

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Lifelong learning among older professionals: How competence strategies and perceptions of professional learning affect pastors' participation

Tone Cecilie Carlsten | Dorothy Sutherland Olsen

Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation,
Research and Education, Oslo, Norway

Correspondence

Tone Cecilie Carlsten, Nordic Institute
for Studies in Innovation, Research and
Education, Po Box 2815, Tøyen, Oslo 0608,
Norway.
Email: tone.cecilie.carlsten@nifu.no

Abstract

One of the challenges of keeping older employees up to date and ensuring their continued involvement in the workplace is to provide them with relevant learning opportunities. This article aims to understand the usefulness of the concept of LLL for a group of older employees (50+). This is done using interviews and a document study on the Church of Norway (CofN) to understand how the concept of LLL is interpreted and acted upon by employers and older pastors. We assume that changes occurring outside the Church provoke the need for new knowledge and new ways of working. We ask how these older professionals perceive their learning opportunities and try to ascertain how the concept of LLL is helping them to tackle the ongoing changes. The article adds to the research on the interplay between competence strategies of employers and attitudes of older employees in a well-established profession. Results of our study show that new strategies open up for greater participation. However, older pastors' greatest motivation for learning seems to be their ordination vows, which include a commitment to continued learning through personal studies. This influences the kind of activities in which they participate, their expectations

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concerning the recognition of their learning and their views on the Church as a learning organisation. We conclude that older pastors do benefit from LLL initiatives in the workplace, but they also benefit from belonging to a profession with a conscious commitment to learning.

1 | INTRODUCTION

We need to become a modern and transparent learning organisation. At the same time, we need to protect the distinctiveness of being a church. As we are moving in the direction of applying secular systems of reporting changes in church attendance in color-coded arrows and measuring outcomes of spiritual work, we need to ask what it does to our understanding of being a church. What does that entail for our work of caring for the sick and dying, for human compassion, and for the direction of our own learning in the whole perspective of Christian thinking? (Area dean 1, CofN)

Despite long professional traditions, pastors in the Church of Norway (CofN) have recently experienced considerable change in their work environment because of reduced membership (Statistics Norway, 2018) and new management practices (Haga, 2010; Sirris, 2018). The quote above from an interview with an area dean in the Church of Norway (CofN) describes some of the challenges arising from these changes. In addition, the CofN was legally separated from the State in 2017 after almost 500 years of state-church cooperation. The CofN has developed its own strategies and applied new management methods in the last decade. At the time of our study, the Church was still trying to find ways to adjust to these changes and was grappling with performance and accountability measures (Haga, 2010; Reite, 2014; Sirris, 2018).

The group of pastors in Norway is characterised by a large number of older professionals, with a considerable share having less than 10 years left before reaching the absolute retirement age of 70. 59% are over 50 and 30% are over 60 (Church of Norway, 2017). Thus, we assume that the changes in the work environment emphasised in the opening quote also provoke a need for new knowledge and new ways of working for this experienced group of employees. Our starting point is the assumption that pastors, like other professionals such as school teachers, will have to develop new competences in order to deal with the changes in their environment (Susskind & Susskind, 2015). So we asked how these older professionals perceived their learning, learning requirements and lifelong learning and tried to ascertain how LLL was helping them to tackle the ongoing changes in the later part of their learning and work trajectories.

Although lifelong learning (LLL) covers a lifetime, most attention has been directed to its potential for older employees. Given the recent policy focus on LLL, one may assume that this development could be observed in how older employees are equipped to handle changes in their work environment. That LLL is central to this is found in the National Competence Development Plan for Pastors in the Church of Norway (Episcopal Meeting, 2015). Here, competence is defined as learning activities that contribute to a lifelong personal and professional development. As such a large group of Norwegian pastors is over the age of 50, competence plans do not include specific senior learner strategies. What is interesting is whether these new plans to govern the Church as a learning organisation meet the needs of experienced employees who are over 50 and how they may help employees nearing the end of their careers to deal with cultural and structural changes.

This article opens with a brief overview of the concept of LLL and professional learning, linking it to our specific case. Some methodological considerations are then outlined, before findings from the analysis of strategic documents and the interviews are presented and discussed.

2 | LIFELONG LEARNING (LLL) AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

In this section, we first provide a brief overview of the concept of lifelong learning (LLL) and how it relates to older employees. We then summarise some recent research on learning in the professions and consider this in relation to our case of pastors in the Church of Norway.

