she left the police to have her daughter. While pregnant Pamela joined an FE college and attended a course in aromatherapy, massage and reflexology. She loved the experience of learning in a non pressured environment and the social aspects of the college.

The garage was owned by Pamela's cousin who offered her the position when her daughter was old enough to start school. She received one week induction training on the company systems delivered by the previous administrator who soon left the company. The training was focused on company procedures and since the only person who possessed any knowledge of its workings was leaving, Pamela had to learn fast. Having had previous experiences with computers, Pamela soon realized that the administration of the company was highly inefficient and contacted the local council for information about IT courses. They helped her to get in touch with the GSWRA.

Although the company had an apprenticeship system in place for the car mechanics, Pamela explained that she was not actively encouraged to go on the training. No allowances were made by the management to facilitate her learning, and any learning had to take place outwith her work hours. Being a single mother, Pamela found it difficult to find time to attend the course. She received a lot of help with baby sitting from friends and family, but felt that this was a short-term solution. The training centre offered her the online course, which she could not pursue since she did not own a Computer. She struggled to complete the course without further assistance from her manager, but was hoping to get back into learning after her daughter had started school.

Pamela argued that she was not a “learner” and emphasised that she was only learning to increase her job prospects. However, it was clear that she had gained soft skills through the training.

Before I came to work at River Motors there would have been lots of jobs come up that I wouldn't have even entertained going for because I had no experience in that line at all. Whereas now I feel as if I can do quite a bit of everything really, you know, just a star really! (Pamela – Administrator – Female – Service D)

Pamela provided an example of a person who did not enjoy school and did not see herself as a “learner”. However, having benefited from previous workplace learning she realised its possible benefits. Despite not receiving much support or encouragement from her manager she was willing to invest her spare time in order to learn as she felt the course would benefit the company, make her job easier and increase her future job prospects.

4.4 Summary

It appeared that most employees were interested in learning and development, but their expression of interest was highly influenced by the approach taken by the manager at the company in which they worked. The majority of employees in expansive as well as restrictive learning environments highlighted social aspects of learning, both as a means of conveying knowledge and information but also as a way of reinforcing the learning culture within the organisation. These findings suggest that employees working in a restrictive learning environment hold a narrow definition of learning, which appear to have an effect on confidence and motivation. The three employee case studies provided examples of learners in an expansive, restrictive and passive-restrictive learning environment. The learner in the expansive learning environment was enthusiastic about learning which fed into her life outwith the workplace. The learner in the restrictive learning environment had a great interest in learning but was prevented by the restraints within the organisational structure to pursue any workplace learning. Finally, the learner in the passive-restrictive learning environment provided an example of a learner who despite lack of encouragement or opportunity attempted to pursue learning. It is highly likely that the learner's prior positive experience of workplace learner had provided confidence, interest and understanding of the positive benefits of work related learning.

SECTION 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION FOR A RANGE OF STAKEHOLDERS

5.1 Summary of findings

5.1.1 Characteristics of a successful learning environment

- Managers with a successful learning environment appeared to promote open communication within the workplace and encouraged informal and social forms of learning.
- The managers' belief in employees' ability to learn and to bring new knowledge, skills and experience into the workplace in a way that would benefit the organisation and the business appeared to have an effect on employees' ability to do so.
- Managers with a successful learning environment welcomed new knowledge and found new knowledge applicable in the workplace.
- Benefits of workplace learning included increased soft skills such as enhanced confidence, employees exercising initiative and communicating more effectively in the workplace.
- Most employees enjoyed learning emphasising the importance of informal learning opportunities.
- Employees in companies with an expansive learning environment were more likely to say that they enjoyed their job and to speak positively about the organisation and management.
- Employees in companies with an expansive learning environment saw learning as a responsibility and part of working life and sought new knowledge.
- Employees were motivated to engage in workplace learning by increased job prospects or to become more independent either in the workplace or at home.
- Employee learning and training encouraging employees to reflect on their work practice and validate existing knowledge, e.g. SVQ training, appeared more likely to increase confidence and satisfaction than learning and training that focused on procedural knowledge such as health and safety training.

