More than skills?

Strategic workplace learning and the benefits of learning

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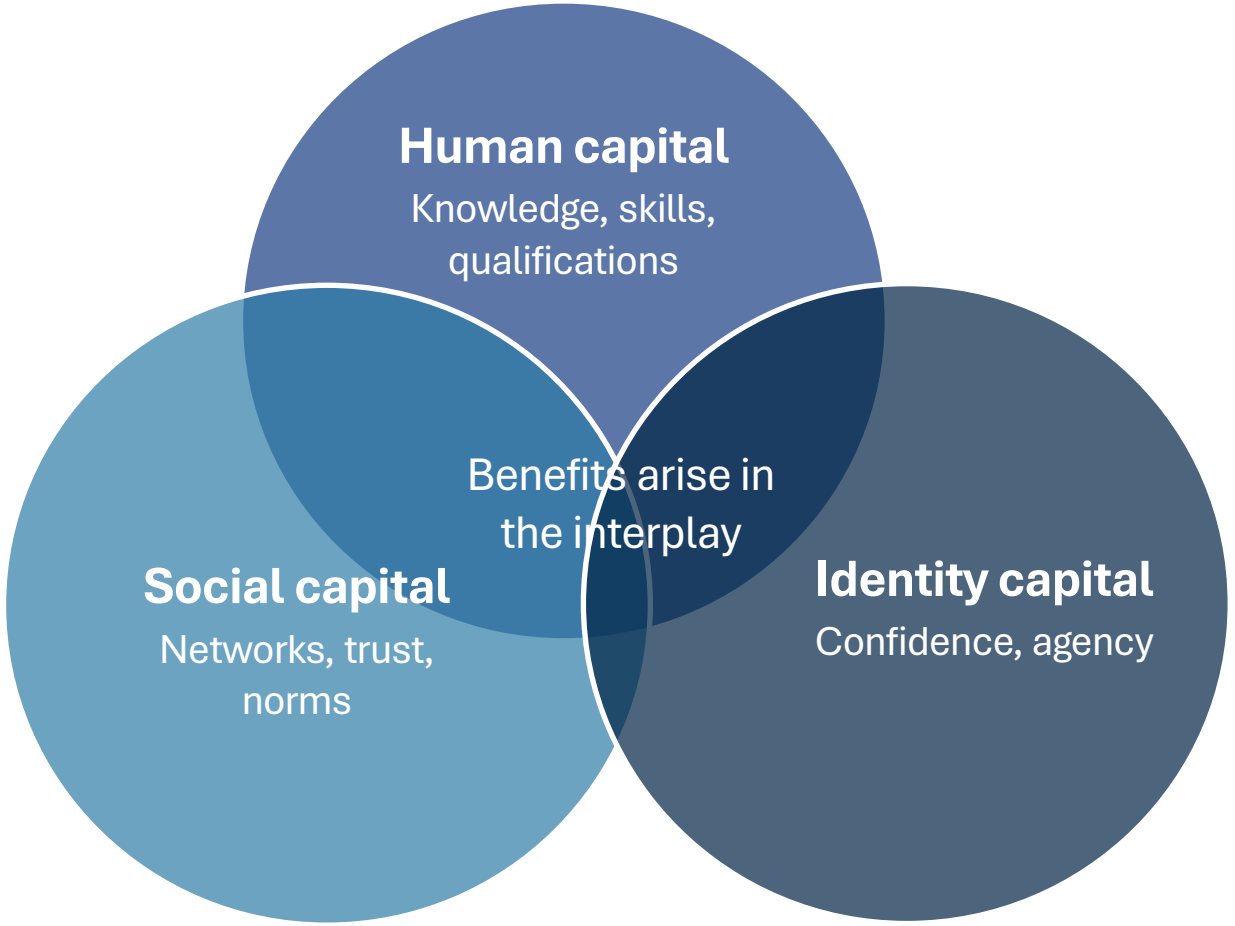
WIDE BENEFITS OF LEARNING