The concept of LLL can be traced back to ancient Greece and, in Mediaeval times, it was closely associated with the Christian Church (Findsen & Formosa, 2011, p. 33). However, modern policies of lifelong learning were introduced at the end of the 1970s. Policy makers turned to lifelong learning as a means to increase social cohesion, employability and, more recently, to tackle the challenge of ageing populations. It has also been hailed as the policy means to improve national performance in the knowledge economy. Some view LLL as a connected system that covers the whole lifecycle and includes all opportunities for learning (Findsen & Formosa, 2011). An important aspect of LLL is that learners should take the initiative of their own learning with the support of the employer. This has been studied in depth in a European context and also in Norway (Midtsundstad, Mehlum, & Hilsen, 2017). Many factors may influence LLL, but motivation and future career plans, as well as a work environment which is conducive to learning have been identified as important factors (CEDEFOP, 2017).

The concept of LLL has also received criticisms. Field (2006) suggests that the concept has too many aims (social, economic and business competitiveness) and that it is a vehicle to stimulate innovation and novelty in the knowledge economy. The term LLL is frequently used to describe individually-motivated learning, but also learning of basic skills at all stages of life and personal development which may not be work-related. The term has also been used as a way of “repackaging” adult learning policy. Field (2006) points out that most European countries have indeed developed national visions of LLL, but that policy implementation lags behind and is much more fragmented.

Employers can, of course, interpret LLL in their own way and the challenge of making it happen among older employees is evident in the findings of The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) which indicates declining participation in organised learning activities and declining literacy, numeracy and technological skills with age (OECD, 2016). Other studies have found that older employees were more interested in learning things that were relevant for their current work situation and current challenges than in learning things which may or may not be useful for them in the future (Becken, Carlsten, Børing, Wedde, Olsen, & Berg, 2015; Field & Canning, 2014; Zwick, 2011).

If we look at the professions more closely, we find some of the same drivers of change and thus of learning. However, we find different attitudes to learning and knowledge, as well as the importance of upholding professional ethics and norms (Susskind & Susskind, 2015). A profession is defined as: “members of any occupational group, usually committed to public service, that defines itself as collectively sharing particular knowledge and practices and that is publicly accountable for its service” (Fenwick & Nerland, 2014, p. 2). In their reconceptualisation of professional learning, Fenwick & Nerland seek to debunk the ideas of professions based on decontextualised individual competence (Fenwick & Nerland, 2014, p. 1). Instead, they conceive learning as something which emerges in situations where there is a gap between action and expectations of the job that needs to be done (Fenwick & Nerland, 2014, p. 101). Guile highlights the importance that professionals place upon continually learning from colleagues and having time and places to meet and exchange experiences and identify ways of developing their knowledge (Guile, 2014, p. 125). The importance of formal education and professional knowledge at the core of a profession is acknowledged, but, as Gherardi (2014, p. 14) points out, although formal knowledge may be at the core, there is also a margin that consists of all the extra, perhaps less formal knowledge which makes the profession function as a group, enabling it to learn new things and to change and develop.

In their study of the clergy, Susskind and Susskind (2015) found a profession with a central role at the interface between worshipper and scriptural texts. However, they found that this role was being challenged in all religions because of technological developments and increasing pressure to document tasks and results and contribute to reducing costs. They found that technology was making the knowledge of individual clergy less exclusive, as

parishioners could now access religious texts online and come into contact with other religious groups. They suggested that it would be important for the clergy to continually adjust to these changes.

Properly practised, LLL and professional learning should ideally result in engaged and competent employees who continuously update their knowledge and learning to work in new ways as part of a learning organisation. However, by including concepts of professional learning, our attention is directed to non-formal learning and everyday informal learning, as well as the all-important formal education of professionals. In this study, we do not limit our definition of learning to something that results in measurable outputs, but as comprising formal and informal and planned and unplanned activities which lead to new insights, new understanding or new ways of working. With some of the earlier research themes and findings in mind, this article looks more closely at learning in one profession which has retained older employees who remain active participants in their profession. We consider how the concept of LLL has been useful to them and how it may have helped them in their learning.

3 | METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As this article focuses on learning, we turn to analytical approaches which have emerged in the context of adult education and lifelong learning research since the 1990s. One of these is biographical learning (Alheit, 1999, 2009; Alheit & Dausien, 2002). From a phenomenological perspective, it may be defined as “a self-willed, ‘autopoietic’ accomplishment on the part of active subjects in which they reflexively ‘organise’ their experience in such a way that they also generate personal coherence, identity, a meaning to their life history and a communicable, socially viable lifeworld perspective for guiding their actions” (Alheit & Dausien, 2002, p. 17). Inspired by this perspective, we developed interview guides which encouraged interviewees to provide a biographical account, thus opening our themes to a broad range of interpretations and reflections.

