



TIIA TAMM

Professional Identity and Self-concept  
of Estonian Social Workers



ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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the Faculty of Education of the University of Tampere,  
for public discussion in the Auditorium of Research Centre  
for Vocational Education, Korkeakoulunkatu 6, Hämeenlinna,  
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## PREFACE

Writing of this doctoral thesis took place in 2000`s, but the these thoughts and ideas were already planted in 1990`s, when Social Work Department (now Social Work Institute) of Tallinn University headed by professor Taimi Tulva started cooperation with Research Centre for Vocational Education at the University of Tampere, headed by professor Pekka Ruohotie.

Although I had finished courses in andragogy, the subject matter encountered in Research Centre for Vocational Education was extraordinarily more complex and interesting. Most importantly, it was about educating today`s social workers on how to find the best opportunities for development. Inspired by all that was being researched and taught by various specialists at the Centre, I enrolled to doctorate studies in Tampere University 1999. Based on my fresh knowledge I created a new study course “Professional growth and professionalism” (for social work curriculum), which I still teach (now only to master`s degree students). In 2008 my textbook on this subject was published, too. Therefore, it is natural that my research topic is the professional identity of social workers, which is important motivational factor of life-long learning and professional growth.

I feel honoured that my doctoral thesis was supervised by professor Pekka Ruohotie, highly respected and groundbreaking researcher. I am grateful to professor Ruohotie for his supervising as well as for the great lectures and seminars he has held in Tallinn University. Social work post-graduate students and social workers have with great interest listened his lectures and conference presentations.

I am very grateful to professor Kari Korpelainen for consulting me. He has a very good understanding social context of Estonian society and therefore gave me expert advice in certain aspects that helped me to improve my doctoral thesis. I would also like to thank doctor of educational sciences Hilikka Roisko for her very constructive remarks and comments. I also wish to thank the staff of the Research Centre for Vocational Education and my special thanks go to warm and supportive friend Airi Kokkonen, who has helped me enormously in organizational and logistical issues while I was sharing my time between Tallinn and Hämeenlinna. I also wish to express gratitude to librarians in Tampere University library and HAMK library, especially to friend Pirkko Överlund, whose helpfulness and professional attitude are invaluable.

I would also like to thank my colleagues and friends in the Social Institute at Tallinn University, who have always supported and helped in many ways. I am very thankful for Estonian social workers that participated in this research, without them the thesis would not have been completed. Finally special thanks to my family – my husband, my children and my brother – who have for years supported my studies and who have been very understanding during the long thesis writing process.

Tallinn, April 2009

Tiia Tamm

## ABSTRACT

After decades of forced interruption the social work profession development started again in 1990's. Since then social work is a rapidly developing profession in Estonian society. Now, when there is more than fifteen years of work practice, professional development and academic teaching, it is time to research how social workers experience self-development and development of social work profession.

The theoretical framework of this research ties together different conceptions of social workers self and professional self context, professional growth and factors supporting it and development of social work profession in society. Important models and theories in this research are London and Mone's (1987) three-dimensional interpretation of factors motivating professional growth (with professional identity as one dimension of thereof), conceptions of development of professional identity and professional growth according to Dubin (1990), Farr and Middlebrooks (1990), Maurer and Tarulli (1994), Ruohotie (1995, 1999), Ruohotie's (2005) theory of growth-oriented atmosphere and model of Lord, Brown and Freiberg (1999) about working self-concept.

The study goal is to describe the development of professional identity and opportunities for professional growth of social workers and get an overview of the self-concept tendencies of social workers and social work students; understand how social workers perceive the development of a new profession based on their experiences.

The sample (N=122) consisted of social workers that had received academic education in the Tallinn University<sup>1</sup> (N1=41/vilistlased), undergraduate students of the Open University engaged in practical social work, who one month after participating in the survey graduated from the university with a BA degree (N2=52/lõpetajad) and future social workers, first year social work students (N=29/statsionaar). The criterion for inclusion in the sample was academic vocational education from the Tallinn University.

The present research is descriptive multi-strategy research, where the first part of the research is survey type and the second part is based on theme interviews and covers the conceptions of social workers about their development to professional social workers and development of the social work profession in Estonian society.

Survey data were analyzed by using statistical methods (factor analysis, bivariate correlation, variance analysis) in order to describe and explain relation between self-concept and professional identity of social workers; and to find the differences between the sample groups.

Survey results show that social workers' and social work students' self-concept components are empathy, innovativeness, self-confidence and need of achievement. These self-identity components are extremely suitable for shaping the social workers professional identity. Professional-self of social workers is characterized by commitment to work, professional

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<sup>1</sup>1919-1928 Tallinn Teachers' Seminar; 1928-1937 Tallinn Pedagogical School; 1937-1947 Tallinn Teachers' Seminar; 1947-1955 Tallinn Teachers' Institute; 1955-1992 Tallinn Pedagogical Institute; 1992-2005 Tallinn Pedagogical University; 2005- Tallinn University

growth, willingness to take risk and ability to cooperate. They also feel togetherness and strong commitment to collective (work team). All above mentioned characteristics form the basis for the development of professional identity of social workers.

The qualitative data added depth and context to the results of survey. On the basis of the conceptions of social workers, the qualitative content analysis brought out eight main categories and fifty-three subcategories. These categories show professional identity elements of social workers and different aspects of their work on the basis of conceptions of social workers about their experiences of their personal development and the development of social work profession in the newly independent Estonia.

Respondents have all experienced stress and as social work is stressful to psyche, the workers' psychosocial coping should not be just their personal work problem. However, the organizational support mechanisms (such as supervision services) are not available for everyone and therefore social workers have only few personal coping strategies at their disposal – support from the colleagues (who are also burdened) or family and network of friends. Too often, work difficulties also bring social workers too often to the limits of their endurance – there is too much bureaucracy and politicization.

Research results describe social workers as innovative and ready to take risks – enterprising people with strong self-confidence and strong need for achievement. Surprisingly, the features remind one of successful entrepreneurs in the business field. All this might be explained by the fact that in our society both social system and social work profession are in developmental phase, the well-organised system waits yet to be established. During the developmental phase the people participating in the process have more opportunities to find different workable solutions but they also have to be more creative and driven to implement a vision.

Based on my research results it may be concluded that in the future social work may be threatened by lack of recognition. Social workers are often left alone with their heavy workload and they do not receive necessary understanding and support from their organization nor society in general (lack of recognition is proved by the relatively low level of salaries). As there is a clear need of professionals in social work, the society and organizations should support these professionals with strong professional identity and growth motivation that are committed to their work. There should be more acknowledgement and support e.g. with salary rise and by enabling every social worker with supervision service, before the number of those leaving from the field due to the burnout increases.

In summary, it can be said that the research has shed light upon professional identity and professional growth of social workers and the development of social work profession in Estonia. As social work as profession has been little researched in Estonia, it is natural that this research brought out many topics that would need further research. New knowledge is needed in vocational education, it would also be used to help and support social workers in their work environment.

**Keywords:** social work, social worker, professional identity, self-concept, professional growth, vocational education, competence, profession.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

It is eighteen years since Estonia regained independence in 1991. Since then sweeping changes have occurred in political and social life, as well as in the economy. Estonian society, up to 1990, grew out of a totalitarian system in which control over individuals – from their material conditions to their thoughts and ideas – was paramount. Liberation from that system, which oppressed basic human aspirations, gave people freedom to participate in every sphere of society. Emerged the illusion of "Great Promise of unlimited development" – promise of the rule of nature, material providence, greatest possible happiness for as many as possible and unlimited personal freedom" (Fromm 2001).

For some time, people's social activities were high, as were the expectations of the soon-to-come better life. But society's rapid reforms inevitably brought about an unexpected reduction in the average standard of living. People encountered difficulties with living and livelihood, and new social problems appeared, such as social stress, unemployment, poverty, and drug-addiction. Problems that had already existed, such as alcoholism and crime, became more severe. (Eesti Inimarengu Aruanne 1997, 12.)

Estonia, as a society in transition, proceeded from state socialism to market economy, leaving behind many regulatory means that could have ensured the minimalization of social disparity. Basics for the development were founded on the principles of theoretical models that established lists of transit components in the preferable order (liberalization, privatization, stabilization, etc). International monetary organizations (IMF, the World Bank) have been closely supervised to ensure that regulations have been followed, and they have become almost normative to Estonia. (Terk 1999, 60.)

To many analysts, it appears that the people's well-being has been sacrificed in the name of speedy economic development. The price has been high: more than 40 % of the Estonian population can be considered poor, although the hope of the nation, upon regaining independence, was to achieve, by means of speedy economic development, the benefits of an information society in which all citizens are satisfied and happy members of society.

Now, more than fifteen years later, the direction decided upon during the initial euphoria of independence does not look so good. Occasionally, somebody in Estonia voices the opinion that the society has not achieved its goals. Fears of dictatorship stemming from a long experience with totalitarian society have taken society to the other extreme: dictatorship of the market economy. Not everyone has experienced a steadily increasing income flow and become a satisfied consumer. Many consider themselves poor and repressed. Transformation from planned economy of totalitarian society to market economy created polarization and inequality of income and quality of life in Estonian society.

Income disparity in society is noticeable. Differentiation within society based on income levels may be interpreted as adaptability to market economy. Although the World Bank names Estonia an example of successful transition, according to the World Bank and UNDP research the Estonian population has divided into three uneven layers. The research is based on actual socio-economic position (occupation, income, and level of consumption) as well as people's own evaluation of their success and competitive ability. (Pettai 1998.)

Layer I is comprised of successfully adjusted elite and the upper-middle class (23%). They became smoothly accustomed with the market economy, came to hold the highest socio-economic standing, and accumulated 50% of the total population's income. Most of them live in the Tallinn area or other larger cities. Their characteristic features are high education and very good professional preparation. Most of the members of layer I are Estonians (80%). Their integration into the new society is markedly better and faster than that of those in other layers, and their influence is decisive because they hold leading positions in politics, economy, culture and education.

Layer II consists of lower-middle class (33%) that has managed to survive although with some difficulty. They accumulate 30% of the total population's income and on the labour market, they can choose from those positions that are left unfilled by Layer I. Layer II's influence on the processes that take place in Estonia is indirect and conditional. They are not directly suppressed but they are not materially involved in the formation of social processes. Elementary social needs such as approval and self-actualization are not satisfied in this layer, and they also lack sense of security and stability for the future. Insufficient integration into the society results from inadequate professional training and they themselves lack resources (time and money) necessary for advanced and conversion training.

Layer III (44%) consists of people who have great difficulties with adjusting to the society: they cope poorly with everyday economic problems and they are suppressed on the labour market. Every fourth person in this group is either permanently unemployed or a social outcast. They accumulate only 20% of the total population's income. Characteristic features of this layer are the lowest level of education and the largest amount of non-Estonians (52%). Layer III influence the social processes minimally and in a totally indirect way. Representatives of this layer feel predominantly suppressed. The lowest sub-layer of this layer (12%) is practically not integrated into the society.

For a society, to function normally, it would be necessary that 50-60% of the population were well educated and enterprising and could have a sense of mission. There should be enough of them in all spheres of the society too. Presently, the 23% of the population in Estonia cannot have an effective impact in every realm (Pettai 1998, 64-67).

Accumulation of social problems has created a lot of tension and discontent in the society. Alienation, disregard of people's will and deepening imbalance in the state's development serve as a backdrop of coping difficulties and suppression. A large part of the population who cannot cope with everyday life, instability and lack of security form new groups that are not able to manage on their own and need assistance. At the same time the number of problems increase and new risk groups emerge. This unfortunate development indicates shortcomings in social policy, especially in carrying out social reforms.

Due to unemployment and income discrepancies, poverty is the reason why many members of the society are not able to cope. Poverty is one of the major global social problems which jeopardize sustainable human development in many countries. "Poverty in Europe in the threshold of the 21st century is a political scandal and a social catastrophe," was a statement made during the EU summit on social issues "Towards Greater Social Justice in Europe: the Challenge of Marginalization and Poverty" 1991, Strasbourg (Eesti Inimarengu Aruanne 1999).

In Estonia, unemployment emerged due to the transition from one economic system to another. In addition to a macro-economic shock, the reasons for unemployment are passivity

towards conversion training, lack of mobility and incapability to adapt to the conditions of the market economy (EV Sotsiaalministeerium 2000).

Unemployment and poverty are interlinked. After Estonia regained its independence, the main factors increasing poverty have been a general economic recession (which brought along the structural and regional decrease of employment rate and consequently the decline of welfare), the change of principles on how to distribute the resources of the public sector (speedy marketing of social welfare system, stressing the importance of self-help mentality, etc), and inefficiency of existing coping strategies in the changed social situation (Kutsar, Tiit & Trumm 1999, 75). Poverty in present day Estonia affects above all families with children, the young unemployed and also the members of the older generation, many of whom have not been able to find their place in the rapidly changing society. However, the average old-age pension is above the poverty line. At the same time, social protection of the unemployed has remained insufficient, impoverishing families with children. Decrease in employment rate has been very rapid and extensive in agricultural regions, e.g. it has caused unemployment and consequent coping difficulties in South-East Estonia (Marksoo 2002, 83). Therefore, due to structural and regional unemployment, regional poverty has developed in Estonia. The following risk-groups have emerged: families with children, the elderly and the unemployed (EV Sotsiaalministeerium 2000).

The influence of poverty is partially latent. Some social processes such as changes in education and population's general health take time to appear, e.g. the number of people with psychological problems has increased during past years. Therefore the actual impact of poverty in these areas is yet to become visible. Some of the primary results of poverty such as the social isolation of the people excluded from the labour market, loss of self-confidence and perspectives for the future, and rapidly deepening marginalization of the long-term unemployed are already noticeable now (Kutsar, Tiit & Trumm 1999, 78-79). At the same time, poverty is not defined in any legislative act in Estonia and therefore there is no officially defined poverty line either. Set subsistence level, which is the basis for dispensing subsistence support to needy households, indirectly operates as a poverty line (EV Sotsiaalministeerium 2000). The U.N. has set their line for extreme poverty at living on less than \$1 a day. In Estonia, 2 % of households (2.9 % of the population) live under these conditions. (EV Sotsiaalministeerium 2000.)

It seems that Estonian politicians have acted on the assumption that the social problems in Estonia will be solved by the rapid development of the economy and the increasing economic growth. Yet it is not possible to postpone tackling social problems: their number is increasing and more and more people are being influenced.

Problems related to the misuse of alcohol as a legal narcotic are not new in Estonia but those related to the spread and consumption of illegal narcotics are. Only ten years ago it was impossible or at least very difficult to obtain illegal narcotics in Estonia. Recently, both trying and using narcotics has increased primarily in the younger age groups. Older people, whose narcotisation habits involve consumption of alcohol, do not usually start using new substances. A similar tendency prevails in other European countries where the use of illegal narcotics is mainly spread among the younger generations.

According to the Estonian Drug Prevention Foundation, the number of patients with mental disorders or conduct disorders stemming from alcohol or drug abuse has been increasing since 1995 (Allaste 2000, 49). Drug and alcohol abuse are among the primary causes of increase of crime in the society. As crime rates rise all over the world, also Estonia confronts problems of high criminality and decreased safety of residents. Crime increase in Estonia as a transit

society has been defined as a manifestation of the deviation of the norms and social disorganization which is caused by the weakening of people's inner norms and diminishing of state control (Saar 1999, 54).

Inevitably, the breakdown of the old system brought along a fall in living standards, amplified social problems, an increase in social pessimism, and growth of crime (Aimre 2002). According to Kurik and Terk (2002) there has also been along with an increase of crime a shift in the crime structure; the percentage of criminal offences against property and the economic crime are constantly increasing. Among the main reasons for crime proliferation are poverty, unsatisfactory living conditions, low level of education and other shortcomings in the society.

One of the most complex tasks that Estonia has to face, is the adjustment with the recurrent demographic situation. As a result of the Soviet Union's Russification policy the percentage of Estonians in the population of the country decreased to 63-64%. At present, one third of the Estonian population consists of non-Estonians, mostly immigrants of Slavic descent. One part of the Soviet era immigrants have Estonian citizenship, another part have Russian or some other citizenship and they are considered foreigners. There are almost 50 000 non-citizens residing in Estonia without any legal grounds. (Heidmets 1998, 49-50.)

In the beginning of the 1990s it was assumed that these immigrants would return to their homelands but this did not happen. There are several obstacles and problems regarding the integration of non-Estonians into the society. These problems are related to language skills (the immigrants do not understanding Estonian or any other language but Russian) but also to the low level of education, which means uncertain perspective regarding vocation and education. The Russian-speaking population worked mainly in those branches of economy which have gone into recession since Estonia regained independence (e.g. Soviet Union military related engineering and metallurgical industry) (Eesti Inimarengu Aruanne 1998). Unemployment and poverty of non-Estonians is accompanied by prostitution and alcoholism. Rapid spread of drug abuse and AIDS have become difficult problem in past years.

Due to the economic growth, in the middle of 2000`s several sharp problems have eased but they are still present. Continues differentiation that results great stratification in the society. Change and continuation of problems is reflected in National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008 (EV Sotsiaalministeerium 2006). In this report economic, demographic and social situation of Estonia is analyzed and government's strategic starting points to improve social involvement are presented.

As a result of positive changes in Estonia's economy (increased employment, reduced unemployment, increase in wages and pensions) and the growth of residents' real income the number of people living in absolute poverty has decreased year-by-year. The share of households living in absolute poverty has decreased by almost a half (14.2% in 2004) and there has been a significant decrease in the share of both adults (from 32.8% in 1998 to 17.0% in 2004) and children (from 40.4% in 1998 to 25.3% in 2004) living below the absolute poverty line (absolute poverty line defined in terms of minimum consumption – food, housing, clothes, education, transport – and the indicator is adjusted annually in accordance with the consumer price index). There has been a slight elevation in the relative risk-of-poverty rate (EU relative poverty line) during last two years – in 2004 some 19.3% of the population received incomes below the 60% median income (the EU average was 16%). During recent years the inequality of income distribution has generally remained at the same level, with the richest receiving six time the income of the poorest in 2004 (compared to only 4.8 across the EU) (Sotsiaalministeerium 2006). Risk groups – the poor, the old, the disabled

or those without suitable work, families with children and etc. – still need continuous material as well as psycho-social professional assistance.

According to Swedner's (1976) typology of social problems, the accumulation of social problems in Estonian society includes both process problems as well as structural problems. Process problems refer to social processes that cause low living standard and insufficient well-being of individuals or groups. Structural problems are caused by society's structural properties and according to Swedner they are caused by process problems. Resource problems form a subtype of structural problems, which indicate that there are not enough resources in the society to satisfy the needs of every individual member. Swedner says that process problems, structure problems and resource problems are social phenomena, but that they are expressed on the individual level. It appears from Swedner's typology that individual or household problems should be regarded as a reflection of society's macro level. For this reason, it is not possible to solve problems on the individual level without adopting measures to solve process problems and structure problems in the background.

In the 1990s, Estonia was in a situation where there was no efficient system of measures and the growth of social problems created the need for an entirely new assistance system, social system. Social security departments were created at local governments; there was a movement to take the organizing of social work and welfare from the Soviet era centralization to the grass-root level, back to the local authorities. Complexities of a transitional society offered real challenges for the social work, but there were no professional social workers. For this reason Tallinn Pedagogical University (in 1991) and University of Tartu (in 1992) started to educate social workers. In the Soviet era the existence of social problems was denied; trade unions and personnel departments had to solve all problems relating to social work, and therefore social workers were not trained. (Kõrda & Tammeleht 1998.). Those who had been trained in social work during the first Estonian republic were already at the age of retirement but there were no new specialists graduating from universities (Tulva 1996). Many people who moved to social work from other professions had an opportunity to acquire higher education either as full time students or by a correspondence course. Social work related training alleviated the enormous need for competent social workers (Tulva 1995, 61).

At present, Estonian society has severe social problems – stratification, unemployment and poverty which cause social exclusion and therefore create tensions in the society. An authority which has to deal with relieving and soothing the existing problems on a daily basis is consisting of the representatives of social work in different social work fields.

I started to work as a social worker in 1992 together with the first social workers in Estonia. I have experienced that there is an enormous load of problems and tasks that the society expects social workers to help to solve. Since social work as a profession is unknown and new for all age groups in our society, then the expectations that the society places on social workers are sometimes unjustifiably high. This pressure strains social workers. It causes feelings of helplessness while helping those needing help, is laborious and involves changing work tasks, which all make it quite a challenge in everyday work.

Social work is a new, but a rapidly developing profession in Estonian society. The experience as a social worker and now teaching social workers has raised several questions: how to endure difficult everyday work where new tasks emerge constantly, stay competent, achieve good results and at the same time pursue professional growth. What kind of personality traits should a social worker have in order to cope with their work? Are there certain characteristic influential factors? Would the philosophy of the profession need to be accepted to create cohesion with work and professional identity to develop? There are some other questions as

well. Does professional academic education help to cope with the work? How should the work organization (or the society) support and motivate social worker's work and professional growth? Do social workers also perceive the society's support and not only the expectations? Which are social workers' own experiences about the development of a new profession in the society?

In this research I will attempt to find answers to these questions. These answers will be of practical help when teaching social workers and with the aid of vocational education to support the development of professional identity. The broader purpose of the research study is to describe and understand the social worker's conceptions of development of their profession and factors influencing professional growth and the status of social work profession in the society.

My general research goal is to describe the elements of professional identity and opportunities for professional growth of social workers and get an overview of the self-concept tendencies of social workers and social work students; understand how social workers perceive the development of a new profession based on their experiences.

The broader purpose of the research study is to describe and understand the social workers' conception of development of their profession and factors influencing professional growth and the status of social work profession in society. There are many factors influencing cohesion with work, identification with profession and therefore the development of professional identity is a rather subjective phenomenon. This phenomenon is influenced by many work and organization related context factors that may be either supportive or hindering.

The development process of professional identity is studied on the basis of the conception of social workers and social work students: how they evaluate their personal characteristics, what they deem important in social work; nature and content of social work. It is also important to examine how social workers regarded the development of the new profession in society while being themselves in a position to influence this process.

The following research tasks emerged from these goals: explore the structure of professional self-concept and important characteristics of social workers and social work students; describe the context factors influencing the development of professional identity and professional growth; analyze the relationship between personal characteristics and work process and work organization related factors; describe the nature, status of social work in the Estonian society and developmental difficulties of the profession based on the conceptions of experiences of social workers.

## 2 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN ESTONIA

### 2.1 Development of the Social Security System in 1918–1940

In order to monitor the development of Estonian social care professions and social workers, we have to look back to the 1920s. As elsewhere in Europe, helping professions have in the cultural and historical context been women's professions.

The First World War (WWI) continued in Estonia as the War of Independence. As a result Estonia gained its independence from tsarist Russia. Estonia quickly adopted democratic constitution and progressive land and education laws. Due to all of that, Estonia underwent rapid development and could ensure its citizens a living standard and subsistence on the level which was considered comparable to other Western European countries.

But the war brought about a grave social situation: thousands of men had been killed on the front or had lost their ability to work. The number of people who needed help was great and it took the drive and unity of Estonian women to assist their nation. By that time Estonian women had already become somewhat organized and had developed certain views about the society. Already in 1917, during the war, the first women's conference took place in Tartu where 17 women's organizations and many individuals participated. The conference organizers presented different problems that needed solutions. In order to be able to assist in finding solutions to the society's problems women needed political rights. The conference participants demanded the independent Estonian Republic social reforms and vocational education. Among many other resolutions adopted by the conference, it was decided to create an umbrella organization, the Estonian Women's Association, which aimed to consolidate these forces in the society that could assist in helping those in need. The so called male public and politicians expressed their support to the conference's resolutions (Kiitam 1998, 3). The Ministry of Work and Social Care was created in 1918 and existed under this name until 1929. The Ministry's task was to establish the social care system and to organize the assistance to a multitude of those in need. The Ministry also dealt with the occupational safety and social policy issues (Leppik 1994, 16).

Tsarist Russia had left almost no resources for organizing the social care in the young Estonian Republic. Individual social care institutions that had been operational earlier were closed down due to difficult times. WW I produced more of those who needed help, mainly war invalids and orphans (Leppik 1994; Tulva 1999; Kiitam 1998). It can be said that it was at the time when Estonian women started to practise social work actively and enthusiastically, although it became apparent in the process that there was a lack of trained social care experts, a lot of work to do, and more and more social workers were needed.

During World War I and the War of Independence (1918–1920), it was not possible to organize social care, but the number of those in need increased. Therefore the main tasks were supporting the families of the soldiers and giving medical help to the invalids. Also rehabilitation was organized for the crippled when possible. Special attention was paid to the founding of new care institutions and to the extension of the existing ones. For example, in 1919 there were 2005 beds in different care institutions but by 1924 this number had risen to

4280 (Leppik 1994, 24). The establishment of social care institutions was supported by the government. At the same time attention was paid to the establishment of open care as well. Open care includes assistance to the poor who do not live in social care institutions i.e. giving assistance at somebody's home.

Most of attention was directed towards welfare of mothers and children. Due to the war there were many children left orphans who were taken care of in orphanages. In 1929, there were 3 orphanages for 325 infants; in 1934 there were 27 orphanages for 1500 infants. Children were also given to foster families and their foster parents got monetary relief. Open care was carried out in kindergartens, welfare centres, children's summer camps and other places. Children's welfare was also carried out by the Estonian Children's Care Association, The Estonian Red Cross and societies for child support, which were at the same time supported by the state (Tulva 1999, 5). On June 19, 1925 the Parliament (*Riigikogu*) passed the Social Care Law. The Law was improved in 1935. This Law was based on the Western European principles of social care. Social and health care were made dependent on the Social Care Law, the Healthcare Law and their respective regulations. The Care Council was created at the Ministry of Social Care whose task was to work out the general social care principles and goals and to review the proposed legislative changes (Leppik 1994; Tulva 1997).

On July 1, 1929 the Ministry for Education and Social Care was created. The ministry existed from 1929 to 1936. This assigned education, health and social care under the same administration. In 1936 an independent Ministry for Social Care (1936-1940) came to exist dealing with health, children's care, social care and pensions. There were two kinds of care: open and stationary. Of all people needing support 87% got assistance from the local authorities and 7% from the state (Children and social care 1937, 5-6; ref. Leppik 1994). It appears that in social care as a whole, most of the responsibility was given to local authorities. The state's role was mainly directive instead of being supportive. Those needing help were divided into groups based on their issues and were treated in different ways. Estonia developed a comprehensive social care system.

The extensive actual social care work was mainly done by women. Many of them were educated abroad and then shared their knowledge at home. But as there was a need for trained social workers it became necessary to create facilities for teaching social workers also in Estonia. At the Women's Congress in 1925 special training was discussed (Kiitam 1998; Tulva 1997).

With the support and guidance of the Estonian Women's Association the Tallinn Institute of Social Work and Household Economy (Tallinna Sotsiaal- ja Kodumajanduse Instituut) opened its doors in 1935, starting to train social assistants, kindergarten teachers and dieticians. Social assistants started to work in local governments, schools and other educational establishments, youth organizations, child welfare centres, orphanages, hospitals and homes for the elderly. It was a novel 3-year educational institution for girls who had graduated from the college. The institute was based on the Central European principles of social pedagogy.

According to Tulva (1997, 6) it could be summarized, that a social care system was established in Estonia during the first period of independence. Self-help organizations as well as the state had an important role to play in this process. The work was done by trained specialists.

## 2.2 Social Care-Related Work during the Soviet Period (1940–1991)

A smoothly functioning social welfare system and social work training that were just gaining momentum were broken down when the Second World War started and Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union. The occupied Estonian Republic was named the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (ESSR) and incorporated to the totalitarian Soviet Union.

During the war and even some time after that, the Tallinn Institute of Social Work and Household Economy still officially existed, but Soviet partocracy had no need for such an institution. The educating of social workers was completely discontinued in 1950 and the teaching of kindergarten teachers and dieticians was transferred to secondary and vocational schools.

In the Soviet era the social workers who had received education in the Estonian Republic remained active in the health care and education system, but never as social workers. This title was never used at the Soviet time.

As a part of the communist totalitarian state, Estonia had to follow Soviet Russia's statehood system. The social welfare system was arranged on the basis of new principles and subordinated to central authorities. The communist centralized system became the authority for political, economical and social spheres. Traditions were replaced with new paradigms (Tulva 1997, 7). The standpoint for the Estonian Republic as an independent state was to protect mothers and children. Since in the Soviet era the aim of policy was the russification of Estonia with the purpose of creating a Soviet nation, this principle of national consistency was out of the question. The social welfare system was also put to the service of this Soviet era russification policy. It had the task to assist war veterans, invalids and "personal pensioners" (retired high-ranking party officials who received special benefits) in order to arrange their lives. So fifty years the most important problem for the social welfare system was the servicing of war-veterans and war-invalids and securing their special favours (Leppik 1994, 20). The department for employment and welfare of the Social Insurance Ministry of the ESSR (1946-1979) took care of the job of the service for war-invalids and war-veterans. In bigger towns departments of social insurance were created that counselled people with problems, such as inability to work, need for a custodian, etc. In 1948 there were 35 social care institutions in Estonia, mainly closed orphanages, old people's homes and homes for disabled people. All decisions affecting a person's life were made far from the client at higher levels of bureaucracy.

During the 1970s and 1980s there was an attempt to motivate people and support their livelihoods by bringing distribution of favours and recognition closer to the people – namely to the workplace. The structure used for executing this policy was personnel departments in cooperation with the Communist Party organization and the trade unions. These organizations distributed benefits and favours, often in the form of commodities that in the market economies were available to every worker or employee: household appliances, cars, but also excursions to foreign countries, visits to health resorts, etc. The purpose was to stimulate the overall work motivation. As a result the women's employment in Estonia was the highest in the Soviet Union. In order to foster mothers' to work, the special 24-hour kindergartens were created, which lead to the alienation between parents and children. This trend was particularly popular in the 70's and in the beginning of the 80's. Disabled children were gathered into the closed social care institutions and that was prevailing principle for decades (Lepik 1994; Tamm 1998). Social care institutions were invariably closed facilities: usually orphanages, old people's homes and nursing homes for disabled people. These people did not exist for other members of society; they were literally hidden inside the closed institutions. Generations

grew up without ever seeing a single disabled person. Also, it was very difficult for a child brought up in a closed orphanage without socialization to cope in the society. In reality these problems were ignored. Jussi Simpura (1995) has analyzed the social policy tendencies in the Baltic states during the Soviet era and has concluded that characteristics of that period were:

- denial of the existence of social problems
- state-centralized management of social welfare
- an important role of the work place and trade unions in distributing the welfare services (social benefits) to the special groups singled out on the basis of set criteria and
- social work and health care related activities were under the supervision of several ministries.

According to Tulva (1997, 7) heavy state surveillance and interference in social care were characteristic of the Soviet occupation era. If we are to view this system and ideology as the social policy of that era, then these policies could be described as paternalistic and dependent on the policy of the Communist party in power. As the state's role in social policy grew, the power of local authority's decreased and especially the role of voluntary organizations, that were principally unacceptable to the totalitarian system, were diminished. Any initiative from bottom to top was forbidden. The work of the social worker as 'helper' and 'doctor of the society' was carried out by the professionals in the neighbouring fields: doctors, teachers, lawyers and kindergarten teachers etc., who could not avoid facing the people's problems.

These decades were used to destroy the values that are based on peasant culture and that are natural for Estonians (importance of the home and family, sense of solidarity, need for privacy, etc.) and to force the change of lifestyle and - place. Ideological vigilance and total mental control oppressed people and shaped them often into apathetic followers. In order to succeed professionally, the more active people had to follow a double standard – one person among the friends and family, a totally different person at the work place. The double morality that damaged personalities, the destruction of self-initiative that lead to apathy, and the sense of surrender have been carried forward into the new, changed society and are among the reasons of why some people are not coping in society.

### 2.3 Development of Social Work in the Newly Independent Estonia (since 1991)

The second period of National Awakening started during Gorbachov's *perestroika*-period, (1985–1991). Perestroika started a democratization process in Soviet Union. The living standard in Estonia was one of the highest in the Soviet Union, but as a result of the policy of russification, by 1989 only 61% of Estonia inhabitants were Estonians. There were general worries about the viability of a nation and in the improving society it was possible in 1991 to organize a referendum on independence. The intelligentsia and country people were the actual retainers of the national identity. In 1988–1989 the intelligentsia emerged on the political arena during the “singing revolution”. In March 1991 a referendum was organized, that showed that most of the citizens supported Estonia's independence. Estonia was declared independent on August 20, 1991. The Soviet Union acknowledged Estonia's independence on September 6, 1991.

The collapse of the Soviet state put an end to its economical and political system. Estonia was put into the situation of a social transition: movement from a totalitarian to a democratic society, from a planned and regulated economy to a market economy (Tulva 1997). The social welfare system changed radically as well – social welfare management returned to the local authorities, as it was during the first Estonian Republic. Radical changes were too rapid for people to adjust smoothly. It was very difficult for the people coming from rigidly regulated society to adapt to the rules of a market economy. The state that has regained independence has to solve many social problems. They are related to the great changes in the society and rooted to the previous communist system, such as vast groups of migrants that are not integrated to society, collapse of the (war) industry and collective farming system not needed in the market economy. The development brought along great numbers of unemployed and all the problems related to that, poverty and crime foremost. But another reason for problems is the liberal socio-political tendencies that are fundamentally different from the Nordic countries' social policy models.

In today's Estonian society the purpose of the social sphere structures is to ensure that those in need are provided with necessary support and services, to create and support a child welfare system and to ensure health care and insurance. The relevant legislation the Social Welfare Act that was approved in 1995 and later amended and supplementary legislations added.

## 2.4 Social Work Training in Estonia and Set Standard of Quality

Already in 1925 the 3rd Congress of Estonian Women discussed the issue of teaching social care workers. Independent Estonia had granted equal rights for men and women and the beginning of social work and social work education are related to the Estonian women's movement. The ideals of the women's movement materialized only ten years later. In 1935 the Tallinn Household Economics Institute was created. It was in 1940 renamed Tallinn Social Work and Household Economy Institute. (See 2.1).

Social work was taught to young women who had graduated from high school. The Institute had three departments: social work, child rearing and dietetics. After graduation, students received the diploma of social aid, kindergarten teacher or dietician. The most important and modern was the social work department, because child rearing and dietetics had been taught to Estonian women before, but social workers had not had the opportunity for higher learning in the country.

The first year in the institute gave modern knowledge and skills necessary to a mother and a household keeper: everything related to household economics and house keeping, home design and improvement. The curriculum also included family health care, adults', elderly-, and children's health care, family legislation, sociology, nursing, children's welfare, social laws, social health care, social pedagogy and philosophy, but also in view of the importance of the good health of future mothers, the theory and practice of physical training. All the teaching and practical training gave an idealized picture of the society, but each student knew how to apply the acquired knowledge and skills in real life. Teaching was a great step forward for social work and social culture.

Social work assistants went to work in local authorities administrations, government institutions, youth organizations, associations, educational institutions, hospitals, old peoples' homes. Kindergarten teachers – in kindergartens, orphanages, educational institutions, youth camps. Dieticians – in hospitals, health centres, canteens, restaurants, etc. Work was new and interesting, but also difficult – everyone had to prove the necessity of one's work and their position in society.

The training of social workers in the first Estonian Republic (1935–1940) was a good reference for the newly independent Estonia to start teaching social workers again. The Tallinn Social Work and Household Economy Institute students followed theory with practicum that had to be carried out in the field. During the study session narrower specialization took place, which was followed by a more personalized complementary teaching both in theory and in practice. Graduation thesis had to include research. The thesis was supervised by a lecturer or a specialist from outside the institute. Students had to defend their thesis in front of a state committee and the state committee also decided on the graduates' work assignments (Lepik 1994; Tulva 1996; Kiitam 1998; Niinemets 1996). The importance of this institute cannot be overstressed. It was a giant leap forward in social work and there was a great deal of work and sense of mission invested into it. The Institute was created at the peak of the women's' movement and at the same time, the government's involvement was ensured. It can be concluded that after the war the Estonian Republic rather quickly managed to create a working and flexible social care system thus to lay the foundation for the modern social work and social work training.

Fifty years of interruption in social work and social work teaching was a grave difficulty that society needed to overcome. Since there were no specially educated social workers, the former trade union workers, teachers, kindergarten teachers and people from medical fields moved on to social care. Almost every tenth social worker became a social worker by accident; 28% were influenced by altruistic motives. There are different profession titles in use (49) and they do not always give an adequate picture of the actual work the social worker is doing (Niinemets 1996). It was necessary to build a structure for the teaching of social work, where the main emphases were on academic education and also in continuing education. Academic teaching in social work was started in 1991 at Tallinn Pedagogical University and 1992 in Tartu University.

The teaching that started in Tallinn Pedagogical University in 1991 meant the beginning of the academic social work teaching in Estonia. This teaching is "in Estonian, and it follows national and cultural specialty" (Tulva 1996, 127). According to Niinemets (2001) in 1992 the Social Work chair was created, and in 1993 the Department of Social Work was established in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Tallinn Pedagogical University is focusing on the general preparation of the social worker. There is the same tendency in Central- and Eastern European countries. Humanistic values, knowledge about the interaction between individual and society, social work theory and methodology, and work with client are important in the social workers' education. Practical training in various social institutions helps to unite theoretical knowledge with practical social work. Lecturers-scholars are from, Germany, USA, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Great Britain, Austria, Canada, etc.

Academic training of social work is a four-year BA training. Yearly admittance is between 15–20 students. Competition for admittance is tight: the highest rate in 1999, when there were 32 candidates per place. Additionally, since 1992 there has been in every year a conversion training group admitted to competence training and their first class graduated in June 1994. Also, the Open University (correspondence training) offers academic education for social workers already working in the field. College graduates working in social welfare have been

admitted to the competence training course, which they have completed in two years (Tulva 1996).

There are five social work study programs: the Doctor's Degree course was started 1997/98. In February 2000 and 2007 Tallinn Pedagogical University's (TPU) social work curriculum was accredited in every level (BA, MA, PhD) for seven years. Research is important in the development of social work, and activities in the field were already started in the beginning of the 1990's as soon as the social work training was restarted in Estonia. TPU's scientific work in the social work field was evaluated by an international commission of the Ministry of Education and Research of Estonia in 2004 and was rated good. At the same time there is not a sufficient number of specially trained social workers in Estonia. Academic or higher vocational education studiums last for several years, and it takes some time before a specially trained social worker enters the labour market. The competence of social workers has the prerequisite of academic or higher vocational education: it is stated in the Social Welfare Act (1995) and in the professional standards of social workers (2001). Despite the legislation, there are still social workers in the field who have not received the academic or higher special training. According to Tulva (2000), only 22% of social workers had special higher or academic education. (Tulva 2000, 8–9). As of January 1, 2001 there are 295 graduated in social work, 90 of those were full-time students and 205 part-time students. As of January 1, 2004 the master's study has been completed by twenty-three and the doctorate study by two people. As of 01.01.2010 there are 731 people who have graduated from Tallinn University in social work (BA, MA level).

In 2000, vocational reform was started. The purpose of the reform was to create qualification requirements system to ensure competitiveness of the Estonian workforce. For this purpose professional councils were established that had to reach agreements on professional qualifications between different parties in the labour market. The Professional Standard of Estonian Social Workers was completed in 2001. The Professional Standard is an official document that determined demands on education, skills, experience, personal characteristics and values. The Professional Standard is the level of competence in the social work field that is approved either on the basis of legislation or internationally developed requirements. A social worker may, on the basis of the Professional Standard, apply for the attestation of professional qualification. Professional qualification is fixed on five levels (Vocational Reform 2000; Professional Standard Social Worker 2001).

The Professional Standard is also the basis of the vocational education in Estonian universities and vocational institutions. Another basis document for vocational training is the Social Ministry's directive No 210, from November 11, 1996. The directive determines vocational education standards for education institutions that teach social workers, social welfare workers and social pedagogues. The directive also determines the basis of the continuing education curriculum. Quality requirements are divided into three chapters: general provisions, concepts with terminology and quality requirements. Quality Requirements, approved in 1996, and the Professional Standard of Social Workers, approved in 2001, are the basis for vocational education of Estonian social workers.

Whereas the modern labour market must be flexible, the broad based vocational education is a necessity for workers to adapt to the constant change in work life. It raises the questions of whether the vocational education, competence and qualification needed in the practical work are in balance, and whether it is a realistic and necessary goal (Rinne & Kivinen 1994, 95).

Estonian higher education reform also influences the vocational education of the social workers. As a member of the European Union, Estonia follows the Bologna declaration to

similize the higher education system to other EU member states' educational systems. For this reason the social workers' vocational education is now, since 2002/03, on the basis of new curricula provided as a 3+2 system (3 years BA + 2 years MA).

## 3 SOCIAL WORK AS AN OCCUPATION AND DEVELOPING PROFESSION

### 3.1 Definition and Tasks of Social Work

#### *Occupation*

There are many fields of social activities, so the professions needed in society are divided into professions on the basis of the division of labour. The division of labour means that the work process as a whole is divided into parts and each part is carried out by a person or a group prepared for that task (Hess, Markson & Stein 2000, 290).

Through time the tendency towards professionalization has been noticeable in society, meaning that the increasing community life have been separated from the every day activities supporting family life. The industrial society's economy is marked by heavy specialization or division of labour (Hess & et al 2000, 170).

*The International Labour Organization (ILO)* defines 1986 'occupation' consisting of set jobs that are coherent with the worker's knowledge, skills, aptitude, work practice and in which the employee could work successfully.

Airaksinen (1991) clearly differentiates occupation and work, even if the latter is demanding and specific. In addition to work and skills, it also includes society's contextual factors. Occupation shapes an individual's position in the society, a representative of an occupation and office profession has certain rights and power in society. A professional always has a specific autonomy, they may make decisions and act independently of the society's decision making systems. In practice, this is power. It can be said that for occupational institutions, their rights and power can be viewed as authority/prestige, since an arranges their internal structure and activity situations in manner suitable to them (Airaksinen 1991, 25).

The competence (sphere of authority) of a profession is based on the jurisdiction that society has authorized/trusted it to carry out specific tasks in society. Factors defining the jurisdiction are not stable or absolute, for this reason competing professions create an interdependent system or profession ecology (Abbott 1988). A profession's authority and prestige depends on values and the meaning that society attributes to the practice of a certain profession, which is either more or less appreciated. Therefore professions are not homogeneous groups because they function depending on the society's needs.

#### *Academic knowledge*

An occupation that is developing or has developed into a profession is characterized by academic knowledge. Although there are many factors influencing the development and competence of professions, academic knowledge is the foundation of the profession. According to Abbott (1988, 9) among the factors influencing professional development, knowledge is the 'currency of competition' for professions.