5.1.2 Challenges to workplace learning

- Difficulties releasing employees for training opportunities was the main challenge preventing SMEs from engaging in training, even in companies where the manager was enthusiastic about learning.
- Some managers felt they did not have enough information about training, how the organisation could benefit from workplace training and found it difficult to apply new knowledge in the workplace.
- Some managers argued that they found it difficult to motivate employees to engage in learning and training activities simultaneously as they held that there were limits to what could be taught in the organisation.
- Some managers were concerned that informal learning may lead to the manager losing control of what is taught.

- Costs of the courses but also loss of production when the employees are on training created barriers for training.
- Some employers mentioned qualified employees leaving for better paid positions, e.g. in the public sector, a challenge.
- Employees mentioned insufficient time to engage in learning activities provided during work time, family commitments and low confidence to be the main barriers to participating in learning and training activities.

5.1.3 Conclusion

In response to recent European, UK and Scottish policy emphasising the need of lifelong and workplace learning this study aimed to identify the learning opportunities and materials provided to SMEs by two learning providers. A second aim was to examine the experiences of employers and employees when engaging with training providers and undertaking training.

In order to examine the learning cultures in the fourteen SMEs participating in the study we applied an expansive-restrictive learning framework (Fuller and Unwin, 2004). This framework identified two types of organisations; organisations with a restrictive approach impose many limitations on learning, whereas those with an expansive approach foster a wide array of formal, non-formal and informal approaches to and opportunities for learning. Within organisations adopting an expansive approach, learning is likely to take place horizontally as well as vertically, and the culture is likely to be less hierarchical. Among the SMEs analysed as part of this study, one additional type of organisational learning culture was identified; the passive-restrictive approach. Managers with a passive-restrictive attitude to organisational learning were characterised by focusing on providing learning and training opportunities for employees involved in the production or service side of the business. The development of other employees was not seen as vital for the business and was therefore absent. Although most employees stated that they enjoyed learning and were interested in taking up some form of workplace learning, their attitude and view of learning, and in particular workplace learning, appeared to be influenced by the attitude held by the manager. Employees in organisations with an expansive approach to learning appeared to view learning as an opportunity and a responsibility. They were more likely to recognise and value informal learning and to transfer knowledge between their personal and work spheres than employees in restrictive and passive-restrictive learning environments. This is outlined in the following Table 6.

Table 6. Characteristics of expansive, restrictive and passive-restrictive learning frameworks and employee attitudes to learning

	Expansive learning framework	Restrictive learning framework	Passive-restrictive learning framework
Company characteristics	Opportunities for whole workforce to develop Widely distributed skills Learning for career and personal interest Access to qualifications and reflection Informal learning highly valued Team work valued Training needs analysis Technical skills valued Gradual transmission to full member of community Cross-boundary communication Managers as facilitators of workforce and individual development Chances to learn new skills/jobs	All training on the job Narrow view of learning Polarization of skills Informal learning discouraged Training used to tailor individual capability to organisational need Training focused on procedural knowledge Little access to qualifications No possibility for employees to gain further knowledge or progress in their “careers” Managers as controllers of workforce and individual development	Share characteristics with expansive and restrictive learning frameworks Some mandatory courses, mostly in-house Informal learning highly valued Training limited in terms of knowledge and time Only part of organisation had opportunity to develop and had shared cultural inheritance of development (apprenticeships) Manager as controller of workforce and individual development
Employee learning	Most employees enjoy learning Value support and encouragement from colleagues Learning viewed as part of working life, a requirement and a responsibility Broad definition of learning Engage in and identify learning outwith work Motivated by improved job prospects and an interest in learning Unclear boundaries between professional and private life	Most employees enjoy learning Narrow view of learning Prefer formal learning over informal learning Prefer learning to take place during working hours Motivated by improved job prospects – to move into a different field of work Clear distinctions between private and work spheres	Most employees enjoy learning Learning focused on technical aspects of their job Informal workplace learning - valued support from colleagues Felt they would benefit from more training but were not allowed sufficient time during work hours to engage in learning activities