The methods used in this study consisted of qualitative analyses of both policy documents and individual in-depth biographical learning interviews. Relevant national and regional policy documents from the period 1970 to 2018 were thematically analysed. One-hour open-ended interviews were conducted with 3 area deans and 12 pastors in three dioceses in Spring 2018. We chose to interview in different dioceses in order to ensure that our findings were not based on an isolated example. The cases were selected to represent different views on LLL, as revealed in a curriculum analysis of all 2015–2020 Norwegian regional competence development plans for pastors. Individual informants were then selected from a list of all pastors who were 50+, representing both genders and a variety of work responsibilities and geographical conditions, such as urban/rural and size of congregation. As about 50% of pastors in the CofN today are female and, given the scope of this article, gender was not a main focus of this analysis. All informants in the original selection gave their informed consent to participate as part of the larger research project *Silver Lining—A Study of Employability and Learning Trajectories of Late Career Learners* sponsored by the Research Council of Norway 2016–2019. Interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim by the first author and analysed by both authors. The rich data sets were analysed with the computer software Nvivo and were subject to systematic analysis.

4 | LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE CHURCH OF NORWAY

In this section, we present the results from an analysis of strategy documents where we take a closer look at how the concept of LLL has been interpreted and operationalised in the Church of Norway. The documents express an idea of LLL in the CofN which follows general tendencies in Norway and Europe, linking the organisation's needs for improvement and renewal due to rapid changes in the work environment and to policy arguments for pastors' right to continued learning as a professional group.

The concept of LLL in strategic plans related to pastors' work was presented in the Official Norwegian Report 1976 “The continued education of pastors” (NOU, 1976, p. 25). This was the first strategic document to use the

concept of LLL as we know it today in the context of the CofN's need for pastors' continued learning. It pointed out that LLL was not a completely new way of conceptualising continued learning as an individual ideal. It was already included in the ordination vows of pastors, which stated: "and by his/her own heart to pursue a life according to the Word of God, and through studies and prayer to delve deeper into the Holy Scripture and the truths of the Christian faith". What was, however, considered as a new challenge to the organisation was that LLL and a systematic way of thinking about learning as work should be the responsibility of the Church. To make this conceptualisation of learning as both an individual and organisational responsibility clear, it was decided that the Church should not make employees responsible for this without providing learning opportunities. Besides the self-study of pastors based on the ideals expressed in their vows, a mentoring service should be made available. In the report, it was also suggested that a plan should be made for formal pastoral days for new pastors; that decentralised courses at the level of the deaneries should be offered; and that the possibility for "study retreats" at higher education institutions should be introduced. This was perhaps the starting point of the dilemma mentioned by the area dean in the opening quote. How should the Church integrate and manage the systemic concept of LLL presented in the strategy development plan in a way that also protected the distinctiveness of their organisation?

A second challenge was more closely related to operationalising the concept of LLL for pastors: How should this new way of thinking about learning at work be communicated within the Church as an organisation? In the report of 1976 mentioned above, the authors called for drastic measures and a change in the mentality in the CofN. They argued that the idea that basic and further education should now be considered as an "organic unity" represented a radical break with earlier ways of thinking about pastors' work. It was no longer possible to claim that a basic education, seen in isolation, would provide a sufficient theological basis for a lifetime. This change in mentality encouraged pastors to prioritise their time and resources in new ways. The strategy document emphasised that the employer would have to provide enough support for a change to be implemented.

A third challenge was related to the change in the pastors' common perception of professional identity. Like other professionals in the 1970s, pastors had to accept the idea that they had not finished with formal education at the time of graduation. By the time pastors entered working life, learning was not only a measure of their autonomy, but a measure within a common framework that was available for inspection and continuing change at the level of the organisation.

For the Church, this change in perception was complicated by the traditional dual view of the pastoral professional identity—that the pastor was an employee of the State and of God. This demanded a thorough theological discussion. The pastors' service is given by God and performed in the power of the Holy Spirit. But, as was pointed out; this does not make the pastor less human than employees in other sectors. In fact, the authors of a prior policy-report in 1972, laying the ground for the 1976-report, claimed that, regrettably, this exaggerated sacralisation in the dual view of the professional identity "has had the inevitable consequence of viewing a pastor's work as a special case in working life" (NOU, 1972, p. 14). The authors concluded that this distinction had been a barrier to the possibility of analysing and discussing pastors' work situation with sufficient transparency. From now on, policy should treat the work of pastors in the same way as other occupations and professions.