A profession consists of knowledge and skills of professionals and position and the prestige of profession. These factors are interdependent, prestige preresquires position and specific skills. Without these there is no professional prestige. Position requires specific occupational skills needed for a certain job. There are occupations that have work, position and prestige (e.g. doctors). There occupations that have work and position (e.g. entrepreneur) and then there are people who have casual work, but no position or prestige (Airaksinen 1991).

A profession is characterized by work, position and prestige and is based on the academic knowledge. However, several theories suggest that academic knowledge alone is not enough to cope with the work successfully.

Social work as an occupation demands vocational academic education that is based on theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The scientific basis of the academic knowledge of social work is based on several social sciences. Because of the division of labour in the society, it has come necessary to learn educational and natural sciences as well. Knowledge alone will not be sufficient for successful work. In addition to knowledge, an idea of how to put the knowledge and skills into practice is needed. Besides these, the intuition, creativity, and the ability to be reflective and analyze one's work are also needed. Quality knowledge in social work means a dynamic and active thinking process, characterized by courage and synchronicity, versatility and multidimensionality (Peter 2000; Karvinen 1996; Miley, O'Melia & Du Bois 1995).

The academic knowledge of the social work is based on theoretical paradigms of human and social sciences that help to explain the nature and reasons of human problems and give foundation to predict the influence and effect of the interactive professional relationship. In the broader perspective, the education of social work includes thorough knowledge about human beings and their real life's situation in the society. According to Jarvis (1998) and Jarvis, Holford and Griffin (2001) the academic knowledge forms a base for the attainment of professional qualification, but at the same time it has to be kept in mind that the occupation is constantly changing. Therefore, it follows that absolute knowledge does not exist – everything is relative, dynamic and changing. Systemic thinking as well as creativity, flexibility, and avoidance of stereotypes are important when solving individual's problems through a service network. There is no absolute knowledge in the human services network, because there cannot be "one right way" of doing things or "one right answer" (Halley, Kopp & Austin 1992, 14). Professions use their knowledge base to move into new areas and to make claims of effectiveness and efficiency. It serves to legitimize professional work by clarifying the foundations of the work and tracing it to the major cultural values of rationality, logic and science. So, knowledge system of a profession is critical to the tasks of research, instructions and legitimating, all of which model the field of a profession and strengthen its capacity to reach outside its sphere (Abbott 1988).

The development of the social work profession in Estonia shows the validity of Abbott's model. The social work profession's field of activity is expanding both vertically and horizontally. Social work occupations have emerged besides the social welfare system also in the education system, health care system and juridical system. The occupation in different areas of social work presents the vocational education with specific challenges. At the same time it is important in a small society such as Estonia to maintain a unifying basic academic knowledge of the social work profession. Since academic knowledge is not absolute and stable, it is important to improve and modernize it. It can be done through research and systematification of social work practice. The research gives an opportunity to develop and improve the theoretical foundation of social work.

### *Concepts of the social work*

In the modern society, different occupations have different development narratives: some are very old and some are only recent and developing. Social work belongs to the latter group. In comparison to old professions, such as teacher and doctor, social work is a so called young profession.

In the USA as well as in European countries, social work as a professional occupation is known from the 19th and 20th century. In the earlier period, due to the polarization of gender roles, the helping work was performed by women without pay as part of the homemaking sphere (Gildemeister & Robert 2000). Afterwards, when developing into paid work, social work, as all occupations, had a division of work and position in the society. At the same, the social worker is in the situation in which work presents personal demands. Social work is a human interaction profession and for effective results, cohesion with work and commitment are necessary. The occupation specifics require great human intimacy in the professional relations, understanding, empathy and even a sense of mission, even when practicing paid work. Similarly, all the social work definitions cover this professional field with a normative, idealized model; the way things should be, not the way they are. Since the social work field is extensive, it is possible to define social work based on the roles and functions it fulfils in the society. In Estonia, social work is foremost defined by the support to society's systems. Social work is defined "as a professional activity, the task of which is to help individuals, groups and communities to cope with difficulties by creating and offering services to them" (Sotsiaalhoolekandeseadus 1995).

At present, the *International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)* defines social work as: "The social work profession promotes social change, problem-solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work" (IASSW 2000). Social work according to Sipilä (1989) is a subsystem that ensures normal and sustainable everyday life. Hepworth and Larsen (1993); Miley, O'Melia and Du Bois (1995; 1998); Hepworth, Rooney and Larsen (1997) generalize that social work attempts to develop people's social capability with the aim to satisfy people's everyday needs as well as possible. The subject of social work is a person in need of assistance. The subject means that a person in need of assistance (client) is viewed as an active participant, who himself decides on the matters relating to his life.

However, the client problem-based approach is not the only possible method in social work, but the approach also depends on the context. The context explains the source of the problems and the problem-solving also depends on the context i.e. societal circumstances, and values. The latter depend on the society's historical and cultural traditions, and therefore social work is a social construct. Social work as social phenomena has to be understood in the present day context. At the same, it can only be discussed within the cultural context framework of this society (Payne 1995, 6; 1997, 13–14).

To summarize social work concepts, it may be concluded that these concepts include professional knowledge of social work, and importance of professional practice. Then also societal functions, for which the social work has emerged in the society. Historically, social work has developed from helping activities and has become an important subsystem in society that has to ensure people's coping and well-being.

### *Nature, tasks and professional profile of the social work*

The nature of social work is best described by its numerous tasks and demands, their complexity and changing nature. The changing nature of social work at the micro level is related to the changes in different areas of human life. Social workers as the representatives of a profession and institutions must react in a sensitive and quick manner to changes. As competent professionals, their function in society is to mediate between the individual and society. Compton and Galaway (1994, 3) show that the social work job assignment is to mediate the process through which the individual and the society reach out for each other through a mutual need for self-fulfilment. Louhelainen's (1985) position is that at the macro level of society, the nature of social work is supportive to human development opportunities by using the society's structures and resources. It may be concluded that social work is necessary for the society to function properly – but this work is carried out on the individual's level.

The social work institutions' tasks are to help to solve social and human relation problems and the empowerment of people in order to increase their well-being. Therefore, social work is supported by human behaviour and social systems theories and on the legislative basis intervenes with human life with the purpose of helping. By nature, social work is an improving, rehabilitating, preventive, renewing and helping practical activity. Consequently, social work includes activities directed at improving human and social conditions and alleviating human distress and social problems (Du Bois & Miley 1999, 1–4). According to several social work theories, social work can be defined as the transactions between people and their environment (Parsons, Jorgensen & Hernandez 1994, 2). Many social work theorists and researchers stress empowerment as an important component in the social process. Definitions of Parsons, Jorgensen and Hernandez (1994), Rose (1992), Gutierrez, Parsons and Cox (1998) and Du Bois and Miley (1999) reflect more specifically the nature of social work's intervention. Then – besides helping and supporting – the nature of social work includes protection and empowerment. In the multidimensional social process, the empowerment is viewed as the final goal of client work. As a result of the empowerment process, the client should be capable to cope with problem-solving, decision making, etc., and thus be able to control his own life and fulfil his social roles.

Therefore, empowerment is defined as the process of gaining power, developing power, taking or seizing power, or facilitating or enabling power. According to Torre (1985), Solomon (1976) and Kieffer (1984), the nature and goals of social work's empowerment process are the following:

- empowerment-process is a developmental process that begins with individual growth, and possibly culminates in larger social change
- a psychological state marked by a heightened feeling of self-esteem, efficacy, and control.

On the basis of above reflections empowerment can be described as a process through which people become strong enough to participate within, share in the control of, and influence events and institutions affecting their lives. Empowerment necessitates that people gain particular skills, knowledge, and sufficient power to influence their lives and the lives of those they care about. The concept of empowerment is interpreted by the following components: citizenship competence, sociopolitical literacy, political competence or participatory competence. Parsons, Jorgensen and Hernandez (1994, 106–107) collate the requisite conditions of these components as follows:

- a personal attitude or sense of self that promotes active social involvement
- knowledge and capacity for critical analysis of the social and political systems that define the environment
- an ability to develop action strategies and cultivate resources for attainment of own goals
- an ability to act in an efficacious manner in concert with others to define and attain collective goals.

It may be summarized that empowerment is an important aspect of the social processes and shows the broad scale and multidimensional activity practice. Therefore, besides theoretical basis and methods learnt in vocational training, certain personal characteristics are demanded from the professional social workers. Personal characteristics of social workers influence the creation and sustainability of reliable client relations: empathy, respect and warmth towards other people are necessary. Especially, the sincerity of the professional's behaviour is the foundation of fruitful professional relation (Payne 1997). Society's culture and values shape and reflect the nature of the professional relationship between the client and the social worker. Pohjola (1993), Rogers (1965) and Rose (1992) emphasize the aspect that in social work (as in other service systems), the attitude towards the client is contradictory, although social workers attempt to give the best to client. The goal must always be the client-centred attitude as the basic factor of the social work relation.

The tasks of social systems in the society are to carry out social protection policies, based on society's ideology, values and resources. Social work activities are related to problems stemming from poverty, helplessness and deviation. Therefore, the task of social work is to carry out services to need-driven groups for their well-being. Social problem-solving work takes place at the society's, the groups' and the individual's level (Compton & Galaway 1994; Louhelainen 1985; Sipilä 1989; Parsons, Jorgensen & Hernandez 1994; Watson 2006). In summary, in case there appears disturbance between an individual and their environment, it is necessary of social worker to intervene into this relation in order to restore the balance and harmony.

The social workers' task according to Trevithick (2002, 17) is to integrate people with problems back into the society. This is interactive helping work that is related to many ethic aspects that are part of the basis of the social work methods. For the setting of goals in a social process, the starting point are the clients needs, but also the organizational capacity, and therefore a social worker has to find the suitable work methods. The method or the practice orientation in social work may be identified by general forms of the practice: work with individuals (sometimes involving counselling), group work (sometimes called social groupwork), community work, and in addition to three classical social work methods, family work (including family counselling and family therapy) is considered a fourth method. Rothman and Sager (1998, 16) show effectiveness of social work that is based on the theoretical knowledge, but it is necessary to use a rational and systematic problem-solving methodology that is based on empirical knowledge and practical wisdom.

Social work theories suggest that it is impossible to use all work methods and practical skills equally often and well. Nevertheless, social workers need to know all methods and practical skills to offer clients more problem-solving options in various circumstances. A special feature in social work at the individual, group and community level is an understanding of human relationships (Payne 1995, 1997; Miley, O'Melia & Du Bois 1998; Lewis, Lewis, Daniels & D'Andrea 1998; Watson & West 2006).

Halley, Kopp and Austin (1992, 14) have noted that cooperation with near-by fields and networking are important in social work. Cooperation and understanding of human relations are also important ingredients of the social competence and flexibility of professional social worker. Cooperation is needed in order to offer the individuals and the community more and better services. But it is equally important to create trustworthy client relationships and therefore, a professional needs to understand himself as a work instrument. The important aspect about knowledge is how you use it in your work. What questions you ask, how effectively you are able to search for alternatives, how well you know yourself and how effectively you use yourself.

The social work process is characterized by intention, reliability and a professional's understanding, positive and warm attitude, as well as considering a client's self-initiative, plans, emotions and energy resources. The professional relation in social work is a dynamic, interactive relation with its own criteria, but there is always room for imagination and creativity. From the opinion of Payne (1997), Compton and Galaway (1994), Miley, O'Melia and Du Bois (1998), Lewis, Lewis and D'Andrea (1998) and Hepworth and Larsen (1993) in the problem-solving process, a social worker must perform simultaneously several activities:

- exploration and evaluation of problems and circumstances
- collecting of information and observations
- connecting with client, organizations and other objects in the work field
- client counselling, reaching consensus for cooperation goals and work activity
- creating of a necessary activity plan
- selecting different activities and methods and their coordination
- influencing the circumstances
- carrying out the change, closing the case
- evaluation of all social work processes in a relation to goal attained.

The process of working toward the solution always contains emotions or feelings, always involves the knowledge base that we have available to us, always involves our perception of the world around us as well as our internal state, a way of organizing data, skills in action, our values and basic philosophies and attitudes, and a way of thinking that involves an orderly approach. In the social work process, the acceptance of human rights and freedom are inevitable, but for the success of the process, organizing ability and rational analytic thinking are also important. It is also important to consider the client's thinking and understanding of their problems. The problem-solving process is typically identified by John Dewey (1933) who attempted to describe the thought processes of a human being confronted with a problem. According to Dewey, problem-solving behaviour is based on reflective thinking that begins with a feeling of perplexity, doubt, or confusion. For reaching a solution from that starting point, Dewey held that effective problem-solving demands the active pursuit of a set of procedural steps in a well-defined and orderly sequence (Compton & Galaway 1989, 370–376). Payne (1995, 23) accentuates that trusting client relations are important in other helping professions (medicine, physiotherapy), but only in the social work the professional-client relation and its sustenance are the main work instruments.

The nature of social work and social practice inevitably involves ethics, values and a humanistic worldview of social professionals. It shows the position people are helped from: human rights, the principle of social justice, a respect on the client's will and faith in their potential. Social work is not based technology, it is based on human relations. An important component for delivering human services is knowledge about the values or preferred beliefs about human nature and the preferred ways of translating these beliefs into helping clients (Halley et al 1992, 14). Professional ethics is founded on moral philosophy. Therefore, the

professionals have to be able to construct the vision of the profession as well as use ethical and social justice principles. This is a demanding goal, especially because the professions are constructed in a social environment and include agreements of general well-being (Airaksinen 1992, 19). Compton and Galaway (1989, 89–92), Pincus and Minahan (1989, 38–47) accentuate that the professional ethics are related to the theoretical basis and practice of a profession. Values and knowledge are often confused, because all value dimensions of human life and living influence the knowledge base of practice one way or another. Therefore, value statements cannot be subjected to scientific investigation. They must be accepted on faith. We can speak of a value as being right or wrong only in relation to the particular belief system or ethical code being used as a standard. If in social work knowledge contradicts values, the starting point for activity are values. Values set limits for the use of practical methods and forms, because these have to be in accordance with the client's individuality and autonomy. The central philosophy and premise in social work are respect towards the individual and the belief in democracy. Liskola (1980) maintains that the society has the obligation to give assistance and the members of the society have responsibility to stand for other members. Social work is based on humanism, democracy and equality. Every human being is valuable; everyone has the right and freedom to live and develop and belong into social groups. Since every human being has value, they have the right to receive help from the society.

Miley, O'Melia and Du Bois (1995, 99–100) emphasize that professional values underscore the philosophical orientation for this empowerment-based approach to practice. The empowerment-centred view directs social workers and clients to develop partnerships that reflect empathy, affirm clients' self-determination, value individual differences, and stress the importance of collaboration. The practice of empowering tells social workers to respect clients' dignity and worth, remain focused on clients, and keep confidentiality. By focusing on clients' strengths and promoting competence, social workers reflect the values of the social work profession in their practice and adhere to professional ethics. Du Bois and Miley (1999, 50–51) structure social work values focus on three general areas: values about people, values about social work in relation to society, and values that inform professional behaviour. Hepworth, Rooney and Larsen (1997, 57) stress that to assist people to operationalize the cardinal values of social work and to reflect those values in the responses to specific practice situations, social workers delineate in the subsequent sections the following values and concepts that flow from the profession's cardinal values:

- all human beings deserve access to the resources they need to deal with life's problems and to develop their potentialities
- all human beings have intrinsic worth and dignity
- the uniqueness and individuality of each person is of value
- given appropriate resources, human beings are capable of growth and change and should be supported in increasing their choices in solving their problems and directing their lives.

The philosophy of social work and the conception of human life and society form the profession philosophy as the social work substance without which the social work cannot be understood nor practiced. According to Siporin (1975) social work philosophy can be understood as the collection of attitudes, ideas, intentions, goals and ethical norms and principles. This enables one to understand human existence and reality, meaning ourselves and the world: history and development. The philosophy of the profession gives important models and standards to describe reality and to evaluate our work. These standards are called norms, prescriptions and ethical principles. The profession's philosophy is a central part of the profession subculture. Students and novice social workers are acculturated into the profession's philosophy as a profession subculture (Tiko 1997, 6).

### *Profession profile*

When we use the conceptions of social work and social worker, we are thinking about specially trained people, who work for pay. A social worker, *Sozialarbeiter/in* in the European tradition, is usually a woman (lately there are more men), with higher vocational education. Social work, *soziale Arbeit*, is a socially needed paid work, which is about organizing and offering social services in the social welfare sphere (Tamm 1998). For social services to be effective and sufficient, the social workers need to have theoretical knowledge and practical skills, and always act on the basis of humanistic and ethical values of social work (Rauhala 1991; Karvinen 1993; Timms 1985; Hepworth & Larsen 1993; Suppes & Wells 1996; Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen 1997). According to Häyrynen and Rönnerberg (1974) these several professional activities shape the social workers' profession profile, which can be interpreted as their work tasks and the work activity model of this profession. Kivinen and Lehtonen (1984, 8) and Hirsjärvi (1990, 14) explain that the profession profile can be constructed in different manners: it can be created as the professional skills and readiness for professional development. This profile can be used in creating vocational educational curricula. Secondly, the profile can be viewed as a certain societal change program, whose development-lines are formed based on the society's intentions. This is taken into consideration when planning the profession practice and professional politics. Thirdly, a professional profile involves different professional practice groups' subjective conceptions, experiences, as well traditions of this profession. Jauhiainen (1995) also stresses the impact of subjective conceptions, visions, values and experiences in the creation of a professional profile.

Today, the internal elements of professions and how they have developed are researched. It is important to explain how elements have formed and how the profession is related to the society. The profession profile has emerged due to sociological researches. Generally speaking, a profession profile can be interpreted either on objective or subjective premises. The objective conception of profession profile describes societal labour division, activity position in societal labour division and necessary vocational education. The subjective conception of profession profile describes vision about certain profession, whereas two conceptions can be separated. They are general profession concept in society and conception of professionals about their profession (Häyrynen & Rönnerberg 1974, 5; Liskola 1980, 3).

The profession's activity and development are better understood among the professionals and their concept about their profession is clear and perspective, but may be vague and distant to other members of the society. Members of society may have a stereotyped vision about the profession, especially if the profession is still in the developmental phase. So there is not yet an adequate profile of the profession and therefore there are unrealistic expectations for the profession's activity. This may cause misunderstanding, disagreement and dissatisfaction.

Profession profile research is closely related to vocational education, especially when there is a need to renew the education (Nurminen 1993, 52). Profession profile is needed to analyze professional activity, especially when planning vocational education. The concept of professional profile involves always the relation between profession and vocational education. A profession is developed and influenced also by the education and at the same time, for planning the vocational education the profession profile in practice must be researched. The description of a profession profile enables to analyze changes in the professional practice. This description reflects flexibility and adaptability of the professional practice in the changing circumstances and has to be taken into account when planning the vocational education of social workers. The internal structure of a profession profile explains the

profession's tasks in society, its practical activities, and is also related conceptual factors of the profession. The profession profile describes the nature of social work, its relations with society, their work elements and professional activity. All this explains why social work has developed into a profession and shows why it has been granted its sphere in the division of labour in society. This explanation serves as a foundation for the vocational education strategies of social workers, but also for reasonable development of labour division between social work and neighbour professions.

The profession profile of social work in Estonia is rather many-sided, but at the same time, work tasks are often not clear or well defined. Neither are profession titles always exact and they do not reflect the actual profession profile. In social practice there are many profession titles in use. According to Tulva's (1996, 46) research there were 49 work titles in use (e.g. specialist, counsellor, inspector etc), which means there is not yet one unifying profession titles list.

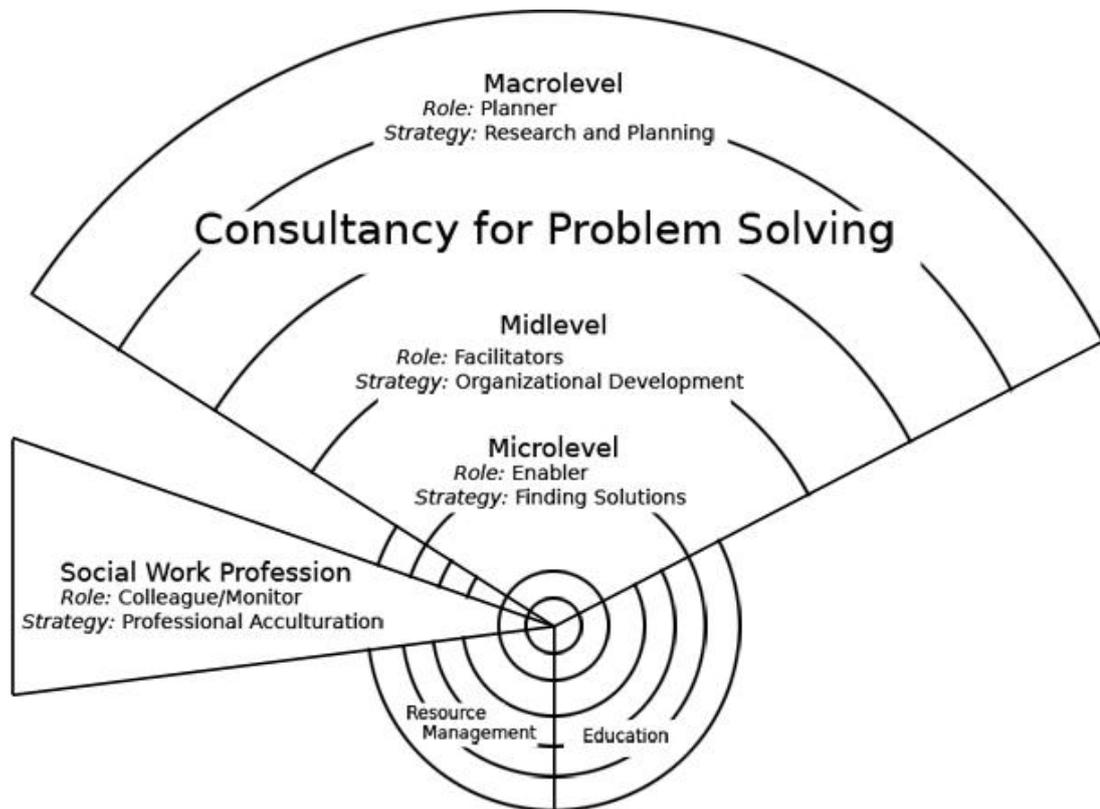
### *Roles of social workers*

The importance of the profession philosophy gives social work a special place among the help professions. Sipilä's (1989) position is that supporting the society's structures gives social work its special nature. These societal structures strengthen the social profession that created the professional ideology and forms work tasks in its sphere and could develop professional identity. Honkonen (1992) agrees that professional ideology is related to professions, because professions aim to reach a position in the society. Professional ideology and professional identity are related to the roles of a social worker. Roles determine behaviour and follow the institutional expectations. "Performance" of the role shows the role, but also expresses the behavioural model of institutional systems. Compton and Galaway (1989) are convinced the purposes of social workers' interventive roles refer to the behaviours expected of a person. Interventive roles will refer to the behaviour by means of which both client (individual, family, group, or community) and you expect you to help accomplish goals specified in the service contract. Five social workers roles may be distinguished – those are social broker, enabler, teacher, mediator, and advocate (Compton & Galaway 1989, 506–507).

Social workers are expected to improve the circumstances, to act as mediators of new opportunities. Social workers are change agents. Through a variety of strategies and tactics, based on such role of a change agent, approaches to managing conflict, and agency goals and sanctions, social workers pursue various forms of change in a planned, systematic way. In evocating the change, social workers take one of the six professional interventive roles: conferee, enabler, broker, advocate, mediator, and guardian (Parsons, Jorgensen & Hernandez 1994, 124). The activity scale of a social worker is so wide that in some problem-solving processes all the roles might be necessary. One of the increasingly important roles in the social work process is the role of advocate. However, unlike the broker, enabler, teacher, and mediator roles, advocacy can be used without the direct involvement of the client (Compton & Galaway 1989, 512). Advocacy services are designed for two basic purposes: 1) increasing a client's sense of personal power and 2) fostering environmental changes that reflect grater responsiveness to their personal needs (Lewis, Lewis, Daniels & D'Andrea 1998, 172). Roles and respective strategies are associated with each social work function. The social workers' roles are expected patterns of professional behaviour. Roles assign certain behaviours and prescribe appropriate responses to particular situations. Goldstein (1973) presents three interrelated components that comprise each role: a role concept, or how people believe they should act in a particular situation; role expectations, or how others believe people should act when they occupy a particular status; and role performance, or how people really do act. In other words, roles have psychological components, including perceptions and feelings; social

components, including behaviours and the expectations of others; and behavioural components (Du Bois & Miley 1999).

Professional roles help us categorize professional activity. Roles define the nature of transactions among professionals. Social work roles and their associated strategies suggest general ways for goal achievement. The schema organizes these social work roles in the context of types of client systems – from the microlevel to the midlevel to the macrolevel – and includes roles related to the interactions with professional colleagues as well.



**Figure 1.** Work roles and strategies of social workers in micro-, mid- and macrolevel (Du Bois & Miley 1999, 244).

Du Bois and Miley (1999) have analyzed a social worker's role on the microlevel as an enabler (see Figure 1). As enablers, social workers work with individual, family, and small group client systems to improve individual social functioning. In the midlevel, the social worker's role is a facilitator. This role describes work with formal groups, organizations, or bureaucratic structures that promote more effective functioning in these multi person systems. In the macrolevel, the social worker's role is a planner. They work with community or societal structures to assess unmet needs. Generally, social workers assume the role of planner to set goals, develop policies, and initiate programs. Strategies associated with the planner role include research and planning. Within their professional system, social workers take the role of colleague and monitor. Professional interactions provide the context for the colleague and monitor roles. Through these roles, social work practitioners maintain the integrity of the social work profession, uphold ethical standards, and offer support to colleagues (Du Bois & Miley 1999, 248). The social worker's role as a complex set of expectations and behavioural patterns is related to their position in social systems. In practicing the profession they have to

be flexible, competent and creative in order to take all different roles. According Varila (1991) the role anchors the workers' professional competence and professional definition. It means that the profession includes the workers' understanding and perception of self, work tasks and their connection to the professional roles.

Individuals that perform the same work tasks constitute professional group. They share a similar view, professional role and professional ethics. The professional group's skills and knowledge are generalized based on these components. As members of a professional group, the workers adopt a professional philosophy, skills and knowledge, anchor cohesion with the work and based on that, professional identity is developed. The social worker's professional roles include as an important element the professional philosophy, but also professional skills and knowledge to do so – they create the social worker's competence. The social workers competence serves as the basis for the intervention into clients' life.

### 3.2 Competence and Professionalism in Social Work

Social work is a human interaction profession, its nature is to help and it is based on a humanistic worldview, the understanding and acceptance of other people in social work practice are necessary. Necessary theoretical knowledge and skills that must be acquired in university or higher vocational education institution, give the basis for supportive client relations. Social workers must be able to see a human being as a holistic, bio-psychosocial creature. They must understand the interaction between the individual and the environment and the resulting individual behaviour patterns. Therefore, the social workers' academic knowledge is interdisciplinary, encompassing both human sciences and social sciences; including fundamental sciences as well as practical helping disciplines. Puhl and Engelke (1996, 69) note that social work is a relatively independent discipline in science, but it partners with other disciplines to prevent social problems and to solve existing social problems. However, Leino (1999, 7) stresses that academic vocational education is expected to give social work professionals such characteristics and abilities as abstract thinking, creativity, excellence, rigor, and reflective capacity.

Professional knowledge must be integrated into the self-concept of a social worker in order to become professional because personality is an important work instrument in the work process. The social worker has to be able to grasp the social work process holistically: to see the effect of intervention, predict outcome and realistically assess and set goals. Professional skills or competence is the ability of a person to govern the process of work on the thinking plane and act appropriately and feasibly in changing circumstances. Professional competence is thus not a static pool of skills and abilities, but rather a result of a constantly changing and growing process. Short (1985) has used the following terms to describe competence: "*competence, competent, competency, competencies*". According to Short, *competence* is the skill to perform certain activities. These can be also performed without cognitive skills or giving evaluations. The term *competency*, according to Short, combines the activity with the goals that are to be achieved. Short has also mentioned the terms *competent* and *competencies*. *Competent* means more than performing a task, it also includes evaluation and analysis. It is *competencies* that means real competence, a holistic approach, the ability of grasping the whole, as well as quality (Tamm 1998, 57).

In the modern, rapidly changing world, we need once and again to re-evaluate the nature and tasks of professional practice. Due to the nature of their work, social workers quickly recognize the changes in society – shift in living standard, changes in legislation, new

political developments – all are reflected in the social work context. Due to the changes, the social work process is difficult and multilayered and the percentage of unpredictability is increasing. Work is a challenge for the social workers' professional competence. Creating a balance between the changing work process and social worker competence is necessary for professional growth. Research is also an important part for professional growth. Social work practice is not based on theory alone nor can it just be based on research evidence (Smale 1995, 73). Therefore, to fulfil the everyday work tasks, it is necessary to maintain and increase competence by different means and methods. Rapid changes of work have also reshaped the idea of competence.

For a long time the prevailing view of competence and professional skills has been the activity model achieved by vocational education and tested in work practice (Satka 1997). It was often thought that professional competence and expertness are ensured if a worker: acquires a general base of knowledge and skills, commands the work methods and accepts the experts' work activity model (Engeström 1989, 3–4). However, the demands for modern professional activity show that following the above model can lead to incompetence. In order to maintain and raise the competence, it is required first to define what competence is, but this is not an easy task. Topical scientific publications offer various views and definitions, but there is no unanimity in the explanation of competence. In defining the competence in the work context and tasks, work nature must also be taken into consideration. In defining the competence, the importance of a worker's personality must be taken into account. For example, in helping professions such as social work, the importance of personality is significant. Most researchers agree that competence in human relation professions requires higher or academic vocational education.

Per-Erik Ellström (1994) views competence as the individual (but also the collective) potential capacity to manage successfully certain work circumstances or perform work tasks successfully according to formal or informal criteria. This all-encompassing definition of capacity comprises motoric skills, cognitive factors (knowledge and intellectual skills), affective factors (values, attitudes, motivation), personality traits (self-confidence, etc.) and social skills (communicative and co-operative skills, etc.) (Ruohotie 2002a, 234). Based on the above, occupational competence according to Ellström (2001) can be seen to involve:

- a relation between the capacity of an individual (or a collective) and the requirements of a certain situation or task
- a combination of knowledge and intellectual skills (e.g., inductive-logical ability) as well as non-cognitive attributes (e.g., motivation and self-confidence)
- a capacity that is the function of the five factors listed above
- a potential rather than an actual capacity, meaning a capacity that is actually used only if certain conditions are present. (Ruohotie 2002a, 234.)

Several researchers interpret competence as a dynamic process. Competence may also be viewed as an individual attribute – personal resource or capital that a worker brings to their occupation (Ruohotie 2002). Virkkunen and Miettinen (1981) also offer a broad definition but they stress competence as knowledge, motivation and ability:

- ability to discern and with the support of vocational education, to deepen theoretical and practical knowledge to solve work tasks
- ability to monitor scientific and technological development in their work sphere and acquire new work methods
- ability to transfer to other spheres of their profession
- ability to grow and develop to new challenging and demanding tasks

- ability to participate in the development of work methods
- ability to acquire completely novel work methods (Tamm 1998, 56).

Professional competence is an expression of the relationship between the abilities of an individual and the requirements of the work. Professional competence must contain the requirements of the work and motivation, which is an expression of the relationship between the work and the person performing the work. Debling (1990) describes competence as follows: competence is accompanied by the ability to perform the working tasks in one's area of work as expected. This is a broad definition of the ability to use one's knowledge and skills in new, changed circumstances in one's area of work.

Therefore, competence also means ability to organize and plan work, innovative task solving in challenging and difficult circumstances that differ from routine work. Debling (1990) interprets competence through three elements. These elements are instrumentality, analytical, and human relation centeredness. Instrumental competence comprises ability to use work instruments and work models. Analytical competence comprises systematical and logical thinking and the ability to cope in changing work situations and human relation competence means ability to operate successfully in the human relation sphere (Debling 1990, 20–22; see also Tamm 2002, 41).

On the state (employer) level, in addition to competence there is also the qualification requirement. Qualification is the specific professional skills necessary for a certain occupational activity. The word *qualification* comes from the Latin word *qualis* meaning accomplishment and also describes nature, character and value of object (Arnold 1998, 280). According to Ellström (1994) qualification is competence required by nature of work or demanded by employer (Tamm 1998, 56–57).

Ellström (2001) defines qualification as the competence that is actually demanded by a work task and/or is determined by individual qualities. According to Jan Streumer and David Björkquist (2001) the term qualification refers to the employees' ability (based on their knowledge and skills) to perform changing work tasks. The concept of qualification has expanded from professional and technical-instrumental knowledge and skills to include new knowledge and skills that enable employees to predict and adjust to changes in the work environment. These new demands have become known as key qualifications (Ruohotie 2002, 234–237). Helakorpi, Aarnio, Kuisma, Mäkinen and Torttila (1988) and Rauhala (1993) explain qualification as a work process element since every work process requires from the worker certain skills and attributes to carry out the work process.

Ruohotie (2002) defines qualifications and core competencies as occupational prerequisites, as well as the qualifications and competencies that are central to employability and lifelong learning according Nijof and Remmers (1989) interpretation in a three-part schema of basic classification of qualifications:

- *Prerequisite or basic skills* that prepare young people for society (intellectual, cultural, and social skills) and for the transition to work life and further education. These skills may be acquired and affirmed at all levels in the educational system.
- *Core or common skills* that may be important for all occupations, a particular occupational sphere, or possibly for one occupation alone. The more generic these skills, the more likely they are to be learned through reflective activities. Core skills could be acquired both through educational programs and through life experiences.
- *Transition skills* that help people to make career-related choices and decisions (self-management skills, and metacognitions or self-regulation skills). These skills are

learned throughout life, both within and outside of work settings (Ruohotie 2002, 239–240).

Qualification is regarded by various researchers as an individual's work performance level, as well as their collective successful work performance. Herrenbrück (2002) distinguishes three levels in the development of personal qualification and a profession's work performance quality: 1) structure of work organization, 2) transparency of work process and 3) profession's influence to society (general public). He also stresses the importance of the time factor in raising the qualification in the social and health sphere; it takes time resources to achieve the qualification (Herrenbrück 2002, 68–69). The result of qualification analyses in the social sphere has led to discussions of professionalism in social work. The analyses show how qualification is developed and maintained in the work process and how it can be defined. That helps to (depending on the work tasks) fulfil gaps between conceptual qualification demands and expected qualification results in the actual work process. It is a constant challenge for organizations and institutions to ensure the quality of everyday activity of work professions (Kühn 2002, 6–11).

In summary, qualification is understood as a level of demands that stem from work tasks and work performance that a potential individual worker and work organization must fulfil. In comparison to competence, qualification is a narrower concept. Competence is broader concept because it includes a worker's personality as a work instrument; in addition to academic skills and knowledge it comprises cognitive readiness to react to changes (social skills, self-control, etc). Capacity of personal characteristics, ability to see the work process holistically, is very important in the social work occupations. There is an overlap of various concepts. Ruohotie (2003a, 4) analyzes such concepts as workers' competence, skills, qualification, capability and efficiency as phenomena that are interrelated and are also related to creativity, innovativity, flexibility, endurance and punctuality. They are a composite of knowledge, activity, efficiency, views and values and indicate some skills and abilities to learn, to act and to strive for goals.

All this has to be taken into consideration while planning the vocational education strategies. As stated above, the social worker's competence is multilayered, and it has to be regarded in different aspects. Guttman, Eisikowits and Malucchio (1988) have presented different aspects of social workers' competence. Although education curricula and content change, generally the social workers' competence is expected to be achieved on the following aspects (Guttman et al. 1988):

- intellectual competence, e.g. general understanding of their work
- functional competence, e.g. understanding of intervention depending on circumstances
- personality competence, e.g. understanding oneself and volition to develop professionalism
- evaluative competence, e.g. ability to evaluate and analyze results and consequences and scope of influence.

Competence can also be defined by using the pair of terms: an individual and work. Work means the tasks and problems that an individual has to perform and solve in order to achieve the desired results. In this case competence is explained as the performance ability of an individual with respect to a problem, task or context. At the same time it could also be seen as the ability to successfully perform a working task or solve a problem and also as the ability to identify and expand the options for interpretation, action and evaluation deriving from the working task, i.e. using reflection in the attitude towards work and activities. This ability is

determined by the psychomotor, affective, social, and other personal characteristics (factors) of the individual. Competence is not a fixed phenomenon, achieved characteristic or readiness. Competence must be developed because a central element in the professional competence is the ability to react to changes and challenges in their work.

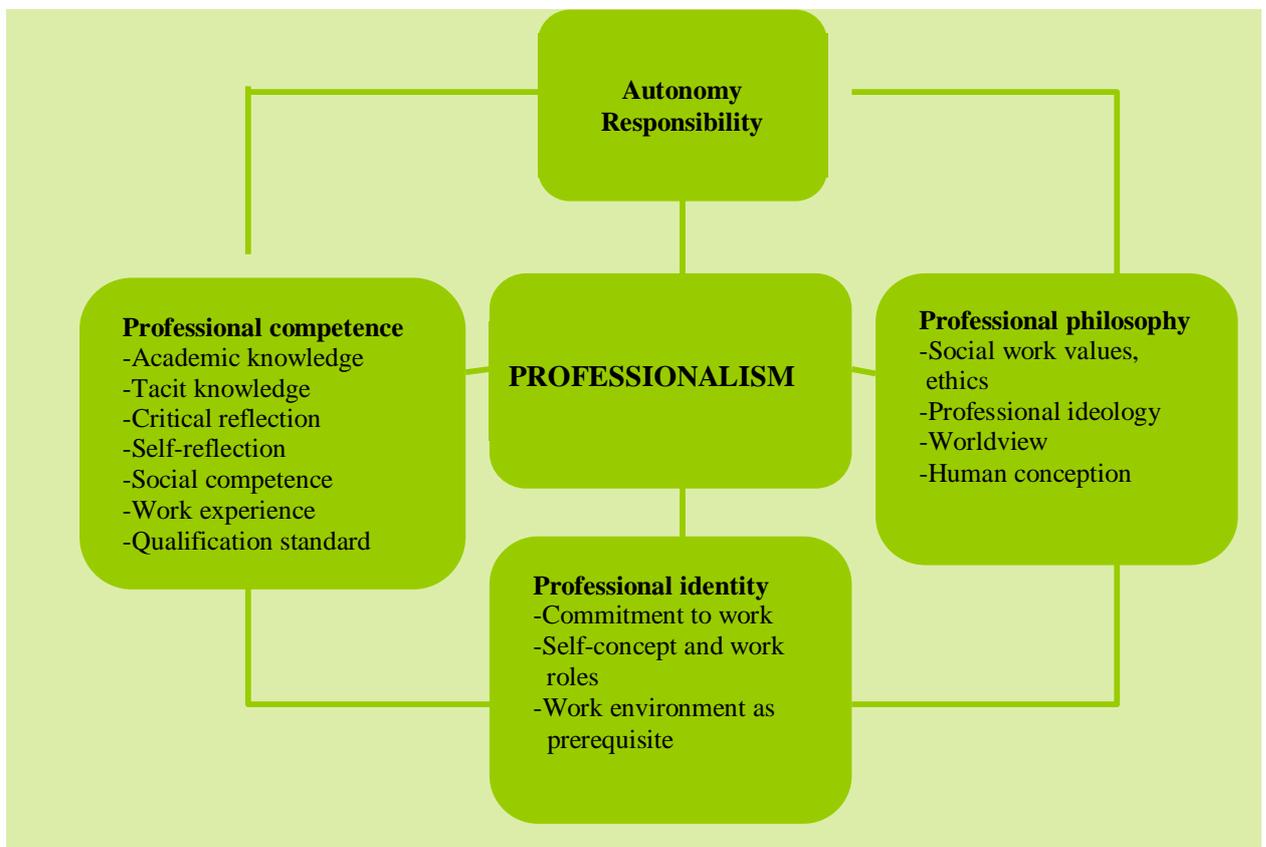
Schön (1983) and other scientists who have done research on the competence of the human relationship professions (e.g. Ashmore 1989; Järvinen 1990; Engeström 1992; Karvinen 1996) describe competence in relation with the concept of reflection (or the reflective practitioner). This concept explains the phenomenon where a highly competent practitioner creates in their work new knowledge and skills through reflection process. According to Melvin Pollner (1991) reflectivity is defined as the process where reflection (feedback) as well critical evaluation took place, some conclusion is reached and new knowledge is created. The whole process is related to learning as well as analyzing and developing the work. Here reflectivity means that a worker is independent, takes responsibility and analyzes critically the work process, outcome and their experiences, in order to achieve new understanding or a new activity model and makes appropriate conclusions.

Reflectivity means more than critical analysis – besides thinking, it includes learning from the experience and creating new opportunities and work methods. Learning from the changing work circumstances and experiences happen by reflection process (Järvinen 1990). Hannele Rousi (1991, 21–23, 64) structurizes Järvinen's (1990) definition of reflectivity into three stages. The first phase, learning to learn, is phase, where the goal is to monitor and evaluate one self's thoughts, feelings, activity. These are main elements of perception of reflectivity. The second phase, learning to evolve incorporates analysis and evaluation of goals and activity. Self-reflection where self-analysis acts as a developmental agent. The third phase, learning to develop requires critical reflection about factors that influence professional practice.

Reflectivity in the social work process assists to improve the efficiency of client relationship and to raise the quality of social services. Besides the definition of reflectivity as the agent of competence, Sternberg et al (2003) as well as Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) present the concept of *tacit knowledge (stille Wissen)* as an important aspect in the development of competence. In their research of successful professionals, Sternberg et al (2003) follow the concept of tacit knowledge that was first introduced by Polanyi (1966; see also Schön 1983). The concept of tacit knowledge characterizes the knowledge obtained through everyday work activities, that has an implicit, inarticulate quality which may be described as professional intuition (Sternberg et al 2003, 98). Halley, Kopp and Austin (1992, 8) also stress the role of intuition in acquiring knowledge: "learning has an intuitive side. Knowledge can come from the environment within. Some of our most important and creative insights can come through what is called tacit knowing – for example, by letting ideas and problems simmer inside, by dreaming, or by meditating".