The training providers reported that a large proportion of managers declined participation, mainly stating time as the main barrier. It should be noted that it therefore is likely that the SMEs reported on here have managers more committed to employee learning and training than those that chose not to get involved in the project. Three main factors affecting employer engagement in employee learning and training were identified in this project. Firstly there was a relationship between organisational learning culture and sector. The majority of the companies with an expansive learning framework were in the care sector and all the companies in which the manager held a restrictive attitude to workplace learning were manufacturing companies. Two of the three companies with managers with a passive-restrictive attitude to organisational

learning were service providers. There are many possible explanations to the correlation between sector and engagement in training activities. Whereas companies in the care sector were driven by legislation reinforcing employee training and development, the manufacturing companies were production driven. Time pressure in the manufacturing companies proved to work against training, a point also illustrated by managers with a passive-restrictive attitude to learning. Findings showed a general barrier towards employee training in manufacturing industries that suggests that the statutory equalities duties applied to the care sector should be extended to the private sector. Secondly the disposition of the individual manager appeared to have an effect on the organisational learning culture. The managers of the two manufacturing companies with an expansive learning framework were local companies with a particular and intentional interest in learning. One of the companies was originally set up with the main aim of providing employees job security whereas the manager for the other company was a qualified teacher.

A third factor that seemed to effect participation in workplace learning and training was available funding. The training providers explained that funding restrictions put limitations to the length of training provided to individual companies. Combined with the lengthy and time consuming process required for training providers to establish trusting relationships with managers that will lead to an invested interest in employee learning and training, these restrictions make it difficult to sustain ongoing training. Conversely, the findings presented in this report indicate that once managers and employees are engaged in training there is an increased awareness of the benefits from employee learning and training and an increased training demand. Maintaining level of funding is key to be able to offer training and engage companies in training and learning activities.

The case studies revealed two SMEs in which employees had initiated the training and put pressure on management to introduce training opportunities into the organisation. One company was manufacturing company B where the manager held a restrictive attitude to learning. A union representative contacted the WEA and arranged literacy/IT training for members of staff. The course was located on the company premises but took place outwith work hours. The manager recognised that the organisation would receive long term benefits from the training and the employees described increased confidence and empowerment by enhanced IT knowledge they were able to apply within and outside the workplace. Unions have had a great input in pushing for training in public sector organisations. The Labour Force Survey (Office for National Statistics, 2005) states that trade union membership in private companies is less than a third of that in public sector organisations and nearly half in organisations with less than 50 employees compared to companies with more than 50 employees. It is likely that this is indicative of the level of employee representation in SMEs.

In the second company, Service company D, the manager held a passive-restrictive attitude towards the training needs of the female administrator in an otherwise male dominated workplace. The administrator who had previously enjoyed workplace learning was aware of the personal and organisational benefits of workplace learning and had the confidence to contact a training provider to organise training. No allowances were made in the workplace for her learning. These case studies provided examples of employees putting upward pressure on employers to introduce workplace learning and training opportunities. However, as highlighted by Eraut (2000) employees need confidence in order to be proactive in seeking learning opportunities and a triangular relationship between challenge, support and confidence. A challenging and supportive organisational learning environment providing a learning environment that stimulates reflection on own practice appear to build employees' confident and encourages employees' to seek learning opportunities.

5.2 Implications for stakeholders

5.2.1 Training providers/ policy makers

- Employers require more readily available information about locally available training relevant to their individual organisational needs.
- Some managers, particularly in the manufacturing industries, need to be made more aware of the benefits of workplace learning and how enhanced and new knowledge can be applied in the workplace and how to take learning forward.
- Continuous funding of workplace training is key to sustaining ongoing training.
- A system where the employee is replaced by an unemployed person is a good way of keeping production maintained while developing employees.
- Training providers found that the manufacturing industries provided the greatest challenges when it comes to introduce workplace learning. The strong relationship between sector and engagement in learning and training activities suggests that statutory equalities duties should be extended to include the private sector.
- More research on the long-term effect of equalities training on organisational learning culture and employees attitudes towards equal opportunities issues is required.

5.2.2 Employers

- Need to provide a challenging and supportive organisational learning environment that stimulates reflection on own practice in order to build employees' confident and encourages employees' to seek learning opportunities.
- Need to take a more proactive role in finding information about available training for the whole workforce and available funding.

5.3.3 Employees

- Need to be aware of their rights as several case studies show that a proactive attitude towards workplace learning can result in increased training opportunities.