After 1976 no other major strategic or policy papers in Norway addressed the issue of LLL for pastors specifically and systematically. However, the original concept was integrated into modern thinking about pastors' continued learning, as became apparent in The National Competence Plan for Pastors in the Church of Norway (Episcopal Meeting, 2015). The conceptualisation from the 1970s has indeed led to changes in pastors' work environment, aligning their situation to work in other sectors in certain ways, such as mentioned by the area dean quoted in the Introduction.

The Church of Norway as an employer, now separate from the State, has become increasingly influenced by market thinking, emphasising performance measurements of both services and learning activities. One of the changes in terms of lifelong learning has been the recent requirement for regional competence development plans for each diocese, based on The National Competence Plan for Pastors in the Church of Norway (Episcopal Meeting, 2015). LLL seems to have had positive impact, making the Church an employer that offers further education and

other formal learning activities to all pastors of all ages. There appears to be greater emphasis on the development of a learning culture to enable and support the competence development of pastors and we find no limitations on older professionals' learning opportunities within the stated aims of the Church. What we do find, however, is that the plans for competence development are mostly concerned with formal and non-formal learning activities. Very few include clear aims or intended evaluations to ensure a recognition of informal learning, which we would consider a weakness, given the literature presented earlier that claims that older employees are more interested in learning in their workplace than in attending programmes and courses which they may not find relevant for their current work situation and current challenges (Becken et al., 2015; Field & Canning, 2014; Zwick, 2011).

5 | OLDER PASTORS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING IN THE CHURCH OF NORWAY

In the following sections, we present findings from the interview analysis that show what older pastors perceive to be useful learning activities tailored to the needs of the Church, as well as to their own needs and motivation.

In the interviews, not only formal and non-formal learning activities were addressed in terms of course- and study programme participation. Informal learning was also operationalised as a concept and discussed as a workplace practice. Questions pertaining to pastors' perception of and experiences with learning-intensive work were included to find out how informal learning opportunities were taken advantage of and recognised in the workplace.

A first impression when analysing the data is the absence of pastors' awareness of the policy concept of life-long learning (LLL). Most referred to learning opportunities as postgraduate and further education and did not include informal learning opportunities in their descriptions of work-related activities. This focus on formal and non-formal learning comprising LLL is also found in the regional competence development plans, as mentioned in the previous section. In addition, only three of the 12 pastors were familiar with their regional competence development plan. The awareness of this new way of organising learning confirmed a result from a representative survey that was distributed by the Episcopal Meeting of the CofN to all 1,330 active ordained pastors in 2017. It found that 73.4% of all pastors were not aware that there was a competence plan for postgraduate and further education in their diocese (Episcopal Meeting, 2017).

Several pastors mentioned the focus on formal study points as a negative aspect of their learning situation. They emphasised that extra study points did not lead to a rise in salary, nor were they important for them at this stage in their career. Several pastors mentioned that it was not easy for them to attend courses in other learning arenas, as their presence was needed in the congregation on a daily basis, despite the promise of support stated in the strategy documents from the 1970s and in the recent National Competence Development Plan for Pastors in the Church of Norway (Episcopal Meeting, 2015).

Another aspect of the Church's focus on formal and non-formal learning activities was the gap that pastors perceived between the courses offered and the competence development they judged they needed. When speaking of their own competence needs and the competence needs of the Church as an organisation, they all emphasised the need to stay updated on global trends and societal change. As one of the pastors put it: "Without being continually updated on the trends of society you cannot be a pastor" (Informant 4). The area deans also called for a strategic discussion about relevant learning opportunities, one of them stating:

I miss a more informed ideological debate about learning, because we really are in need of continuous updating. We need an awareness in our national church leadership that if we are to exist in this world and to meet the people in this world, we need to feel its pulse. (Area dean 3, CofN)

An example that some pastors linked to the need to understand societal trends was the need to better define and understand the borders between pastoral duties and cooperation with other partners with regard to burials. Both families and undertakers have recently been putting new demands upon the Church when it comes to adjusting services

to accommodate their needs. Pastors felt that these new demands collided with the long traditions of the Church. Instead of courses meeting needs to understand legal guidelines and how to deal with such situations in a common way for the profession as a whole, some pastors claimed that the courses that were offered were too academic and specialised, or as one pastor reported: "It is not that these courses I can choose between are not interesting to me still, theologically speaking, but attending them feels more like a competence vacation than anything else" (Informant 7).