It may be concluded that in the development of professional competence it must be taken into account, besides the professional standard, the above described individual capacity and also social competence. According to Thiessen and Schweizer (2000) social competence may be considered the foundation of social sphere work practice. At the same time, it is impossible to distinguish social competence from the theory and methods competence. The importance of the cohesion with the context as well as the reflection-process must be kept in mind when creating future professional practice potential (Thiessen & Schweizer 2000, 197, 206). In the social work profession, a philosophy of multiaspected professional competency is included: it is a starting position for social workers' work performance. Here it is important who or what is in the centre of work, therefore it is important to define the relationship between object and

subject. If work experience is also added to the above mentioned, then we may talk about the professionalism of workers. In explaining the professional competence of social workers, Trevithick (2002) stresses that "it is important to understand professional accountability in context and to attempt to differentiate between *professionalism*, *professionalization* and *"technicist" solutions*". Trevithick defines based on Barker (1995, 297), professionalism as "the degree to which an individual possesses and uses the knowledge, skills, and qualification of a profession and adheres to its values and ethics when serving the client" (Trevithick 2002, 162). Researchers make a distinction between *professionalism* and *professionalization*: according to Payne (1997, 30) *professionalization* is "control of knowledge"; based on Mayo (1994). Trevithick (2002, 162) explains *professionalization* as ""*technicist*" *solution*, that also fail to service users by applying techniques regardless of wider debates about values and underlying social relations". Professionalism in social work means the case management that is based (unlike intuitive-empathical case management) on the social science methods, including the hermeneutical concept. (Dewe, Ferchhoff, Scherr & Stüwe 1996, 121.)



**Figure 2.** Prerequisites of the development of professionalism in social work.

All this also strengthens the worker's sense of connectedness and therefore motivates workers to grow professionally. Professionalism that is based on competence, work experience and reflectivity is related to ethics (see figure 2). Professional ethics is the competence construct (Brumlik 2000, 279–287). Professionalism shows organized professional activity based on professional ideology with the aim to develop an occupation into a profession. It also shows the trust (legal authorization) the society has given to said occupation, giving it the opportunity to act autonomously and take responsibility. Autonomy gives a profession the opportunity to strengthen its status by using its potential (knowledge, skills, creativity) in organizing well-being services quickly and flexibly. Therefore, a profession enlarges its professional activity sphere and proves its necessity in the society.

In summary, a competent and self-reflective social worker develops one's work role and on this basis the professional identity takes shape. Professional identity develops on the support of the professional ideology, which is the profession's beliefs and values. Beliefs and values derive from a worldview and human conception of professions. Profession ideology acts in any profession as a determinant; it defines the work nature and practice methods of the profession. Therefore, professional ideology legitimize a profession's work practice methods.

### 3.3 Social Work as a Developing Profession

Modern society needs professional social work system where there are competent workers, whose recreation is carried out by the academic or higher vocational education institutions.

Therefore, if there is in the society the necessary work sphere, public institutions and profession has needed professional qualification and competence, social work may be regarded as a developing profession (Abbott 1988; Kontinen 1997; Karvinen 1996). Occupation develops from the work needed in the society and a profession develops from the occupation.

Social work is a comparatively young and evolving profession that started to develop in the cause of urban transformation during the 1880s. Professional education did not appear until after the beginning of the 20th century. Today in general social work education programs are accredited by a major national organization, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (Suppes & Wells 1996, 79).

In Estonia, social work as an occupation has existed for more than fifteen years. Vocational education is provided either by an academic education such as a university or by a higher vocational education institution. Social work curricula in Tallinn University were accredited (2000) in all levels (BA, MA, PhD) for nine years by the international committee of Ministry of Education and Research (and were accredited again 2007). Social work research field was also evaluated by the international committee in 2004. Social work as a relatively new occupation in every society has come through some growing pains. A question raised repeatedly is whether social work is a profession because it has been suggested that it lacks an autonomous scientific-theoretical basis.

Social work's professional status was evaluated by Flexner in 1915, and his conclusion has influenced social workers ever since. Flexner's speech "Is Social Work a Profession?" delivered at the 1915 meeting of the Baltimore Conference on Charities and Correction was an incredibly significant event in the process of developing the foundation for social work as an organized profession. Flexner concluded that social work was not yet a profession because it mediated between other professions it did not have the responsibility or power of a true profession (Du Bois & Miley 1999, 45; Marsh 2000, 389). With the rapid development in the beginning of the 20th century which included expanding the number of schools of social work, forming a professional accreditation body, standardizing educational curricula, advocating training for all social workers, developing methodologies for practice, expanding social work's empirical knowledge base, and consolidating and solidifying professional associations social workers asserted that social work had in fact attained a professional status. The emergence of new professions and the increase of their activity field and influence forced the exploration of the professions in order to define and classify their status in society.

Greenwood (1957) in his classic article "Attributes of a Profession" provides another landmark in the evaluation of the professional status of social work. Greenwood's continuum, which deals with differences between a professional and nonprofessional status includes the following indicators of a professional standing:

- a profession has fundamental knowledge and develops a systematic body of theory that directs the skills of practice; educational preparation must be intellectual as well as practical
- professional authority and credibility in the client-professional relationship are based on the use of professional judgment and competence
- a profession is empowered to regulate and control its own membership, professional practice, education, and performance standards. The community sanctions regulatory powers and professional privilege
- a profession has an enforceable, explicit, systematic, and binding regulatory code of ethics that compels ethical behaviour by its members
- a profession is guided by a culture of values, norms, and symbols within an organizational network of formal and informal groups, through which the profession functions and performs its services. (Du Bois & Miley 1999, 46.)

Using these indicators to evaluate the professional status of social work, Greenwood (1957) contended that "social work is already a profession; it has too many points of congruence with the model to be classifiable otherwise" (Du Bois & Miley 1999, 46). Criteria to determine the status of a profession show the opportunities for a profession to develop and increase in order to occupy an important position in the organizing of public life. All this will be the result of the process of development of a profession. On the basis of an empirical study, Harold Wilensky (1964) has stated that there exists a natural process in the society for an occupation to develop into a profession. Therefore, the development of an occupation to a profession and reaching the status of a profession in the society can be clearly determined by certain factors (Tamm 1998). According to Wilensky (1964, 142–145) these factors are:

- becoming a full-time occupation
- establishing the first training school
- establishing the first university school
- establishing the first professional association
- establishing the first national professional association
- establishing the first state licensing law
- establishing a formal code of ethics.

Hellberg (1978, 9) defines the characteristic factors of the development from an occupation to a profession as follows: 1) the development to a profession is a process where a certain activity sphere has achieved such a status in the society whereby an occupation can be defined as a profession; 2) a process where a certain occupation enlarges its activity sphere or has gradually achieved a considerable position in the society, influencing and controlling important strategic resources of the society. Both of these definitions refer to an organizational level (Tamm 1998, 60). Karvinen (1996) postulates that theoretical scientific basis and vocational education, aspiration towards uniform vocational training and methodology, drawing the line between closely related professions and independent professional association are the main characteristic factors in defining a profession. According

to Parve (1995) professional and professionalism in the western culture have been related to traditional professions like medical doctors and lawyers.

Client relationship is a characteristic feature in many professions. A diagnostic client relationship can be observed as inevitable in professions where the client-worker personally meets with clients and influences circumstances with their knowledge, skills and authority. This is typical in the doctor-patient relationship model, but the social worker-client relationship is similar (Johnson 1972, 57–58, Johnson 1995). Abbott (1988, 40) stresses that the substance of professional activity is always a certain diagnostic problem-solving process. Professions in their practice attempt to 1) diagnose or classify problems, 2) decide or consider various different problem-solving solutions, 3) finally manage and perform certain activities. This process of diagnosis, decision and performance constitutes the logic of professional practice.

Dewe (2000) highlights the professional client relationship in social work and in social pedagogy. This raises the question whether social work can be called a developing profession if a specific professional activity includes attributes/indicators (academic vocational education, licencing/accrediting, self-regulation of professions, professional solidarity, etc.) of classical professions (Dewe 2000, 290). The reason why helping occupations such as social work want to reach the status of a profession is that having achieved certain professional criteria, there are opportunities to raise the professions activity to a higher level of quality. Therefore, the profession can better satisfy the society's demands. This in return presents demands to the society – the necessity of longterm vocational education, professional growth, etc. Professional growth in the era of specialization of helping professions is also important because social workers have to achieve the recognition as professionals. Although unlike other classical client-relationship professions such as medical doctor, etc, have also higher vocational education and their studium is equally thorough. Even more so since these groups have specific but different relation to those in need than doctors (Parve 1995).

Both doctors and lawyers translate the relationship with the person in need of help into their respective professional languages, whereas social workers have to decode the result and translate it back into the client's language. Doctors and lawyers have their own professional jargon and people view them as being on a higher level in the society than social workers and psychologists. Consequently, the work of a social worker is subjectively viewed as not quite perfect. This is also so because a social worker's client is often inadequate. Nevertheless, it would be productive for the helping workers (social workers, psychologists, prison pedagogues) if their professions were as valued as other traditional professions (Parve 1995).

In a welfare state, striving for autonomy is characteristic of social work as well as of other professions. In order to achieve this, a profession determines its jurisdiction of competence, keeping its professional knowledge and skills rigorously within its profession. Nevertheless, the aspiration of social work to become a true profession has been met with criticism, and there have been attempts to put the position of social work as a profession only into the context of a developing society because the development of a profession and professionalism is viewed as a central process in the development of a society (Rajavaara 1986; Abbott 1988). According to Konttinen (1997) and Abbott (1988) there are two major trends when it comes to defining profession and professionalism. One research field explores professionalism of professions, e.g. all the defining factors in the development of a profession. The other field covers the importance of professions for the society, e.g. the functional aspects of a profession. Functionalistic researchers treat a profession both as a prerequisite and warranty for the development of the society, as well as a balancing factor in the competitive and power driven labour market society (Tamm 1998). Therefore, Abbott (1988) defines professions as

occupational groups that use their abstract knowledge to solve problems in the society. Jurisdiction of competence of a profession is based on the society's trust to solve certain problems. Competence of professions develops in the process of activity practice, which means that it is neither absolute nor stable. Therefore, profession dynamics are related to changes in the society.

The social work occupation in the Estonian society is similarly facing the question whether it has prerequisites to develop into a profession and whether social work in Estonia has a position, authority and prestige in the society. Professions have been regarded in different ways by social scientists. Some have taken their point of departure in Max Weber's sociology, and seen professionals as a 'Stand', a "*status stratum*", which has shaped the modern society, although fulfilling a pre-modern tradition (Sunesson 2000, 521). A profession may also be regarded as a social phenomenon, and professional groups as social groups. Pierre Bourdieu's (1998) concept of the social field where the field is a constructed social space – as a force space which contains dominating and dominated parties and where social groups are placed in different positions: left right, up and down. Bourdieu shows the coherence between the position of a social group and its capital. The position of a profession as a social group is according to Bourdieu (1983; 1998; 2003) determined by its economical and cultural capital (professionalism, education), social and symbolic capital (reputation of occupation, prestige). According to Bourdieu's social field concept, the position of social work as a profession in Estonia has apparently not yet developed in the social workers' nor the society's view. Since social work is a new and developing profession, not everyone in the society comprehends its nature. Some see social work mainly as a source of economic assistance (money providers), others view it as a solution to all problems, posing unrealistic and demanding expectations. Despite the pains of growth the professional field of social work is expanding (working now also in medicine, education, juridical systems) and increasing the jurisdiction of competence.

Increase of a professional field is an important factor in the development from an occupation to a profession (Abbott 1988). At the same the increase of a professional field and jurisdiction of competence entail position competition with other professions in the social field in the society. Representatives of functionalism (Durkheim, Parsons) regard professions as important bearers of social values. For the perseverance of the society as a system it is useful to legitimize morality with the assistance of professions, because if this is left solely to the individuals then according to functionalists chaos and conflicts will ensue. The development of professional ethics organizes and unifies professional group into professional association. The stronger and better organized the profession, the stronger ethical norms it creates and bears (Durkheim 1957, 7–25). Talcott Parsons' functional profession concept stems from the functionalistic socialization theory model. Parsons' outline of a theory of the professionals (1967, 34–49) was to have a deep impact in the sociology of professions. Parsons saw the professionals as a layer with stratum specific properties, which was described with very positive signs (Sunesson 2000, 521). Parsons' (1951) model of a society gives two important functions to education – socialization and selection (see also Ronnby 1986; Blackledge and Hunt 1993; Ritzer 2002). According to Parsons (1951; 1954) the social model is applied from bottom to top – originating from the individual and their needs. A social system consists of social relations, human interrelations and subsequent activities. Therefore functionalists are interested in activities that preserve the society as a system and the perservance is upheld with the help of institutionalized norms. Function is defined as an activity within the structure whose goal is to preserve the system. Every part of the society has a function or a task to uphold society. Therefore profession has a function to help the society to act as a system. But if the balance in the society has for some reason been distorted, the society will apply balancing sub-systems (Parsons 1951). It follows, that in the functional model the social system may be viewed as a societal balancing system. From the point of view of Parsons

(1954, 36–41) professions are important social systems because they proceed in their activity from rationality and their activity is founded on the universalism. Universalism of professions means that a professional does not select clients based on their race, wealth or personal characteristics, but evaluates the nature of the client's problem and their own professional ability to offer productive assistance. Rationality here means institutional tendency, not a particular characteristic applied to an individual professional worker. Since rationality is inevitable for the society as a system, then professions occupy an important position in the society. According to conceptions based on Parsons (1954) and Durkheim (1957) the social work profession may be regarded as a bearer of the consensus value, rational and universal system that fulfils stabilizing and balancing function of the society.

Therefore, the main function of social work is to ease and solve social problems in the society (Louhelainen 1985). The social work profession is functionalistic and always related to that culture where the social work practice is performed. A social work theoretic Malcolm Payne (1995, 1997) explains social work as a social phenomenon that we may understand from a social and cultural context – it meaning, that social work is socially constructed. Although the theoretical basis of social work is interdisciplinary, it may only be interpreted within the frame of certain cultural context. According to Berger and Luckmann's (1966, 1971) approach of social constructivism, the human understanding of reality forms cognition/knowledge which directs the behaviour, but everyone's understanding of reality is different. In the constructivistic approach of Capra (1996), people are part of the holistic world and create constantly everything that we call reality (Peavy 1999, 39).

The foresaid helps to give meaning to social work as a helping institution, that is entirely a social construct created by people, and its nature is always characterized by the historical tradition and culture of a society. The idea of social constructivism enables to understand and explain the emergence of social work as a profession and its activity in the society because professional relation specifics and intervention methods are adapted to professional activity on the basis of culture of a specific society (traditions, customs and values).

From the point of view of social constructivism, the importance of social context for professional activity can be understood and at the same time it explains social work clients as subjects with different interpretations of reality. Social work as a complex human-relation profession is a special social activity where people take interactive roles of social workers and clients and the main helping instrument is a professional relationship (Payne 1997, 14–15, 1995, 23.) Accepting the subjectivity of reality helps social work professionals to remain flexible, broad-minded and tolerant. Therefore they are able to understand that comprehension and values of other people are not wrong but different. Humanism believes in the ability of conscious human beings to reason, make choices and act freely.

Humanistic approach views the function of helping professions to assist people to achieve self-cognition and understand the surrounding world and to find suitable opportunities to cope in life. For that reason social workers attempt to help people to obtain self-awareness skills and to understand the importance and influence of their environment. Then their self-interpretation is valid and valuable. Humanism focuses on the human being that is the basis of social work. This is the valuation of human being, the acceptance of their uniqueness and empathic understanding. Client individuality approach follows phenomenological explanation in analyzing human behaviour. Phenomenological ideas in social work affirm the approach that human behaviour can be understood from the standpoint of the person involved and in analyzing and evaluating socially the behaviour of people, it is important how people understand and interpret the surrounding world. (Payne 1995, 140, 1997, 180–181.)

Social work as a social system authorizes professionals' intervention in human life, influencing it and acting as the society's social control system. This causes the complexity of social work functions and therefore presents great challenges to social workers and involves several contradictions.

### 3.4 Contradiction of Social Work Practice

In researching the profession a contradiction emerges which is caused by the society's internal conflicts and fulfilment of the function of the profession in the society. Professional activity involves elements that support society's structures and elements that at the same time are counterproductive for that support. For example, social work professional activity aims to achieve professional success which is also clients' success (Crompton 1990). At the same the profession influences structures of society by using the resources given to the profession by the society. This is a typical phenomenon characterising social work. Social work is one profession among other professions. It must compete for its position in the society against others professions. According to Abbott (1988) this forces the profession to develop because the competition between professions supports professional practice and in this way the professional competence will increase.

Arnkil (1991) supports the interpretation of social work as a welfare state's helping network system. Success in completion reflects the professions' position and the structure of the society's systems. Therefore, general social and historical factors influence the development of different professions from the outside, through the society's structure. This shows that professions can not be viewed as separate phenomena, but as part of general systems of the society. For social work, development is not only the result of self-interested and purposeful efforts, but the natural outcome of the development of the society. According to Arnkil (1991) professionalization develops in contradictory manner. The competition-field where social work strives to take control over certain jurisdiction of competence is the state system of services. Determining of jurisdiction of competence gives tasks for social work that other professions either have not been able to or wanted to perform. Contradictions and complexity add to the work tasks changes in the society and the development of the system of services.

Demands for the profession are great, but means to fulfil these demands are not always sufficient. This creates professional uncertainty, and according to Abbott (1988) raises the question about the relation between general (or objective) and personal (or subjective), which refers to the relationship between changeable and stable. It is not easy to define the relationship between objective and subjective factors. Abbott (1988) lists the objective factors of professional activity as:

- technology
- organization
- nature phenomena
- changes in the society (e.g. economical).

A profession must always be ready to adapt to these factors. Financial crises and new conservative policy (Jones 1989) forces western welfare states to find new solutions just as social crises drive development and education of social work in post-socialist countries (Tamm 1998).

Objective factors listed above may have a negative impact to the professional activity. Contradiction in social work professional practice may arise as professional responsibility is related to ethical aspects. It can happen that a social worker must give help but is unable to assist or take the responsibility because of objective reasons (rigidity of bureaucracy, shortage of resources, etc). There can also emerge a contradiction between ethical principles and work practice in case there is a great difference in values between the professional and the client (e.g. in probation work). The professional must always, despite the clients' deviant behaviour, express nonjudgmental attitude. In addition, the social worker represents the control system of the society and intervenes if an individual is unable to cope. As Arnkil (1991, 166) states: "support is offered from the position of threat". Therefore, changes and contradictions produce demands to the helping professionals. Social workers' constant readiness to adapt to changes demands a high level of competence that can not be upheld for the whole professional life only on the basis of vocational education. Life-long learning and professional growth ensure the competence of a social worker.

## 4 PROFESSIONAL GROWTH, IDENTITY AND SELF-CONCEPT IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING WORLD

### 4.1 Prerequisites of Professional Growth

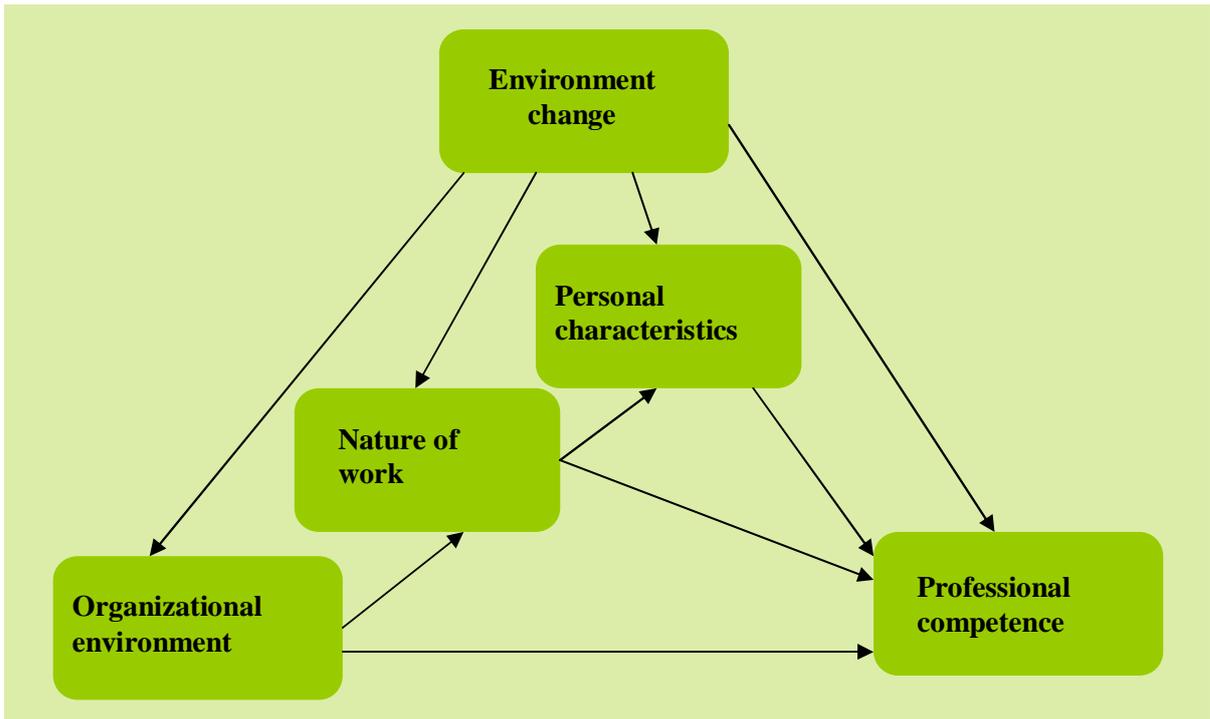
#### 4.1.1 What is Professional Growth?

The real resource for a small nation is its well-educated and professional population. Therefore vocational education must conform to changing professional demands. Globalization, the development of technology, economic integration, changes in professions raise general education demands and increase the need for especially well educated professionals. The collapse of hierarchical work organization requires from most workers an extensive and holistic understanding and control of entities. An individual must be able to move in the work field and flexibly go from one organization and task to another. A manager is more like a coach, 'facilitator' and provider of resources than a controller (Ruohotie 1999; Leino 1999).

Rapid obsolescence of knowledge and skills threatens workers in different professions, especially workers that have higher vocational education (Ruohotie 2000; Kaufman 1990). Professions, such as social work, which are related to developments and changes in the society, must take into consideration rapid changes in work tasks and conditions that the profession is not competent to perform. A situation develops where knowledge and skills become outdated and this causes apparent problems because changes occur in work tasks, demands, fields of responsibility, which professionals are unable to cope with, given their existing competence (Ruohotie 2000). Factors influencing professional competence are shown in Figure 3.

There are four influential factors related to competence in the Kaufman (1990) model: 1) changes in environment, including technological development but also regional and professional dynamics of the workforce, 2) atmosphere of organization that influences management systems, 3) nature and organization of work and work related opportunities for development, 4) personal characteristics and subsequent motivation factors, cognitive abilities, etc. (Ruohotie 1994, 180; 1995, 125.)

There are many factors that influence professional competence. Thus it is not easy to achieve competence with only the help of vocational education and professional practice. Competence must also be upheld through life long learning. In the modern society competence has for a long time been based on the theoretical basis and activity model tested in professional practice (Satka 1997). As stated already, this is not a workable model in today's society – competence is achieved through professional growth. Every opportunity and method is good for professional growth.



**Figure 3.** Professional competence model according to Kaufman (1990).

From the point of view of Ruohotie (1995, 125) professional growth is a process, in which workers' professional competence is maintained and increased. Such professional development can be observed as a process that encompasses the whole individual life span. According to Dubin (1990) the following reasons for professional growth make it an inevitable process:

1. *Rapid creation of knowledge:* New knowledge is constantly being created and replacing the old. Scientific and technical knowledge doubles every five to seven years.
2. *Complexity of knowledge:* The acquisition of new knowledge is difficult as traditional boundaries are blurring. Development in one sphere may be beneficial in other disciplines.
3. *Technological innovation:* This process is the obvious reason for the aging of knowledge. It is suggested that in the next 10 to 20 years more technological change shall take place than throughout the whole previous history.
4. *Global competition:* While nations are investing in research and development on an increasing scale, they are looking for management techniques which support innovation and, through training and other development functions, ensure the productive use of human resources. Restructuring, automation, new methods of management, increased allocation of funds to product development, and radical reductions in the time required for the development of new products are the result (Dubin 1990; see also Tamm 1998, 16).

These reasons of the inevitability of professional growth have an impact on every employer and employee, work organization and management structure. Consequently, in pursuing professional growth it is necessary to keep in mind both the personal characteristics of workers and the work environment factors.

Several factors serve as prerequisites of the professional growth process. Professional growth, which is needed for maintaining competence, is the cumulative effect of many factors, including personality factors, organization factors, work environment factors, etc.

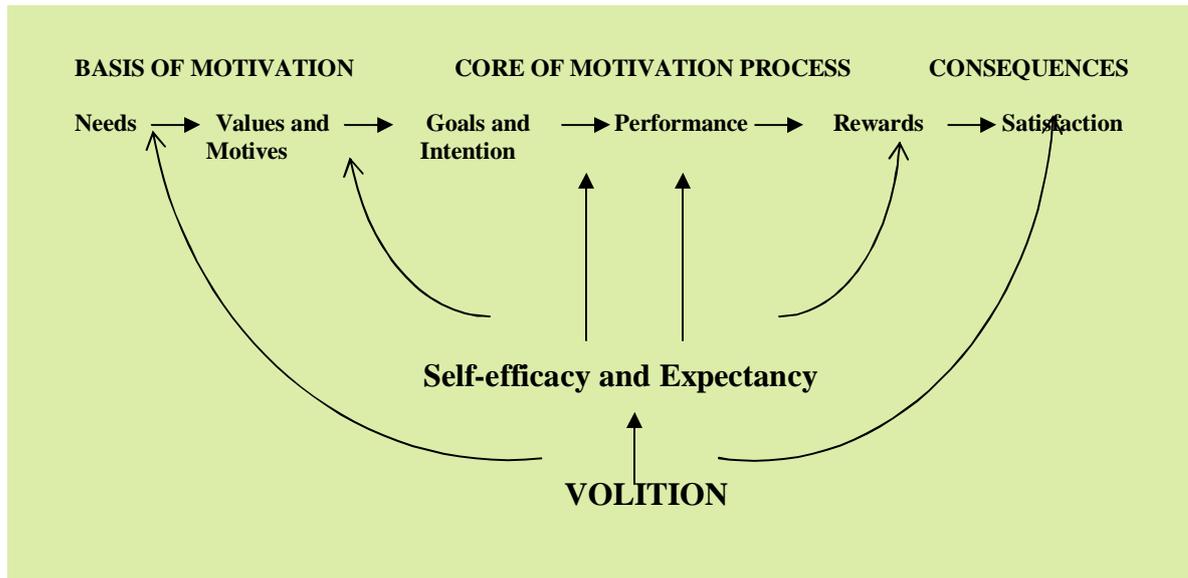
Both the personality factors and the following important phenomena have an effect on professional growth: personality factors and organization factors – work environment, which consist of nature and content of work, work management, physical environment of an organization, values, norms and human relations of an organization and management methods and forms of organization affect on professional growth. (Dubin 1990; Farr & Middlebrooks 1990.)

Hall (1986) has also analyzed the prerequisites of professional growth and found these factors in the society, organization, work role, as well as in the personality of the worker. Therefore, the question arises how to keep the process of professional growth active and what the workers' stimuli are to maintain and enhance competence. The workers' motivation to invest personal resources for the professional growth process plays an important role here.

Motives are influencing factors that guide an individual's energy to achieve certain purposes (Lawler 1973, 3). Motives form motivation, which is an individual's psychological attitude that determines behaviour. Therefore motives stimulate and guide an individual's general behavioural tendency. Some, mostly humanistic, researchers regard needs as the basic element of motivation, but the individual's values and activity goals are also included (see also Maslow 1954; McGregor 1960; McClelland 1961; Alderfer 1969). Functionalists also describe disposition of needs as "the most important motivation elements for activity" (Parsons & Shils 1951, 113). In summary, needs are important motivating factors that influence an individual's behaviour and motivate him or her to act. According to Dubin (1990) the most important motivating factor in professional growth is the personality factor. While knowledge and skills are important in work, they are not sufficient, thus active search for new knowledge and skills depends on the workers' motivation.

Locke (1991) and Locke and Latham (1990) regard motivation as a sequence process, where the basis are needs and values that help to set goals which should result in expected rewards and satisfaction (see Figure 4).

The goals and performance strategies are made up based on current knowledge (Latham & Locke 1991). Alternatively Binswanger (1991) stresses the importance of volition in the self-regulatory process. Locke's model expresses well the sequential nature of the motivation process (Ruohotie 1994a).



**Figure 4.** Sequence of motivation process based on Locke's model (Ruohotie 1994a, 19).

The process of professional growth as a tool for maintaining and increasing competence is also influenced by work organization, hierarchical relations, organizational atmosphere and human relations prevalent in the work team, management methods and manners. The main purpose of professional growth is to improve work performance and raise workers' competence. Therefore the following spheres must be observed:

- acquirement of new and up-to-date information
- development of skills and techniques
- valuation of workers of a certain profession in the society (Ruohotie 1995, 122).

The workers' individual self and their aspiration to set goals (which can also be viewed as the self-actualization process) are the determining factors for professional growth, but professional growth will be insufficient if not supported by work and work environment factors.

#### 4.1.2 Organizational Factors as Prerequisites of Professional Growth

Professional growth is influenced by various factors – organizational factors, work environment factors and personality factors. Personality factors are obviously subjective factors, but work environment and organization factors may be viewed both as being subjective and objective. Different aspects of work environment and management are perceived on the workers' level subjectively. Therefore various researchers regard aspects of subjectivity and objectivity in work atmosphere differently: several researchers consider work atmosphere as a subjective cognition and not only as a combination of objective work factors. For that reason, according to Ruohotie (1994b, 179–180; 2005, 50–51) work atmosphere in the organization influences considerably the possibilities for professional growth.

Maurer and Tarulli (1994) have attempted to sum up the following important factors for professional growth:

- *Perceptions related to the working environment*: general organizational orientation towards personnel development and support in the work place, particularly from supervisors.
- *Perceptions and beliefs regarding the benefits of development*: interesting and challenging work now or in the future, the tasks themselves; increased autonomy, remuneration, promotion and material benefits.
- *Values and judgements*: perceptions relating to the environment and the benefits of development may have different significance for different people. For example, senior management support may be critical to certain people and unimportant to others.

On the conceptual level the work atmosphere of an organization can be defined and determined as a clearly defined holistic perception about the organization. Work atmosphere may be regarded both on the individual level and on the group level. It is impossible to define the one and only best atmosphere because this depends on the organization's intentions. Atmospheres can be divided into three groups: performance (process) oriented, human relations oriented and authority oriented. A performance oriented atmosphere encourages individuals' creative activity and aims to increase participation and independent work activity.

A performance oriented and human relations oriented atmosphere leads to good work results and satisfaction with work. However, this will not materialize if the organization's personnel is unable to prompt achievement motivation and to create opportunities for needs fulfilment.

The organization's technology, structure (bureaucracy), operating principles and the general economic and labour market conditions naturally influence the work atmosphere either positively or negatively, depending on the internal and/or external situation of the organization.

According to the cognitive approach people react to the environment both emotionally and behaviourally depending on how they perceive different situation factors. They interpret environmental factors in a manner that is psychologically agreeable for them (Ruohotie 1998, 31–32). Ruohotie (1995, 151) also positions that individual perceptions of environmental attributes (situation factors) can vary from a descriptive portrayal of a situation into complex judgements on what different situation factors mean to them. James and James's (1992) perception of the environment incorporates values and judgements. People evaluate environmental attributes on the basis of these schema that are founded on work related values, e.g. recognition and challenges (Ruohotie 1999, 16).

Therefore it could be concluded that judgement is the result of the integration of descriptive perception and schema based values. People have internal requirements on which they base their conclusions about whether work is challenging or not. This is a subjective, value based process – cognitive judgement proceeds from the personal meaning given to environmental attributes that the individual values, wishes and wants. Therefore environmental attributes or descriptive perceptions can be similar for two people but judgement of the different attributes may be distinctively different. Judgments are strongly determined by affective processes (e.g. satisfaction), because these combined with psychological stimuli create subjective emotional experiences. Emotional reactions (psychological responses) to work environment can be regarded as a judgement function – cognitions about the meaning of the different situation factors on personal wellbeing. For example, people expect work to offer challenges, because

they have experienced that challenges are emotionally relevant and influence the sense of wellbeing and satisfaction (Ruohotie 1995, 151–152; 1994b, 182–183). According to Hall (1986) professional growth is dependent on the social and institutional context as well personal attributes and circumstances.

Organizational factors that influence professional growth are the following (Ruohotie 1994b, 183–184; 1999, 12–13):

- *Creation of a supportive culture:* In a supportive environment innovation becomes a natural part of everyday work. Tasks can be defined in broad terms, encouraging change and choice. Cooperation is an explicit objective since active interpersonal communication supports generation of new ideas and supports novelty. Because if there is a constant need to ask approval from others, it smothers innovation, therefore it is useful to replace hierarchical structures with decentralized networks emphasizing equality and democracy.
- *Reward of development:* In innovative organizations learning, initiative and experiment are rewarded as inherently valuable.
- *Supportive and participative management:* In innovative organizations it is the duty of management to create a workplace in which each individual can reach their full potential. Activation of opportunity, enabling of activity and the provision of role-models are characteristic of a supportive and participative management style.
- *Intensive communication:* The more intensive the communication, the more effectively new ideas and alternative points of view can be shared and developed. Intensive communication is characterized by the rapid dissemination of ideas and immediate feedback.
- *Security:* In competition, the organizations of a secure and confident atmosphere for employees are successful and sustainable. Fear of failure, blame or criticism hinders creativity and innovation.

Democratic management may be characterized by having the following attributes: *integrity, maximum freedom, minimum structures, and competence*. Integrity is needed to create trust. Trust is necessary for workers to put their full potential into maximum use. Maximum freedom of the system supports participation and contribution of individuals. Minimum structure allows freedom, nevertheless, it must be strong enough to offer discipline and limit risks. Competence means not only knowledgeable leaders, but also balancing of task, talent, education, resources for growth (Hartoonian 2003, 55).

As seen above, there are numerous factors that shape organizational and work environment that influence workers' wellbeing, work satisfaction and motivation to professional growth. Ruohotie (1994b; 1996; 1999) presents the thorough analysis about the organizational factors that influence professional growth and according to Hartoonian (2003) these organizational factors can have positive impact on democratic organizational management. Because democratic management in an organization supports workers' autonomy and subsequent innovation and creativity in their work, therefore they use maximum potential for the benefit of the organization. Democratic management and support to initiative and creativity encourages workers' professional growth and innovation in organization. Ruohotie (1994b, 185; 1996, 21) shows that professional development is thwarted by excessive pressure to perform and by minimization of risk-taking. Such attitudes encourage people to follow

routines which have been successful in the past and therefore hinder innovation. In order to succeed, organizations must be capable of constant innovation. Activation of innovation requires at least two things from the organization:

- organization must learn to fully develop and utilize the capacity of its personnel, and
- organization must show imagination and suspend judgement in order to promote the development of new ideas.

Changes in societies and the resulting changes in work environment make professional growth inevitable. Organizations face the task of creating a rewarding developing environment. For this reason non-linear ideas are important, because only non-linear ideas create new resources in a non-linear world. Radical non-linear innovation is the only way to escape merciless hyper-competition – it means separation from past bonds and visualization of new solutions for clients' needs. (Hamel 2000.)

All these above mentioned work environment factors and organization factors are keys to professional growth, e.g. supportive environment, the organizational climate and the reward system in use to influence the direction of people's learning.

#### 4.1.3 Work Role Related Factors as Prerequisites of Professional Growth

Work and work-related influences can either prevent and hinder or support the full use of the workers' growth potential. Growth potential is barred by routine work that gives little stimulation; however, challenging, diverse work and autonomy create a sound foundation for self-growth. It can be expected that people react positively to these professional growth opportunities that correspond to their personal growth opportunities (Ruohotie 1993, 288; Ruohotie 2000, 53). Professional growth is naturally related to the workers' work roles. Work roles are characterized by many features that break the regular career development routine e.g. learning from work experience. Learning from work experience occurs, when an individual meets challenging situations. The wish to improve required competence or to achieve rewards, or to avoid unpleasant situations and negative results could serve as the motivational background.

Ruohotie (1999, 14–16) refers to the results of McCauley's research group and define such situations as *developmental components*. McCauley's group (1994) divides challenges at work into three main categories: *job transitions*, *task-related characteristics* and *obstacles*.

1. *Job transitions* mean changes in working role such as work content or responsibility, professional status or changes in the workplace.
2. *Task-related characteristics* refer to the various problems and difficulties which the individual faces at work. They include the demand to create change (developing new directions, solving inherited problems, reduction decisions and problems with subordinates), a high level of responsibility (meeting high demands, managing diversity, overload of and meeting outside pressure), and handling individuals over whom the person has no authority.
3. *Obstacles* may be set by a difficult supervisor, lack of management support or adverse business conditions.

Growth opportunities for career development can be a natural part of the work environment if accumulation and the broadening of experience is attended to as opportunities arise. Growth is based on every situation that offers new learning opportunities and motivates to learn. New or

unclear situations or conflicting demands offer opportunities to learn. In social work there are ample opportunities for such situations. It is good to have people in such occupations who learn from and are fulfilled by solving new work problems.

#### 4.1.4 Personality Factors as Prerequisites of Growth

Professional growth is also influenced by many personal factors, e.g. changes that take place in the family, health, age, etc. All these can make an individual weigh career related expectations and priorities. According to Hall (1986) one can also experience non-satisfaction with a *status quo* situation and this may develop into frustration that makes career development impossible.

Some personal characteristics assist life management and help control work stress related negative consequences (e.g. basic personality disposition, development motivation, resilience, initiative, flexibility, tolerance of the uncertain, autonomy). An important prerequisite of development is the ability to cope with work changes and challenging goals. Success or progress usually accelerates career development and launches a psychological cycle of success. Achieving challenging goals increases an individual's motivation and desire to strive for success in the future. Coping leads to an intrinsic experience of success and progress which in turn enhances a person's self-esteem and competency. Intrinsic rewards strengthen one's commitment and direct later goal choices. (Hall 1971, 1986, 1990.) Dubin (1990) asserts that the most important personal factor for professional growth is motivation. Motivation is high, when an individual believes that participation will increase his or ability to cope better in future tasks than in previous ones, a rise in the professional competence level increases rewards and benefits and professional growth leads to the desired results (for example: a rise in pay, promotion, recognition by employer, decrease in routine tasks, increase in free time). An individual's motivation as an important personal factor of professional growth may be viewed as a multidimensional and dynamic process. The importance of motivation appears in every decision of worklife, including searching for work, acceptance of work, weighing career opportunities, application for education, obtaining new work experiences, setting and reaching goals (Ruohotie 1994a; Grimmer 1994).

This leads one to conclude that the worker's personality is particularly important in the human relations professions, such as social work. For this reason many researchers stress personal factors, because they regard them as the most important motivation factors in professional growth. Also Maurer and Tarulli (1994) regard personal factors as important factors for professional development. Personality factors are related to learning and development activities. They include:

- *Identification with work*, which shows the extent of professional cohesion between the person and the work and the importance of work in an individual's life.
- *Personal concept of career*, or how the individual has assessed his or her strengths and weaknesses in relation to career.
- *The need for self-development*, or how confident the individual is in his or her ability to acquire new professional knowledge and skills.
- *Self-confidence*, or how confident the individual is of his or her ability to learn new skills.

Once a person has settled comfortably into the professional role and career routine, the question arises, which factors would trigger a change in this routine and create a wish to learn something new.

Farr and Middlebrooks (1990) see professional development as a motivation force, which they have also described as professional updating using the concepts of expectancy theory. *Expectancy beliefs, instrumentality beliefs and outcome valences* combine in a multiplicative fashion to influence a professional's motivation towards updating activities. *Expectancy* relates to the belief that participation will result in becoming or remaining professionally competent. *Instrumentality* refers to the beliefs that influence professional status and rewards. *Outcome valences* refer to the extent of the professional's attachment to, or aversion to, results of updating. Expectancy beliefs, instrumentality beliefs and outcome valences are dependent upon, among other things, personalities, motive structures, present circumstances and previous experience. Farr and Middlebrooks observe motivation from the expectancy theory angle: they stress especially workers' personality and previous experiences, because different people in the work position still have different understanding, need, meaning and visions of professional updating.

Aspiration to self-actualization is another motivating force in professional development: opportunities for self-realization in a suitable and interesting area, testing their abilities, stabilizing their position in the social hierarchy and achieving approval. Approval and self-realization in work may be achieved if the general values in the culture are related with success in work. In researching work motivation in different cultures, Smith and Bond (1999) have found it has variations: on the one hand, it has ties with *individualism-collectivism* relations and values, and on the other hand, with *masculinity-femininity* related relations and values. Knowledge about the variations in work motivation in different cultures is relatively old – the German sociologist Max Weber (1921/1947) “saw the existence of the Protestant work ethic as a major contributor to the rise of capitalism in certain Western European nations. Interestingly, contemporary data indicate that the Protestant work ethic now has a surprising distribution” (Smith & Bond 1999, 203). He proposes that cultural differences in work motivations can be predicted on the basis of his surveys of values endorsed by students and teachers. One can expect for instance that work centrality will be high in nations where mastery and hierarchy are strongly endorsed, and low where affective autonomy, egalitarianism, harmony or conservatism are favoured (Smith & Bond 1999, 203). Professional updating may be looked upon from different angles. Besides other factors, professional development also benefits from strong career motivation. London and Mone (1987) have illustrated the concept of career motivation and professional updating. They interpret personal factors for professional growth in three dimensions. Table 1 describes the components of the three career motivation domains:

1. *Flexibility/resilience* refers to belief in oneself, need for achievement, willingness to take risks and working independently or cooperatively as needed. Career flexibility and resilience show the extent to which people resist career barriers or work difficulties. People who are high in career resilience see themselves as competent individuals that are able to control what happens to them. He or she gets a sense of accomplishment from what he or she does and where he or she is able to take risks. These persons also know when and how to cooperate with others and when proceed independently. Career resilience determines a person's commitment to career goals.

2. *Career insight* refers to establishing realistic career goals and knowing his or her strengths and weaknesses. Career insight is how realistic people are about themselves and their careers

and how accurate they are in their self-perception and career goals. People who are high in career insight try to understand themselves and their environment.