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APPENDIX 1

Table 7. Overview of SMEs

Company/ Sector	Learning environment manager's attitude, vision of learning, communication	Attitude to formal learning access to qualifications	Attitude to informal learning emphasis on the team	Benefits of training	Challenges with training	Placement on the expansive/ restrictive continuum
Care A	Opportunities for the whole workforce to develop, training to align the goals of developing the individual and organisational capability Employees learn in order to progress their career but also for personal interest. Communication open-door policy	Ongoing, access to qualifications e.g. SVQ. Preparation classes organised for employees with additional needs, e.g. report writing or basic IT. Training available to all employees, participation had a "snowballing" effect. The SVQ requires the learner to invest time during the working day and in their spare time for learning and reflection on work practice	Highly valued. Most learning takes place on the floor, employees are encouraged to learn from each other. Cross-boundary communication encouraged. Team work highly valued: multidimensional view of expertise and extensive sharing of knowledge, e.g. nurses frequently ask care assistants for advice as they spend more time with the residents	Increased confidence, skills	Cost - but there are opportunities to receive free training	Expansive Courses and an emphasis on the team were utilised to create an environment in which all employees engaged in continuous learning
Care B	There are opportunities for the whole workforce to develop. Employees take learning opportunities for granted. Employees learn for career progression but also for personal interest. Communication open-door policy, employees approach manager with training needs	Ongoing, Access to qualifications e.g. SVQ, preparation classes are organised for employees with additional needs, e.g. report writing or basic IT. The SVQ requires the learner to invest time during the working day as well as in the spare time for learning and reflection on work practice	Highly valued. Ongoing, e.g. shadowing. Employees are out reach workers and work mainly independently, few opportunities for team work and/or cross-boundary communication	Knowledge applicable in the workplace. Increased understanding, skills, awareness, empathy	Employees may pick up bad habits, releasing staff for training, informing staff about training opportunities	Expansive Training is driven by equality opp. legislation. All employees were given opp to learn and develop with a view of furthering their career. "Everybody can learn"

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Care C	Opportunities for the whole workforce to develop. Training needs assessed during regular appraisals	Employees get access to SVQ training at local college. Good experience with older worker returning to education. Literacy training provided where help is needed. Legislation strong driving force	Informal learning and shadowing highly valued	SVQ training provided understanding of the job. Increased confidence and more independent workers. Employees were able to bring new knowledge into the workplace	Time; employees work long hours and have young families taking up time outwith work hours. Difficult to keep qualified staff as they receive a higher wage in the public sector Although employees are supposed to get an increase in their salary with experience this is not the case	Expansive Employees were perceived as more confident as a result of training
Care D	Opportunities for the whole workforce to develop. Legislation is viewed as motivation for staff to engage in training. Training for career progression and personal interest aligned with goal of enhancing organisational capability. Communication open door policy	Ongoing, access to qualifications e.g. SVQ, preparation classes are organised for employees with additional needs, e.g. report writing or basic IT. The SVQ requires the learner to invest time during the working day as well as in the spare time for learning and reflection on work practice	Peer-learning and team work encouraged. Informal learning and community training is offered. Learners intimidated by more formal training leading to a qualification	Workers know that knowledge is applicable in the workplace. Additional qualifications seen as back-up in case of redundancy	Releasing staff. Personal circumstances	Expansive Training improved employees' confidence in their own ability and their work practice

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Service A	The whole workforce are given opportunities to develop. Support for employees as learners. Learning and training is used as a vehicle to align the goals of the individual and organizational capability. Employee development plan developed during regular supervision	Access to qualifications. Technical skills are valued and internal training is available	Employees are encouraged to learn from each other	The organisation is an Investor In Excellence, additionally internal training keeps employees up to date with legislative changes	Time: negotiating rota for the drivers	Expansive
Service B	Part of the organisation gets an opportunity to develop and has shared cultural inheritance of workforce learning and training of technical skills	Mandatory training courses such as running machinery and first aid	Highly valued. Initial training in-house	Efficiency. Observed satisfaction when receiving accreditation. Training used as a means of showing appreciation. Soft skills; self-esteem, trust, confidence	Cost, Time, Difficulty releasing some members of staff for training. Difficulty finding information about training. Little understanding in how to make the best use of training and learning	Passive-Restrictive Time constraints made it difficult to provide training to all employees
Service C (Credit control management specialist)	The whole workforce is given opportunities to develop. Learning is highly valued. Learning is highly job-focused	Most training external. Qualifications are highly valued and link goals of developing the individual and organizational capability. Gradual transition to full, rounded participation	Employees are encouraged to learn from each other. Innovation important. Communication within the organisation is informal and is considered a vital tool to motivate employees. Technical skills are valued and developed informally	Training ensures quality and motivates staff	Time and cost	Expansive There was an attitude that providing employees opportunities would motivate staff