Pastors and area deans alike reported a change towards mandatory non-formal courses for the whole profession after 2015, such as learning about different approaches to homiletics (the art and science of preaching). They agreed that these national measures were positive for the Church as a learning organisation. One pastor who was reaching the retirement age of 70 had indeed found a new spark to continue to work with this theological renewal:

Right now, we have a mandatory class in the art of preaching for all the pastors in this area. It is really interesting! We make movies of our sermons and analyse them together within an analytical framework emphasising the sermon as more interactive. So much has changed in my field the past 30 years, and I didn't know about it! It is so good to see and be part of that change! (Pastor, Informant 13, CofN)

Although somewhat reluctant to join, all pastors in the oldest age group in our study involved in this particular course found it to be a stimulating experience, integrating everyday practice, digitalisation examples and theoretical discussions across age groups in the profession. One reason for the reluctance was that many courses did not meet their immediate needs, but were designed to meet the needs of higher education institutions. The area deans pointed out that their main job in this regard was not to help the pastors to complete the course, but to motivate the older pastors to join in the first place.

The main learning category that was missing in pastors biographical accounts was informal learning. Even though they described daily learning opportunities in detail and how important these had been in their career, they did not view these individual studies as part of the systematic development of the Church as an organisation. Nor did they define them as learning opportunities, rather, they connected them to their obligation to the Church, to their own work with the congregations and to their ordination vows and the ongoing work of being a good pastor:

When we talk about competence development, I realise I'm not up to date. I really don't have that knowledge base with me. But I am still learning! Every week as I prepare my sermon there is something new to discover in the Gospels. Oh, I can struggle with the Scriptures and feel it in my body that I need to stretch myself cognitively and spiritually. This is no routine work! I feel blessed to have such a job that brings me self-renewal even at my age. So maybe I'll stay until I'm 67 at least. (Pastor, Informant 14 CofN)

In fact, several pastors reported that regular everyday studies and prayers defined their spiritual learning both as private persons and as professionals and that this had been the case since their initial training to become a pastor. This way of understanding pastoral spirituality as a subjective and new approach to traditional Christian practices that potentially revitalised their spiritual and vocational lives is also found in other recent studies (Kaufman, 2017). Even if this may be seen as informal learning activities from our perspective, to the informants the outcome of these practices was often defined as a spiritual experience rather than as a vocational competence. This suggests that the professional development of these pastors cannot simply be defined in terms of measurable learning outputs that are normally linked to strategic plans for competence development in organisations. It also implies that some examples of informal learning will be difficult to recognise and value explicitly by others than the learners and thus may be difficult to translate into an LLL-format.

The focus on declining Church attendance and on new management styles has influenced the way pastors work and learn. Pastors have recently spent time with colleagues discussing national signals of increased secularisation.

They discuss ideas and reflect on these numbers with other pastors and their area dean as part of daily workplace practices. Some pastors have recently been held directly accountable for Church attendance in the employee appraisal reviews. While pastors have always been concerned with reaching many people to share the Gospels, the informants in this study claimed that systematic reflection on statistics was a relatively new way of learning at work. This is, for instance, done in the weekly staff meetings where clergy update each other and discuss how to uphold the legitimacy and integrity of their practices. For several pastors, this was where the real learning took place, not in the formal and non-formal learning activities, but in continually developing new interpretations of their profession in relation to new external requirements. The formal and non-formal learning activities were in their view more about ensuring a certain standard and being open to a discourse that was not confined to a local parish or one diocese.

Interviews revealed informal learning activities, such as sharing experiences after individual study days. However, the pastors did not define this as central to their learning. Some pastors even mentioned a lack of recognition for informal learning to be connected to their own lack of interest in participating in formal and non-formal learning activities. They reported a disappointment that their employer had never asked for the special competence they had previously acquired through non-formal activities. That this disappointment was related to a lack of a systemic emphasis on informal learning as part of LLL for older pastors is also found in the survey mentioned earlier (Episcopal Meeting, 2017).