3. *Career identity is formed of job involvement, professional involvement, organizational involvement, need for advancement, need for recognition and need for a leadership role. Career identity shows the extent to which people define themselves by their work. People who are high in career identity are involved in their jobs, their careers, and their professions. Career identity reflects the direction of career goals — whether a person wants to advance in their career, to be in position of leadership.*

**Table 1.** Descriptions of the Career-Motivation Dimensions (according to London & Mone 1987, 56–57; 66–67).

Dimensions	Definitions	Behaviours Demonstrating the Dimension
<b>Career resilience</b>	The ability to adapt to changing circumstances, even when the circumstances are discouraging or disruptive	
Belief in oneself	The degree to which one is confident of one's ability to perform	Conveying self-assurance in performing the job Easily adjusting to changes (new procedures, rules, technology) Expressing ideas even if they are unpopular Trying to promote career progress
Need for achievement	The degree to which one desires to excel in one's work	Doing one's best on all tasks Taking the initiative to do what is needed to achieve career goals Seeking projects that require learning new skills
Willingness to take risks	The degree to which one is able to take actions with uncertain outcomes	Expressing ideas even when the ideas are contrary to those of the boss Being unafraid to let others know when they have made mistakes Going out on a limb for something one believes in Being innovative in doing one's job
Working independently or cooperatively as needed	The degree to which one is comfortable working either alone or with a group, depending on the demands of the task	Making decisions or working effectively either as an individual or as a member of a team Being able to complete whole assignments independently and being able to contribute to a group assignment

**Table 1.** Descriptions of the Career-Motivation Dimensions (cont.) (according London & Mone 1987, 56–57; 66–67).

Dimensions	Definitions	Behaviours Demonstrating the Dimension
<b>Career insight</b>	The ability to be realistic about oneself and one's career and to put these perceptions to use in establishing goals	
Establishing career goals	The degree to which one has thought about one's career objectives and planned how they can be achieved	Having a specific, realistic career goal and plan for achieving it Being willing to alter goals as career interests and circumstances change Welcoming job changes and assignments that enhance career opportunities
Knowing one's strengths and weakness	The degree to which one has determined one's strong and weak points, especially with respect to career objectives	Seeing oneself as others do Having a clear perception of one's ability to accomplish a task Using feedback from others to learn about oneself
<b>Career identity</b>	The extent to which one defines oneself by work	
Job, organizational, and professional involvement	The degree to which one is willing to immerse oneself in activities related to the job, the organization, and the profession	
Job involvement		Working hard, even if it means frequently working long days and weekends Treating the job as more important than other activities Considering the job to be fascinating

**Table 1.** Descriptions of the Career-Motivation Dimensions (cont.) (according London & Mone 1987, 56–57; 66–67).

Dimensions	Definitions	Behaviours Demonstrating the Dimension
Organizational involvement		Taking pride in working for one's company Feeling that if one's company is successful, one is successful Thinking many people in the company can have a significant impact on one's career
Professional involvement		Seeing self as a representative of the profession Being active in a professional organization Encouraging others in the field to join the professional organization
Need for advancement recognition, and leadership role	The degree to which one desires to be promoted and acknowledged as a leader	
Need for advancement		Wanting to advance as rapidly as possible Having advancement as a major career goal Wanting to earn as much money as possible
Need for recognition		Thinking it is important when the boss recognizes one's accomplishments Looking forward to the prestige that comes with advancement Wanting to be recognized for good performance
Need for a leadership role		Desiring a position of leadership Emerging as the leader in group situations Wanting to hold an elective office in an organization

Professional development is also related to career development motivation. The model by London and Mone (1987) (see Table 1) illustrates the concept of career motivation.

The application of their analysis shows that career flexibility, career development and career identity as well as their component factors (such as self-reliance, need to perform, willingness to take risks, setting of career goals and self-awareness as to weaknesses and strengths) together with commitment to work support active professional development and professional identity. Career motivation and its factors determine to which degree individuals acquire further training, which developmental goals they set and how important the achievement of these goals is to them. (Ruohotie 1997, 23–24.)

In summary, personal factors discussed above show that professional growth is on one hand a highly subjective process, but on the other hand, the process is related to work process and work organization. The work process and organization set the demands for the worker, but they do not always ensure the professional growth needed to maintain professional competence. Klein (2003, 320) states that professional growth and personal development face the challenge of examining issues and approaches from a highly personal perspective. Established standards of preparation, development, maintenance of professional skills pay little attention to the needs of lifelong learning: personal and professional growth.

#### *Self-Directed and Self-Regulated Learning in Professional Growth*

The individuals' motivation to develop in their work and profession is expressed in the willingness to face new challenges and to learn new skills and knowledge. In order to do it successfully, a high level of competence is required. For competence maintenance and enhancement, life-long learning, that has become a regular notion in work life, is necessary. Such constant learning is achieved when an individual comprehends his or her strengths and weaknesses, because only then is he or she capable of setting the relevant development goals and seeks to fulfil them.

Internalized goals are especially important for self-motivation. As Bandura explains, they "represent future consequences in thought /.../ many of the things we do are designed to gain anticipated benefits and to avert future difficulties." It may be said that when individuals commit themselves to explicit goals, perceived negative discrepancies between what they do and what they seek to achieve create dissatisfaction that serves as a motivator for change. (Bandura 1977, 161.) A motivated individual who has set explicit goals and knows his or her strengths and weaknesses is ready for lifelong learning, if the work environment is supportive towards growth. The learning process where individuals themselves set goals and take responsibility is known as self-directed learning. An active knowledge-seeking professional, who is interested in constant maintenance of competence, makes decisions about their learning and takes responsibility in establishing learning goals can be defined as self-directed learner. (Candy 1991.)

Thus the question is whether the learner is the subject who actively directs his or her activities or whether the directing comes from outside. Self-directed learning can be observed from the standpoint of humanistic psychology as acquiring knowledge on an andragogic and pedagogic basis, where the learner establishes the learning goals and has presumably good learning potential. At the same time, it is necessary that the society creates circumstances to satisfy the learning needs. (Ruohotie 1994a.)

Ruohotie (2000b, 16), based on Borgström (1988) explains that "the basic assumption of lifelong education, which sees people as active seekers of knowledge making their own choices and taking prime responsibility for the definition of study objectives and the planning and evaluation of the study process, leads to the concept of self-directed learning". This phenomenon encompasses both the autonomy and volition of the learner, as well as his or her self-regulation. Self-regulation refers to an individual's active participation in his or her own learning process and is necessary to influence one's learning and motivation. Self-regulation involves a complex of processes such as setting goals for learning, using effective strategies to organize information to be remembered (Ruohotie 2003b, 251–253). Therefore, lifelong learning in professional growth means that an individual established goals to understand and acquire new knowledge, it is cognitive self-regulation. Individuals operating on the level of higher awareness control their thinking process, direct their thoughts and decide over the appropriate psychical processes in the learning process.

#### 4.1.5 Modelling of Prerequisites of Professional Growth

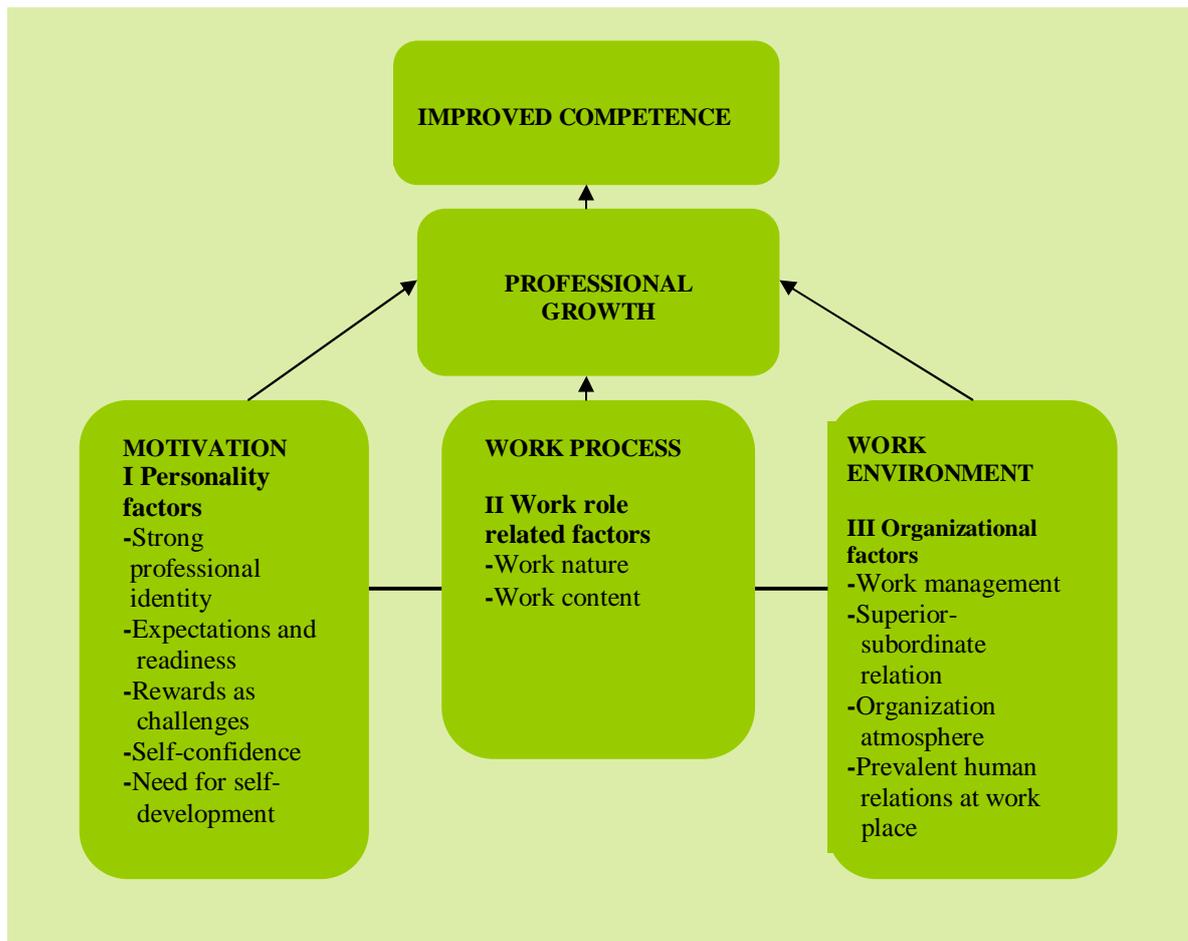
Professional growth must ensure adequate competence to cope with work-tasks. In today's rapidly changing work life the level of competence is indicated by the ability to cope with new circumstances and challenges in work.

Career related success experiences promote career development. The most important prerequisite of development is the successful accomplishment of challenging goals. Challenging goals add to an individual's motivation and willingness to strive for goal achievement. Goal realization leads to an internal sense of success that strengthens self-confidence and professional identity. (Hall 1986, 144–145.) Professional growth is influenced by many personality related factors of the workers. In addition to personality factors, work and organization factors are also important. They create a supportive (or an unsupportive) environment that enables (or fails to enable) a supportive frame for workers to realize established development goals. According to Dubin (1990), Farr and Middlebrooks (1990), Maurer and Tarulli (1994) and Ruohotie (1999, 2005) the prerequisites of professional growth can be presented as a model (see Figure 5) that includes several components related with work environment and workers' personality factors:

1) *Personality factors*: motivation, expectations, realistic professional concept (understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses), work commitment and cohesion, strong professional identity, achievement need, volition to control circumstances, success-experiences and rewards constitute personality potential for professional growth. At the same, the personality factors also include the context factors, such as personal life stages, family and domestic roles, child care and education. An individual's health and family support also have considerable significance in career development.

2) *Work role related factors*: challenging nature and content of work that offers opportunities for reflective in-work learning, demands creativity, initiative and activity autonomy.

3) *Organizational factors*: work atmosphere, management policies and practices that create the necessary conditions and supportive context for development.



**Figure 5.** Model of professional growth (built on the basis of conceptions of Dubin 1990; Farr & Middlebrooks 1990; Maurer & Tarulli 1994; Ruohotie 1999, 2005).

Professional growth in work life means lifelong learning. Empowerment of the workers is a supportive aspect in this process that requires sustainable and great personal efforts. Empowerment means that a person or a group has an improved ability or power to manage personal capacities.

Worell and Remer (1992) define empowerment as means of finding one's own personal power, developing increased self-esteem and valuing one's self, but in addition to this power to manage his or her personal capacities, the empowerment concept implies that a person also manages her/his circumstances and has the ability to participate in and to influence a social community. (Niemi 2000, 8.) Thomas and Velthouse (1990) define empowerment as internal motivation that is characterized by such cognitive constructs as meaning, competence, self-determination, and refer to it as psychological empowerment. Meaning is defined by the correspondence between the requirements of the work role and individual beliefs, values, and behaviour (Beairsto and Ruohotie 2003, 118). Therefore, the prerequisites of professional growth can be determined on work environment level and on individual level. Farr and Middlebrooks (1990), Ruohotie (1994, 1995, 1996, 1999) and Dubin (1990) stress that an important characteristic feature of development activity lies in the fact that it strengthens a person's intrinsic motivation to maintain and increase professional competence.

Ruohotie (1994, 1996) emphasizes that work itself can either discourage or promote the use of growth potential. Monotonous work which has few rewards discourages it. At the same time, diverse and independent work creates a good foundation for personal development. The organization's task is to create an organizational environment that can affect growth motivation and professional development by way of perceptions and expectations. A growth-oriented environment encourages risk-taking and innovativeness.

Factors supporting professional growth have been categorized in terms of work or work organization — supervisor, worker relations, organizational climate, work place peer-colleague relationship and management policies and practices. A supervisor's view of him- or herself and his or her career motivation affect the personal achievements and ability to create conditions for personal growth and development. (Ruohotie & Nokelainen 2001, 127–128.)

Since professional growth inevitably affects everyone in an organization, we may view the organization as a learning organization. A learning organization supports both individuals and teams in continuous learning and creates the necessary climate and conditions. In summary, professional growth demands life-long learning, that takes great effort, energy and time. Workers succeed when they are interested in development, have motivation and volition to expend the necessary personal resources. The workers' efforts should be rewarded by substantial benefits: successful work performance and deserving salary, recognition and career development. In human relation professions, in addition to the above, the professional philosophy that workers bind with their self-concept creates conditions for the development of professional identity and constitutes the base for professional growth.

## 4.2 Professional Identity

### 4.2.1 Professional Identity – Relation to Self-concept

A worker's cohesion with work and commitment to work, shows to which degree the nature and content of work are compatible with the worker's nature. Strong cohesion with work – adaptation of human nature with work, development of professional identity – are the prerequisites of and the foundation for professional growth. A strong identification with work convinces the organization (society) that certain professional activity is performed on a high level and offers satisfaction to a worker. Commitment to work ensures successful fulfilment of work tasks, a sense of success is an encouraging factor for future work performance and professional development. Although work tasks and the work environment are similar, the development of professional identity is different for every worker, because development of professional identity is influenced by the specific self-concept of each worker.

Professional identity is always associated with the workers' self-concept; their identity – their essential nature, values and world view. A complex and multilayered self-concept is described in many personality theories as hierarchic or structured whole (Hankamäki 1995). Besides self-concept, several work related factors have an important role in the development of professional identity. Such are work content and nature, work environment (work climate, management policies and practices) and also the work role accepted by worker, etc. Therefore many questions rise. How does work content and how do the subsequent work roles influence work identity? How does self-identity influence the development of professional identity? In

what manner is the professional identity related to self-identity? Which contextual factors related to personal life stage influence the creation of professional identity?

In order to explain the development of professional identity, it is necessary to describe and explain the meaning of the concepts *self* and *identity* and the relations between them. It appears that this is not a simple task. Besides the notions *I/self* and *self-identity* there are also several other notions in use, such as *personal identity*, *social identity*, *collective identity*, but also *self-awareness* that is associated with all of the above mentioned concepts. The notions 'self' and 'identity' are significant research objects in psychology and sociology.

Scientific investigation of self and identity emerged in the 19th century. In "Principles of Psychology" published in 1890, the psychologist William James described self as one major factor influencing human thinking, feeling, and behaviour. *Self-identity*, according to James was determined as "perceiving today's self as we were yesterday and are tomorrow, everything that goes together with our self." According to James personal identity does not exist as a fact but as a sense of similarity and if that sense is lost, the sense of identity is lost. (Valk 2003, 227).

Two principal development tendencies may be distinguished in the concept "identity": psychological tendency and sociological tendency. Psychologists describe the development of identity as an internal and relatively stable process, but sociologists regard identity as a social phenomenon dependent on the environment. Therefore, identity is not viewed as a stable individual feature, but seen as situation related, changing in time, space and context. (Valk 2003, 227–228.) According to Ruohotie (2004) an individual's self-concept is a more extensive concept than self-identity. Structures of self-concept are psychical models that an individual uses to organize his or her life. Self-concept is related to self-identity in the form of cognitive structures. Modern sociology of education interprets self-concept as a cognitive process where an individual constantly determines self by his or her abilities and role demands. Similarly self-concept can be seen as how it determines individual identity (*personal identity*, *social identity*). Differently structured identities show how and with whom an individual compares and identifies himself or herself (Ruohotie 2004, 7). Self-concept structures influence considerably how people process social information. They also influence how people relate, remember and evaluate themselves and other people (Myers 1997, 65). Therefore, identity can be observed as a part of self-concept, but identity also involves self-concept. Identity is an important human expression, it means an essential human nature, a core personality (Rönholm 1999, 23–24). According to development psychologist Erikson (1950), identity is a human essence, a holistic personality view of an adult, but also a process, because it is dynamic and developing.

In describing identity as a holistic personality, Erikson shows the influence of internally perceived phenomena to his or her social reality. An individual creates his or her identity on different development levels and in different social roles (Flammer 1999, 83-89). Identity is an answer to the question: who am I? *I/self* is something deep within, it is constant and cumulative. At the same it is something indefinite, changeable and hard to comprehend. Various researchers from different scientific traditions consider identity from different aspects. Self – it is subjective, but self can not develop without social feedback and social reflexion. Self-awareness is impossible without intimacy with and attention from other people (Ojanen 1996, 23). Self objectivization is shown by the ability to take different roles, to place oneself to others' position. In the sociological approach to identity, the adaptability to society's given role is seen as the main element in identification; the development of identity means interaction with the social environment. Valk (2003, 227) explains that the sociological identity concept was established by representatives of symbolic interactionism Cooley (1902)

and Mead (1934). The sociological identity concept does not regard the subject as autonomous, because identity forms from the interactive relation between self and environment. Therefore identity can not be stable, it forms and changes constantly, depending on representations of the culture system (Hall 1999, 21–23).

According to humanistic and phenomenological human-concept, the individual self-concept forms as the result of previous structured experiences (Rogers 1950). An individual forms the self-concept in relation with other people and the environment; also including their aspirations and values as the important factors (Rogers 1965, 499–500). Maslow (1954, 1962) stresses the importance of self-actualization as a part of self-concept, whereby self-actualization needs, as well as aesthetic needs do not vanish with age. This is an important aspect, considering that the western culture values work and aspiration of self-actualization through work (Lord, Brown & Freiberg 1999). Work provides opportunities for human development by helping people express themselves and giving them the opportunity to learn and use new skills. Work also helps satisfy people's social and psychological needs and offers individuals' a lot of content and meaning (Halley, Kopp & Austin 1992, 169). In an individual, who realizes himself or herself through work, this is expressed as substantial personal phenomenon – the work can mean calling and mission. For these individuals the work role becomes the most important part of their life and they are unable to sometimes fulfil other social roles. This may cause imbalance in their close human relations. Maslow (1999, 50–51; 284) accentuates that self-actualization can only happen when there is the existence of *self*. Self-actualization is influenced by many different factors – even the self-actualization of a person with strong identity depends on their abilities, values and is also related to cultural context.

In social constructivism the concepts *self* and *identity* are seen as *self-concept*, which is constructed through interactive relation with social environment (Burr 1995; Berger & Luckmann 1967). According to Berger and Luckmann (1967) all social phenomena are constructed through social reality. Berger and Luckmann's anti-essentialist account of social life argues that human beings together create and then sustain all social phenomena through social practices. According to Deaux (1992), from the perspective of social constructivism, it can be argued that personal meanings are constructed in and dependent on the social context. Thus individual's personal identity cannot be separated from the context in which it develops (Deaux 1992, 17). The importance of context is emphasized in the development of identity, because from the view of social constructivism identity is created again and again and interpreted to other people through language. Therefore identity can be understood and explained in the context of discourse. Discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements, etc. which in some way together produce a particular version of events. According to the social constructivist approach, there are a multitude of discourses constantly at work constructing and producing our identity. Therefore, an individual's identity does not originate from inside the person, but from the social realm (Burr 1995; Kitzinger 1992).

According to a view outlined above, there are a multitude of alternative pictures that can be painted of an event (or a person or class of persons), to represent in a particular way or casting it in a certain light, available through language. Burr (1995, 48-51) explains that surrounding any object, event, person, etc., there may be a multitude of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the object in question, a different way of representing it to the world. Rönholm (1999) stresses that the origination of identity can then be regarded as a very individual phenomenon, or as constructed in the context of social reality. The nature of identity may also be regarded via structure, process, content as well as different components.

An individual's self-identity can also be defined as a sum of personal and social identities. An individual's personal identity is self-categorization that is based on similarities and differences perceived in comparison with others and this determines the sense of uniqueness as an individual. Differently from *personal identity*, *social identity* is based on an individual's categorization founded on his or her group membership, and on comparison against other individuals (Lord, Brown & Freiberg 1999, 169). According to Valk (2003) the approach stressing personal identity (see Harter 1997; Waterman 1993) regards the human inner potential and *true self* as the main foundation for the development of identity. Therefore, social factors are phenomena limiting individuality. This concept proceeds from the idea that there is a certain 'true self' – an individual's actual experiences and tendencies, - that cannot be fully expressed because of the society's rigid rules and regulations. At the same time, personal identity is in its nature social, because only through social instruments (language, stereotypes, etc.) can an individual work with his or her inner self. Most theories (see Tajfel 1981; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell 1987) take the personal part of identity first and foremost as a designer of social identity and social roles and personal and social identity are then distinguished as two aspects of the self-concept (Valk 2003, 230–231). Personal identity is related with an individual's self-categorization, in which there are cognitive, emotional, judgmental and intentional components. When comparing personal identity with social identity, it is difficult to distinguish between their respective components, because as Rönholm (1999, 91–92) states – an individual may experience social identity also as personal identity.

*Social identity* means identity's relation with social groups, relationships and roles. Valk (2002, 231) presents the categorization of social identities by Thoits and Virshup (1997), in which self level or *individual social identity* is observed as *social identity* and *we-level social identity* is *collective identity*. Also Lord, Brown and Freiberg (1999) relate and distinguish social identity with greater social context. Social identity may be regarded as *interpersonal* or *collective identity*. Interpersonal approach is important in work related activities, in superior-subordinate relations; collective identity is important in teamwork and common efforts of an organization. On the collective level an individual identifies himself or herself with a certain group by using the group prototype for comparison and self-categorization. On that level, the wellbeing of the group is often the key issue. Likewise, an organization's identity may be especially important when individual is identifying himself or herself on the collective level. Collective identity may have significant relevance when the function of a team leader is carried out by a regular team member, not by a formal leader, or when the efficiency of an organization depends on the high level of cohesion with work and commitment is an important factor. At the same time, an individual's self-identity strengthens and becomes clearer precisely when working in a collective.

According to Lord, Brown and Freiberg (1999), (see Banaji & Prentice 1994; Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McCarty 1994) identity is observed through *self-identity* and *social identity*, whereas *social identity* may be divided into levels of *social identity* and *collective social identity*. According to Brewer and Gardner (1996, 84), at the *individual level*, one emphasizes interpersonal comparisons. Self-worth is based on favourable comparisons to others, at least in Western cultures, and self-enhancement motivation or self serving biases are common (Lord, Brown & Freiberg 1999). Brewer and Gardner's (1996) theory describes two levels of *social identities* — *interpersonal* and *collective social identities*. *Interpersonal relation* of superiors to subordinates affects subordinates' identification and self-concept, which, in turn, are critical determinants of social and organizational processes (Lord, Brown & Freiberg 1999, 170; Ruohotie 2004, 7). Brewer and Gardner (1996) note that self-concepts are defined in terms of roles that specify one's relation to others (e.g., child-parent, student-teacher, subordinate-leader). Self-representations are also dependent on the reflected self, or the self as

seen through the reactions of others (Lord, Brown & Freiberg 1999, 170). At the group level, one identifies with a particular group such as one's work team or organization, using the group prototype as a basis for inter-group comparisons and self-definition. Group-level identification would make racial or ethnic differences particularly important. Similarly, organizational identities may be especially important, when the self is defined at the group level (Lord, Brown & Freiberg 1999).

As it appears, identity may be regarded from different aspects: discern elements and components, analyze their significance and degree of context cohesion, motivators and schemas of development. Identity levels may be observed as *sub-identities* as stated by Hall (1976). *Sub-identities* have all the features and characteristics demonstrated in the individual's roles. These roles may be very different but still simultaneous (e.g. social worker but also spouse, parent, etc). With every role there are additional expectations from other people: in work roles expectations of peers and leaders; expectations of children and spouse in parent and spouse role.

Sub-identities are also connected with human needs and values. In worker role other roles are less active and the development of this sub-identity (professional identity) is influenced by personal factors but also greatly shaped by social context that gives the role status, position (Aimre 2001, 94–97). *Professional identity* may be regarded as part of an individual's *social identity*, but it is strongly related to *personal identity* – because acknowledgment and acceptance of professional ideology is related to self-identity: identification with the profession is stressed because this is where important values and internal motivation stimuli are. *Professional identity* as a *sub-identity* may be explained as an individual's view of himself or herself in performing certain tasks in the profession. It means an individual's conception of how he or she manages in professional practice, which is expressed by acceptance of the professional role. It also involves the individual's conception of to what extent his or her personal characteristics are in correlation with work goals. Although an individual can define several (sub)identities in his or her life, it is rather difficult to activate more than one or two roles simultaneously. Accordingly, we can observe a subordination of identities that is changing. The activation and emergence of a certain role is related to the individual's needs and values (Lord, Brown & Freiberg 1999; Hall 1990; Ruohotie 1995, 2000, 2004). The general concept of identity involves simultaneously a subjective component of self-identity and the outside identification reflected from other people. Therefore, here we may speak separately of self-identity and public identity. Public identity should not be confused with social identity, although the analogy appears to be tempting. A similar distinction must be made between personal identity and self-concept (Rönholm 1999). Work provides one of the important answers to the question: who am I? Some possible responses are: I am a welfare worker. Of course other factors go into the making up of a person's identity, but the work a person does is one of the chief ingredients (Halley, Kopp, & Austin 1992, 169).

Since *identity* and *social role* are also very closely related concepts, they are often mixed up. According to Miller and Prentice (1994) the structures of both the identity and social role are determined by other people's expectations and norms. For example, if the social role expectations are similar, still the individual's identity in this social role is specific. The social identity (through the social roles e.g. worker's role) anchors the self-concept in the broader social world. An individual's *self-identity* and *social identity* are expressed through social roles as individually important carriers of values and world view. Although Brewer and Gardner (1996) have laid out this three-level system for understanding self-identity, they have not considered how it may function in an organizational context. However, these factors

would seem to be particularly critical in understanding such functioning. (Lord, Brown & Freiberg 1999.)

A worker's *self-identity structure* emerges in the organizational context, because it shows its cohesion with the work and with peers. This self-identity structure as presented by Ruohotie (2004, 13) shows concept of self-identity structure presented by the researchers Selenta and Lord (2002) as *personal, interpersonal* and *collective identity* (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Self-identity levels and dimensions according to Selenta and Lord (2002); Lord and Brown (2004) and Ruohotie (2004).

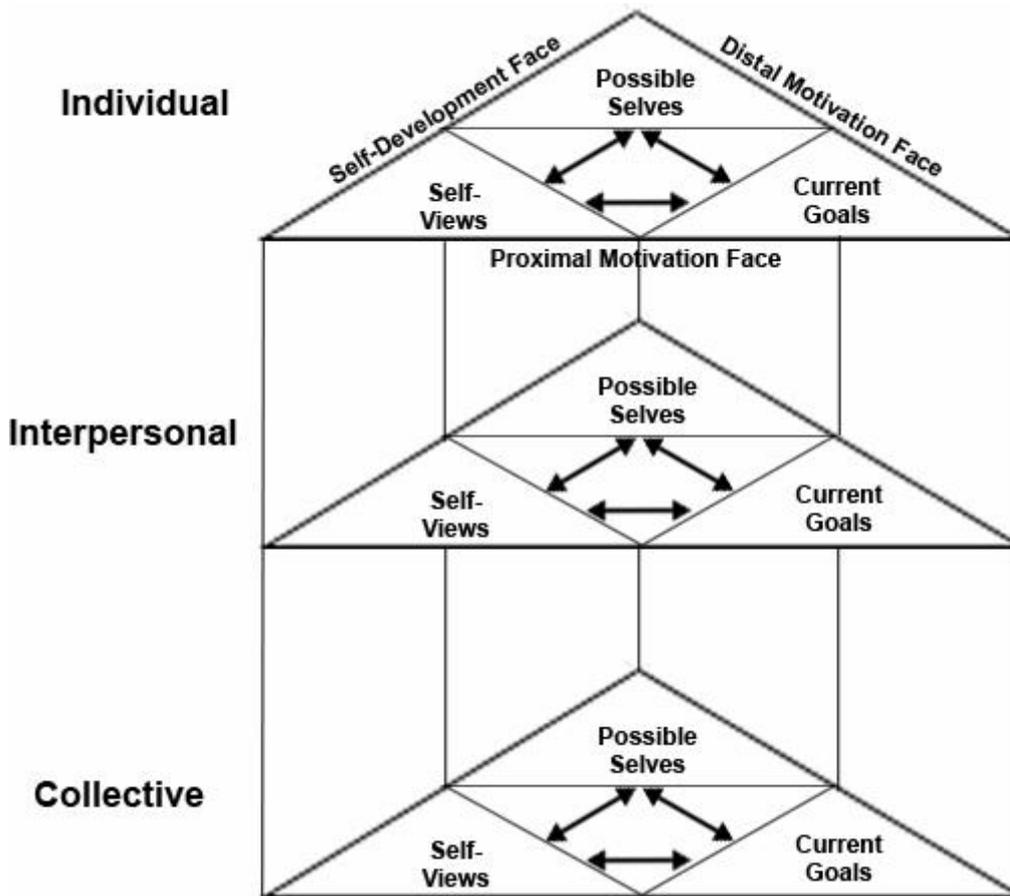
Levels and dimensions	Description of dimensions
<i>Personal level</i>	
Comparative identity	Individual's characteristics or achievements are compared with others
Internal identity Independence	Self is determined by comparison against inner self. Independence /autonomy is valued higher than social activities
<i>Interpersonal level (Relational)</i>	
Care for other people	Care for other people and helping them determine self
Human relations identity	Self is determined by close human relations and self-reflection
<i>Collective level</i>	
Focusing on group achievements	Group achievements and internal contributions determine self
Group identity	Self is determined based on the reactions experienced in the group (also reactions from outsiders towards the group)

The level of personal identity is constituted of three dimensions; the dimension interpreting social identity is divided into two groups, one of them being the interpersonal level that characterizes care and human relations and the other is the collective level characterized by focusing to group achievements and the group. However, due to the limitations of human abilities, all these levels of self-identity are not active continuously or evenly.

### *The Working Self-Concept*

By differentiating the personal, interpersonal and collective identity Lord, Brown and Freiberg (1999) combine the *working self-concept* with new aspects. The Working Self-Concept (WSC) is the highly activated, contextually sensitive portion of the self-concept that guides action and information processing on a moment-to-moment basis. All possible selves are not simultaneously active because humans have relatively limited attentional capacity (Lord et al. 1999; Lord & Brown 2004). The *personal, interpersonal* and *collective identities* are formed by complex and dynamic systems, called *proximal motivation face, distal motivation face* and *self-development face*. The development of both personal as well as social

identity is regarded through three components. These components are *self-views*, *possible selves* and *current goals and standards* (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Modelling of working self-concept components and dimensions (Lord, Brown & Freiberg 1999, 170).

Due to the limited attention capacity of human information processors, only a small portion of the potentially accessible aspects of the self are activated at any one time. Therefore the distinction, between *current goals*, which are short-term, narrow standards, and *possible selves*, which are more long-term, broader standards. Though both current goals and possible selves provide comparisons for *self-views*, they have quite different motivational and affective consequences. (Lord, Brown & Freiberg 1999.)

#### 4.2.2 Development of Professional Identity

The relation of self-identity to professional identity may be regarded as how an individual sees himself or herself in work roles and how well he or she manages the work life, work practice. Cohesion of self-identity with professional identity is expressed by accepting and anchoring professional roles. Acceptance of the professional role shows the individual's conception about to what extent his or her characteristics correspond to the characteristics of the successful practitioner of a certain profession. For example, in social work there are several requirements to personal characteristics and if an individual does not recognize these characteristics within himself or herself, he or she cannot/shall not accept a social worker's professional role.

Role acceptance is also related to society's expectations – it means that an individual's professional self-concept is shaped by society's prevalent role concepts. In addition to the role concepts generally accepted in the society, an individual develops a concept of himself or herself as a worker, based on their needs, work motivation and, naturally, their abilities. These components of the professional self are also supplemented by *self-esteem* and *self-confidence*. These components start to develop already during the vocational education period and continue to develop through the whole work life, but these components are influenced both by childhood and adult life experiences.

Heikkinen (2000) points out that the concept of identity is mostly used when speaking of an individual as a subject, but also when determining an individual's special quality in society. Personal identity serves as a foundation for the development of professional identity (who am I?), because an individual's self-concept influences his or her choice of profession (is this an economically viable profession or a mission, etc). In work life identity influences aspirations and career pursuits (the ideal self's concept of career) and degree of effort for professional growth. Professional activity and professional growth are related to the development of personal identity, that means a process of becoming independent and belonging together with other people. The development of professional identity means first and foremost self-discovery and self-awareness through work, the process is invoked by the choice of profession. This is characterized by adaptation with work, i.e. choosing interesting and autonomous work. (Heikkinen 2001, 171.) Researchers view accommodation with work, development of self-concept and professional identity as a *life course* process (Super 1957; 1990; Ruohotie 1995, 2000; Heikkinen 2001). Each life course stage is related with work life: growth (childhood), exploration and trial (youth), development (adolescence), maintenance and stability (mid-life) and withdrawal (old age) (Hall 1990; Super 1990). Super (1990) sees the process starting with the choice of profession based on Rogers's phenomenological self-concept theory. Super presents the choice of a profession as a process where an individual evaluates the interesting aspects of professions, i.e. compares self-concept with the stereotypical concepts of professions. The process of choosing is a subjective, complicated, reflective process, where in the case of satisfactory selection, the individual attempts to adapt to the new circumstances. After vocational training the individual moves to work life where there are more opportunities for the development of professional identity. Work that corresponds with the individual's nature promotes enthusiasm; success and sense of achievement support work commitment.

Development of professional identity may be also viewed as a worker's belonging to somewhere, sharing his or her knowledge and skills with other people. Being for other people, a worker's necessity and indispensability may be regarded as an aspect of professional identity (Heikkinen 2001). According to Super (1990) development of professional identity as cohesion with work is promoted by *professional maturity*. Professional maturity is defined as an individual's readiness to cope with certain work tasks, individual phases in their work life, stemming from society's expectations. Society's expectations to individual are guided by the individuals who already have covered that work phase. Ruohotie (1995) shows that readiness can be divided into affective and cognitive readiness. *Affective readiness* is primarily related to planning of the career and exploration of professional alternatives. *Cognitive readiness* is 1) knowledge of the principles of decisions related to *career path* and ability to use these principles in real life choice situations; 2) knowledge of the nature of career path, profession and work life; and 3) knowledge of this particular professional and occupational sphere, where the individual's preferences are directed. (Ruohotie (1995, 137.)

*Professional maturity* is a promoting factor to the development of professional identity, because professional maturity creates readiness to acquire the necessary work roles. Super (1990) postulates that the role-view describes life stages, an individual's constellations of positions and roles. The roles may be supportive – complementing and compensatory or neutral. Roles may be contradictory, one role may e.g. take time and energy away from other roles. Therefore, roles may both enrich and hinder an individual's life. If the work role is permanently most active, then other role performances may recede into the background (e.g. spouse and parent roles). An active work role and the existence of favourable role-combinations influence strongly an individual's professional identity and professional growth. Due to changes in self-concept and environment role-views accommodation continues as adaptation process through all life stages.

It must be kept in mind that the development of professional identity is based on the interaction between institutions that create roles and society. The shaping and developing of professional identity is tied to time, because this process is related to the society's context and cultural traditions: work and development are organized by people who have different experiences and understanding of education, occupation and profession. (Heikkinen 2001, 13–15.)

### 4.3 Professional Identity of Social Workers

The vocational training period, vocational education as a socialization process creates opportunities for the individual to move into the chosen professional culture, and to accept the professional ideology. When acquiring a profession in social work sphere, the learner tests the compatibility of his or her self-concept with the profession philosophy, which in the case of social work is one of the main foundations of this profession. In the learning process the roles of social workers are acquired in order to fulfil the society's expectation and work goals. An individual's active participation in the vocational education process creates the basis for the development of professional identity on the career path.

The social workers' roles that anchor workers in their profession emerge from the occupational picture. Professional roles are instrumental for the development of professional identity, because to adopt a professional role means to accept work tasks and expectations of the society. In the broad perspective, a social worker is a helper and bringer/creator of changes. Social workers generate various strategies and tactics (depending on the organizational or institutional goals) the desired changes via a planned, systematic activity process (Parsons, Jorgensen & Hernandez 1994). A social worker, determining with clients their problems and exploring the context factors, weighing options and opportunities to intervene in order to change the circumstances, takes different professional roles in the social process, the empowerment process. From the opinion of Parsons, Jorgensen and Hernandez (1994) and Compton and Callaway (1994) in every complicated professional procedure of intervention a social worker has different professional roles: a conferee, an enabler, a broker, an advocate, a mediator and certainly a guardian.

Cohesion with work emerges if the social worker comprehends and values the work and accepts the clients, the social worker is successful in work and has a sense of accomplishment. At the same time, it has to be kept in mind that the society's expectations can be completely different from the expectations of workers. Therefore there are different role expectations at play: the social worker's subjective expectations versus the society's objective expectations that are not always adequate. These expectations may not be adequate if the society is not

fully aware of the roles of a certain profession; as is the case with social work in Estonia because it is still a new and developing profession. The social workers' own conception of their professional roles must be realistic and based on knowledge-skills and strategies of intervention, but first and foremost on ethics and professional philosophy. These give a social worker stability and balance in work, and all this enables him or her to cope with everyday tasks and develop cohesion with work. A realistic profession concept (see London and Mone 1987, 56–57; 66–67), clear career goals, the need for achievement, the need for a leadership role in order to direct processes towards the desired course – all this characterizes a worker with strong self-concept he or she has the required prerequisites of development of professional identity. Such worker is capable of professional work, because he or she integrates the knowledge and skills with personal characteristics and values. The consequent feeling of achievement is encouraging and strengthens cohesion and commitment with work.

The factors of work and work environment are also important for the development of professional identity. Creative, innovative work accomplishments are founded on supportive work environment, opportunities for professional growth and variety in work tasks. The status of social work in the society and society's validation of social work profession practices are also important for the development of cohesion with work and therefore for the development of professional identity. Social workers' cohesion with work and work commitment are founded on their worldview and values. Humanistic worldview and values are central principles that help to develop cohesion with work, which according to London and Mone (1987) is one component of professional identity.

The work task of social workers is often to support the reconstruction of the client's diffused self-concept. Social workers are unable to help other people, if they do not know who they are, where they belong, which goals they have and what they value and do not value, etc. Social workers face these questions every day and they also have to assist other people in finding answers to these questions and take responsibility both for themselves and others. Academic or higher vocational education of social workers must appreciate that students as young adolescents have reached a certain level of personal development, but from there forward, vocational education must strengthen the characteristics suitable for social work and develop humanistic outlook that anchors them with profession philosophy, creating therefore a basis for development of cohesion with work and professional identity.

#### 4.4 Research Questions

Social work as a new profession has been developing in Estonia during approximately 15 years. This is a long period in human life but in the development process of a profession it is a short period. Nevertheless, the social work profession in Estonia is already working as a system and the re-creation for the profession is in progress.

Commitment and cohesion with work are important because in social work there is lot of uncertainty and challenges. These features demand certain flexibility of competences from the social worker that is not achievable solely through education. As in many professions the constant professional growth is necessary for the level of competency that allows a social worker to meet these challenges successfully. One of the prerequisites of professional growth is commitment to work, which is an important element of professional identity. Therefore also raises the question about the supportive factors that would help to develop and strengthen professional identity. Professional identity develops in the work practice, but it should also be supported by vocational education.

Also for the young developing profession, as the social work profession in Estonian society is, there arise many questions about how to improve results in social work. These results also have impact on the vocational education of future social workers. How to educate and whom – young people straight from high school or people with life and work experiences? Where to educate – in vocational educational institutions or in academic universities?

In order to get answers to these many questions and to develop professional practice of social work, research has been carried out in parallel with vocational education. The researchers' topics have covered different client group needs that create a satisfactory network of the social system. Research topics touch on gerontology, child protection, social work with disabled people, but also social work tasks in probation and the role of social work in education and health care. The growing pains of social work as a new profession and the aspects relating to work problems and the context of social workers, however, have not been sufficiently studied. Still in recent years, social workers and their professional practice have been studied in surveys carried out either in Tallinn University or in the University of Tartu. The subjects covered work satisfaction and factors influencing professional growth opportunities of social workers working in different spheres. One of the first of more comprehensive studies was conducted by prof. Taimi Tulva from Tallinn University in her dissertation *Social Work in Estonia in a Period of Change*, that she defended in Lappeenranta University, Finland in 1995.

In 1998, I examined the development of the social work profession and opportunities for professional growth in my Master's dissertation. As a teacher of future social workers, I am interested in the factors that support academically educated social workers in maintaining and increasing their competence, and consequently their readiness for life long learning and professional growth. According to the London and Mone (1987, 56–57; 66–67) model (see Table 1), high motivation, which is connected with commitment to work and development of professional identity are needed for professional growth. Emergence of professional cohesion is connected to self-concept tendencies. The development of professional cohesion and professional identity must be supported by academic vocational education, which should give social workers the necessary competence and skills to analyze their strengths and weaknesses on their to career paths. In this manner a social worker as a self-directed learner can develop his or her professional competence and take responsibility for professional growth.

If a worker commits himself or herself to work, accepts professional ideology and adjusts the self-concept with professional philosophy for the reason that the substance of this profession is important to him or her, then we may speak about the development of professional identity. Professional identity is a very important factor for professional growth in social work, because only social workers with a strong professional identity are capable of meeting the challenges they face in everyday work.