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Service D	Part of the organisation gets an opportunity to develop and has shared cultural inheritance of workforce development with a tradition of apprenticeship	Some access to qualifications, e.g. ECDL, although workplace allowances such as study-time during work-time is not allowed all employees	Informal and social learning highly valued. Apprenticeship system for part of the team. Other employees work in isolation but received most of their training informally	Increased efficiency. Learning and training for career progression	No time allowances afforded employees not prioritised to enjoy learning opportunities the company allow other employees	Passive-Restrictive
Manufacturing A	The whole workforce gets the opportunity to develop. Employees learn for progression of career as well as personal interest as most employees have a personal interest in horticulture. Skills are widely distributed. Innovation is important; what worked one year might not work the following	Employees are encouraged to obtain qualifications such as HNCs and Chain saw licence	Most learning on the job is informal on-the-job training. Team work is valued and employees are encouraged to learn from each other	Understanding, skills, career progression	Releasing staff. Benefits may be long-term and not necessarily benefit the organisation	Expansive In-house training with a strong focus on peer-learning aimed to provide understanding of the elements involved in the work process
Manufacturing B	Virtually all training is on-the-job offering few opportunities for reflection. There is a narrow view of learning and training, access to learning is restricted in terms of tasks and knowledge related to the job. There is a polarization of skills and highly defined hierarchy	Limited/no access to qualifications	Informal learning is actively discouraged	Training is used to tailor individual capability to organizational need; manage people in order to improve the business, introduce new technologies	Training initiated by head office is insufficient. Manager feels that not all employees are able to learn	Restrictive Learning focused towards work related goal or the technical aspects of the work process. Employees had no influence over workplace learning/training
Agriculture A	Workforce learning and training is used to tailor individual capability to organizational need	Little or no access to qualifications	Informal learning and technical skills are highly valued. Virtually all learning is on-the-job	Increased efficiency and flexibility in the workplace	Cost. Finding out about training	Restrictive

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Manufacturing C	Learning not a priority Little money invested in learning and development opportunities, it was argues that employees did not need to develop their skills in order to do their job. Innovation is not important	There is a narrow view of learning access is limited in terms of tasks and knowledge. Little access to qualifications. Some employees underwent obligatory training, such as fork list training, first aid	Most learning was informal. Employees were encouraged to learn each other's job in order to be able to cover during holidays	Training focused on procedural knowledge and aimed at facilitating the role of the manager	The manager found it difficult to motivate employees to learn. He argued that too great an emphasis on learning would lead to employees losing interest	Restrictive The manager held the attitude that the company did not offer employees opportunities to learn. Employees were perceived as uninterested in learning
Import A	Access to training narrowed to what was considered essential for company development. No assessment of training needs- "no need". Polarized distribution of skills and clearly defined roles within a very small team. Technical skills taken for granted	The manager is reluctant to spend money on training courses. Limited courses, e.g. health and safety and the current account package, have been offered to employees	Highly valued	The manager recognises that the company runs smoother the more knowledge the workforce possesses	Cost is seen as the main obstacle	Passive-Restrictive Training not viewed as an investment
Manufacturing D	Opportunities for the whole workforce to develop, vision of learning is for progression of career with an apprenticeship system in place. Cross-boundary communication encouraged	Apprentice system in place. External as well as internal training is provided. Technical skills are valued	Informal learning and team work is highly valued	It was argued that informal learning led to empowerment. Increased productivity, less errors, increased ambition	Difficulty keeping qualified staff (engineers). Providing a learning environment away from distractions at the desk	Expansive Training results in increase in production, fewer errors, and more ambitious employees