A re-analysis of the data from this survey showed that the desire to participate in professional development activities decreased after the age of 59. This is in line with research on seniors in other parts of working life (OECD, 2016). As an example of several respondents in the 50–59 age group, one pastor put it this way in a commentary to the question of desired learning activities:

I do not wish at all to participate in continued learning activities anymore. I have so many courses and classes behind me that I find no use for in my work or in the church altogether. I have been a pastor in a time when competence development has been stressed, and I have taken advantage of it. I'm left with a feeling that this is mostly much ado about nothing, and I believe the church really needs to take stock and find out in a systematic way how they want to use the same competence development they encourage. (Pastor, survey respondent, CofN)

Although this is only one statement from an older pastor who responded in the “Other”-category, it represents more replies in the survey. Also, in a study from 2009, half the sample of pastors in a national survey reported that they were critical of their employer's lack of interest in using their new competence (Høeg & Gresaker, 2009). The findings from 2009 seem to be confirmed both in the 2017 survey and in this qualitative study.

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In summary, we can say that we found that pastors did indeed participate in many organised learning activities. However, we also found that the way they perceived learning in general affected their participation. The interviews also suggest that there were many lost opportunities for learning and much of the individual learning was not used afterwards. The pastors also drew clear links between learning opportunities, recognition of their learning by the Church as an organisation represented by the area deans and bishops and their own motivation to stay in work until the absolute retirement age of 70.

The findings in this study align with other studies (Becken et al., 2015; OECD, 2016) which report that the motivation for learning is reduced or at least fragile among older employees. In this study, we linked this motivation to the organisation's operationalisation of LLL strategies and the way pastors perceived this. The increasing challenge of motivating older employees to participate in formal learning and at the same time encourage their

willingness to engage in learning which is relevant for their current task supports findings from earlier research on older employees and their attitude to LLL (Becken et al., 2015; Field & Canning, 2014; Zwick, 2011).

The document analysis indicates that the Church of Norway has to a large extent been affected by the general trends of LLL found in other parts of working life. National and regional competence development plans have been implemented, and the Church is to a large degree encouraging pastors to participate in formal and non-formal learning activities. The argumentation in these strategic documents is closely linked to arguments from the first Church policy documents from the 1970s and affected by modern performance-oriented management trends.

We found pastors learning as a direct result of competence plans. However, their own accounts of their learning needs and their judgements of what helps them do their job include topics and methods that rarely figure in competence plans or discussions of LLL. Looking at their learning from the perspective of professions, we find that pastors' learning needs and preferences align well with the traditions of their profession and their own professional values. Pastors participating in this study showed a well-developed sense of their own responsibility and role, including assessing their own need for new competence. They appear to connect this responsibility to their ordination vows more than to competence strategies. Our informants describe examples of learning embedded in everyday practice and thus not easily visible as learning to themselves, other employees or employers.

By comparing what the pastors say about learning in practice and their learning needs with what their employers aim for in their competence plans, we see a wide gap. Furthermore, while the employer stresses formal and non-formal learning such as postgraduate and further education programmes, there seems to be a lack of understanding of the prevalence and importance of informal learning at the organisational level. This emphasis on formal and non-formal learning opportunities and gaining more study points is no doubt important for the Church as the organisation develops. However, the systematic lack of recognition of learning is not motivating older pastors to participate in training, nor to stay in service, according to this study.

By taking a biographical approach to interviews about LLL, we were able to capture some of the seemingly marginal episodes in the lives of our learners which have had an effect on the development of their insights and abilities. Opening up the conversation and allowing for reflections on learning that incorporates aspects of spirituality that is not possible to fit into the dominating grid of LLL, the biographical approach made some of the underlying factors more visible. The differences between formalised and informal learning and the tradition of valuing the former may be an unavoidable consequence of the fact that learning frameworks generally stem from the formal education system. By using Alheit's concept of learning biographies, we were able to turn the order around, letting the pastors make more of this embedded learning visible within the dominant framework of LLL.

It is not possible for us to compare our findings directly with other professions, however the strong sense of responsibility and the shared interpretation of the pastors' role are similar to descriptions of values and identity in other professions, e.g., school teachers (Jensen, Lahn, & Nerland, 2012). In Northern Europe, school teachers also share pastors' challenges of adapting a traditional profession to new ways of measuring outcome of services (through pupils' grades) and adjusting professional legitimacy to meet new organisational conditions due to accountability measures. Further research could reveal similar challenges for other professions where traditions of responsibility for one's own learning come up against modern management methods and requirements for measurable learning. We have found that the conceptualisation of LLL may be bringing more awareness of learning into the workplace and that this may be an advantage for older workers. However, belonging to a profession with a built-in concept of professional learning may be more valuable for older employees than working for an employer who embraces LLL.

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