With reference to previous, in this research I looked for answers to the following questions:

1. What is the self-concept of the social work student and of the social worker, those engaged in social work, like?
2. What were the motives that brought them to the social work field?
3. What are social workers' experiences and their conceptions of social work?
4. What kind of identity is the professional identity of social workers?
5. How committed to professional values the social workers are?

## 5 DESIGN OF RESEARCH

### 5.1 Research Methodology

Research methodology is based on social constructivism and hermeneutical-phenomenological approach. In the present research I have described the individual's conception of the relation between self-identity and professional identity, his or her personality and work environment relation as the representative of social work profession. In this research I have described and interpreted the significance that the respondents, social work professionals, have given to their activities and experiences in their everyday work context, which is constantly changing. The research aims to understand and interpret the world of other people (social workers), in order to discover the characteristic features seen by different people that are specific to human constructed phenomena.

Constructivism as epistemological category comes from cognition philosophy/cognitive psychology (*Erkenntnisphilosophie*). According to the cognitive psychology theorist Piaget, an individual constructs his or her self-concept and social reality time and again, integrating old schemas/structures into new (Flammer 1999, 125).

The social constructivism approach explains the different individuals' world/phenomena construction in interactive relation with the environment. An individual interprets the experiences from the interactive process, depending on his or her culture context through the use of language. It is important what kind of significations are given to own cognition of world and oneself through discourse (Berger & Luckmann 1967; Gergen 1985; Burr 1995). Social constructivism involves challenging most of our commonsense knowledge of ourselves and the world we live in. The framework itself has to change, and with it our understanding of every aspect of social and psychological life. Individual's identity avoids the essentialist connotations of personality, and is also implicitly a social concept (Burr 1995, 16–31). According to the social constructivism approach individuals construct both the concept of themselves and of the world, but the researcher can understand and interpret other people's conceptions as a bystander. Therefore in this research, based on research questions and goals, other methodological approach is the hermeneutical-phenomenological approach.

Hermeneutics may be regarded and understood as dualistic communication form that is based on both listening and speaking (Järvinen & Järvinen 2000, 201). Hermeneutics as a philosophical research tradition is older than phenomenology. It developed in the 1800's first through the philosophy of Schleiermacher and later Dilthey. Wilhelm Dilthey used the concept of *Geisteswissenschaft* for this scientific trend, offering this paradigm to counterbalance the positivistic approach, with the aim of studying social objects, activities and phenomena, where human activities are an important factor. Dilthey's motto was: "Nature is explanatory, human beings and culture are understood".

Hermeneutics was influenced by Heidegger's work "*Sein und Zeit*" (1927), in which he presented his radically new concept of "understanding" phenomenon. He claims that "understanding" is not only an epistemological but also an ontological condition. Therefore, "to be, one must understand"; understanding is the major component of existence (existentialism). Gadamer (1960), influenced by Heidegger, stressed the researcher's

possibility for “pre-understanding” (*Vorverständnis*), that directs the interpreting process. Gadamer also stresses the importance of language and the equal importance and intensity of the researcher’s role and the respondent’s role. According to Gadamer, the purpose of interpretation is not objectivity. The hermeneutical approach is characterized by such an “hermeneutical element” as “empathy”. Empathy brings the researcher, who places himself in a certain situation on the basis of a text or some other interpretation, within the research process in order to better understand and interpret the nature of the phenomenon being studied. The hermeneutical research method is characterized by “understanding” and “interpreting”. Heidegger and Gadamer were of the opinion that human’s natural activity is a specific self-expression in interpreting the understanding of reality (Heidegger 1962; Gadamer 1976; Gadamer 1989). It may be said that later hermeneutics melted into phenomenology. Similarly to hermeneutics, phenomenology may also be regarded as a scientific-philosophical orientation (methodological approach), as well as a research method. As a method phenomenology stresses “*Zu den Sachen selbst*“, which means that it is not necessary to explain collected research material on the basis of a theory. “*Zu den Sachen selbst*” has been the motto of phenomenology since the beginning of the 20th century, when it was born in Germany. A representative of German phenomenology Husserl stated that the world is a subjective phenomenon that we, humans, construct with the help of our senses. The phenomenological aspect stresses the researcher’s observations in the research process situations where the phenomenon being studied unrolls to the researcher as authentic, unprejudiced, rich and multidimensional.

## 5.2 Research Methods

### 5.2.1 Research Strategy

The present research is descriptive multi-strategy research, research which aims to give an overview of an area that has been little researched and describe the different aspects of the development of social workers professional identity and the opportunities for professional growth. The first part of the research is survey type and the second part is based on theme interviews and covers the conceptions of social workers about their development to professional social workers and development of the social work profession in Estonian society.

Bryman (2001, 454) explains that a multi-strategy research is becoming more common due to the growing preparedness to think of research methods as techniques of data collection or analysis that are not as encumbered by epistemological and ontological baggage. Bryman presents Hammersley’s (1996) three approaches to multi-strategy research: 1) triangulation – refers to use of quantitative research to corroborate qualitative research findings or vice versa; 2) facilitation – arises when one research strategy is employed in order to aid research using the other research strategy; 3) complementarity – occurs when the two research strategies are employed in order that different aspects of an investigation can be dovetailed (Bryman 2001, 447). The reasons for combining quantitative and qualitative approaches are to capitalize on the strengths of the two approaches, and to compensate for the weaknesses of each approach. Quantitative and qualitative research are combined in order to provide a general picture of the phenomenon (Punch 1999, 246–247).

Descriptive research presents accurate descriptions from individuals about occurrences or circumstances; research strategy can be either quantitative or qualitative (Hirsjärvi et al 2004, 129–130; Anttila 1996, 250).

The present research is *descriptive multi-strategy research*, research which aims to give an overview of an area that has been little researched and describe the different aspects of the development of social workers professional identity and the opportunities for professional growth. The first part of the research is survey type and the second part is based on theme interviews and covers the conceptions of social workers about their development to professional social workers and development of the social work profession in Estonian society.

Bryman (2001, 454) explains that a *multi-strategy research* is becoming more common due to the growing preparedness to think of research methods as techniques of data collection or analysis that are not as encumbered by epistemological and ontological baggage. Bryman presents Hammersley's (1996) three approaches to *multi-strategy research*: 1) triangulation – refers to use of quantitative research to corroborate qualitative research findings or *vice versa*; 2) facilitation – arises when one research strategy is employed in order to aid research using the other research strategy; 3) complementarity – occurs when the two research strategies are employed in order that different aspects of an investigation can be dovetailed (Bryman 2001, 447). The reasons for combining quantitative and qualitative approaches are to capitalize on the strengths of the two approaches, and to compensate for the weaknesses of each approach. Quantitative and qualitative research are combined in order to provide a general picture of the phenomenon (Punch 1999, 246–247)

*Descriptive research* presents accurate descriptions from individuals about occurrences or circumstances; research strategy can be either quantitative or qualitative (Hirsjärvi et al 2004, 129–130; Anttila 1996, 250).

The empirical part of my research has two stages, where I aim to unify the *quantitative survey research* with in-depth *qualitative research*. I thought it necessary to use “*mixed methods*” for this research. The reason being that the subject has not been studied extensively and my goal was to get a holistic picture of the phenomenon and develop a deep understanding of the nature of the phenomenon. Quantitative and qualitative empirical methods were used in combination for this research in order to describe as comprehensively as possible both the context factors and personality factors influencing the development of professional identity of social workers.

The descriptive research design aims to present a systematic description of a certain area or object(s). This type of description is separated from the perception/understanding gathered by applied knowledge and practical experience, using scientific data gathering and analysis methods; knowledge based on that process, which is subjected to scientific criteria. (Kenkmann & Saarniit 1998, 10). Also Hirsjärvi et al (1997, 136) characterize a descriptive research as the research, which is aimed at presenting accurate descriptions of individuals, events and phenomena; research design can be both quantitative and qualitative. According to Niglas (2004) quantitative and qualitative research methods are also regarded to be diametrically different methods. The dispute between the representatives of quantitative or qualitative research methods is related to the emergence of hermeneutics and the transfer of Kuhn's concept of paradigms into the context of social sciences in the late 1960's and early 1970's. In the English methodological literature the period is referred to as *paradigm wars*, because the critique against previously accepted ways of studying phenomena and the debates between the proponents of different positions were so extensive. It is not correct to consider

quantitative and qualitative research methods contrary and incommensurable approach. If the purpose is to enhance the quality of research, then, instead looking for the differences of quantitative and qualitative research methods, similarities should be found. (Niglas 2004, 13.)

Without negating the influence of different ontological and epistemological approaches in the research, several researchers have stressed the possibility of using and combining various research methods stemming from the research goals; the use of mixed methods. Leino-Kilpi (1996, 222) states that differences between quantitative and qualitative research may be stressed, but there is also the possibility of a better research result when using the combined methods. Quantitative and qualitative research strategies and methods can be like in this research study complementary. The quantitative stage may precede the qualitative stage; e.g. a broad quantitative survey can create the foundation on how to formulate suitable groups for qualitative interviews (Hirsjärvi, Remes, Sajavaara 1997, 133). In this research the quantitative survey stage served as the grounds and framework for choosing certain groups for interviewing. According to Punch (1998, 243) qualitative methods are the best way we have of getting the insider's perspective, the "actor's definition of the situation", the meanings people attach to things and events. Qualitative data have a holism and richness, and are well able to deal with the complexity of social phenomena.

Combining different methods in the same study is called triangulation. Triangulation means the use of different methods in different study stages and in the process of data gathering, as well as in the analysis process. According to Denzin (1989) "the concept of triangulation" denotes any attempt to combine or mix different methods in a research study. Denzin's triangulation means more than using multiple measurements of the same phenomenon, it involves combining different methods and theories, as well as perspectives of different investigators:

- *Data triangulation* means the variety of methods used in data gathering for the research of the same phenomenon.
- *Investigator triangulation* means that more than one researcher participated in the study.
- *Theory triangulation* refers to the use of multiple theoretical viewpoints in the analysis process.
- *Methodological triangulation* means the use of multiple methods to study a single problem or a phenomenon. This type of triangulation is after used for combining qualitative and quantitative methods.

Leino-Kilpi (1997) presents according to Begley (1996) and Janesick (1994) two additional triangulation types. First of them is *triangulation in analysis process* which means reconciling different methods with the same research material. The second triangulation type is *interdisciplinary triangulation*, which connects different disciplines in research to solve the same research problem.

*Mixed methods* are suitable for situations where there is a need to study the different aspects of a phenomenon or when it is necessary to formulate a holistic view of the phenomenon to acquire a thorough and accurate result. The aim is to obtain more knowledge and understanding, seeking different information in the different stages and at the same time about the researched phenomenon (Leino-Kilpi 1997, 223–224). According to Bryman (1988; 1992) to do so is necessary because different methods have different weaknesses and strengths. Within this context, quantitative and qualitative approaches are usually seen as different ways of studying the same phenomenon and being able to answer the same research questions.

Niglas (2004, 33–34) presents “taxonomies for combining a quantitative and qualitative approach” based on Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998):

- *Monomethod studies* follow ‘one of the predominant paradigms’ at all stages of the inquiry. Either purely quantitative or purely qualitative studies.
- *Mixed method studies* combine the quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single study or multiphased study. Here, quantitative and qualitative approaches seem to be regarded relatively independent as the authors stress that all mixed method designs use triangulation techniques.
- *Mixed model studies* combine qualitative and quantitative approaches within different phases of the research process. Here, qualitative and quantitative methodologies can be interwoven in different ways.

In this research I have combined methods (mixed methods) relatively independently. I have used triangulation in data gathering, but also theory triangulation and methodological triangulation in the analysis process.

### 5.2.2 Data Gathering by Survey

The material for the first stage of the empirical part of this research is gathered from the comprehensive questionnaire. Leino-Kilpi (1997) claims that the quantitative research stage is the first stage (in mixed methods), if an attempt is made to study unexpected results, e.g., results of factor analysis, which need additional study or require a qualitative specification of the phenomenon. The purpose of this research is to gather research material based on certain criteria from the selected sample, who give answers to the same questions. Anttila (1996, 251) explains that the goals of the survey study are:

- to gather authentic material that describes the existing phenomenon
- to identify problems or existing circumstances
- to compare and evaluate the phenomenon.

Hirsjärvi et al (1997, 130) describe typical survey features: a sample is chosen from a certain group, from whom the research material (usually relatively small) is gathered in a standardized manner, either by the survey-questionnaire or by the structured interview. Based on the analysis of the research material an attempt is made to describe, compare and explain the nature of the phenomenon. Järvinen & Järvinen (2000) stress that an important factor in survey research is operationalization that helps the researcher to measure the concepts presented in the theories against the gathered material. The research capacity and scope must afford to analyze the aspects of the phenomenon purposefully. In survey research the sample gives answers to questions selected in advance that proceed from a certain theory or model. A structured questionnaire contains multiple selection answers derived from the researcher’s guiding theory.

The questionnaire (see Annex 1) for the present study consists here of two parts: the primary part covers questions about personal characteristics that form the basis for development of worker’s professional identity and questions about work process and work environment factors that influence professional growth and development of professional identity. This part of the questionnaire is based on the measurement instrument developed by professor Pekka Ruohotie from Tampere University. A taxonomy had been developed from the Growth Needs Project initiated by the Research Centre for Vocational Education of Tampere University for

evaluating and measuring the personal characteristics of the employees, but also work effectiveness and transitions of work process as well as developmental factors and obstacles. Professional characteristics as professional self-concept components (1–89 questions) were measured with professional self-concept measurement constructed by professor Pekka Ruohotie (1995) which followed the model by London and Mone (1987) which presented career motivation elements (statements measuring management motivation in self-concept questionnaire by Ruohotie (1995) were left out). Questions 90–118 are constructed by Ruohotie as measurement that is based on the theoretical conceptions of self-efficacy and outcome expectations of Bandura (1977; 1982; 1986). There are many challenges in social work that can be viewed as development component of work. Learning through work experience is tied with developing challenges at work. Therefore questions 119–166 refer transitions in work, but also work developmental factors and obstacles on the basis of theoretical conceptions of McCauley (1994). McCauley (1994) with his research team has created a measurement to evaluate development in work – *The Developmental Challenge Profile* (DCP), which divides work promoting challenges into several components and concentrates to the features supporting the development (see 4.1.3).

The secondary part of the questionnaire (see Annex 1), that is created by me is connected to the questions concerning the social work context. This part of the survey concerning the context of social work consisted of 20 questions, 9 of them being open-ended questions that were divided into 3 blocs. The context questionnaire helped to gather background data about the content and nature of social work, opportunities for professional growth as well as development difficulties of social work as a new profession and its status in the society. (The first bloc of the context questionnaire contained general questions about the sample: age, gender, vocational educational level, tenure and occupational life).

The questions of primary part (Annex 1) were statement questions, where the respondent could choose the suitable answer. The respondent could evaluate the statements on Likert's scale (1...5), where 1 expresses disagreement with the statement 2 = little agreement, 3 = some degree of agreement, 4 = strong agreement and 5 expresses full agreement with the statement.

The first empirical stage of the research was conducted between November 2000 and March 2001 (test survey was carried out from December 1999 to February 2000). Potential respondents were given both an oral and written explanation about the purposes and meaning of the research. Questionnaires were filled in during the learning session (81 respondents) and social workers continuing education seminar (11), were sent by mail (16), by e-mail (14) – altogether 122 questionnaires were returned. 133 questionnaires were distributed and 122 were returned and used as the research material. The return percentage is 92%. Not all questionnaires sent by mail (group N1) were returned (11). All questionnaires filled in during the session (92) and sent by e-mail (14) were returned. The questionnaires were numbered and coded for quotation from A 1 to A 122.

The sample of the survey (N=122) consisted of social workers that had received academic education in the Tallinn University (N1=41/vilistlased), undergraduate students of the Open University engaged in practical social work, who one month after participating in the survey graduated from the university with a BA degree (N2=52/lõpetajad) and future social workers, first year social work students (N=29/statsionaar). The criterion for inclusion in the sample was academic vocational education from the Tallinn University.

A sample can be considered representative if it expresses the minimodel of the full quantity (Tooding 1998, 156). This research sample can be regarded as a *stratified sample*. To acquire

a stratified sample, the full quantity is divided into parts on the basis of certain stratum attributes and a random sample is chosen in the stratum. The value of the stratum attributes must be clearly known, as well as the number of individuals in the stratum (*stratum frame*) (Tooding 1998, 160).

The full quantity consists of all social workers in Estonia, the stratified sample consists of social workers with academic vocational education from Tallinn University and social work students in Tallinn University. The value of the stratum attribute is academic vocational education. The number of individuals in the stratum (or stratum frame) is 295 social workers and students (as of January 1, 2001). 93 social workers and 29 social work students (N=122) participated in this research as the stratified sample.

First the general data about the sample were processed in order to get the picture of the sample profile. It appeared that there 13 men and 108 women (N=122) in the sample. Gender distribution see Table 3.

As seen from the table, there are more women than men in the social work profession; it is typical due to the historical-cultural development of the helping professions. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that there are men who come to study social work in the university, we have male students in every learning group, even if not too many.

**Table 3.** Gender distribution of the respondents (N=122).

Gender	Group N1	Group N2	Group N3	Total	%
Women	40	46	23	109	89%
Men	1	6	6	13	11%
Total	41	52	29	122	100%

The age distribution of the respondents varies widely. The youngest respondent was 17 years old and oldest 59 years old. The average age is 35 years. The majority of the sample was formed by groups N1 and N2, (social workers) – 76% of the respondents. Group N3 (social work students) – the percentage of the sample was 34% (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Age distribution of the respondents (N=122).

Age group	Group N1	Group N2	Group N3	Respondents	%
Under 20 years	-	-	22	22	18%
20-29	13	8	6	27	22%
30-39	13	10	1	24	20%
40-49	15	19	-	34	28%
50-59	11	4	-	15	12%
Total	52	41	29	122	100%
Mean				35 years	

The largest age group of respondents fell between ages 40–49. The average age was considerably lower (35 years), because all (except one respondent) in the students group were under 20 years or between 20-29 years. The average age of long term social work practitioners (N1 and N2) was 39 years.

In the research by Tulva (1996) the average age of social workers was 42 years. (This research included both social workers with academic vocational education and with other

education.) In my research in 1998 the average age of social workers was also 42 years. It is explained by the fact that there are many people who came to the social work field from other fields and had to acquire a new profession in the middle age. In the 1990's there were only a few young social workers with academic vocational education, but their number is increasing with every year and thanks to that the average age of social workers in Estonia is slowly dropping, which is a normal process.

The average work experience in the social work field for the 93 social workers (N1 and N2) was 7 years. Two social workers had worked less than a year. Twenty-one social workers had worked in that field more than 10 years. One person claimed to have 26 years of social work experience, although such a profession did not exist in Estonia during the Soviet era, however, the work content and nature belonged to the field of social work (orphanage, nursing home, retirement office, etc.). See Table 5.

**Table 5.** Work experience in social work (N1+N2=93)

Length of service	Respondents	%
Less than 1 year	2	2%
1-3 years	11	12%
4-6 years	32	34%
7-10 years	40	43%
More than 10 years	8	9%
Total	93	100%
Mean	7 years	

The students also had acquired some work experience, mainly as voluntary social work practitioners, but there were also students who had been working professionally, but the duration of their work experience remained under 6 months (N3=18/29).

The work content and the level of responsibility is expressed by the titles of occupational positions held by the respondents. There are four different titles of occupational positions: specialist, leading specialist, counsellor and manager. Manager here refers to head of an institution or local authority in social work (see Table 6).

**Table 6.** Occupational positions of social workers (N1+N2=93).

Occupation	Group N1	Group N2	Respondents	%
Manager	13	13	26	28%
Leading specialist	19	7	26	28%
Counsellor	3	7	10	11%
Specialist	17	13	30	32%
Other		1	1	1%
Total	52	41	93	100%

The students with work experience are specialists in public sector institutions or voluntary social work practitioners (N3=18/29).

### 5.2.2.1 Data Analysis

Material gathered by a questionnaire is analyzed in this study by using the factor analysis. On the basis of the results of factor analysis the summation indexes are formed and *bivariate-correlation* is conducted in order to bring out the correlation between summation indexes. Finally, on the basis of means a variance analysis was carried out by using One-Way ANOVA (*Analysis of Variance*) method. The goal of the variance analysis is to check statistical significance of the differences between the groups. The research material gathered by the questionnaire was analyzed by using the SPSS-data processing package.

One of the goals of the analysis was also to find the facilities to strengthen the reliability of the research. The use of Likert's scale in the questionnaire enables also the analysis of the gathered material with demanding quantitative methods. Therefore, factor analysis was used as the analysis method in the research. The factor analysis was the first analyzing method to be used and based on these results, summation variables were derived from the basic variables.

Proceeding from the research goals and tasks, the main components of the self-concept of social workers and social work students must be explored: which personal characteristics they themselves evaluate as important and necessary and which components of self-concept and professional identity are in correlation. For this goal it was necessary to consolidate and group the data. Grouping is an important part of the research process.

In social and human sciences usually grouping techniques are used for structuring, in other words for finding the research object. This is called explorative grouping, for which factor analysis is particularly suitable. Explorative grouping analysis (factor analysis) is a mathematical-statistical method for grouping the research material. (Erätuuli, Leino & Yli-Luoma 1994.)

Factor analysis is based on the relation between the variables, e.g. the variables with strong correlation are grouped together. In this manner a smaller number of factors is derived from the basic variables, which can be used to describe all basic variables (Niglas 2002), with the purpose of finding out different conceptions that cannot be measured directly, but can be measured indirectly.

For grouping the research data, each variable must be clearly separate and variables must be either numeric variables or have a numeric scale value corresponding to the interval gradation scale. It means that research material must be gathered with the interval gradation scale (Erätuuli et al 1994). The final goal of the analysis is the derivation of the factor variables or new summation variables, which are composed as a linear combination of the basic variables – each basis variable must be strongly related to only one derived factor. (Niglas 2002.) In this research I have used an integral gradation scale, the five-point *Likert Scale*, where 1 = 'not at all'... 5 = 'fully agree'.

I carried out a factor analysis several times. First, I analyzed the full sample (N=122) with all 166 questions. Fourteen factors were derived, with a relatively good internal consistency (the reliability estimator Cronbach's alpha index for all factors was > 0.60). The factor variables percentage of all data (% of variance) was 51.9%, at the same percentage of nine factors remained between 3–4%, which was too little and diffuse. Therefore the results of these factor analyses were excluded.

Then a new factor analysis was performed, including the full sample (N=122) and 42 questions concerning the personal characteristics components. Most of the work-related questions were excluded, because a part of the sample (11 students) did not have experience of permanent work and therefore they were unable to answer all 166 questions. That could have been the reason why the first factor analysis showed a high diffusion rate and the percentages obtained for the majority of factor variables were small. The general self-concept orientation of social workers and social work students was measured with 42 statements of questionnaire. On the basis of this factor analysis it was possible to identify important personal characteristics as professional self-concept components of the social workers and social work students. A factor analysis was carried out, using the principal component analysis method, where linear combinations are formed from the basic variables so that the first combination, e.g. dispersion of factors of principal components would be as great as possible, so that a possibly large variance of basic variables would be obtained. The factor analysis was carried out by employing SPSS-for Windows Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation method.

The most widely used criterion for determining the factors is the Kaiser criterion: only the factors with eigenvalue  $> 1$  are included (Erätuuli et al 1994, 53). In my research I also adopted the criterion that the eigenvalue of factors must be  $> 1$  and the percentage of variances were on the level of 5%. Factor loadings that were smaller than 0.30 were also excluded. The criteria for determining the factors were statistical significance, as well continual accordance. In order to find out the optimal number of factors, Cattell's Scree test was used, where it is possible to visually determine number of factors, because the eigenvalue-curve breakage and then stabilization shows that the factors on the straight line have very low, error margin eigenvalues. Based on Cattell's Scree test, six factors remained, when retaining all components with eigenvalues over 1, the 6-factor solution explained 43,9% of the variance.

The bivariate correlation was carried out to find the correlation between summation indexes. The correlation matrix of components by factor analysis gives an overview of the relations between different variables. The higher the correlation coefficient, the stronger the linear relation between the variables, i.e. they measure the same phenomenon or closely related conceptions (Erätuuli et al 1994).

Based on the first factor analysis I formulated summation variables (19) that were derived from 100 basic variables. The initial results were interpreted in the article *Eesti sotsiaaltöötajate ametiidentiteedi kujunemine ametikasvu eeldusena* (2002) in the collection of articles *Sotsiaal- ja kasvatusteaduste dialoog ja ühishuvid* (Tallinn University 2002) and the article *Motivational Factors As Prerequisites For Professional Growth in Ammatti ja kasvatus* (Tampereen Yliopisto 2005).

In this research I have interpreted the result of the second factor analysis. Based on the second factor analysis 20 summation variables were derived from 81 basic variables: 12 professional-self factors and 8 work related factors that are important for the development of professional identity. In formulating summation variables I excluded all variables with communalities under 2. The summation variables were derived on the basis of reliability index *Cronbach's alpha* (variables under reliability index 0.60 have been excluded). *Cronbach's alpha* expresses the strength of internal consistency of the summation variable (Table 8).

### 5.2.3 Data Gathering by Semi-structured Interview

The second empirical method is a theme interview — semi-structured interview, background notes and discussions — aiming to gather in-depth research material in order to describe through these conceptions of social workers the different aspects and context factors of the development of professional identity and professional growth.

Finnish researchers Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000, 47–48) have given semi-structured interview a name theme interview. Their reasoning is that the most important and unifying aspect of the interviews are the chosen themes as opposed to the method or structure. Theme interview as the name of the method does not classify category nor give any indication about the depth of the interview. Theme interview is by nature closer to unstructured interview than structured interview. However, theme interview is semi-structured as the sphere of theme is same for all respondents. Bryman (2001, 314) points out that in using semi-structured interview (theme interview), the researcher has a list of questions of fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply. Questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined on the schedule. Questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by interviewees.

Based on the results of factor analysis of the first empirical stage of study and the research the frame of the theme interview was constructed (see also Annex 2). The London and Mone (1987) three-dimensional model of the influence of personal motivation factors to work commitment and development of professional identity served as one principle of constructing the frame of the theme interview. The 10 theme interviews were conducted with social workers belonging to groups N1 and N2 between January 2002 and June 2003. I conducted 15 theme interviews, but 10 were used in the research. Five interviews were with the social work managers and planners to understand the social work context factors and trends in social policy. These five interviews were necessary for me as a researcher to better understand what is happening in the social work field of our society at that moment.

The research material gathered by theme interviews consists of the conceptions of social workers. Professionals discuss their reasons for choosing the social work field, the nature and content of social work, profession philosophy and their experiences as students and representatives of the new profession. The discussions include evaluation and understanding of their own competence and that of their colleagues, vocational education and opportunities for professional growth. They also analyze the obstacles for the development of the social work profession. Denzin and Lincoln (1998a), state that qualitative research means different things in each of these moments, this means that qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, them in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Although a written theme interview frame existed as well (and those who wished, obtained it beforehand), the theme interviews took place as natural and free conversations, where the phenomena that the respondents knew very well and deemed important were discussed. In order to embrace all theme interview domains, I asked questions and offered commentaries to deepen the topic at hand. Theme interviews were conducted on neutral ground, or at the social worker's work place, as the interviewee wished. All interviews were recorded (average length 1.4 h). Advance permission for recording was obtained from the respondents. All ten theme interviews were transcribed (150 pages) and coded for quotation I 1... I 10. According to Järvinen and Järvinen (2000, 193–194), quoting of the interviewee's answers in research is deliberate and has several purposes: to support the researcher's interpretations, describe the

depth of the respondents' experiences, present the respondents' thoughts, feelings and moods, etc.

The sample for the qualitative empirical stage was selected after careful deliberation. For the research the interviewees were chosen from the group that has experience with the phenomenon being studied. Åstedt-Kurki and Nieminen (1997, 155) emphasise the interviewees willingness to discuss their experiences with the researcher. This sample is gathered from the same sample, that provided the research material for the first empirical stage by answering to the questions in the questionnaire. However, working social work students with limited work experience were excluded from the second empirical stage sample. Also excluded were the practicing social workers who only had been working for a short time. The sample for the second empirical stage consisted of social workers, that had long term experience in different areas of social work and who had worked in the field for many years (average 9 years). Another criterion for selecting the sample was the respondent's residence, for the sample had to represent various Estonian towns and counties, including the counties in the islands. In this research the interviewees came from six different towns and counties. All respondents had graduated in social work from the Tallinn University in social work during the period from 1995 to 2003. The respondents were holding different occupations in the field of social work. The interviewees were social workers in the local authorities and social work institutions: social counsellors, heads of social and health care departments, child protection workers, social workers working with the disabled people, and social workers working in the sphere of gerontology.

### 5.2.3.1 Content Analysis

The gathered research material was analyzed by using the qualitative content analysis method. The researcher holds the central role in qualitative content analysis process because he or she interprets the conceptions of the interviewees through their own conceptions. Therefore, the researcher is also a research instrument. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 8) show that in a qualitative research process researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 23) three interconnected generic activities define the qualitative research process. They go by variety of different labels, including theory, method and analysis, and ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Behind these terms stands the personal biography of the gendered researcher, who speaks from a particular class, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective. The gendered, multiculturally-situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that are examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways. In qualitative analyses in general, there is no clear and set order of sequence: the researcher must repeatedly read the research material and reflect on his or her understanding of and the experience from the research material. In the initial stage the researcher creates a general picture by repeatedly reading the research material, then brings forward (from the research questions) important text sections/grouped text. Then the researcher compares the similarities and differences of grouped texts and specifies their characteristic features.

Bryman (2001, 183–184) concluded that qualitative content analysis offers different kinds of units of analysis, to be as guides to the kinds of objects that might be the focus of attention. What researcher would actually want or need to count will be significantly dictated by research question. Qualitative content analysis of the semi-structured interviews involves by opinion of Radnor (2002, 69–70) close examination of the information that is collected in order to find answers to research questions. When researchers engage in this process they arrive at descriptions of the interviewees' attitudes, values and beliefs, and their perceptions of their practices. From these series of descriptions an interpretation is provided based on the evidence that has been systematically organized.

There are different classification approaches on qualitative contents analysis. According Eskola and Suoranta (1998) there are two ways of outlining the classification that describe the content: data oriented approach and approach that has been operationalized from a theory. In the process of developing of the classification of qualitative content analysis, it is possible to derive the classification either from a theory, purely from a data (data oriented classification), or the classification structure is a compilation of these two.

The classification of content analysis used in this research is the compilation of data oriented and theory-based approaches.

The analysis of qualitative data is not usually seen as the last stage of a research process but research is considered to be more cyclical process, in which data analysis begins already during the data gathering. Qualitative content analysis combines analysis and synthesis. The researcher creates the meaning categories that objectively do not exist in the research material, based on his or her own conceptions. Vast and substantial material was gathered for the second empirical stage of this research. To start with qualitative data analysis, all the interviews had to be read several times in order to obtain a holistic overview of the conceptions of social workers. Only after that it became possible to begin the finding and grouping of the emerging themes and the coding of the data generally. Punch (1998, 204–206) stresses that the coding is the starting activity of a qualitative analysis, it is the labelling of data, which continues throughout the analysis process. Initial coding will typically be descriptive and of low inference, whereas later coding may be more interpretive requiring some degree of inference beyond the data and tends to focus on pattern codes. There is a range of possibilities, when it comes to bringing codes to the data or finding them in the data, however both the research questions as well as the conceptual framework and the data generally can not be avoided.

Through repeated reading and listening of the interviews it came apparent that there were many different conceptions of social work and the features of social workers. To code the text I marked some paragraphs with permanent colour markers to be later assembled into categories, instead of cutting these paragraphs out from the paper. Then I created conventional signs with letters (in Estonian) and colours on the text paper. For example, AI/ASUM = Entering into social work field (green); PÄD = Competence (blue); ER/K = Vocational education (yellow); etc. Now, when the interview texts were all processed and coloured according to topics, then I transferred the colours also into the interview texts in the computer, since it enabled to cut text into groups more quickly than on paper. In the process of text grouping in the computer I followed the conventional signs on the paper text in order not to lose the holistic picture of certain themes. By cutting and coding the grouped text the various initial sub-categories emerged that could be later incorporated and concentrated.

Based on different researchers, Hsieh and Shannon (2007, 111–112) bring out the need in research to combine and organize the larger number of subcategories (depending on the

relationship between subcategories) into a smaller number of categories. In this research incorporation and concentration was carried out by comparing the sub-categories, weighing their differences and similarities. The unifying characteristic aspects that were important for all interviewees and that would unify them into a main category had to be found for the sub-categories that were drawn from the conceptions of the interviewees. Then it was possible to specify and compare the equality and the level of cohesion of the categories. The interpretation of categories in the research report is based on the nature and value of the cohesion between the categories. Chi (1997) explains, that content analysis can consist of several different levels so that a new coding is used in specifying the features of the data in more detailed manner than the previous coding was capable of doing.

Therefore it was possible to separate grouped texts, and then to form subcategories that were unified into the main categories. Now on the basis of grouped texts follows the creation of different precise categories. Categories that are formed from the research material are the research results. These categories are formed by the qualitative content analysis process that describe the different conceptions of the research material can be organized vertically, horizontally and hierarchically. The horizontally interpreted qualitative categories are equal and they do not describe the superiority level. Such description in the categorization is characteristic to qualitative content analysis research. Järvinen and Järvinen (2000, 88) as well as Järvinen and Karttunen (1997, 169–170) emphasize that vertically interpreted categories do not express the superiority level either, but categories are set according to criteria stemming from the research material, e. g. generalization, time order. Hierarchically interpreted categories of conceptions are presented according to the different superiority levels.

In my research I have used both the horizontal and vertical interpretation of the categories, depending on the relation and the level of generalization. I first wrote the sub-categories that I gathered into a main category down on separate A3 papers, where I could analyze them visually, in order to find the nuances of differences and similarities between the categories and the theoretical concept. In this manner it was possible to find the main categories. Analysis was finished when new perspectives could not be found from the data. Radnor (2002, 88) stresses that having put together the coded transcripts, the researcher writes a statement that supports the data organized within categories. These statements summarize the findings within that category as interpreted by the researcher. This is the end of the analysis stage, which now forms the basis for an understanding of what is going on.

### 5.3 Reliability and Validity

The quality criteria of the questionnaire are evaluated in relation to validity and reliability of the research instrument, which are characterized in the following.

A research design relates to the criteria that are employed when evaluating social research. It is a framework for the generation of evidence that is suited both to a certain set of criteria and to the research question in which the investigator is interested. Three of the most prominent criteria for the evaluation of social research are validity, replication and reliability (Bryman 2001, 28–31). According to Sproull (2002, 74–76) the validity expresses the feasibility and adequacy of methods: validity is seen as the research instrument's ability to give information and knowledge about what was meant to be measured. Validity means the accuracy of the measurement, shows to what degree the measuring instrument was adequate for the set purpose.

*Internal validity* relates to the issue of causality; it is concerned with the question whether the conclusion that incorporates a causal relationship between two or more variables is stable. *External validity* is concerned with whether the results of the study can be generalized beyond the specific research context. *Replication* refers to the issue of replicability of the survey. The survey should be replicable for other researchers by the same measurement. Therefore, in order to assess the reliability of a measure of the concept, the procedures must be replicable by someone else (Bryman 2001, 30). From the opinion of Sproull (2002, 74), the criterion of reliability refers to stability, consistency and dependability of the used methods: reliability is concerned with the issue whether the results of a study are repeatable, it means whether the used measurement instruments have internal consistency. *Reliability* expresses the degree of stability and consistency the instruments measure same manner each time that it is used on the same context and on the same respondents. In other words, if the results of the research can be reproduced by similar method, then the research instrument can be considered reliable. Bryman (2001, 28–32, 74), summarizes that although *reliability and validity* are analytically distinguishable, they are related because reliability is a prerequisite for validity. It means, if the measurement instrument is not reliable, it cannot be valid, e.g. it cannot measure what it was meant to measure. In other words, validity evaluation presumes that the measurement is reliable.

Sproull (2002, 76) characterizes some aspects of reliability and validity as follows:

- validity is specific, the instrument may be valid with a specific criterion, but not with another criterion; with a specific group/sample, but not with another group/sample
- an instrument may have different types of validity and reliability evaluations
- different types of validity and reliability evaluations serve different purposes
- validity and reliability are always evaluated, not proved.

*Internal consistency* of the measurement instrument's components appears when for the measuring of latent variables test blocs that must be in accordance and that must measure the same latent variable are used (Käärik 2004). *Reliability of internal consistency* is evaluated by estimators/indexes as the *Cronbach alpha index*. *Cronbach's alpha index* is a commonly used test of internal reliability, it essentially calculates the average of all possible split-half reliability coefficients. A computed alpha coefficient will vary between 1 (denoting perfect internal reliability) and 0 (denoting no internal reliability). The higher the alpha, the more

reliable the test/scale is. Cronbach's alpha use has grown as a result of its incorporation into computer software for quantitative data analysis (Bryman 2001, 70–72).

In this research I have also used Cronbach's alpha to estimate the internal reliability of *factorloading variables* and *summation variables* (see Table 7 and Table 8).

When a questionnaire is composed with the purpose of gathering factual information, the reliability is higher than when measuring peoples' attitudes and evaluations about certain phenomena. Also, in this work the basis of the analysis was comprised of the social workers' opinions and evaluations, but still, factorloading variables were higher than 0.70 (4 from 6, see Table 7 and 15 from 20, see Table 8), which according to Westergaard et al (1989) referred by Bryman (2001, 71) is a satisfactory level on the scale of Cronbach's alpha (from 0 to 1).

**Table 7.** Reliability indexes of factors of personal characteristics as components of professional self-concept of respondents (see also Table 9).

Factors	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
	Innovativeness	Self-confidence	Need of achievement	Tendency for risk-taking	Ability to cooperate	Empathy
<i>Cronbach alpha</i>	.83	.66	.71	.79	.62	.85

**Table 8.** Reliability indexes of summation variables of professional self-concept components of respondents (see also Table 11).

Summation variables	Self-confidence	Flexibility	Need of achievement	Tendency for risk-taking	Ability to cooperate	Empathy	Commitment to work
<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	.70	.63	.75	.82	.63	.82	.67
Summation variables	Commitment to work-collective	Growth motivation	Innovativeness	Professional conception	Need for recognition	Efficacy beliefs	Collective efficacy beliefs
<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	.83	.75	.83	.70	.84	.75	.82
Summation variables	Collective outcome expectations	Work demands and responsibility	Need of approval	Autonomy and influence	Change and development	Work obstacles	
<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	.78	.71	.86	.90	.70	.80	

In constructing a measurement instrument the foundation of theoretical concepts is also important. In this research the primary part of the questionnaire (professional-self and work related factors) as measurement instrument is constructed on the basis of theoretical approaches that are repeatedly tested with the same research instrument in the framework of the Growth Needs Project. The various researches of the Growth Needs Project have used

different approaches, but the goal has always been to describe or explain prerequisites and influencing factors of professional growth.

The theoretical framework in this research is also related to the theoretical approaches that form the foundation of this measuring instrument: the London and Mone (1987) model of personality factors necessary for professional growth and development of professional identity, as well as other theories and approaches (Dubin 1990; Farr & Middlebrooks 1990; Maurer and Tarulli 1994; Ruohotie 1995, 1999, 2005; Lord, Brown and Freiberg 1999) on professional growth and professional identity.

The second part of the questionnaire – questions of context – has been tested as part of questionnaire in my MA research in 1998 for gathering research material. Measurement of context is based on my knowledge and experience in the social work practice and teaching.

For valuation of validity it is also important that the researcher knows the research area thoroughly and knows and understands the respondents. It may be said that this validity aspect is fulfilled in this research, the researcher knows the social work field well and also knows the respondents as former students and colleagues; but also as students of social work. The respondents' accuracy and honesty in filling the questionnaire is a prerequisite for validity. Anonymity was guaranteed and there was enough time to return the questionnaire. Validity is also influenced by the ability of the respondents to comprehend the questionnaire – it is important that the respondents understand the questions. Therefore the language of the questionnaire must be clear and easy to understand. In this research all respondents were well informed and the professional terminology did not cause any problems in comprehending the questions.

The sufficient number of questions is another guarantee for validity; in this research validity was ensured by the adequate number of questions: 166 questions and 20 *additional context questions*. The great number of questions appeared to be problematic because the number of respondents (122) were not so great. Preliminary results of factor analysis gave plenty of factors (14 to 17) with high factorloadings, but there was great dispersion. For example, for 17 factors the percentage was < 60%, but 6 factors the percentage was 43.9% of the data.

It would be necessary and interesting to carry out another study on the basis of the same measurement instrument but then to include more respondents (in every year the number of social workers with academic vocational education increases, the number today is considerably higher than in 2000 and 2003).

Triangulation in this research is also expected to ensure the validity thereof: different methods of gathering and analyzing the research material were used. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998a), triangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation.

The criteria for evaluating the validity and reliability of the qualitative research are not so clear. Neither can the quality criteria of qualitative research be evaluated following the same rules as those used for quantitative research. The reason for this is the multidimensionality of the qualitative research and the aspirations towards objectivity are in principle problematic. As the quality criteria in the qualitative research, the researcher must consider whether the research goal was reached and the research results are usable. Evaluation cannot be performed in the end of the research process, it has to be carried out through the whole research process - the transparency and clarity of the research process express the reliability of the research. According to (Ahonen 1994, 129–130), the reliability of the qualitative analysis is first and foremost related to the validity of interpretations. The reader of the research can evaluate the

reliability of the research process, if given enough descriptions about the research process (theoretical approaches, their cohesion with the research questions, etc), also about the description of sample and gathering of the research material and interpretation process. The reader may still see things differently than interpreted by the researcher, because the reader has not met the respondents, not interviewed them, talked with them before and after the interviews, e.g. has not been related with the context, that all is very important for the purposes of research.

The combined use of both quantitative and qualitative methods provided the best framework for the research, although the use of qualitative and quantitative methods was rational and valuable in this research, it should be kept in mind that the weaknesses of both methods cannot be fully eliminated by combining them.

#### 5.4 Ethical Aspects of the Research

Research participants trust the researcher and bring out lot of personal information. Therefore, ethical issues cannot be ignored and the researcher has obligation to ensure the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality. According to Neuman (2003, 116) the researcher has a moral and professional obligation to be ethical, even when research subjects are less concerned about protecting their privacy and other rights than are researchers.