Sustaining effects

Learning maintains wellbeing, identity and relations through change

Transforming effects

Learning changes trajectories, self-understanding and practices

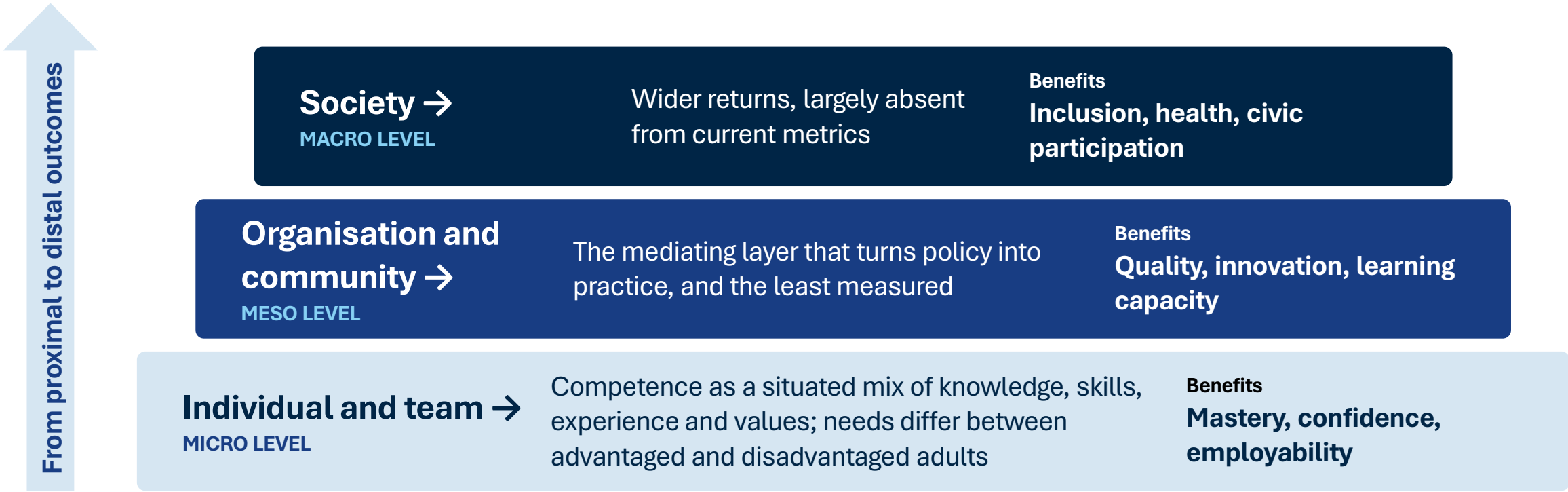


Yet current metrics focus mainly on employability and productivity.

What does the wider view mean for learning at work?

Brandi et al. (2023). The European year of skills 2023; Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Brassett-Grundy & Bynner (2004), The Benefits of Learning

BENEFITS AT SEVERAL LEVELS



- Needs at the three levels do not automatically align. Benefits must be connected across them -

See e.g., OECD (2026), Desjardins & Kalenda - Micro, meso and macro levels; proximal and distal outcomes

MOST LEARNING IS INFORMAL



Formal

Structured and intentional, leading to recognised qualifications, long duration

VET, degree programmes



Non-formal

Organised and intentional, without formal qualifications, short duration

Courses, in-house training



Informal

Arises in everyday work, often unplanned and unrecognised

Problem-solving, colleagues, digital resources

A continuum, not shares: most learning has formal and informal qualities. Not 70-20-10.

Blind spot: informal learning is where learning grows fastest, yet it is weakly designed and measured.

- Types tell us where learning happens, not what learning is -

Brandi & Iannone (2016). Learning strategies in enterprises; Eurostat (2016). Classification of learning activities – Manual: 2016 edition; Jeong et al. (2018). Review on informal learning

FOUR THEORIES OF LEARNING

	Functionalist: learning as something organisations have		**Process-oriented: learning as something organisations are**	
	Routines	**Communication**	**Practice**	**Pragmatism**
Learning as	Acquiring knowledge and processing experience to change routines	Detecting and correcting errors by changing theories of action and communication	Access to and participation in communities of practice	Inquiry into and resolution of uncertain situations
What the theory sees	How routines are stabilised and renewed; learning traps	Defensive reasoning and undiscussables that block learning	Access, trajectories and uneven participation	Uncertain situations, experimentation and consequences
Outcome in focus	**Knowledge and skills; renewed routines**	**Reflective capacity; revise knowledge and assumptions**	**Competence in practice; identity**	**Experience and judgement in the new**
What providers can do	Targeted interventions: courses, procedures, feedback	Reflection on assumptions: dialogue, reviews, action research	Create conditions: access, onboarding, mentoring	Create conditions: spaces for inquiry, learning labs

- Skills are one outcome among several. Each theory sees something and misses something else -

Brandi & Elkjær (2026). Organisatorisk læring, in Klassisk og moderne organisationsteori, 2nd ed.

WORK CREATES LEARNING NEEDS

INTEGRATION connects demand and supply so that learning reaches the work, by connecting

Actors: managers, employees, union reps, providers

Designs: a portfolio, not one default

Analysis and action: the need is analysed, not assumed

Demand

Which learning does the work actually require?

Analyse the problem. Do not assume the need.



inform each other

Supply

Which designs can meet it?

A range of designs, beyond the course as the default.

WORK is the source of learning needs and the condition for learning, where the logics of production and development pull in different directions. AI, digitalisation and the green transition are moving the boundary between routine and non-routine work.

Integrating learning and work: Ellström (2011); Brandi & Iannone (2021). Work design: Wijga, Beausaert & Kyndt (2025)

TWO CASES, TWO BENEFITS





Building Innovation Capacity – competence development in practice

Husqvarna Group and Easyfood

Learning and development approach

Process-oriented: practice and pragmatism

Learning design

Learning labs: cross-functional groups work on real challenges

Learning benefits

Broader view on learning, collaboration as social capital, reflection as value creation



Skills development for employees with short education

Novo Nordisk and ISS facility services

Learning and development approach

Functionalist: targeted skills development

Learning design

Skills development based on needs identified at several levels

Learning benefits

Work language and technical skills, used at work and in daily life, e.g. MitID

THREE POINTS OF ATTENTION

1

Benefits are unevenly distributed

Education level predicts who learns at work, and routine jobs get the fewest developmental chances. Yet stabilising routine is learning too: the risk is being confined to it.

2

Design a system, not a default

Identify needs analytically, offer more than the course as the default, and integrate learning in work. Do not fall back on habit.

3

Realisation is not automatic

Knowledge, experience, and skills and competences must be recontextualised and transformed, not just transferred. Courses risk weak transfer; learning labs may lack new knowledge. See learning from failures as opportunities for delvelopment

CLOSING MESSAGES

The question is not which theory of learning is right, but whether our designs for learning match the learning that work, and the transitions ahead, demand.

Build workplace learning capacity

The ability to learn, and to get better at learning

Integrate learning and work

Balance the logics of production and development

Create expansive learning environments

Access, variation and reflection, within and beyond the workplace