The BSA (British Sociological Assotiation) *Statement of Ethical Practice* enjoins researchers to anticipate, and to guard against, consequences for research participants which can be predicted to be harmful and to consider carefully the possibility that the research experience may be disturbing one. Similar sentiments are expressed by the SRA (Social Research Assotiation) *Ethical Guidelines*, for example, when it is advocated that the social researcher should try to minimize disturbance both to subjects themselves and to subjects relationships with their environment. The issue of harm to participants is further addressed in ethical codes by advocating care over maintaining the confidentiality of records. This means that the identities and records of individuals should be maintained as confidential. This injunction also means that care needs to be taken when findings are being published to ensure that individuals are not identified or identifiable (Bryman 2004, 510).

Interviewed social workers were provided with detailed information about the research problems and goals and their willingness to cooperate were confirmed. Data that could possibly reveal the respondent's identity were removed. All interviews were coded to guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents. Also all names of people or places mentioned by the respondents were removed from the quotes to protect the identity of the clients.

Interviews with respondents were performed in Estonian and quotations used in the research are translations into English.

## 6 RESEARCH RESULTS: PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND SELF-CONCEPT OF SOCIAL WORKERS

### 6.1 The Professional Self-concept of Social Workers and Social Work Students

In the human relations professions such as social work, personality is particularly important. Many researchers stress personal factors, because they regard them as the most important motivation factors in professional growth. Also Maurer and Tarulli (1994) regard personal factors as important factors for professional development. Personality factors as identification with work, personal concept of career, or the need for self-development, self-confidence, etc are related to learning and development activities. Self-concepts of the workers (essential nature, values and world view) are always associated with the professional identity of the workers.

Originating from the goal and research questions derived on the factor analysis method the main components of the self-concept and professional- self of social workers and social work students must be explored: which personal characteristics they themselves evaluate as important and necessary and which components of self-concept and professional identity are in correlation.

The factors of work and work environment are also important for the development of professional identity. Creative, innovative work accomplishments are founded on supportive work environment, opportunities for professional growth and variety in work tasks.

The reliability of the factor loading variables was measured on the basis of the reliability index Cronbach's alpha (the factor loadings variables with reliability values below 0.60 have been excluded). The reliability index Cronbach's alpha shows the internal consistency of the factors.

In Table 9 below, the final factor model by the method of orthogonality Varimax rotation is presented. Table 10 presents the list of all items and their *factor loadings*. Yli-Luoma (1997, 83) stresses that rotation is needed because it facilitates the interpretation of the results of the factor analysis. As Varimax rotation can be considered a stable method, there is no need for the error detection rotation.

**Table 9.** Factor loadings and the percentage of variance for *Principal Components* extraction, *Varimax rotation* on self-concept components and factor variables reliability index  
Cronbach`s alpha: loadings under 0.30 were omitted (N=122).

Item	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
31.	.725					
24.	.705					
32.	.609					
27.	.547					
30.	.535					
14.	.496					
3.		.582				
9.		.578				
2.		.570				
8.		.555				
1.		.428				
25.		.302				
16.			.789			
17.			.670			
19.			.653			
18.			.530			
20.			.319			
26.				.734		
29.				.643		
34.					.708	
35.					.647	
33.					.480	
38.						.869
39.						.821
<i>Reliability index Cronbach`s alpha</i>	.83	.66	.71	.79	.62	.85
<i>Per cent of variance</i>	14.3	8.0	7.6	7.5	7.3	6.7

The following section presents the six factors derived by the factor analysis and describes the variables that formed each factor and the connecting characteristics, I named the derived factors:

F1 = *Innovativeness*; F2 = *Self-confidence*; F3 = *Need of achievement*; F4 = *Tendency for risk-taking*; F5 = *Ability to cooperate*; F6 = *Empathy*.

**Table 10.** The factors' means and standard deviation.

	Means	SD
Factor 1 <i>Innovativeness</i>	3.63	0.85
Factor 2 <i>Self-confidence</i>	3.63	0.70
Factor 3 <i>Need of achievement</i>	3.70	0.70
Factor 4 <i>Tendency for risk-taking</i>	3.33	0.97
Factor 5 <i>Ability to cooperate</i>	3.97	0.73
Factor 6 <i>Empathy</i>	3.60	1.17

#### Factor 1 *Innovativeness*

The first factor was derived from the following variables:

31. I willingly test everything new	.725
24. If given new tasks, I am usually excited about them	.704
32. I like situations that demand speedy action.	.609
27. I cope with uncertainty and stress well.	.547
30. I want work which involves changes and variety, although it may seem unstable.	.535
14. I easily adapt to changes. (technology, new legislative acts, work methods, etc.)	.496

The percentage of this factor was the highest of the data (14,3% of variance).

An appropriate label for this factor is *Innovation*. For the first factor, the *Cronbach's alpha* index was one of the highest – 0.81. The structure of 1st factor is stable, all variances received high factor loadings – >0.50.

The first factor incorporates variables with similar characteristics that show the respondents' interest in new and unknown work tasks and challenges and their ability to manage the stress caused by this. It also shows that social workers and social work students – the representatives and shapers of a new profession – value novelty, change and challenges. This orientation is highly important in social work practice, because the work is challenging and unpredictable: social work is characterized by problem-solving, which is inherent in almost all forms of direct and indirect practice (Martin & O'Connor 1989). Social work demands creativity and innovation, and the ability to see and create new possibilities in the problem-solving process.

#### Factor 2 *Self-confidence*

The second factor was derived from the following variables:

3. I think my subordinates respect me.	.582
9. I have enough determination to reach my goals.	.578
2. My work results are higher than average.	.570
8. I trust my abilities even in difficult situations.	.555
1. I have the courage to express opinions that differ from the others' opinions.	.428
25. The others find it difficult to keep up with me when working together.	.302

The structure of the second factor is relatively even, the percentage was 8.0% of the data. The reliability estimator *Cronbach's alpha* was 0.66.

The statements of the second factor measure the respondents' self-confidence, self-assurance, and show their courage to express their views. These characteristics show the respondents' trust in their ability to cope in difficult circumstances. For this reason the second factor was labelled *Self-confidence*.

All factor loadings of the second factor were not so high, but the factor mean was one of the highest (M= 3.74) (see Table 9). The reason for this might be that due to the limited work experience of students they have not yet built trust in their abilities and skills and therefore they lack in self-confidence. For comparison, the mean for the N3 group (students) was 3.65 and the sample group N2 mean was 3.98.

### Factor 3 *Need of achievement*

The third factor was derived from the following variables:

16. I have a strong wish to show others what I am capable of.	.789
17. It is important for me to do well in everything I take up.	.670
19. It is important for me to receive acknowledgement and recognition.	.653
18. I have ambition to achieve as much as possible.	.530
20. I take on a lot of responsibilities.	.319

These variables describe an individual's ambition and aspiration to be successful and at the same time receive recognition for the good work. It may be concluded from the structure of the factor that both social workers and students need achievement and recognition. Therefore, the factor was labelled *Need for achievement*. Cronbach's alpha was > 0.70 (0.71) and the percentage of the factor of the data was 7.6%.

### Factor 4 *Tendency for risk-taking*

The fourth factor was derived from the following variables:

26. I believe that a right amount of risk is like a pinch of salt in life.	.734
29. I think it is tempting to take risks.	.643

The reliability index Cronbach's alpha was 0.79 and the percentage of the fourth factor of the data was 7.5%. The fourth factor was easy to label because both variables express an individual's venturesome attitude, readiness and fearlessness in unknown and unstable situations. This factor was labelled *Tendency for risk-taking*. Although this factor was derived from only two variables, the factor loadings are high and the internal consistency of this factor is good, because the reliability index *Cronbach's alpha* is relatively high (0.79).

It seems to reflect the general orientation to risk exposure that is needed in social work profession, for example the unpredictability of tasks and the clients' difficult human relations. All this demands from the social worker the willingness to look for new solutions. The results may not always be positive, but the courage to try out new possibilities is always necessary in this work. All this may be regarded in social work as a challenge that constantly tests workers' competence.

Today these employees are more successful who have the courage to face the uncertainty caused by changes in work life: they adapt to the changes because in this manner it is possible to use new opportunities that proceed from changes (Ruohotie 1999, 47).

#### Factor 5 Ability to cooperate

The fifth factor was derived from the following variables:

34. I like to work in a team.	.708
35. I like to help others.	.647
33. It is easy for me to find friends.	.480

*Cronbach's alpha* was 0.62, 5 and the percentage of the fifth factor of the data was 7.3%.

The variables of the fifth factor describe and characterize an individual's high level of social competence and therefore this factor was labelled *Ability to cooperate*. The mean was the highest (3.97) in the fifth factor.

As well as empathy, communication skills and willingness to work in team are necessary in social work. Teamwork, networking, flexibility and co-operation ability are prerequisites for good results in social work.

#### Factor 6 Empathy

The sixth factor was derived from the following variables:

38. It is not difficult for me to understand another person.	.869
39. I have no difficulty in seeing differences between people.	.821

The reliability index was the highest in the sixth factor: 0.85; 6. and the percentage of the data was 6.7%. This factor was labelled *Empathy*. The sixth factor was also derived from only two variables, but factor loadings were the highest. Similarly, the reliability index *Cronbach's alpha* was the highest at 0.85.

Understanding and noticing other people is the foundation of social work. Empathic people are successful in human relations professions because they understand other people's thoughts and feelings and subsequent behaviour patterns. This is a prerequisite for being able to help other people and to find the best solutions to their problems. These social workers create trusting client relations more quickly and this is an important factor in social work process.

The 5th factor *Ability to cooperate* had the highest mean and the 6th factor *Empathy* had the lowest.

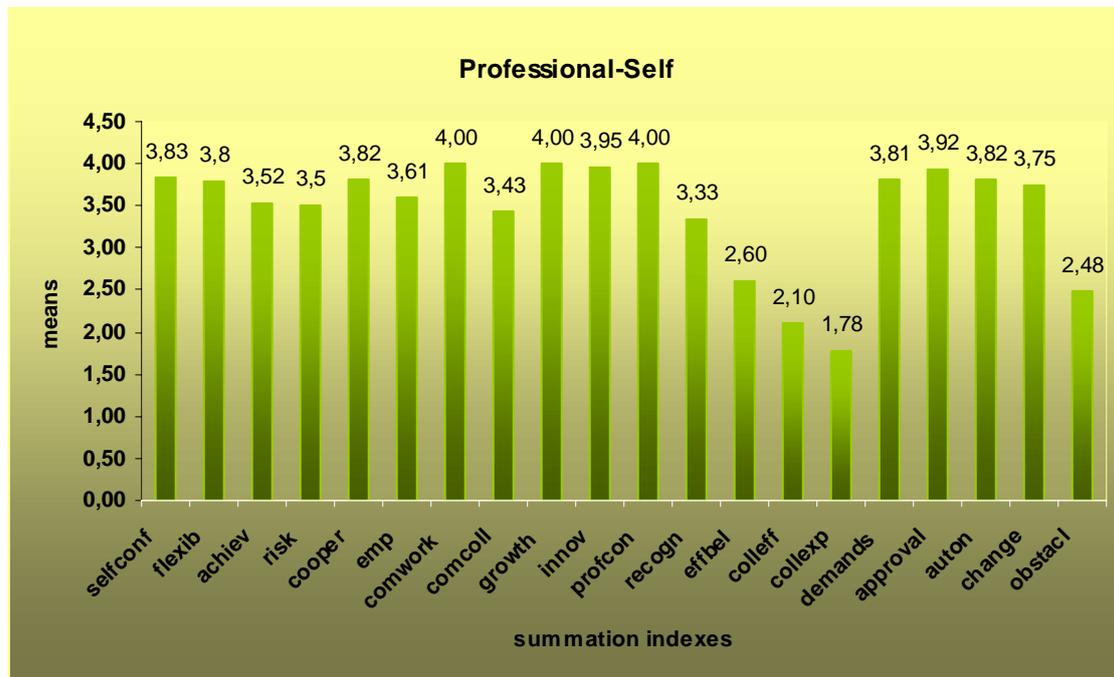
In summary, the structure of the professional self-concept of social workers and social work students shows the following tendencies: they are ready to co-operate, empathic and willing to take professional risks. They have trust in their abilities and have faith that they can improve people's life in the society. They have a lower sensitivity threshold than people on the average in our society and they believe in themselves and human beings in general, which is not a prevalent view in our material success oriented society.

### 6.1.1 Summation Variables: Relations Between Self-concept and Professional Self-concept

The compatibility of the nature of their work with their self-concept helps social workers to identify with their work. Then the development of professional identity and the construction of a professional self-concept become possible. In order to describe the relation between the social worker's self-concept and the professional self-concept I had to describe the variability of the personal characteristics of social workers.

A second factor analysis was performed with a part of the sample (N=111): all practitioners (N1+N2=93) and students (N3=18/29) that had work experience and had responded in the survey to all work related questions. The factor analysis involved all 166 questions. Twenty professional-self factors were derived, 12 of these were related to self-concept and eight were related to work and work environment (transitions in work, work developmental factors and obstacles) (see Table 11 and Figure 7). The content and characteristics of the grouped variables formed the basis of the factor labels. The factors are:

F1 Self-confidence, F2 Flexibility, F3 Need of achievement, F4 Tendency for risk-taking, F5 Ability to cooperate, F6 Empathy, F7 Commitment to work, F8 Commitment to organization, F9 Growth motivation, F10 Innovativeness, F11 Professional conception, F12 Need for recognition, F13 Efficacy beliefs, F14 Collective efficacy beliefs, F15 Collective outcome expectations, F16 Work demands and responsibility, F17 Need of approval, F18 Autonomy and influence, F19 Change and development and F20 Work obstacles.



**Figure 7.** Summation indexes of professional self-concept of social workers and social work students with work experience (N1+N2+N3/18=111).

Based on Cattell's Scree test 20 factors remained, the percentage of variances of data was 59.9%. Based on the factor analysis, 20 summation variables were derived from 166 basic variables. The basic variables with communalities  $<2$  were excluded. The summation variables were derived on the basis of the reliability index Cronbach's alpha (the variables with reliability ratings below 0.60 have been excluded) (Table 11).

**Table 11.** Scale of summation variables, based on the sample ( $N1+N2+N3/18 = 111$ ).

Summation variables	Variables	Scale	Mean/SD	Cronbach's Alpha
1. Self-confidence	5	1....5	3.83 0.40	$\alpha=0.70$
2. Flexibility	6	1....5	3.80 0.41	$\alpha=0.63$
3. Need of achievement	7	1....5	3.52 0.52	$\alpha=0.75$
4. Tendency for risk-taking	6	1....5	3.50 0.67	$\alpha=0.82$
5. Ability to cooperate	3	1....5	3.82 0.44	$\alpha=0.63$
6. Empathy	2	1....5	3.61 1.01	$\alpha=0.82$
7. Commitment to work	2	1....5	4.00 0.62	$\alpha=0.67$
8. Commitment to work collective	5	1....5	3.43 0.75	$\alpha=0.83$
9. Growth motivation	6	1....5	4.00 0.53	$\alpha=0.75$
10. Innovativeness	4	1....5	3.95 0.62	$\alpha=0.83$
11. Professional conception	4	1....5	4.00 0.41	$\alpha=0.70$
12. Need for recognition	5	1....5	3.33 0.75	$\alpha=0.84$
13. Efficacy beliefs	2	1....5	2.60 1.09	$\alpha=0.75$
14. Collective efficacy beliefs	3	1....5	2.10 0.93	$\alpha=0.82$
15. Collective outcome expectations	2	1....5	1.78 1.01	$\alpha=0.78$
16. Work demands and responsibility	3	1....5	3.81 0.73	$\alpha=0.71$
17. Need of approval	2	1....5	3.92 0.77	$\alpha=0.86$
18. Autonomy and influence	5	1....5	3.82 0.70	$\alpha=0.90$
19. Change and development	4	1....5	3.75 0.66	$\alpha=0.70$
20. Work obstacles	5	1....5	2.48 0.92	$\alpha=0.80$

The comparison of mean values of the summation variables shows the personal characteristics as the components of professional self-concept that the respondents consider important and well-established.

*Growth motivation*, *Commitment to work* and *Professional conception* scored the highest on the scale of the summation variables (1...5), (Mean 4.00; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.75$ ; Mean 4.00; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.67$ ; Mean 4.00; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.70$ ).

*Growth motivation* derived from the statements 'I follow actively the developments of my field', 'self-development is my constant challenge', etc. The mean value for *Commitment to work* derived from the statements 'I am able to work hard regardless of difficulties in order to achieve an important goal', 'I usually don't give up before reaching my goal'(see Annex 3). Commitment to work is according to London & Mone (1987) the most important component in the development of professional identity. *Professional conception* derived from the statements 'I know my strengths and weaknesses', 'I have quite realistic understanding of what I'm capable of', etc. According to the 3-dimensional model by London and Mone (1987) commitment to work and professional (career) conception are among the more important personal factors for the development of professional identity and motivating professional growth. A realistic professional conception strengthens commitment to work, supports the development of professional identity and helps to set realistic goals for professional growth. *Innovativeness* (Mean 3,95; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.83$ ) derived from the statements 'I am interested in problems that have no ready-made solutions', 'I like tasks where I can find new solutions', etc. It appears that social workers have interest in solving work problems and finding new solutions, that is necessary for professional development.

Summation index *Need of approval* (Mean 3.92; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.86$ ) showed the highest mean value of summation variables concerning work and organization. *Need of approval* brings out how important it is for social workers to earn approval for their whole professional activity from their management and officials, that working on other work fields, because bystanders often do not understand the purpose and principles of their activities.

*Ability to cooperate* (Mean 3.82; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.63$ ) derived from the statements: 'It is easy for me to find friend', 'I can easily make another person to open up', 'In general, during communication I understand a speaker's message and emotions'. *Empathy* (Mean 3,61; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.82$ ), derived from the statements: 'It is not difficult for me to understand another person', 'I have no difficulty in seeing differences between people", etc. Ability to cooperate and empathy are important personal characteristics in a social worker's professional activity, because understanding as well ability to co-operate are needed through the whole process, both in dealing with clients and with colleagues. This shows how highly co-operation is valued and how important it is to have colleagues suitable for social work. Co-operation immediately brings out the personal characteristics of a social worker, their values and professional skills. Although social workers appreciate autonomy in their work, they also understand how important is the readiness for cooperation, because in the networking it is the social worker, that has to initiate and coordinate cooperation. It is impossible to achieve good results without cooperation.

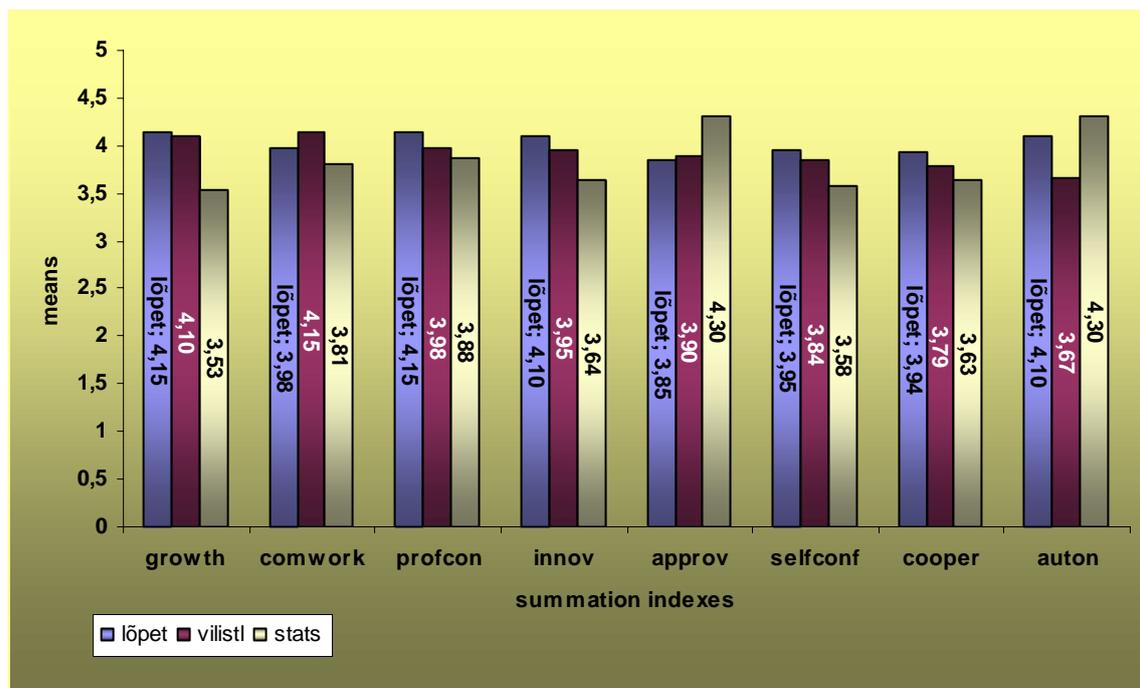
*Autonomy and influence* (Mean 3.82; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.90$ ) had the high mean value of summation variables concerning work and organizational factors. The following statements were considered important: 'In this job I decide myself which workmethods to use', 'In this job I decide myself on how to organize my work' and 'I attempt to influence management to remove drawbacks that became apparent during work process', 'I offer proposals to make this

job more effective', etc. Autonomy, the freedom to make decisions and influence situations are the most interesting challenges in social work.

*Change and development* (Mean 3.75; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.70$ ) are some of the challenges of social work. The summation variable was derived from the statements 'The nature of this job changes constantly', 'This job requires constant learning of new things', etc.

*Commitment to work collective* (Mean 3.43; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.83$ ) derived from the statements: 'I highly value belonging to my present work collective', 'I feel I'm a family with my colleagues', etc. Commitment to collective (work team) means strong connection with closest colleagues but not always strong connection with the whole organization. Close colleagues are valued for shared views and as supporters during difficult times.

*Collective outcome expectations* scored low (Mean 1.78; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.78$ ). Even if a work team is efficient (and this is considered important by respondents), it still may remain unnoticed and unappreciated by organization at large. The managers of the whole organization are seldom able to motivate achievement and development.



**Figure 8.** Main summation indexes of professional-self in group comparison (N1=löpet; N2=vilistl; N3/18=stats).

In the group comparison of the summation variables (see Figure 8) the *Growth motivation* scored the highest mean value of social workers group (N1=löpet Mean 4.15 and N2=vilistl Mean 4.10), but in the group of social work students (N3=stats) the score of these summation variables is relatively low (Mean 3.53). Also the mean values of summation variables of *Commitment to work* and *Professional conception* are in group comparison lower in the students group (N3=stats Mean 3.81 and 3.88) than in the social workers' groups. Six summation indexes out of the eight summation indexes with highest mean had lower means in the group of students (N3=stats) than in the group of social workers (N1=löpet and N2=vilistl) (see Figure 8). It may be explained by uncertainty the students have in understanding their

future profession. Students have only limited work experience and therefore have not yet developed the cohesion with work, which is one of the most important growth motivation factor. That also suggests that students' growth motivation is therefore lower than social workers'. At the same time there are only two summation variables which (N3=stats) higher mean value than either group of social workers (N1=löpet and N2=vilistl). These are *Need of approval* and *Autonomy and influence*. Perhaps it expresses the need for approval from authorities and the aim for independence the students just out of school feel.

On the basis of means a variance analysis was carried out. The goal of the variance analysis is to check statistical significance of the differences between the groups. By using One-Way ANOVA (*Analysis of Variance*) method it came evident that there are eight summation indexes where there is statistically significant difference between the three groups. The mean difference is significant at the level .05. (see Annex 5).

However, all 20 summation indexes help to shape the picture of social worker's professional-self and factors influencing its development. The summation indexes with highest mean value present all the components of professional-self that are necessary for a social worker: high growth motivation, commitment to work, trust in one's abilities and openness for cooperation. In professional life respondents are interested in novel and alternative opportunities while still being realistic as clear professional conception shows good understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses.

Thereafter a bivariate correlation analysis was carried out to find correlation between summation indexes. Linear correlation between summation indexes is characterized by *Pearson's* correlation index  $r$ . The critical value of significance probability of correlation index  $r$  on significance level for this sample  $n=111$  is  $r=0.20$  if  $p<0.05$  and  $r=0.25$  if  $p<0.01$ . (see Annex 4 "*Development of professional identity: intercorrelation of personal characteristics and the professional self-concept components*").

Strong correlation appears between the summation indexes *Growth motivation* and *Innovativeness* ( $r=0.518;p<0.01$ ) and between *Innovativeness* and *Tendency for risk-taking* ( $r=0.541;p<0.01$ ); *Commitment to work* is strongly connected with *Innovativeness* ( $r=0.533;p<0.01$ ). The results show that novelty, interest in problem solving and other positive stress factors connect social workers with their work. The challenges and interesting work tasks that make practitioners test their abilities counterbalance the negative stressful aspects.

*Innovativeness* is also in correlation with *Need for achievement* ( $r=0.501;p<0.01$ ) and *Need for achievement* is in correlation with *Growth motivation* ( $r=0.406;p<0.01$ ). It appears that social workers have relatively high recognition and achievement need, but this need is well founded on realistic professional conception that shows a good understanding of their abilities and professional skills.

Strong correlation appears between the summation indexes *Professional conception* and *Flexibility* ( $r=0.446;p<0.01$ ) and *Ability to cooperate* ( $r=0.516;p<0.01$ ). According to London and Mone (1987), *Professional conception* is one of the more important motivation factors in professional growth as it is the basis of flexibility and ability to work with other people.

There is a correlation between the summation indexes *Self-confidence* and *Tendency for risk-taking* ( $r=0.427;p<0.01$ ) and between *Self-confidence* and *Innovativeness* ( $r=0.414;p<0.01$ ). Self-confidence gives courage to achieve more, to grow and try out new approaches and to

take risks when needed. Such people are open to everything new and want to achieve good results.

There is a correlation between *Need for achievement* and *Tendency for risk-taking* ( $r=0.498;p<0.01$ ). In order to achieve better results, one has to try new solutions, therefore *Need for achievement* is in correlation with *Innovativeness* ( $r=0.501;p<0.01$ ). Results of these correlations show that social workers have a realistic understanding of both their strengths and weaknesses, and professional skills and these characteristics are important for the development of professional identity and for professional growth, but tendency to take risks shows that social workers are willing to try new work methods and novel ways of problem solving. Work environment and management appear to have negative influence on work efficiency. If management and work organization are relatively inefficient, they influence *Collective efficacy beliefs* ( $r= 0.520;p<0.01$ ) as *Work obstacles*.

The means analysis and bivariate correlation of summation indexes show us the personal characteristics of Estonian social workers: they are empathic and innovative in their work, sufficiently self-efficient, flexible and able to cooperate with other people. Respondents have strong cohesion with work – they have a strong need for achievement, tendency to take risks and a sense of responsibility as they wish to have a positive impact on the environment. Social workers are proactive and open for new ideas and want to grow and develop. At the same time they are aware of their professional skills and their personal strengths and weaknesses, i.e. they have a realistic professional conception. All these factors help to develop professional identity and form the basis for professional growth.

The work team is considered very important, both its work and its members are highly valued, because good results in social work are achieved in co-operation. However, there is often lack of cohesion with the larger organization the work team belongs to. Also social workers feel that there is lack of appreciation and recognition from the organization. Therefore respondents look for work satisfaction and recognition in work processes, from team members and clients. The indifference of the management to work results and professional growth undermines the innovativeness and creativity of social workers. If a social worker is not informed about their tasks by the organization, we cannot expect the worker's commitment to work and the professional identity cannot develop properly.

The results of the analysis (factors and the results of bivariate analysis) present the scale of the components of professional self that are considered important in the work of a professional helper: self-confidence, realistic professional conception, need of achievement but also courage to take risks. Cooperation and growth motivation are also emphasized. All the above-mentioned characteristics form the basis for the development of professional identity.

The organization-related factors' support to professional growth is relatively weak. Organizations should pay more attention to prizing, inspiring and motivating professional identity and professional growth.

## 6.2 The Motives for Engaging in Social Work

Why people have come to social work and to study it? How they experience their work process and the development difficulties in a society where social work did not exist for about fifty years? All interviewees have worked in the field for many years and witnessed the

rebirth of the social work profession in Estonia. How they perceive the nature and the content of social work in the context of other professions in the society?

### 6.2.1 Learning Motivation and Expectations

According to survey three major reasons for studying social work at the university level were: 1) interest in social work (77% N=122), 2) a wish to acquire academic vocational education (72% N=122), and 3) lack of professional knowledge and skills (43% N=122). Also 18% of the 122 respondents mentioned a sense of mission as a fourth motivator. This shows that there were many respondents that had several equally influential motivation factors.

The learning expectations were also different. Those already in the profession stressed not only the importance of an academic degree and professional knowledge and skills but also the importance of variety in work life.

*".....to gather as much knowledge as possible to help oneself and to learn about different solutions, but also to change the everyday work routine..." (A 15)*

Many students of the Open University viewed academic vocational education as a challenge.

*"My personal expectation was – will I really manage this?!" (A 7)*

For social work practitioners studying in the university meant learning the general concept of social work, creating a systematic understanding and a relationship between theory and practice.

*"....I have worked in social work for 15 years. I have good practical skills but I lack theoretical knowledge. My expectation was to acquire theoretical knowledge that I hoped to receive." (A 39)*

*".....I expected to learn about social work theory so I could practice social work professionally..." (A 13)*

A young graduate who, four years after the graduation, works as the deputy head of the social and healthcare department in the local authority, explains that young peoples' expectations about education when taking up university studies are uncertain.

*".....I was a just a kid when I started studying. I didn't have many expectations. I wanted to prove something to myself and it was important to be admitted into the university." (A 105)*

In general the expectations of the 29 students involved in this research were unclear, however most of them mentioned interest in social work as a learning motive (28 out of 29 respondents). Most of them did not analyze their expectations when starting studying, some have replied that they hope to learn and then change something in the society.

*"I feel there is a lot to do in this field." (A 58)*

*"...I hope I can support that field...." (A 49)*

*"...I want to improve Estonian society..." (A 66)*

## 6.2.2 Motives and Reasons for Entering Social Work

The reasons that brought respondents to the field of social work vary considerably, but there is a unifying tendency – work in the new field has been a challenge to all. A qualitative content analysis of the research material gathered via theme interviews presented the different experiences of coming to the social work field. It emerges from the analysis results that the respondents who got started in social work had no experiences of the social worker's roles and they identified themselves as helpers. The experiences and views of the social workers that first studied in the university and then took up social work practice differ from the experiences and conceptions of those who first started to work in the field and then entered the university. For those who started to work after the university graduation, the development process has followed in the natural and logical sequence. Most of them had to choose their professional sphere without having to work experience in the selected field. According to the model of Hall (1990), respondents have covered the first stage, the exploration stage, of their career, which is viewed as the identity development stage (approx. up to 25 years). This stage is followed by the work-experience years and the so-called trial stage, where workers attempt to adjust their identity to the work roles. This is called an intimacy stage. From that stage on, the possibilities are career-updating, stabilization or for the third option, the stage of changes, depression or leaving the field.

Results of the qualitative content analysis show that practitioners who acquired academic vocational education while working have, as a rule, left their previous work field and came to a new work field, social work, in this particular career stage. The reasons for leaving the previous work field were either that the work position had become unnecessary in the new economic model or the respondents were not satisfied with their work and used the opportunity to start working in a new and interesting field. For the majority, coming to the new, unknown field was a great challenge, stimulated by internal motivational factors, as many initially lost in the salary and had to start from a lower work position than they had before. The main motivational factor was the need for development, which could not be realized in the previous work role. According to Ruohotie (1995, 128), the people who have the development need, react positively to development opportunities and embrace them because an increase in development opportunities is more important for them than an increase in work benefits.

Category 1, named *Entering Social Work* is derived hierarchically from two horizontal categories: Category 1a: *Career Choice Model* and Category 1b: *Motives for Entering the Field*. (Figure 9)

<b>Category 1: Entering Social Work</b>	
<b>Category 1a: Career Choice Model</b>	<b>Category 1b: Motives for Entering the Field</b>
<b>Category 1a1: Incidental Choice</b>	<b>Category 1b1: New Profession as Challenge</b>
<b>Category 1a2: Conscious Choice</b>	<b>Category 1b2: Novelty and Autonomy</b>

**Figure 9.** Career choice and motives for entering social work.

## **Category 1a Career Choice Model**

Category 1a *Career Choice Model* is the first horizontal category in the main category 1 *Entering Social Work*, which is derived from the vertical sub-categories 1a1 *Incidental Choice* and 1a2 *Conscious Choice*.

Category 1a *Career Choice Model* is derived from the responses of social workers, where they have analysed and described their reasons for taking up social work practice and studying social work in university. One has to pay attention to the fact that some social workers studied first and then started with the practical work, while others started to work before they acquired vocational education. The reasons could be divided into two groups: some stressed that their choice was accidental, influenced by certain circumstances and meetings; others stressed the consciousness in their choices, as they could not or did not wish to continue in their previous occupation.

### **Category 1a1 Incidental Choice**

This category draws together social workers' descriptions about the incidents that led them to social work. Although coming to the field was incidental for them, during the interview they (to a surprise for themselves) came to the conclusion that if they have remained in this demanding and difficult work, they must have had from the beginning some unconscious wish to do helping work.

*"...I thought that I took up social work accidentally, but now I feel that it was the result of my previous life..." (I4)*

*"...coming to social work was incidental, but with hindsight I may say that I wanted to come to this field." (I7)*

There were no educated professionals in the field to start with because employers sought for suitable people, not knowing themselves what tasks the profession involves. People came to social work for different reasons, but when analyzing this decision now, they are convinced that caring for other people has always been in their nature.

*„...I started to work as social worker in 1991 and it happened completely by chance, because there hadn't been such work before and the position of social worker had not been announced in any local authority before. Although I came to this field incidentally, analyzing it now, I have realized that I was trying to understand and help other people already in school. I remember that I was often sitting with girls from my class, and even with boys and listening to their worries. Classmates came to my home with their problems, so I must have always had this wish to support other people..." (I1)*

### **Category 1a2 Conscious Choice**

This category reflects entering the profession as a conscious choice. The previous job had exhausted itself, there was nothing interesting left, everything had become regular and routine. There was a wish to move on in work life and to choose a profession that involves working with people.

*"...in my case, it was like I had exhausted myself in my previous occupation and completely ready for new. I was open, I noticed, I wanted to help, I felt that I WANTED to help..." (I5)*

Even if there had been another option, the choice was still made in favour of social work.

*“...I graduated as medical attendant and learnt some pharmacology, too. But then I was looking for a job, because my father fell ill and I had to support him – so I chose my work because of my home. There were some jobs I applied for and then I finally chose social work. I think this helping bug or wish is given to one at birth – so I went to work at the local government, because then there were no social workers at al...” (I 10)*

### **Category 1b Motives for Entering the Field**

Category 1b *Motives for entering the field* was derived from the response that described motives for entering the profession and remaining there. Category 1b is formed by two vertical categories: category 1b1: *New profession as challenge* and category 1b2: *Novelty and autonomy*.

#### **Category 1b1 New Profession as Challenge**

Response of category 1b1 *New Profession* describes profound changes in newly re-independent Estonia, which had impact on every area of life. The problems stemming from these changes in economy and social life created a need for new organizing and stabilizing systems in society. Among these systems are some new professions – such as social work. The prerequisite for the development of social work profession was the acute need for helping systems. Entering a new field was a real challenge. All interviewees had witnessed the beginning and the 12-13 years of development of social work in Estonia.

*“...coming to work in this field was a real challenge... we definitely have the courage to do new things, otherwise it wouldn't be possible in this field, we didn't have anything here in social work – we built up the whole system from scratch.” (I 1)*

Since people took up social work as they were intrigued by the new profession and looking for new challenges, the actual knowledge of roles in the social work profession roles was lacking.

*“ when I took up social work, I didn't know at all what social work was...” (I 4)*

Some people entered the profession deliberately to look for the challenges offered by the new profession and to get away from the routine and uninteresting work.

*„...I entered the field incidentally but as a new job it offered a challenge. I had grown out from my old work, I could do it in my sleep, there was nothing special there anymore – everything was regular and too easy, although I was already on the highest career level.” (I 7)*

#### **Category 1b2 Novelty and Autonomy**

The category *Novelty and Autonomy* shows that the motive of taking up social work appears to be interest in social work as a new opportunity in the new society.

Social workers stressed that they saw new exciting opportunities in their profession because organizations and employers that created social work positions did not know what exactly has to be done in this work. This inspired social workers to create and find new work methods to ensure the productivity in social field. They had the opportunity to independently test themselves and their methods because there was no ready-made social system.

If the employers could not formulate the responsibilities of the social worker in their organization, the social workers had to find their sphere themselves – it was frightening, but it also provided an opportunity for creative work performance. It offered the experience of independent work to the young specialist just graduated from the university.

*“...for six months there was no job description at all. I was just told to start working and that was pretty much all I was told then. So I didn't know at all what I was supposed to do. Since no-one had told me what I had to do, I did everything according to my own understanding and skills. First I figured out some sort of job description and started from there. I still have relatively free hands, I am autonomous, independent and that is interesting. So far I feel I'm getting more skilled all the time – there has been an enormous development – so that even when there has been some serious challenge, I've managed it well and it is all exciting because there are new things to solve. Apparently I notice these more difficult things now, see more problems and can verbalize them and seek for solutions.” (I 2)*

In the new society of free choices, the opportunity to participate in the development and to give one's own contribution to society was a reason for many young people to take up social work.

*“...this awakened sense of freedom in the society give the interest towards this profession, naturally it was because social work is so broad, not a narrow speciality. It was interesting to get the whole picture of human beings and society as such. Since I had already worked for a year and seen how this structure was built, I could more or less guess what it might become. It was interesting, of course, for a young person, something that was being created, something you are creating, and it was exciting...” (I 9)*

Although the social workers who participated in the research worked in different areas of social work, they are all characterized by a common features of being interested in people, having sense of responsibility on societal processes and faith in their ability to improve everyday life. Also there were respondents who had become dissatisfied with their routine work and were looking for new challenges. They therefore chose the new occupation to realize their potential.

### 6.3 Social Workers' Experiences and Conceptions of Social Work

Social work has been interpreted as institutionalised, organised and societal sphere, which is viewed, on one hand, as a help and support work and, on the other hand, as a control institution proceeding from certain intervention methods. (Pincus & Minahan 1989; Rothman & Sager 1998; Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen 1997.)

Direct social work practice includes work with individuals, families and groups. Prior to 1970s social work practice was defined by methodologies or by fields of practice: social workers were thus variously identified as caseworkers, group workers, community organizers, child welfare workers, psychiatric social workers, school social workers, medical social workers, and so on. Today there are attempts to formulate a framework or content of social work by finding common base for social work practice comprised of purpose, values, sanction, knowledge, and common skills resulting from a broadened perspective of social work. This new perspective was not oriented to methods of practice and fostered the use of the presently employed generic term *social work practice* (Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen 1997, 22–25).

Respondents of the research work in different social work areas with different client groups (children, families with children, disabled people, unemployed, people with mental illness, addicts, etc.) and in local governments, where there are few social workers, anyone must practice client work and at the same time has to organise and coordinate the provision of services to different groups in need.

Based on the new perspective, social work is described as helping and changing work, human-centred work, and social workers are seen as 'human service workers'. Human service workers are described as being characterized by a dynamically evolving generic human services viewpoint, by a multidisciplinary (or interdisciplinary) focus, by a concern for the whole person, and by an approach that involves being a generalist change agent (Mehr 1995, 47).

It appears from the results that social workers experience their work practice as bringing changes into the life of another human being. This process requires good professional knowledge and skills. The knowledge and skills are constantly put to test in the work life as new tasks that were not part of the practice in the early years of social work emerge all the time. According to Leino (1996, 71–90) new professional knowledge is integrated in the work process as the work process is managed on the basis of the earlier knowledge structures.

Social workers stressed the importance of values and of a human-centred attitude in social work. Workers' personal values must be in accordance with social work profession values, otherwise it is not possible to work in this field.

Values are asserted by the profession association and social workers must adhere to these in their work. Personal and professional values permeate social work practice. These principles guide the day-to-day social work and they include acceptance, individualization, non-judgementalism, objectivity, self-determination, access to resources, confidentiality, and accountability (Miley, Melia & Du Bois 1998; Hepworth & Larsen 1993; Compton & Galaway 1994; Du Bois & Miley 1999; Watson 2006).

The results show that social work, which involves work with human relations, causes considerable stress and there is a risk of burnout. When social workers experience burnout, their personal and professional sense of power dwindles along with their practice competence. Among its other serious symptoms, burnout means that a social worker adopts a new attitude towards clients, characterized by negativism, cynicism, distancing and objectification, inflexibility and rigid adherence to rules and blaming the victim. Practitioners experiencing burnout become less objective and less concerned about their clients.

Social workers function best when their work environment supports their strengths and encourages their efforts to collaborate with clients as partners. Supervision is also of great help, as supervision requires the worker to be accountable. Supervision is part of the profession's responsibility for monitoring its own practice by having the most competent social workers share their knowledge and skills with those who are still working toward high levels of competence. Supervision accomplishes three purposes: to structure practice by asking the worker to report and reflect on the work with the client system, to provide a support system to reinforce and encourage the work, and to create a forum to identify the worker's strengths, and set goals for professional growth (Miley, O'Melia & Du Bois 1998, 358–360).

It appears from the research results that the social workers' opportunities to receive supervision service and work environment support differ considerably. In larger cities local

governments have the ability to offer supervision to their social workers, but this service is not available in smaller local governments in the countryside. Only very few social workers can afford private supervision as they have to cover the expenses for this by themselves. Since supervision is not readily available, social workers in this research offer the support within their work team in order to help each other out of difficult circumstances.

There are also numerous personal strategies recommended to counter the effects of stress, including relaxation exercises, guided imagery, meditation, hobbies, and supportive relationship with family and friends. The importance of protection techniques against burnout introduced in the course of vocational training was also stressed. (Korpelainen 2006, 70–73.)

### 6.3.1 Content and Nature of Social Work

The category 2 *Content and Nature of Social Work* expresses the views about the nature and content of social work. Second category is derived from three horizontal categories: Category 2a *Work with Human Relations*; category 2b *Coping Strategies*. Categories 2a and 2b are derived from four vertical categories. See Figure 8.

In this category social work is described as centred on human relations, full of variety and interesting but also stressful and emotionally hard to bear. In order to help other people professionally, one must be able to help and protect oneself against a burnout. Coping strategies against burnout are different: some social workers receive assistance from their work organization, others must be able to take care of themselves without such support.

<b>Category 2: Content and Nature of Social Work</b>	
<b>Category 2a: Work with Human Relations</b>	<b>Category 2b: Coping Strategies</b>
<b>Category 2a1: Helping and Changing Work</b>	<b>Category 2b1: Support Network</b>
<b>Category 2a2: Stressful Work and Burnout</b>	<b>Category 2b2: Supervision and Recreation</b>

**Figure 10.** Content and nature of social work.

#### **Category 2a Work with Human Relations**

Category 2a *Work with Human Relations* is the first horizontal category from category 2 *Social work Content and Nature*. The category was named so as it presents those views that express social work as interactive human relation process.

Category 2a1 *Helping and Changing Work* presents these views that describe social work in terms of interactive help where the goal is to evoke change in people's lives that they wish for but cannot achieve by themselves, for subjective and/or objective reasons. Social work is seen as producing change, which often gives clients satisfaction, well-being and dignity,

*"....the nature of our work is always helping, and behind that help there are changes. Now when I have come across every kind of client groups and every sort of work tasks, I may say that a social worker can change people's lives and well-being. It is this caring of other people that should be the actual content of social work, and not distributing some kind of support." (I 4)*

It is necessary in a human-centred work to consult and support the client; a social worker has to be caring but also knowledgeable and skilful in order to act purposefully. Client support and empowerment are necessary for clients to wish to change their life and to manage their life on their own again.

*“The nature of this work is such that the work motivation here is not salary, or actually not often salary, but the wish to help and change the world for better. The more you work and learn, the more you know and can, you can see these opportunities for changes and can help. This gives one responsibility in this influential role, you just don’t imagine that you won’t help but on the contrary – you already have a plan running in your head about how things should go. At least I know how to direct clients and put them into motion, to help to live their life as they wish. This is my responsibility to think about that...” (I 6)*

Besides offering services that help clients to cope with their everyday life, new tasks are constantly emerging in social work. These new tasks may be quite different from their professional area, but they still might influence their clients and they have to handle them.

*“In our work no single day looks like another, there is no routine. Besides offering the regular services, new things come about all the time that I have to do to protect my clients: court cases about clients’ real estate, complex cases in child welfare, like a case where parents from different nationalities get divorced. Our activities cover so many life areas; to help people we have to learn new things all the time, like legislation for example. So social work really is, like Payne [Malcolm Payne] said, the only helping profession that deals with almost every aspect of human life, so it really demands great competence: you have to be good at legislation and at the same time you must be an empathic counsellor, you know. And I certainly say that this everyday work with clients keeps my own emotional side fresh. It is the nature of this work that I really like.” (I 7)*

Although the network already exists, the actual client work, where you have to mobilize, support, encourage and empower your client, still demands great effort from the social worker, because people do not wish nor have the strength to move on with their life. It takes considerable effort to awake a person from their apathy.

*“The content of this work is helping people because it seems to me that people are awfully passive nowadays, that there is so little or not at all of civic courage and initiative. I don’t know if they are so messed up with their life, so busy with everyday worries that if something happens, they don’t have the energy nor resources to do anything. Perhaps in our society with its economic success the social sphere has been left neglected. People don’t have strength, they would want to belong somewhere, but they feel that they don’t.” (I 2)*

## **Category 2a2 Stressful Work and Burnout**

This category reflects the views of social workers describing the personal side of their work where the social worker is included personally. It appears from the results that the workload in helping profession is considerable and the work involves great responsibility for one’s actions and for the clients.

Social workers are under stress. They regularly encounter gloomy and irrevocable circumstances that make them feel helpless and become despondent. This is not an easy task – often there are complex, multi-problem client cases, lack of resources, lack of understanding in the society of both social workers’ as well as social sphere clients. Social work means interfering with other people’s lives and doing that it is mandatory to follow human rights, professional ethics, be competent in the work, be a member of a work organization, member of a work team and to achieve good results to the satisfaction of one’s clients.

For one who wishes to help people purposefully but is working in an underfunded local government, the amount of work will soon become unmanageable. It is even more difficult for people coming from other fields, who lack social work education. There is a great danger that they will soon burn out.

*"...a social worker is very much alone in their problems and those without special education, they don't know how to protect themselves, they don't know how to leave their work problems behind. /.../ when they talk about problems they see at work, their eyes are always in tears. I've learnt it, I don't take others people's problems home, to my family. When I started, I was like that – problems from work filled the house, I myself was left behind the door..." (I 4)*

Even experienced professionals, who should know how to protect themselves may still be in danger of burnout, but they have more hope to come through if they have people in their team or work field who support them and help to get through difficult times.

### **Category 2b Coping Strategies**

Category 2b *Coping Strategies* is the second horizontal category from category 2 *Social Work Content and Nature*. This category is named so as the response in this category shows how social workers cope with stress and burnout. The results show that most social workers use the support network created by the social workers themselves. The second most widely-used coping strategy is supervision service. Relaxation and recreation are also found in hobbies, holidays with families and in relationships with people from other fields.

#### **Category 2b1 Support Network**

The response in this category describes experiences about coping with work stress. Here the coping strategy is the support network formed by colleagues. In a difficult work situation this support network replaces supervision service. Since from time to time each colleague is in a similar situation, they understand each other well; there are different methods of using the network for avoiding burnout.

*"...you may know what to do but still burnout at some point.. It is like a breaking point. I can see when my colleagues are there, because I've been there myself. If I see my colleague is like that, I know what to do. I can show appreciation or tell them to take a rest, even for half a day. I've seen that sympathy can give strength." (I 5)*

Those who had been in danger of burnout without receiving any outside help, understand the importance of this supportive network of colleagues.

*"....in danger of burnout, at present most social workers don't have that option, so they change profession. They don't have strength and they change profession, they can't cope. Society should think more about how to help and protect social workers, but supervision service is expensive and employers try to evade using it." (I 9)*

Social workers who have been in the field for a long time have witnessed the burnout of many social workers who have been left on their own. Burnout social workers will, as a rule, choose another profession or continue in the social sphere but not in the client work. If a social worker can rely on colleagues or the management in difficult work circumstances, they will be able to cope with stress and will continue afresh.

*"The burnout rate in our field is in my opinion catastrophic. I think the situation is really awful. When I now think back to how I began, when I wanted to help everyone... In my first year, I faced circumstances which were completely different from what I had imagined and had a breakdown in six*

*months. I ended up in a spa, was sitting there in all sorts of baths for week and a half and then went back to work. I didn't need medicine, but I still have this experience of what a burnout is. I think one of the reasons was that there was no-one to talk to, I couldn't understand what is going on myself and there was no-one to take interest in what was happening to me. A worker needs some sort of support anyway, either from one's colleagues or, in some lucky instance, from one's boss, because you really need someone to discuss things. Speak things out vocally, because you are thinking in your mind, but if you speak them up, you hear them differently.” (I 10)*

The social workers that do not receive supervision may face burnout and can therefore be dangerous for the quality of the client work. In order to manage the work and to stay in the field, many of these social workers have coped with stress by creating their own support network to assist each other in stressful situations.

*„You can't help other people if you have burnt yourself out or are in a mess yourself. And it happens because in our work field there is no one to help helpers. In order not to burn out, social workers must themselves find these options and if we can't - either burn out and go away or adapt yourself and learn to protect yourself. Of course there are trained supervisors, but it is an expensive service and social workers cannot afford to buy it themselves. Employers should do that, but they don't. Since supervision service is not available, then in reality we get help from our own good colleagues. This is on what our profession stands.” (I 1)*

### **Category 2b2 Supervision and Recreation**

Under this category there are views about supervision service as one coping strategy. The results show that there are supervision service users, but they do not represent the majority. Supervision service is expensive and only larger and wealthier local governments (mainly larger towns) offer it to their workers. Admittedly, the work is more intense in these local governments, but in small local governments, social worker's workload may similarly exceed what they can bear, but there is no supervision service available for them. There are social workers who can choose their own provider of supervision, but only few can do it.

*”.....in our town, the health care department offers supervision service, but I have never used it because group supervision doesn't suit me for some reason and I don't feel comfortable there. But I have my own supervisor whom I contact when I have to and who then gives me council. I pay for this service myself, but this person is always there for me.” (I 3)*

Employers do not always see the importance of supervision service for social workers, the service is considered expensive and obviously they do not always see the necessity of it. Social workers whose organizations do not offer this service are not optimistic about the future.

*“...in danger of burnout, at present most social workers don't have that option, so they change profession. They go to work somewhere else, they cannot cope. Society should think more about how to help and protect social workers, but supervision service is expensive and employers try to evade using it....” (I 9)*

*”Social work is necessary for the society, but in the sense of funding of continuous training, supervision or work guidance - there is no hope for that.” (I 4)*

Social workers with special training and experience have high expectations about the quality of supervision service. There are only few providers of supervision service and its quality is not always up to the expectations.

*“...we tried supervision in our town, but it didn't have any good effect on me, because often these specialists, they think they know how to guide you in your work, but in reality they don't. A*

*supervision group has to be built on trust, not by lining everyone up and telling them to talk. Yes, if the quality of the supervision were ensured, it would be a good thing but not now.” (I 7)*

Many social workers manage stress situations very well by using different coping and relaxation strategies and they also know what to recommend to their colleagues. They spend time with family, spend holidays away from home and from the work place.

*”...work stress will come when you have some difficult work situations that need solutions, but things just accumulate and accumulate and then you don’t want to go to work in the mornings. Well, this is how it starts. Then it is actually important for me to get out from the routine, away for even a few days’ vacation, away from my work environment and then I want to communicate with people from other fields and that kind of reloads me. If I get away even for a little while, I look at everything more calmly and clearly and then I can go on again.” (I 9)*

The social workers who have been in the field for longer periods perceive the danger of burnout in good time. If they are in the middle of an emotionally stressful situation, they use strategies they have learnt by themselves in order to move out from the difficult situation. Suitable coping strategies are also recommended to colleagues. The strategy may be a personal network or professional support offered by their work organization.

*”...when I have difficult moments... when I have really difficult moments, I know what to do. I immediately alert my personal network, contact a colleague I have especially good relationship with, call her and ask her to listen to me and only after that I go to see a psychologist. We have that option, so I go and get additional information, I go because I know I’m wearing ‘dark glasses’ at the time. I get help from other social workers, our intra-organizational network. We also have a psychiatrist here but this is our own intra-organizational network. We have psychology service in our town, within the family help structure. They are a separate unit although the town guarantees this money so that they can offer free of charge services to county and town people and we have a place to send people who have no money for help. And we also use this service for our workers. We, the four child welfare workers, we have an appointment once in a month and we choose whose client’s case is the most difficult (because they are always difficult). So when I say my case is really hard and my colleagues say that they don’t have that difficult cases at the time, we discuss this case and the psychologist points out certain points. When I am in the middle of a court case, I also contact a psychologist who says what should be best for the child. I always shape my opinion by discussing things with a specialist so that I know that when I have really difficult client cases, I have people around me. This all is the process, the movement of our work....” (I 5)*

Based on the conceptions of social workers’ it came apparent that social work is an human relations work where social workers have to help their clients to change and improve their lives. Because of the nature and content of the work, social workers have to have very close connection with people, they have to delve into their clients problems in order to be able to assist in finding the solutions. This work aspect results in heavy psychical burden and emotional stress for social workers. However, the coping strategies they can choose from are support of colleagues network and family and friends. Effective help for preventing and coping of stressful situations is supervision, but this is only available for few social workers that are working in larger local government institutions.

### 6.3.2 Professional Growth and Competence of Social Workers

It appeared from the research that the social work profession is strongly connected with the general change processes in the society. It offers a social worker new challenges, but the professionals must cope with these challenges successfully. Managing the new circumstances

must be ensured by the high level of competence. For this reason social workers need constant self-improvement and professional growth.

Professional updating is an inevitable process in today's work life, directed at maintenance and enhancement of one's professional competency (Ruohotie 1995; Dubin 1990; Kaufman 1990). The necessity of professional growth emerges in the work process. The worker's motivation for development is primary, but support from the work environment is also needed.

The maintenance and increase of competency is subject to the combined effect of personal traits and salient features of the work environment. Individual competence is the basis of organizational competence (Ruohotie 1996, 15, 32). What does the worker's competence in one's work sphere consist of? For example, in a profession involving human relations, such as social work, critical thinking and reflecting, as well as problem solving abilities are needed. At the same time, for the effective work of the organization, the worker's willingness to cooperate, social skills and other such qualities based on personality traits, are fundamental. Therefore, the concept of competence is dynamic and broad and it includes specific work skills and also workers' personal potential.

In a profession centred on human relations, competence means the potential capacity to perform certain work tasks. According to Leino (1999, 7), academically educated workers need abstract thinking, creativity, excellence, rigour, and reflective capacity in their work. Ruohotie (2002a, 234; 2002b, 13–15) interprets competence in terms of motoric skills, cognitive factors (knowledge and intellectual skills), affective factors (values, attitudes, motivation), personality traits (self-confidence, etc.) and in addition social skills (communicative and co-operative skills, etc.). In helping professions an important component of competence is social skills, social competence. According to Krips (2002, 10–11), different terms are in use, such as communicative competence and social competence, but also interpersonal competence, which by nature are all overlapping terms. Social competence is defined as coping in the social environment by means of one's skills, personal traits and orientation. The components of social competence are autonomy, resourcefulness, intelligence, empathy, creativity and co-operation ability. Thiessen and Schweizer (2000) regard social competence as fundamental for professions in social field, but they stress that social competence cannot be separated from the mastery of theory and method competence.

Ruohotie (2002b, 15–16) interprets competence as an individual's attributes, their resources or capital that they bring to their workplace, and differentiates between workers' formal competence and actual competence. Formal competence is based on vocational education and it differs from actual competence, which develops on the basis of everyday life and work experiences.

Reflective competence – learning from work experiences – can only develop through the active work performance. According to Schön (1983), Järvinen (1990), Engeström (1992), Ashmore (1989) and Karvinen (1996) the actual competence of professionals develops in work process by reflectivity. From the opinion of Järvinen (1990, 10) reflectivity means workers' analysis of their way of thinking, communication as social competence, as well as their own activities.

Reflectivity helps to learn from experiences it helps one to see new opportunities and to create original ways and methods. The results show that reflectivity has an important role in the enhancement of the competence of social workers. The social workers stressed the importance of vocational education as the foundation to readiness for reflective work and professional

growth in a broader perspective. However, it came evident that the conditions and opportunities for professional updating vary greatly among social workers.

Kaufman (1990), Dubin (1990), Farr and Middlebrooks (1994) and Ruohotie (1995) point out factors such as the worker's personal characteristics, the nature of work, the atmosphere in the organization and changes in environment as having greatest influence on the professional updating.

The interviewees express strong personal motivation for professional growth too. They stressed the inevitability of professional development in their work. Although the professional growth of social workers is not always supported by organizational environment, the research clearly shows that the respondents understand the meaning of life-long learning. This gives social workers both an opportunity for individual development, as well as new knowledge and new skills to cope with challenges. The acquisition of new knowledge is possible thanks to free and natural human interest in the new, which is connected to self-actualization needs. According to Habermas (1971), the human cognitive interests include scientific-technical, practical and emancipatory interests. The scientific-technical interest helps people to control (but also manipulate) external environment; the knowledge is by nature instrumental. The practical-cognitive interest is related to social environment and social relations and the knowledge is by nature historical-hermeneutical. The emancipatory-cognitive interest is the natural human need for developing and growing internally and in relationship with other people. It means liberation from restrictions, understanding oneself and the world (Habermas 1971, 191–199). The natural human interest for knowledge could not be fully realized in the totalitarian society where we have come from. In addition to personal freedom, access to information and knowledge were also restricted. In the new, free society new opportunities emerged for learning, making independent decisions, and shaping personal views and values based on this newly acquired knowledge.

It is seen from the results that vocational education and the following additional training have strongly influenced the self-awareness of social workers. New knowledge has helped to (re)shape their worldview and come to a realization who they are and what they want. This has anchored values and has developed self-identity. Mezirow (1995) has defined such learning process as emancipatory learning, transformative learning, where in learning process the learner is freed from obstacles that have limited their choices and then it is possible to advance in the rational control of one's life. It appears from the results that the strengthening of self-awareness gives self-confidence, self-confidence gives the courage to take risks and to move on and be successful in one's professional life.

New knowledge must assist in the achievement of work quality and efficacy that is necessary for successful career development. Bruce Beairsto (2000, 12–13) stresses that new knowledge must be operationalized in order to be useful. It must become usable, procedural knowledge, and even this is only useful in relatively stable situations in which knowledge is put into use in predictable ways. When knowledge is to be used in new and changing contexts, it is essential to develop not only procedural knowledge, but also generative knowledge or understanding; that is, the ability to work with novel situations and to extend one's understandings on the basis of that experience.

That leads to the importance of knowing one's professional strengths and weaknesses, which can only be analyzed in the work process. Obtaining new knowledge is possible only if it is understood what kind of knowledge is needed.

The results show that social workers have clear learning goals, and these goals form the basis for obtaining new knowledge. Novice workers and learners develop over the years to become self-directed learners that set their own learning goals and take responsibility for their learning. Self-directed learners have the willingness and wish to learn. Ruohotie (1998) stresses the belief of self-directed learners in managing their learning process and this process is not influenced by the authorities. A self-directed learner views knowledge as relative and context-dependent, but at the same time they understand the connection between the values influencing behavioural patterns and the cultural context. Self-directed learners analyze in which manner they can apply the new quality of their knowledge to the betterment of their society. (Ruohotie 1998, 27.)

Professional updating is possible if it is supported by the work organization and its managers. If a worker must bear full responsibility for life-long learning, it may become too difficult a task. Beairsto and Ruohotie (2003) view life-long learning as a continuous process in the professional's work life, where one needs empowering. Empowerment is interpreted by Beairsto and Ruohotie not simply as another word for delegation of responsibility to subordinates, for removal of constraints or even for provision of increased levels of authority, but also as intrinsic motivation characterized by such cognitive constructs as meaning, competence, self-determination and impact, and refer to it as psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment of professionals as lifelong learners involves the development of a range of characteristics that span the cognitive, conative and affective domains.

Support of a work organization means creating development opportunities for all workers. Social work is teamwork and the high competence of the whole team is important here but also the colleagues' readiness for professional growth. Social workers stressed the role of the work organization in the process of professional growth, although it differ among interviewees. Some social workers have strong organizational support for development, which is expressed by encouragement and financial support for learning, but this is not the case with all social workers. It appears from the results that social workers often have to ensure their professional updating by themselves and this is considered normal; it is not regarded as only the organization's responsibility. But if there is no support from the organization to life-long learning, then self-education and learning are more difficult and there is increased risk of burnout, because everyday work is demanding already. On the other hand, social workers attach importance to a high level of competence as protection against burnout, because competence gives self-confidence and the knowledge and skills to cope with difficult circumstances.

Social workers differentiate between systematic vocational education and continuing education – the response shows that continuing education without basic vocational education is not fully appreciated because a practitioner may not receive the expected gains. Social workers stress the importance of professional knowledge and skills as the generator of professional cohesion and, in a broader perspective, a prerequisite for coping with everyday work. Being professionals themselves, social workers are unable to picture uneducated people practicing social work; they believe it would be damaging both to clients' well-being and the prestige of the profession. Social workers emphasize the increase in self-confidence through the learning process and the considerable influence of vocational education on their internal growth. Academic vocational education is seen by social workers as broad-based and it is accepted as such, because in the changing work life you need the ability to react to changes and accept these as challenges.

### Category 3 Professional Growth and Competence

Category 3 *Professional Growth and Competence* is derived from three horizontal categories: 3a *Development of Professionalism*, 3b *Professional Growth*, 3c *Work Environment and Competence*. The three horizontal categories include eleven vertical categories (Figure 11).

<b>Category 3: Professional Growth and Competence</b>		
<b>Category 3a: Development of Professionalism</b>	<b>Category 3b: Professional Growth</b>	<b>Category 3c: Work Environment and Competence</b>
<b>Category 3a1: Vocational Education</b>	<b>Category 3b1: Life-long Learning</b>	<b>Category 3c1: Competence of Work Team</b>
<b>Category 3a2: Personal Characteristics</b>	<b>Category 3b2: Self-directedness</b>	<b>Category 3c2: Work Organization as Supporter of Professional Growth</b>
<b>Category 3a3: Self-awareness</b>	<b>Category 3b3: Learning from Work and Reflectivity</b>	<b>Category 3c3: Continuing Education and Professional Standards</b>
<b>Category 3a4: Coping with Work</b>		
<b>Category 3a5: Relationship between Theory and Practice</b>		

**Figure 11.** Social workers' views about professional growth and competence.

#### Category 3a Development of Professionalism

Social workers as professionals seem to know how to analyze deficiencies in their knowledge and skills. The constant learning process shapes them into self-directed learners. Social workers responses also express application of reflective work principles and relating practice to academic knowledge.

Category 3a *Development of Professionalism* was derived from three horizontal categories that were named as follows: category 3a2 *Vocational Education and Personal Characteristics*; category 3a3 *Self-awareness*; category 3a4 *Coping with Work*; category 3a5 *Relationship between Theory and Practice*. These titles were given according to social workers' views about vocational education as tested in work process, the learning process is also seen as a component of personal internal growth that helps to become a professional in the field. The response also shows that social workers learn to connect theory with practice and experience a sense of recognition.

### Category 3a1 Vocational Education

All interviewees stressed the opinion that social work cannot be nor must not be done without vocational education, although this attitude is expressed in our society. Vocational academic education is the foundation of successful work. It also appears from the response of social workers that if social work is carried out without vocational education, it is not by nature a systematic professional activity that influences peoples' life and well-being. A couple of interviewees were of more critical opinion and suggested that uneducated workers may do more harm than good in social work and this should not be allowed to happen.

After venturing into a new field with the goal of helping and improving people's life that had considerably lowered in living quality, social workers discovered that it is not easy or simple, but a complex professional activity and in order to get good results, one must have systematic professional knowledge.

*"I wanted to do this work well and started off in a very open manner... and then came some 'blunders' and I understood that this is deliberate practice and the wish to help alone won't be enough..." (I 5)*

*"...there are work objectives in social work, the problems are so complex and multilayered that you need preparation to analyze them properly; you need vocational education for that – otherwise you don't see the nature of the problem and then you can't find solutions, you can't help another person" (I 8)*

When they realized in the work process that professional skills were not sufficient, but the field itself appealed, it was decided to obtain vocational education.

*"...I knew immediately that I must go to study this (social work), we had two years' training from Tampere and we were the first county in Estonia to get good basic training in social work, but I felt that the others had something considerably more... particularly in knowledge. They had more of specific knowledge and I knew this was something I could learn too. I came to the university when the head of the local government raised everybody's salary except mine and the explanation was that I don't have academic education. Well, I decided I'd have it and now after I've gotten my MA, I say it is fantastic education, I am really pleased with my vocational education and I'm a complete fan of social work and I'm never ashamed to say it everywhere. I say it happily, loud and clear." (I 4)*

It appears that social workers go into vocational training with a sense of mission, eagerness to learn and because of the lack of practical knowledge. Often the study process turns out difficult, because they must also continue with their everyday work and life. It is particularly difficult for the Open University students, whose previous study period was often years ago. They were motivated to study by the example of colleagues that have strong cohesion with social work.

*„...I've been studying social work for a very long time... I started when Peda[gogical University] had taught social work for a year and I came here because it was a new programme. It was in 1992 and I knew it was a new programme and that it would be interesting. I had scanned the ground a bit (I come from a small town), went to talk to the county social work counsellor to do a bit of research and then came to study here and found it was something new and innovative. After the high school I worked in the pension office for a year and our social counsellor made it pretty clear what social work is (she is deeply involved herself) and she helped, so I actually knew what it was that I was going to study." (I 9)*

It is not easy to study while working, it takes resolution and a strong wish to stay in the chosen path. Those who find it unobtainable, leave and find something else to do, but those who find their work suitable are inspired by the need to be good in their profession. Studying while working means great changes in personal life.

*"...there were five of us who came to study in the university from my work place but two of us graduated. It was too difficult for some. For me it wasn't difficult for the first two years. Now, when I look back to it, I don't know where I got that energy from: I had to study at nights because I started from abc – how to write, how to do everything; I had forgotten everything. Then I started to study in the mornings, woke up at four in the morning and studied for my best time of the day – between four and eight - then I went to work. And it was kind of regular, I got used to it. Now it is scary to even think about it." (I 5)*

For some interviewees entering the field of social work field was not a conscious aspiration but happened due to external circumstances, but if the profession was in harmony with the worker's self-concept, then they became enthusiastic, stayed in the field and made great effort to receive academic vocational education. A profession unites colleagues and gives a sense of belonging, creating solidarity with other members of the profession. If other members of the organization are learning, it is an encouraging example.

*„...when I started to study, I didn't have an inner need; these work tasks seemed easy then and I managed them well. The colleague who was already studying in the university influenced me and those who had already graduated also suggested that I came to study...(I 6)*

Vocational education gives courage and confidence: ability to stay in balance during difficult times and is the basis for the development of cohesion with work.

*„When I began studying in the university, I immediately started to have 'wow- moments'. And these give you a good feeling and the strength to go through, or past or below, obstacles. Anyway, I can leave them behind." (I 4)*

The importance of academic vocational education and the changes this long learning process has triggered in an individual's way of thinking often come apparent only after the graduation.

*"...when I came to the university, I honestly didn't know what I wanted. It took me for a while to understand what studying in the Open University means and how much I have to work by myself and at first it seemed that I was told things that I didn't need. I had a very narrow approach in the beginning, but this is it – the more you learn, the more you see that you need to learn even more." (I 6)*

It is also found that training courses alone do not give professional knowledge. If you do not have vocational basic education, training is not really efficient, students cannot understand special terminology and are unable to get the whole picture.

*"....we just finished another training, we had the third children protection training by Norwegian experts. It was long-term training, the teachers were very good professionals – people who are among the best in their field. It was sad for me to see how I and others who have learned social work in the university, we can understand things and it is all very interesting, but it is sad that others, who do practical work, but haven't studied in the university, listen, and can't always understand everything. It may be said that often training doesn't grow and develop for them, it is torn out of the context and without the foundation it is not very useful, because we may lighten one narrow aspect very subtly, but then the terminology starts to play and those without academic education – they don't know what it is about, they interpret things completely differently. In my opinion a social worker must have academic vocational education; it gives the right attitude and understanding. Whether I use correct professional terminology is also a question of competence." (I 5)*

Although some people are of the opinion that social work education should not take place at university level and the diploma of higher vocational education is sufficient, the results show that the social workers who have graduated from a university value their education. When comparing their competence and attitude with those of their colleagues who have received higher vocational education, they find that higher vocational education is practical and task oriented, but a general understanding about human being in environment and society is not seen as a central aspect in social work.

*"...there is a great difference between academic education and higher vocational education. I think you can sense that difference in the way of thinking and attitudes. It is a bit reactionary sometimes, for example we often debate about the choice of strategy or methods ... and if I ask to explain why she does things the way she does, she can't explain it. Well, I think she spends too much energy on small matters, there is little benefit and later she admits that, yes, perhaps she shouldn't have done things the way she did." (I 9)*

*"My partner-colleague, who is now graduating from diploma studies at college – I can see how she works and studies and I am absolutely convinced that academic education is best for successful work as it gives you the foundation. I'm a huge fan of my university..." (I 5)*

As vocational education in social work, just like the profession itself, is just only developing in the society. There is not yet a clear understanding of on what level higher vocational education is, compared to academic education; is there a real difference or does it only appear to be so? Social workers' opinions show that they value academic education highly because it gives a dimension that helps to see society as a whole and also each individual as unique being. It is not possible to prepare social workers for absolutely everything that may come up in a work situation: in social work professional life is dynamic and unpredictable. Vocational education must certainly give students a general readiness to understand a person in his/her environment, to develop themselves and to support and encourage the development of other people. Vocational education must give them knowledge and skills to analyse their work and learn from this – to be a thinking and creative worker.

*"...to work in social work field without academic education... maybe some can, but my personal opinion is that academic education is a must and the broader it is the better. Actually I think you should re-specialize several times during your life, because one stage will exhaust itself and you should move on to a different social work area or you will burn out. Academic higher education must be, maybe it is my subjective opinion, but life has shown that vocational training is not enough to cope in the field. For example, when trainees come to practice and I'm their instructor, it is apparent that university students are more independent and more co-operative and don't need such finger-pointing that I have to practice with students from vocational institutions. Maybe it will change, but right now it is like that." (I 3)*

There is also the question whether social workers that have different education levels are equal in the labour market and whether employers can see and wish to see the differences there. Social workers interpreted differences in educational level through professional standards and they found that the level of education should be reflected in the work position and in career development.

*"According to my personal experiences, when I speak about life in general or social work in particular with colleagues with vocational education, I've been puzzled for many times. I don't think I am that smart a person, I'm pretty critical about myself, but I have felt that there is difference and it is to my favour and sometimes it feels that the difference is too wide. It shouldn't be that wide, because our professional positions are more or less equal. Perhaps the position of someone with vocational higher education could be different from the position of someone with academic vocational education..." (I 10)*

### Category 3a2 Personal Characteristics

This category draws together views about social work in terms of personal characteristics that are inevitable in this human relations profession. Such personal characteristics as empathy, goodwill, openness and good communication skills were mentioned as necessary features and skills. Understanding and appreciating of other people and a tolerant and non-judgmental, unprejudiced attitude are very important in social work, when communicating with clients and work colleagues, in the superior-subordinate relations, as well as when communicating with people from other fields.

Every interviewee stressed that social work cannot be practiced by just everyone, they have to exhibit certain personal characteristics. One may enter the field by chance, but those without the necessary features leave quickly; only those who want to be of help, to test themselves and who have the needed prerequisites will remain.

*"...I already had higher vocational education in pre-school education and had worked in a kindergarten for ten years. When there was a new town district formed, I was offered the position of the head of social work. It was in 1993. I wanted to try because social work really attracts me and somehow I still feel this work suits to my nature. I love this work, I've never had the feeling that I don't want to do this. I feel I'm suitable for this work because of my personal characteristics..." (I 7)*

Social competence and interpersonal skills are highly valued. But although social competence is seen as important, in this profession you will have to reach substance, which is caring for other people and being supportive in difficult times. These people also believe that it is important to show caring for others openly in the society.

*"...you are suited for social work if you are a skilful communicator – these professional skills (theories) are really useful if you are energetic and love people, love life.. But if you want to 'press other people' you may study as long as you like – it won't help. It is a mission and empathy and tolerance and unconditional love. Not anything physical of course, you just respect and love other human being..." (I 4)*

*"I believe that in principle everyone has empathy and goodwill. How else it could be there if not from nature and supported by family. I think in principle such a person whose personal characteristics are not suited for helping profession, won't choose it in the first place and if such a person happens to choose helping profession for some reason, they nevertheless won't become a good helper." (I 10)*

All respondents regarded social competence as an important factor – the basis for a professional client relation, but it was always connected with personal characteristics. Personal characteristics were seen important, as well as knowledge and skills: work experiences have taught that caring is necessary, but if one has real wish to help, one must know how and when.

*"...personal characteristics are naturally important, but you can't emphasize these without education. Training is absolutely necessary and in addition to that personal characteristics such as empathy, tolerance, social nerve, sensitivity, ability to see problems, a low pain threshold and at the same time courage and ability to react to everything, because if I see, but won't react, then nothing changes." (I 2)*

*"...besides charity and empathy, communication skills are a must. This work is endless communicating: explaining everything in different committees and getting what you need, because many things depend on funding and it depends on you how quickly and convincingly you manage to explain everything. Personal characteristics are obviously very important here, I would even say that everything depends on character: how you can inspire your work team, take them along. Sometimes*

*you have to keep emotions up, but sometimes to calm them down – not to get carried away by the client's emotions. You have to be really strong, you have to have good 'nerve'..." (I 1)*

There is a lot of communication, both with clients as well as with their families, fellow officers and networking with specialists from nearby fields. You have to know how to communicate with higher ranking officials who do not always know the social work specifics, but participate in funds planning and allocation process. You have to be flexible in all human relations and able to see things also from the perspective of the head of organization or institution.

*„...important characteristics in social work include a calm mind, flexibility, optimism, ability to see and hear and a multitude of other personality characteristics, which you just have to have. If you are not a good communicator, it is very difficult to do this work and at the same time you have to be flexible and able to understand that your opinion is not the only one or the right one – there are dozen other opinions and you have to find the way, to find what would be best in this situation. You can't press your opinion, you have to be able to take others' opinions into account, accept them, otherwise conflicts will arise and people who create conflicts can't be social workers..." (I 6)*

A social worker has to be open, empathic and at the same time realistic and analytical. They have to have good knowledge about different life areas, have to be courageous and able to take initiative.

*"...you have to be really open in social work, you must understand a stranger's concern. Empathy is so important, and at the same time you have to be able to contain yourself, you must not go along with everything, but you must be able to share. What is particularly important is this openness and skill to listen to everyone, to enter dialogue with everyone while trying to help them. Analytical skills are also a must and a social worker must be a real expert in human nature." (I 7)*

At first glance there appears to be a contradiction in the conception of social worker's personal characteristics, because so radically different features are seen as characteristics of social workers. They are viewed as sensitive, open, helpful and empathic humans, while on the other side they are regarded as adventurous, with high self-esteem and natural self-starters, who have broad knowledge about different fields.

*„...a worker in the social work field has to be incredibly universal and dynamic, because there are situations where you have to be infinitely soft and warm and there are those in which you need to be bold and self-assertive and have enormous self-confidence, because you need to deal with various officials on behalf of your clients, lawyers for example, who pretty much try to make a fool out of you and this is something you just can't let happen. In situations like these you need, besides legislative knowledge, courage and good communication skills." (I 7)*

### **Category 3a3 Self-awareness**

This category is based on views about the importance of vocational education and work for personal development and in the process of self-awareness. Social workers have developed themselves internally in the context of work and education, learning to comprehend and conceptualize themselves by finding out who they are, what they want, where they belong to. In the beginning there has been uncertainty about wishes and goals, there have been some moments of accidentality, but the process of vocational education has helped to understand oneself and see clearly one's position as a social worker, as an individual and as a member of society. The values and worldview become clearer and anchored (or changed) in the process of learning and work; self-confidence and skills emerge to set goals and to realize them.

*"...in the university you start to perceive things,... you see that these values are within yourself, I hadn't verbalized them for myself, but they were within me. They rose to the surface here in the university, I got to understand, for the foremost who I am myself and what my worldview is. It sort of anchored everything else and this is most important, because if I don't know myself what is inside of me, if I can't see my own problems and things, how could I then help other people if I am empty and dry? And in the client relationship for example the other party will sense it immediately. But I can safely say that now I'm a good child protection social worker because I'm very strong, I have lots of power, I can go and mobilize this power in other persons, too. Of course they must go on by themselves, but I have that power to awaken them..." (I 5)*

While the new job was found interesting, it was still necessary to begin with vocational learning, which was an unaccustomed activity. But the learning process became enjoyable and it also supported self-development. People started to perceive their potential and abilities and constructed their self-concept.

*"...in the beginning it was awfully difficult, in the sense that some lectures of psychology from then and there... and to orient oneself in this was somewhat difficult in the beginning... but it was good to hear when in BA exam several study mates said about the Payne's theory textbook that this is oh-so exciting book. Now when we start to mature we understand everything.... and who we are and what we want..." (I 4)*

You must learn from work and be able to realistically analyze yourself – both in terms of worldview and values, as well as professional skills. You must be able to see your strengths and weaknesses.

*"...when working with clients you must be able to rationally analyze your own self - who you are and what your professional strengths and weaknesses are. You see, I must know if I'm ready to do these things and those things for this work. That is necessary." (I 5)*

### **Category 3a4 Coping with Work**

This category describes the views of social workers about the importance of vocational education in coping with work. Vocational education is necessary for the development of professionalism. According to the social workers, a professional is a worker that has a sound theoretical background, experiences of practical work and in addition suitable personal characteristics. A professional must stay abreast with changes in the society.

*"...when I now thought about those interview questions, and then recalled that it was ten years ago when we started with social work, I can't imagine anymore that someone unprofessional would do that work. I think in terms of education, someone without academic vocational education – they can't manage it. You can't do that work anymore based only on enthusiasm, you'll hit the ceiling pretty soon. And since the EU accession is important, we have to have the same standards, we can't be at the same level if we don't have the academic education." (I 8)*

Personal education process and work life have helped to understand the importance of vocational education in work.

*"I certainly believe that every social worker must have academic vocational education, although I myself started without any kind of social work education. I first went to social work counsellor training and then I thought I already knew something. Then came the other stages: diploma studies, BA, MA and I can see it from myself that this is necessary." (I 10)*

Professional knowledge and skills must be applied to the work, without practical application of theoretical knowledge there is little success in work.

*"...as important as professional knowledge is the ability to utilize this knowledge to the maximum, because you are kind of like a pendulum, a link between the society and the client: you know their circumstances, but you also have employees, you must stand for them as well. At the same time you have to be able to get along with the organization's managers, your superiors who decide on the funding, and all this takes lots of skills." (I 1)*

### **Category 3a5 Relationship between Theory and Practice**

This category focuses on views about the relation between vocational education and practical work. Among the interviewees there were those that had started with practical work and then went on to acquire vocational education as well as those that went to school first and then began to work. It is interesting to note that the age of social workers is not at all important: the first group includes also young social workers.

It is particularly difficult for a young specialist without work experiences to adapt to work life; once they receive experiences, they know how to connect the theoretical basis with practice.

*„...when I went to work after the university, it was difficult to put knowledge into use,/.../ it was difficult to connect theory with practical work. But now when I'm studying in the Open University and working at the same time, it is considerably easier to tie theory with practice and this sense of recognition, these 'wow-moments' everybody talks about, this really exists. Now when I'm studying for an MA, it is interesting to analyze all this...." (I 9)*

At the same time the respondents think that academic education should not be directly connected with everyday work elements, but it must give readiness and ability to develop.

*"...this theoretical foundation is what university gives and if you are working in the field, this theory won't be anything far off, you easily know how to apply it. I said it was much easier and there were plenty of 'wow-moments' because we did new things and in the university we were told that there is a theoretical foundation and it can be linked to practice. It was good to found out this, it was a really good feeling..." (I 8)*

In a complex human relations profession such as social work, it is not easy to respond to the challenges of everyday work, which are difficult to foresee, but must nevertheless be solved.

*„Academic education should not be made too practical, I'm sure of that. I think academic education is necessary to find the bottlenecks in my work, because this is something you can build on, because university won't give you a ready-made model and client situations, it is out of the question. But it gives you the ability to develop, because it gives you the foundation on which you can build your own knowledge and skills system. It really justifies itself, because you are able to analyze what you need to do to raise your competence, what it is you need to learn more." (I 9)*

### **Category 3b Professional Growth**

The second horizontal category, 3b *Professional growth*, focuses on the need of life-long learning and about how social workers develop into self-directed learners during the learning process, set their goals and discover the opportunities to learn from their work. The views in this category show that professional growth is a natural part of social worker's life. The sense of success motivates a social worker to develop further, but if there are no opportunities or want for this, then they delve into their knowledge and skills, in order to achieve high competence in a certain social work sphere. If there has developed cohesion with work, then there is also a recognized need for self-education.

### Category 3b1 Life-long Learning

This category is characterized by social workers' conviction that life-long learning is a means of enhancing their competence. Life-long learning and work practice provide a foundation for procedural competence – the skill to put knowledge into practice; be creative and think and analyze independently

*„...competent workers are the ones who can protect themselves and can use their knowledge to the maximum in difficult everyday work situations. In the client work, the theoretical analysis must go through my head really quickly, I can't take some sort of book and look it up from there. It is a more creative work; the knowledge that is within me comes up and everything grows together for solving this individual's problem and it is important that in this concrete situation you can choose and use different options that already exist and have been tested, because this gives maximum results” (I 1)*

Although social work is a new profession, the number of specialists with academic vocational education is increasing, and this means increased competitiveness for them in the labour market. Competitiveness demands individual initiative from the workers to develop their competence.

*”Professional development is necessary, anyway, you can see it immediately when you start work. Take legislation for example; legislative acts are changed all the time, and new laws are adopted that influence our field. If you want to do your work well and remain on a high quality level, then professional development is absolutely necessary, because everything changes and develops.” (I 9)*

Training is necessary for personal development and the maintenance of competence, but it also brings new perspective into work and provides opportunities to see the different aspects of the work.

*“...continuous learning and training take you away from the everyday routine; you participate in a course and they discuss a particular topic – either something to do with psychology or legislation – you immediately start to analyze your own work, are able to see it from a different angle and the picture becomes fresher and clearer...” (I 3)*

There are social workers that acknowledge their organization for supporting their professional growth, but not every social worker feels that they receive such support. They admit they had to find opportunities and funds for self-education by themselves and they consider it to be quite normal, although it is difficult and takes great effort.

*”...everyone of us learns all the time, people we meet on training courses always say that they envy us, because they work in private enterprises and they don't have such continuous training because the employers don't want to invest in their education. For me it has been very interesting to learn and develop. How could I work otherwise at all?” (I 7)*

As continuous training demands energy and resources, the content and the quality of education are important, because self-directed social workers put much emphasis on the quality of training.

*“We had visitors from the neighbouring county and there were a young specialist who works with the unemployed, a great worker in his sphere, but at the same, he wouldn't be able to work in child protection, because in this sphere he is less competent.” (I 6)*

Academic vocational education is considered an elementary demand that forms the basis for further development, but the path and progression of development are determined by social workers themselves.

*"I have a high opinion about academic vocational education, but this is not sufficient to continue to work well. You have to learn more all the time, and also, from the other people. We forget things, and life changes and several things need to be freshened up or learnt in addition. Therefore it doesn't matter if you recall organization theories or communication theories or learn IT technology – it means everything must be learnt anew or in addition." (I 3)*

Enhancement of competence and professional growth mean the deliberate creation of a professional defence system to protect themselves as indispensable work instruments from the burnout. Competence gives self-confidence and enables coping with work. It gives enthusiasm and courage to recognize difficulties and to cope with them successfully.

*"...enhancement of competence as professional growth is absolutely necessary, because only an incompetent social worker can say that they won't have a burnout and that they are so capable – that in itself shows that they don't know anything about it. If they claim that they are so strong and nothing could happen to them – they are already in the defensive state and unable to start to solve things. Then the question arises what they are doing with the clients..... competence – that is self protection, whose purpose is recreation – is completely necessary..." (I 5)*

### **Category 3b2 Self-directedness**

This category focuses on workers' development as conscious learners. In the beginning of the studies they have had vague goals and aims, but the learning process has given them, in addition to professional knowledge, also great personal development potential. There has been no clear system of occupation titles or educational demands. Although there are professional standards, local governments have not used them. In spite of this, social workers stress that the maintenance and enhancement of competence are elementary work demands. As self-directed learners they have high demands and expectations both for themselves and for the quality of continuing education.

*"...social workers with practical experiences and academic vocational education are self-directed in the sense that they know what they want to learn and to know and they all are willing to pay for education from their small salary, but then they want to receive high quality training..." (I 3)*

Self-analysis and work demands are the basis for planning education and this is seen as an integral part of work life.

*"...it is important that if social workers have graduated from academic education, then they must take care of themselves and find what they want to know and what is missing in their knowledge and skills and where they could learn more. And this is something they have to know how to analyze themselves. If you receive new training, it also helps you to remember the things learnt before, and it adds to your knowledge." (I 5)*

If a social worker is a self-directed learner, he or she is able to analyze himself or herself and know about his or her strengths and weaknesses and this helps a social worker to set learning goals.

*"...I know what I lack, I can analyze myself, evaluate my knowledge and skills. It is important that I know my strengths and weaknesses. And I have analyzed myself in this manner: who I am as a professional, which area I need to learn more, I know that I want to learn my work sphere thoroughly, because our society is so small that we must be given broad vocational education, and in work life I must develop myself." (I 9)*

### **Category 3b3 Learning from Work and Reflectivity**

This category describes social workers' views about learning from their work. Learning from work and reflectivity are known from education process, but they stress that its actual usefulness appears through their own work experiences. Reflectivity helps to learn from one's own work, but also from the work of the team.

*„...You have to be prepared, you got to have vocational education for that, otherwise you don't know how to reflect your workprocess or you actions. You also can't find new solutions.“ ... (I 8)*

Reflective work as an opportunity to learn is generally accepted by everyone and it was seen as a development opportunity offered by everyday work.

*“...for me the enhancement of competence and professional growth are absolutely necessary. This readiness to learn all the time is necessary because not a single client story is similar to another and, solving the problem, I am already thinking what I can learn from this case. I do it already when we are discussing and analyzing the problem and are setting the goals.“ (I 5)*

Competence must not be seen as static, but as a process, where different methods are used for learning. Learning from the work process is also considered important by the respondents. Development of competence in social work is always related to the culture of the society and the helping tradition, but at the same time social workers remain open for new knowledge, used elsewhere in the world, in order to enhance their competence

*“...in client work I know that I have everything in me and can take what I need 'off the shelf' and this everyday work gives me additional knowledge – you learn from your work as you were learning in the university. I remember that someone's research showed that in our changing world 17% of knowledge becomes outdated in a year, so if this is multiplied by five, it means that in every five years you have to have practically new knowledge. And even if you don't start from the beginning, you should still improve yourself constantly, you must learn new knowledge, everything new from social work field in other societies, but also learn to analyze setbacks in one's own work and also what was well done and to learn to connect all this into your future practical work, in order to avoid mistakes and move on in your work...“ (I 1)*

### **Category 3c Work Environment and Competence**

Category 3c *Work environment and competence* is the third horizontal category of category 3 *Professional growth and competence*, which is derived from three vertical categories that deal with the influence work environment has on the process of professional growth. This category describes views on growth opportunities on the societal and organizational level.

#### **Category 3c1 Competence of Work Team**

The category reflects opinions about the necessity to involve colleagues, whose competence level is also important, because it has impact on the whole organization's work results.

*“...another thing that influences work is that colleagues who are nice people are also competent and have vocational education. This is very important...“ (I 3)*

Competence of the colleagues is highly valued both by peers and managers; it is an important factor for the achievement of the common purpose of the organization.

*„...as a manager I'm proud that I have smart and competent employees. But how many managers are really proud of that? More often this makes them worry that their employees are smarter than them because they study there and there and know more than I, the manager. So, be sensible then, move away if you can't or don't know how, but don't stay there and hamper those who know better. The competence of the whole collective is important for the maximum results.” (I 1)*

Self-development, not only the client's development, but that of the social workers themselves and their colleagues is perceived from the humanistic worldview: people are seen as human beings that aspire to develop, which is a natural and elementary aim. The social workers who do not think like that have to be guided and they will understand themselves that it is worth the effort. The respondents, however, thought that if a person does not have nor will have the wish for self-development, then they should not work in the social work field. The general opinion is that people themselves want to learn and develop.

*“...it is coded into human beings that they want to develop, they feel the need to move on, it is part of life. I think that actually you shouldn't force anybody and guide, but my own experiences have shown that sometimes you have to make people learn and study, whether they like it or not and if it is obvious that it does not change a thing, then it is better for that person to leave the social work field. But it is necessary to give a person an opportunity, perhaps this person will open up at one point and may become a good professional. Some people have all this within themselves, but some need a stronger push... “(I 10)*

### **Category 3c2 Work Organization as Supporter of Professional Growth**

The opinions in this category express the necessity of organizational support in professional growth process. The topic of life-long education was covered by all interviewees, although it is not easy for everyone to participate in continuous learning. Employers assume that social workers themselves are responsible for their level of competence and they should invest themselves in vocational education, as well as continuing education. As the social worker's level of income is not high, the expenses on education are a heavy burden. At the same time, there are organizations that support professional development by all means: encourage learning and give financial support.

*“...we have every kind of learning opportunities, we should be grateful to our great managers that they have been sensible and understanding, we haven't had any limitations placed on us regarding additional training, no meddling with our learning. We can develop well and the managers see to it that we could get as good additional training as possible and it does not have to be as cheap as possible. So we get the training that we need and thanks to that we manage to keep our professional level. Our management understands it well, so in this regard we have been lucky.” (I 3)*

It is important that a social worker's work organization understands and supports life-long learning:

*“...I think it is a question of prioritizing that our superiors have set up financial resources for training and recreation, it is a great thing and not available everywhere, but in our town, we somewhat have it. So it really depends on the area, I don't think it is a question of the lack of money but it is a matter of attitude whether money is given for training or not.” (I 5)*

### **Category 3c3 Continuing Education and Professional Standards**

This category focuses on social workers' opinions about competence standards. Qualification standards of social workers are regarded as a positive development promoter. For the development of competence a good continuing education network is needed, so that every social worker can – if so wishes – raise his or her competence level. At the same time the

quality of additional training offered at present is not deemed good enough and it is suggested that universities and the related institutions should offer continuing education.

*“...it is a good thing that qualification standards exist and these should be applied everywhere immediately, to motivate constant self-development. Additional training should take place in the university; we would surely prefer universities as educators. Nobody trusts these small training firms; what they offer is not satisfactory.” (I 6)*

Knowledgeable and self-directed social workers put much emphasis on the quality of continuing training.

*“...continuous learning is extremely important and it shouldn't be done haphazardly, by some kind of 'teaching firms' offering additional training, which is accidental and unprofessional. Training should be offered by the universities and in the form of systematic teaching.” (I 9)*

Systematic continuing training must be related to professional standards and offer opportunities for self-developing workers to further their career.

*“...I consider it important that academically educated social workers have systematic and purposeful additional training in the university and that training should give attestation points according to qualification standards. Obviously the university provides vocational education and advanced training and therefore it would be good if they offered continuing training – that would be best for us.” (I 3)*

Category 3 consists of social workers conceptions of professional growth and competence. It became clearly visible that social workers have very high growth motivation. Although they consider academic vocational education as foundation of competence, they view constant development and life-long learning as natural and evident part of professional life. In some cases it became apparent that the danger for driving for professional growth and development of social workers could be lack of support of work organization management.

### 6.3.3 Social Workers' Work Environment: Societal and Organizational Factors

Professional growth has become a central demand in the work life of most professions, one that demands a great effort from the workers. Hall (1990), Dubin (1990) London and Mone (1987), Maurer and Tarulli (1994), Ruohotie and Grimmett (1994) and Farr and Middlebrooks (1990) suggest different personal motivation factors that help to mobilize workers for the intense professional updating process. Contemporary work process has changed, in many organizations there no longer exists heavy management hierarchy, but workers are equal partners in work teams with shared responsibility and the results depend on the work of each member of the work collective. In this context, high level of competence of every worker and readiness to grow professionally are important. In addition to this, courage and support of the organization and leadership are needed. Maurer and Tarulli (1994) and Ruohotie (1993, 1994, 1996, 1999, 2000) stress the creation of a supportive development environment: the professional growth of workers is promoted by intensive communication, a supportive and participatory management and a belief in obtaining benefits from development, but also by recognition and material returns.

## Category 4 Work Environment: Societal and Organizational Factors

Category 4 *Work environment: Societal and Organizational Factors* reflect conceptions about important contextual factors that influence development of the social work profession and the development of the professional growth of social workers. Category 5 is derived from two horizontal categories that are titled, based on the conceptions, category 5a *Societal Factors* and category 5b *Organizational Factors and Work Environment*. Two horizontal categories are derived from five vertical categories.

<b>Category 4: Work Environment: Societal and Organizational Factors</b>	
<b>Category 4a: Societal Factors</b>	<b>Category 4b: Organizational Factors and Work Environment</b>
<b>Category 4a1: Politicization of Social Work</b>	<b>Category 4b1: Work Management and Leadership</b>
<b>Category 4a2: Contradiction of Social Work</b>	<b>Category 4b2: Recognition and Support</b>
	<b>Category 4b3: Work Team as a Basis</b>

**Figure 12.** Work environment factors influencing social work.

### Category 4a Societal factors

Category 4a *Societal factors* is formed from conceptions that describe the social workers' work environment in the broader sense. The social work profession is connected to every process in the society, and therefore social workers are aware not only about the economic and political changes, but also changes in the society's value system during the past decade. These conceptions show that the values of social workers are not the same with the values of those who hold political power and that can bring about a great contradiction. The social work system is directly involved with human well-being and it is an expensive and resource demanding sphere, and therefore the development of system depends on political decisions. Social workers' conceptions show that politicians tend to manipulate social sphere issues and decision making processes to gain their political objective.

### Category 4a1 Politicization of Social Work

The conceptions of this category are characterized by politicising of everyday work and discrepancy between the values of social work and those prevailing among the public. People who, due to their values are unwilling or unable to see the nature of social work, but are eager for political power, have learnt to use the so-called 'social questions' in their political campaigns. There is no systematic conception on how to help those in need, decisions are made based on power ambitions to gain cheap popularity, political profit and the often involve manipulating people.

"...he [head of organization] has other motives for acknowledging social work, not those motives you think he has and these motives don't work together... for example, this kind of case – a social worker has tried for two years to arrange the repair of an elderly man's stove, he has smoke inside the room, but there are never resources for that ... and then, six months before the elections, he [the head] says to this man that let's repair this stove and asks why he hasn't asked for it before... so before the elections they repair it, but then after the elections comes another old person and wants his stove to be

*repaired, and then he tells this other person that it can't be done, there is no money for that and to turn please, to the social worker... and everything starts from the beginning..." (I 4)*

Power shift in local government may bring completely new parties to power and then there is an attempt to fill local government with people connected with their parties. This policy endangers skilled specialists and professionals, because in these cases the professional level is not considered important, only the political affiliation.

*"...the social worker depends too much on political changes in the society, the replacement of local authorities often means that the social worker is let go from the work (proclaimed not trustworthy) and the social workers have to work constantly under these uncertain circumstances. We don't have security and particularly in small towns you may become ostracised because those in power don't like your husband as he is in the opposition party, so this sort of absurdities influence our work life..." (I 6)*

Often social workers are not satisfied with being included into political games. They wish that the social sphere could develop naturally and steadily and the basis of the development should be long-term political conceptions and programmes.

*"...particularly this political tossing where social work fields are also involved, hinders practical work; those regulations are often quite unprofessional and contradictory, but nevertheless they are going to have influence, we can't ignore them, you see. In these times, this social work for people should be done in principle anyway, it shouldn't depend on election campaigns and party programmes." (I 9)*

#### **Category 4a2 Contradiction of Social Work**

Representatives of the new profession are challenged by the values of previous, totalitarian societies, where people unable to successfully manage their lives were considered worthless for society. Because the everyday workload is considerable, there is not much time left to enlighten society about the nature and purpose of social work. Social work and its value must also be explained to an employer that also has little understanding about the nature of social work.

*"...organization [local government] wouldn't understand the nature of our work. We (social workers) were just some annoying bugs that dealt with those who were even more annoying and we were in the house only because it was demanded, but they didn't realize why it was needed... although later the head of county admitted starting to better understand the nature of social work, but before that we had our several fights ... it was all for other people, not for ourselves..." (I 4)*

Also the other sphere officials in the organization have difficulty in understanding the special helping needs of each and every client.

*"...in the local government where I worked maybe a quarter of the people at best, understood the nature of social work, perhaps accepted it, but typically didn't accept helping every client; attitude was kind of 'they got things anyway, what else do they want' or 'they [clients] are themselves to be blamed..." (I 4)*

Social workers regard a person in an environment in a clearer manner than officials from other spheres seem to. One reason being that their education years were in the previous society, they have difficulties in understanding the influence of societal processes and environmental impact on the coping outcomes of people.

*"...those officials, colleagues in the organization but not working in the social service field, often don't understand the nature of social work ... don't understand... I think that we are already seeing*

*things like the society starting to talk openly about in two years. To some extent it is normal because processes have their beginning point, then there is culmination and some solution must be found ... we [social workers] see the development of these processes from the seed...” (I 5)*

If there are difficulties in recognizing the nature of social work and its purposes, it is difficult to recognize the professionals as bearers of the value of social work.

*“...there have been problems at the local government level that some social workers feel that they are not valued, their ideas are seen as squandering of money... it has happened in our county too, economic thinking is domineering. But the heads of rural municipalities go often to the county government and we here have managed to influence them if there is need to support the social worker...” (I 6)*

Local government officials are often unable to understand the reasons for helping “such people” as ex-convicts, long-term unemployed and addicts.

*“...the social worker who works with the heart, is inconvenient for the local authorities and disturbs the locals as well... ‘why do you give them and why do you do things for them’. Our people are not tolerant yet... our people are still living for survival, other nations that have leaved in peace, in the sense that they haven’t been under such oppression – they are different..... that’s where it comes from that we are intolerant and we don’t like differences...” (I 4)*

## **Category 4b Organizational Factors and Work Environment**

Category 4b *Organizational Factors and Work Environment* is the second horizontal category in the category 4 *Work Environment: Organizational and Societal Factors*. This category reflects the experiences of social workers about their work environment and the impact of the organization on their work.

### **Category 4b1 Work Management and Leadership**

This category is characterized by the conceptions of social workers about work management and leadership styles, which vary considerably. Social workers have experienced transparent work management and supportive leadership style, but also unsatisfactory work environments, obscure management and authoritarian leaderships, that hinder creativity and initiative.

Social workers from small local governments have had more negative experiences because there are a lot of people who need help, but there is a limited number of social workers (often just one). In many cases this sole social worker must also take care of the culture- and education sphere of local government. But there also exist local governments that hire more social sphere professionals. Due to the many problems that exist with children and families, and with youth, there is an acute need in local governments for more child welfare and youth work professionals. Social workers stress the lack of social workers in child welfare.

*“...there are not many of us, only 25 child protection workers for 16 thousand children in Tallinn. That is an incredibly small number, but the more professional our workers are, the greater and better help we could give to children and families. More of them are graduating from school, I’ve seen that very nice young people come to social work, but the problem is that there are too few positions available.....for example child protection had a position added two years ago, but the state should certainly create more positions for child and youth workers. It would be beneficial for the society to prevent problems with the help of these young educated specialists rather than to bury money into trying to solve these problems...young professionals would suit ideally to work with youth and also*

*would be suitable for social work in schools, but there should also be youth and children centres as well...” (I 7)*

If the organization management has no clear view about the task of the social workers, then they can hardly bother to create the necessary work environment. In social work the client work process demands an environment that guarantees privacy, confidentiality and the elementary means of communication, but sadly even these can be missing.

*“...our work conditions are miserable. Take the physical environment for example: we have a room, but no phone and that hampers work since I can't contact the parent directly. I have to go to the teachers' room and talk while everyone listens and children and parents know that they can find me in the teachers' room and this is no good; many of them have not called because of that. Now, after having worked here for almost three years, I'm getting a computer and an internet connection. In addition, there are confidential materials that are not supposed to be seen, but this not always respected...” (I 2)*

However, there also exist organizations where there is a suitable work environment and management; work tasks are clear, people have full understanding about their tasks and they are given time to plan their work, time for self-development and opportunities to relax from the intense work periods. This kind of organizational support gives the social worker a sense of security and shows faith in their work.

*“...I see things this way: that we are one part of town government structure; there are departments and one department is the social service department. We have a number of people who each manage one social service area: disabled people, children, coping of the elderly. This is all very good and I think it should be like that everywhere. We have our department head, the department functions well and we feel very secure there, but I know that there are too few social workers in the small local governments, they often have to do everything alone: be a financier, boss and client worker and even be an outstanding client worker...” (I 5)*

Work life is also influenced by the legislation and regulations by the higher authorities. Social workers highlight as a positive aspect that the Social Ministry includes professionals when drawing up development programmes and legislation. It is very important for social workers as this ensures applicable legislation.

*“...I have to say in praise of the Social Ministry that when they start to prepare new law or some change in legislation, that they then gather the county representatives together and ask their opinion, and then the county consults local governments, and the opinion of the specialists working on the grass-root level is asked...” (I 6)*

Conceptions show that according to social workers the applicability of legislative acts is not as good as it could be; it is not always in tune with life nor takes into account the changes in the society, but they still influence the life of the majority of the population.

*“...law can't ever describe practically every angle of life, but it should still be applicable, even though it often isn't. Regulations just don't hook together, are even conflicting, and they contradict each other; this is the sad reality of our everyday work. I think it is necessary to hold broader consultations before drawing up regulations, and research studies carried out before they start to pass fundamental laws in social work that will then influence many lives; good, educated specialists who work in that field should be consulted. It is a question of political will...” (I 8)*

Management is seen as an important factor influencing the work results and professional growth of social workers. Suitable management styles awake tremendous potential in people and direct them to make efforts. At the same time, managers that do not encourage or support

or recognize their subordinates, may limit workers interest in their work, which leads to a lessened cohesion with work and a lack of motivation for professional growth.

*“...I’ve had two employers in social work, two heads of local government, and I have to say they were not good and I’m very sorry for that, because in the first job, where I was for 6-7 years, I had built the foundation for the social work and left many marks there; it was sad to leave it all behind, but on the other hand I was looking for something new, better understanding among the management, better skilled people and more humane attitude, but I happened to be in another place that was even worse... I’ve been thinking that how for two times... both times, I had such a bad luck. Questioned whether I have tendency to find such bosses, I spoke about it with a therapist and we found that this was coincident. But I’d say that these organizations have very ambitious people as leaders..... they don’t care what field it is, if it is social work or machinery, they are busy with their ambitions, it is important for them to lift themselves personally no matter what..... so after all, the disregard or not valuing people from the part of the leaders can be said to be a reason and that this success, that everybody is after, and all this materialism... when we talk about humanity and a focus on the people, then, in my opinion, it is still far from being subjective...” (I 10)*

Cooperation and considering the other are natural elements of social work and therefore social workers would like to work in low-hierarchy organizations. They value equal partnership and unlimited sharing of information. An environment that does not fulfil these expectations hinders their work.

*“....we don’t have a partnership, we have high hierarchic leadership; the formal façade looks democratic, but internally you are not allowed to pass this hierarchy, you have to keep it in mind all of the time, who is in what position. As for the management, I’m not at all satisfied with the information flow, which is completely one-directional: I go and tell the management what my work situation is, but the other way round, that I would get information I need for my work – that doesn’t happen, I usually hear everything from someone else....information sort of comes from the management, but not like it could or should and that is bad...” (I 2)*

There are also conceptions that reflect a partnership-based management.

*“.....I’m very happy with the present management of our organization and the work environment is very good and the management style is on the partnership level.... so called low hierarchy... we don’t have this ‘you are subordinate and you follow the orders’, in our organization you are a colleague.... we have the same objectives and things, we have a work-team and we are equal partners and that is important.” (I 3)*

Society’s growth pains can influence the stability of the social work. In some organizations political changes have too strong an influence, and that brings instability to the local social worker and their clients.

*“...after all, this rambling around in the social work management starts from the Social Ministry where there is unfortunately constant personnel turnover. Political forces make new decisions that may not be sensible... I think we have the right to be critical, because I see that social workers want to help their clients, but all these constant changes in political directions and different orders, that are often so contradictory... these actually influence the social worker working there and the clients, because all these changes, these constant 180-degree turns, they actually have the most negative impact on our regular people.” (I 10)*

#### **Category 4b2 Recognition and Support**

This category gathers conceptions about organizational encouragement and motivation of social workers. Good work results demand a secure work environment. Social workers do not expect some special recognition for their work, but an appreciative and accepting environment

that offers security. For instance, being appreciated equally with other officials in the salary system of an organization.

*“...when I have been working as a counsellor or a senior specialist, then I have been on the same salary scale with equally qualified specialists, so I fortunately haven’t experienced that kind of underpayment...” (I 10)*

Organizational support is considered an important factor for work and learning motivation.

*“...still, the organization has been supportive... for example by helping with going to university, given study-vocation, small things like that, but if this is appreciated, that you go to university, that could be of real help, because everything starts with small things like that...” (I 10)*

### **Category 4b3 Work Team as Basis**

This category gathers conceptions about the importance of the work team in the work process. A work team formed as a group of adherents and competent colleagues is highly appreciated. Sometimes a work team means the social sphere work group in local government, but also a smaller team in certain social work spheres, e.g. child welfare, gerontology, etc. Work team and work organization are not equally important. Although organizational factors for work are influential, their impact is still smaller than the impact of one’s own work team. With such a close work team it is possible to work successfully even when not satisfied with the management and leadership of the organization as a whole. Separation of the work team from the organization is clear cut and considered the basis of their work.

*“...the work team is important and this must be worked out before setting some big objectives and I can say that we really have one. If your work team, this small team you work with is good and job allocation runs smoothly and you can share both worries and joys together.... then this certainly evens out other problems that are in a big organization... so that actually this small group of colleagues is much more important than the whole organization.” (I 5)*

In the conceptions of social workers a good work environment and competent and caring colleagues are much more important than the full use of good career opportunities.

*“...our organization is just fantastic.... we have this internal support, we have so close a team that we ‘unload’ each other, discuss difficult work issues and if we have complicated cases or need quick transportation or something else that you don’t have at the moment, then you don’t need to worry that somebody might turn their back on you. Somebody always helps, mutual support exists through the organization, you never feel left alone with your problems, in that regard our staff is incredibly nice....and from this follows that if there is an opportunity to rise in a career, then you wonder if you can get another equally good team? This stops you from taking the offer, you just can’t leave the team...” (I 3)*

Teamwork may also replace supervision.

*“...the first thing that helps me in my work when there are more difficult or complex cases are my colleagues, because together with them you can take everything apart and discuss them through with my closest colleagues....my work team, they are specialists and they give good advice and then I see new options myself, too...” (I 9)*

Work quality and good results depend on a good teamwork. As social work is a new profession, many social workers had the opportunity to put together their own work teams that may act almost ideally.

*“...if you want results, then a work team is fundamental..... I was very lucky that I got to put together my own collective..... I chose people I knew from before and in ten years it developed into, I could say, an almost ideal team, it was limitless pleasure to work with them.” (I 1)*

The competence of the work team is important, but good inter-team relations and unifying work goals are also highly valued. It is much easier to stay in this intense profession if it is possible to avoid problems and conflicts in the work team.

*“...the people who surround us are always important, because you can't do that work alone and since it is hard work and unpredictable, then for the readiness to face these problems the staff is infinitely important.....it is important that they are adherent to each other's point of view, that there is a similar way in thinking....in this work there is no hope for productive work, if there aren't normal relationships, so that you don't need to waste your time and energy for solving some kind of internal tensions or conflicts, this is impossible, here everything just has to work well.” (I 7)*

This category covers how social workers describe and analyze both positive and negative organizational and societal factors that influence their work.

Competent colleagues, members of the work team is considered an important supportive work environmental factor. Respondents see that professional colleagues help them to achieve effective results and are supportive in their difficult and demanding work circumstances, that are hard to manage alone. Management support is also important for social workers; the motivation and recognition they offer helps to strengthen work commitment and professional growth. However, it appears that the support and understanding from organizational management and colleagues that are not social workers is not universal, that they do not understand the content and nature of social work. Social work is viewed as time and money consuming and does not reflect their values.

Social work financing depends on political decisions and for that reason social work tends to be too politicized; every respondent had experienced the negative impact of this aspect. Politicization of social work creates uncertainty and opportunities to manipulate with workers as well as with clients (see quotation in category 4a1).

#### 6.3.4 Cooperation with Adjoining Fields and Networking

The social workers are relatively autonomous in their profession and this makes social work an unique activity sphere (Jokinen, Juhila & Pösö 1995, 14). On the other hand, good results in social work always depend on productive cooperation with colleagues and other institutions, that have service networks and that help to achieve set goals in the client work process. Du Bois and Miley (1999, 56) present range tenets that reflect the essence of the social work purpose and the core of the common base of practice. Among these, mentioned as particularly important is the development of cooperative networks within the institutional resource system. Human resources, including social services programmes, that are designed to promote the wellbeing of everybody are provided within social (i.e., economic, political, health, educational) institutions. Having a cohesive and comprehensive system for the delivery of social services that benefits diverse members of society requires careful planning and a commitment to cooperation among service providers.

Category 5 gathers social workers conceptions about the cooperation of adjoining fields. Social workers describe the necessity of cooperation, difficulties in its implementation and also positive cooperation experiences.

## Category 5 Cooperation with Adjoining Fields and Networking

Conceptions in the category 5 *Cooperation with Adjoining Fields and Networking* show cooperation as an important component of successful and productive social work. Category 5 gathers conceptions that describe cooperation and development of a network as a time and energy consuming activity. Category 5 *Cooperation with Adjoining Fields and Networking* is derived from three horizontal categories that discuss different cooperation aspects in social work: category 5a *Social Worker as Cooperation Initiator*, category 5b *Impact of the Absence of Cooperation* and 5c *Cooperation and Profession Boundaries*.

Category 5: Cooperation with Adjoining Fields and Networking		
Category 5a: Social Worker as Cooperation Initiator	Category 5b: Impact of the Absence of Cooperation	Category 5c: Cooperation and Profession Boundaries

**Figure 13.** Social workers cooperation with adjoining networking.

### Category 5a Social Worker as Cooperation Initiator

This category gathers social workers' conceptions about initiating cooperation. For client-centred social work, the social workers' efforts must be united with efforts by professionals from adjoining fields. There have been a lot of talks about cooperation and networking, but they have not developed as quickly as hoped.

*"...you must work hard for that relationship..... to get that bridge, you must build it yourself if you want to have cooperation. In our local government this network is fantastic in medicine, education, police, and especially in youth police...." (I 4)*

Social workers have experienced that they must initiate cooperation by themselves, and only then it is possible to convince other professionals about its usefulness.

*"...it is much better for us to bring things together and if I join this ring, for example, of a school social worker and separate structures like non-profit organizations, in this way we can create the network... we know that it can only be done together and that it works. The best acknowledgment that I've ever received on networking was when there came a teacher, that didn't have any network experience. She didn't know what it was, – sitting together and discussing, – and she didn't want to participate, but I managed to make it so interesting to her, that she decided to give it a try. She came and afterwards she told me that she wouldn't have believed it... so the person must experience it and if they are without this experience, the first step is to get them interested and invite them to come even just for once... then they start to look forward to cooperation, because they see that nobody is going to blame them... for example the teacher has done the best possible, but things are still not well with a child and we can only help together..." (I 5)*

When other professionals have realized the value of cooperation in their own work, cooperation begins to proceed more smoothly and conveniently.

*"...we already have this network....parts of the network such as education and medicine are starting to realize that there are specialists in the other fields who can help, that they don't have to be capable to manage everything by themselves. For example, in a school, class teachers are not super-humans, but they try to manage within their organization.... perhaps it is not because of distrustfulness, but it just doesn't occur to them that we are offering co-operation, they are so used to their routine. Me and*

*my colleague are trying to build a cooperation network and we are making progress, our own regional schools that are in our own district, those we have educated, with them we have very good cooperation. You have to start it by yourself, there is no other way to make a workable network.” (I 3)*

### **Category 5b Impact of the Absence of Cooperation**

This category is characterized by descriptions about the negative impact of the absence of cooperation in their work. Experiences have shown that the lack of cooperation and networking may cause irrecoverable and uncalled consequences that the social worker believes could have been avoided with good cooperation with professionals from adjoining field.

*“...cooperation with adjoining fields like medicine, health care, education in the schools or police perhaps... I don't have much to do with the police, only casually, but I know that in our district child protection workers have close relations with the police and they have a very good cooperation, in particular because they are in the same building and they say that is very good and that they are seen as serious work partners and other authorities have realized that the cooperation with social workers is beneficial to them. The same has happened, as much as we have talked about it with colleagues, with the cooperation with family doctors. Family doctors have also realized that cooperation with us has become necessary to them. But at the same time I still have negative experiences in my own work too... one client case, which shows that not we don't have as good cooperation in every field as we should have, if we want to have good results. A mentally disabled son and his mother had emigrated to Sweden and the son killed the mother in Sweden, documents were swiftly drawn up and the son was sent back here....he came to live in the downtown and the workers of the crisis centre started to work with the boy. I took him there myself, but I didn't participate in their work. Let's say that we didn't have such a network and cooperation was weak and this boy slipped through our fingers, so that he was finally found hanged in the forest, he had committed suicide... now in hindsight, now I'd know what to do, but then we didn't have even as much cooperation that we could have analysed this case together... I still have a thorn in my heart that perhaps I did something wrong...” (I 9)*

### **Category 5c Cooperation and Profession Boundaries**

The conceptions of this category stressed the phenomenon that cooperation shows the boundaries of the social work profession as well as the need to expand these boundaries. Since social work is a new profession, the members of other professions are not always able to recognize the jurisdiction of the social work profession. Emergence of new problems in society may create 'grey areas' – problems that no profession actually sees as part of its jurisdiction.

*“...I think that now there is so much talk about social work in the society, but many, very many don't comprehend its nature at all, it is just fashionable to talk about it, but it all remains only as talk....in general, it happens that if there are problems in the society, and if they are not quite in the field of medicine or education, then whose are they? ... well, then they are in the social work field, it is thought; but at the same time the previously existing structures or offices try to push the social work field away. It appears that they are afraid of us as competitors in the society or they just don't want to work with us, because it is inconvenient for them that if there is one more fields managing something and then they have to work on it too. At the same time, I have examples of the very good cooperation among the members of the work team that makes individual rehabilitation plans for disabled young people and together with these young people, and this all runs smoothly, everyone is specialist in his or her field, nobody dominates, they are experts... there is a very good mutual understanding...” (I 8)*

The motivation for cooperation is that it gives better opportunities for client-case management, but there is yet only little preventive cooperation work.

“...networking is tremendously important when working with children and families. We already have a network, other parts of the network, let’s say education and medicine, depending on the particular case already initiate contact themselves. A lot depends on whether you have met this cooperation partner before and if you have worked together before, then you already know whom to look for. But preventive cooperation, that doesn’t always happen yet, as a rule problems exist already. But in our own area the cooperation with adjoining fields is good, there were misunderstandings about to whose field the case belongs to. Cooperation sort of helps to clear the boundaries of your professional field.” (I 3)

Respondents stressed that they have come to understanding that cooperation with adjoining fields has to be initiated by themselves; that they have to be able to engage workers from other fields. All respondents have experienced how important is the cooperation with other social workers – it has direct influence on work quality. Absence of cooperation has immensely negative impact on both the results and quality of social work. It is particularly evident in cases where adjoining field professionals have different opinions about the work field boundaries.

### 6.3.5 Position of Social Work in the Society: Prestige and Career Opportunities

Social work is necessary in the society, at the same time, the social field needs lots of the resources and the benefits of helping work are not directly visible. The development of helping activity into professional paid work has given to social works, as other professions in society, their rights and jurisdiction of competence in general societal work division. This all gives the profession a certain power in society and it is given the right to administer resources of society. Abbott (1988) stresses the dynamism and changefulness of the factors that define the limits of a profession’s jurisdiction. According to Airaksinen (1991), the rights and power of a profession can be viewed as its prestige, and the authority of the profession. The profession’s sphere of influence and its prestige depend on societal values and the meaning that is given to the activities of that profession. However, the profession shapes the position of a worker as a member of society.

#### Category 6 Social work Position in the Society, Prestige and Career

Category 6 *Social Work Position in the Society, Prestige and Career* consists of conceptions about the profession position of social work and the prestige of social work in the society. Category 6 *Social Work Position in the Society, Prestige and Career* was derived from three horizontal categories 6a *Social Work Position*, 6b *Social work Prestige* and 6c *Career in Social Work*.

Category 6: Social Work Position in the Society, Prestige and Career		
Category 6a: Social Work Position	Category 6b: Social Work Prestige	Category 6c: Career in Social Work

**Figure 14.** Social work position in the society, prestige and career in social work.

#### Category 6a Social Work Position

Category 6a *Social Work Position* gathers the conceptions about the attainment of the social work profession position in society. Since social work activity and education were intermitted

for decades in the society, then it now has to prove its value to the society. People that have personal experiences with the social work profession accept the profession, but for the society as whole it will take some more time.

*“...when I’m asked what I do for my work and I answer that I do social work, I’m a social worker, then they more or less know the content of my work, know rather well, meaning the society is sort of used to us because we exist and we are needed....ten years ago they were not used to it, you had to explain all the time what and how, now they know it is a profession like others that we need for living here normally...” (I 9)*

*“...the position of social work has changed a lot during the last decade, there are more educated specialists now and all this influences its position in the society...” (I 8)*

The social work profession develops its position in society because it has an influence on many people’s life and if the influence is positive, then the profession is seen as useful and it is appreciated.

*“...we come from a society that didn’t know anything about social work, now the society has better knowledge about what social workers and the social system deals with and consequently people appreciate our work and profession more than in the first years, when people didn’t know what to think about it...” (I 3)*

The profession’s reputation and position can be damaged by an unsuitable worker who does not accept the values of social work.

*“....a person gives a super impression in the job interview, but later it becomes apparent, that actually he or she is not suitable for this work and of course, a case like this certainly devaluates the profession...” (I 9)*

### **Category 6b Social Work Prestige**

Category 6b *Social work Prestige* gathers social workers’ conceptions about the authority and prestige of social work. These interviewees that saw social work as prestigious, argued that the necessity of the social work has given it a good image in the society. Other interviewees that considered the social work profession not as prestigious, reasoned that since politicians do not value the well-being of society’s members, there are not enough resources allocated for solving and preventing social problems. Furthermore, in their opinion, this expresses the low position of social work in the society. They also see the low salary scale of the social work profession as an indicator of low prestige. Social workers also stress the importance of effective professional social work as the foundation of the profession’s prestige. Members of the profession, social workers themselves, should be proud about their humane profession.

*“...first you have to appreciate your profession yourself and to be dignified, then others can’t say anything bad like ‘why this work is needed for’... inevitably, maybe not everyone needs this profession, fortunately, but I think that in some life stage, everyone may end up as our client...for example, noone is protected from becoming unemployed. The fact that society doesn’t pay a higher salary for people working in this profession, doesn’t mean that society doesn’t appreciate this profession...it gives people a sense of security and hope...” (I 7)*

The professional prestige is also enhanced by the reliability of their good work in the community; it helps to create trust towards the profession.

*“...social work is esteemed in the society... I haven’t met anyone that views this profession as unprestigious because society’s awareness has increased and now it has reached the understanding that this profession touches everyone in the society and they have found so professional treatment*

*from our system that they already trust us and they come and know what they want. I think this is a peculiarity of our district that our clients know more than average about the legislation and this shows our good work.” (I 3)*

The low prestige of social work is, according to many interviewees, shown in the relatively low salary level. There are mostly women working in social work profession, because in Estonia there is a tendency to pay women a lower salary than men for the same work. Social workers see this as a reason why there are less men in social work than needed: especially in probation, youth and children welfare. This is also seen as a reason why media and public life are not interested in the social work sphere.

*“...the position and prestige of social work has changed a lot during the last decade, there are more educated specialists now and all this influences its position and image in the society. People don't come to a social worker just to ask for subsistence, but they want counselling on how to move on with their life. I really see this as a positive change....social work is now a developing profession and social workers are needed on so many levels and many spheres, not only in social organisations, but in medicine organisations, schools, prisons, detention houses, there is already great demand for social workers and therefore I think social workers should be better paid, because that also shows a profession's recognition and necessity in the society....there should also be more male social workers, because right now it is a very feminine field, but then the salaries should also rise in our field... women's professions, as social work, we have relatively lower salaries, and women are paid a lot less in Estonia for the same work. The other half is moral recognition from the society, and that is rather weak, although our work influences the whole society, it is not some inner-guild thing. For instance, when the social work congress was held, there were no articles in the newspapers that something like this took place, as if it were some obscure discussion somewhere, that doesn't really matter, when it was actually a nation-wide event which wasn't at all reflected.” (I 8)*

### **Category 6c Career in Social Work**

This category is characterized by conceptions where opportunities to the rise in the career ladder are seen as regular, but also a career as internal development as well as a rise to a high competence level, e.g. the level of an expert, are valued. A career is seen as a move and ascent in work quality, but also in internal personal development, and the achievement of professionalism. Many social workers have been in a high management position in their previous profession, they have experienced career success and now they do not see it as an interesting challenge.

*“...it is possible to have a career in this field, but it is up to everybody's own internal feelings what it is they see as a career, in the sense that how great a leap they view as career, you see.... whether it is a position or the maximum development of the professional skills, a so called expert... development and career, each person has their own definition about what they regard as a career. I really think you can have a career in social work one way or the other, see the self-development and growth in a career, but also on the professional ladder too. But at the same time, if a person doesn't have this desire to make a career then... for instance, I know a person... a social worker, who has graduated from university and continues learning, but doesn't want to hear anything about making a career, if someone offers this to her, she asks to be left alone, says that she wants to work well in peace.... she doesn't even want to think about it. She has achievement need, but self-actualization is in the manner of internal, spiritual growth, that she doesn't want to hold a higher position, internal stimuli for development are more important...” (I 9)*

These social workers not interested in career advancement do not want to lose connection with real work life. Mid-level managers may have some connection with client work in social work, but not higher level management, and client work is what most social workers value in their work life as this is interesting and offers new challenges.

*„...there are career opportunities, but at the same time every kind of leadership is responsibility, manager must hold greater responsibility. I have led so long in my life that I would very much like to try my secure line - the client work. I say that client work is indeed the thing that actually keeps you professionally fresh, and also emotionally. Career challenges do exist and these have been offered too the social ministry has offered a vacant position, but knowing the field, it is obviously not client work anymore: although social work, you actually work like a functionary and this not the same.“ (I 7)*

Social workers are confident that their work is needed in the society, social work profession has reached in short period of time to relatively important position. According to Airaksinen (1991) position of profession does not guarantee the prestige of profession. Respondents stressed that although the position of social work profession is relatively good, prestige of the profession is not sufficiently high. For example, the salary level of prestigious professions is high but salary level of social workers is average and in some areas it is even low. At the same time social workers brought out that the prestige of social work profession depends largely on themselves – on how effective their work is and how professional social workers are in cooperation with the members of the adjoining field professions.

#### 6.4 Professional Identity of Social Workers

Self-concept means the person's conception of oneself in relation to surrounding world. Self-concept forms the basis of social interactivity and self-reflection. The self-reflection process results in seeing oneself through other people because the self-concept forms from the experiences that we receive from in interactive relation with the social environment. Structures of self-concept are psychical models that help a person organize their life. The structures influence how we process social information and also how we remember and evaluate the self and other people (Ruohotie 2004; Myers 1999; Ojanen 1996). Ruohotie (2004) explains that self-concept is a broader term than self-identity. At the same, self-identity and self-concept are closely related terms that some researchers (Hall & Mirvis 1996) view as synonymous. Self-concept can be structured on how it defines the identity of an individual; for example, personal identity and social identity are separate structured identities that show in which manner and with whom a person identifies and compares oneself (Ruohotie 2004). Social identity, unlike personal identity, is based on an individual's definition based on the group-belonging experiences and relations with other individuals (Lord and Brown and Freiberg 1999; Valk 2003). Social identity on the we-level may be regarded as human-relation based (interpersonal) or collective identity. According to Hall (1986), an individual's identity is formed of different sub-identities. One of the most important sub-identities of the working-person is that a person's professional identity, that is, an individual's conception of him/herself from the point-of-view of a work or profession. London and Mone (1987) present career identity as a part of personal identity, because career identity shows the importance placed on career and the strength of the cohesion with work, growth motivation, achievement need, recognition need and willingness to lead. Professional identity is closely related to career identity, because it is related both with the personal identity as well as the collective identity of individual. Professional identity shows an individual's relation with the environment – who I am, where I belong to, who we are within the profession.

Conceptions of social workers show that the decision to come to the social work was based on personal identity; social work is seen as a mission work. Even if some social workers happened to have come to social work field by accident, they have stayed in this work because the nature and the content of the social work agree with their personal identity, with their nature, worldview and values. It also appears that social workers have strong social

identity both in the interpersonal and the collective level. The existence of professional identity shows according to London and Mone (1987) that workers have a strong commitment to work and a high achievement need and also a need for acknowledgement. Professional identity is one of the strongest personal motivational factors in professional growth and career. The professional identity of workers is expressed through professional roles. Mehr (1995) presents twelve different roles of a social worker the individual worker must attain; for example *broker, advocate, teacher-educator, consultant, administrator, evaluator etc.* A professional can perform his or her work tasks through these roles. Results show that social workers have adapted well to their roles, but they have experienced unrealistic role-expectations from other members of society. In the model by London and Mone (1987) willingness and motivation to lead show a strong cohesion with work. Leadership means to social workers foremost better opportunities to influence and implement innovative ideas.

### **Category 7 Professional Identity**

Category 7 *Professional Identity* consists of two horizontal categories: category 7a *Personal and Interpersonal Level* and category 7b *Collective Level*. Two horizontal categories are derived from eight vertical categories.

<b>Category 7: Professional Identity</b>	
<b>Category 7a: Personal and Interpersonal Level</b>	<b>Category 7b: Collective Level</b>
<b>Category 7a1: Mission Work</b>	<b>Category 7b1: Sense of Togetherness</b>
<b>Category 7a2: Self-Confidence and Willingness to risk</b>	<b>Category 7b2: Work Success as Group Success</b>
<b>Category 7a3: Commitment to Work</b>	
<b>Category 7a4: Recognition and Achievement Need</b>	
<b>Category 7a5: Roles of the Social Worker</b>	
<b>Category 7a6: Need for a Leadership Role</b>	

**Figure 15.** Structure of professional identity of social workers.

### **Category 7a Personal and Interpersonal Level**

Category 7a *Personal and Interpersonal Level* gathers conceptions that describe different elements of the development of professional identity. The basis for the development of professional identity is the personal identity level, which shows cohesion with work, internalization of professional roles and need for achievement and recognition – different personal factors that are also important motivators for professional updating.

It was functional to unite social workers' conceptions about personal and interpersonal identity levels. Selenta and Lord (2002) explain that the interpersonal identity level is caring about other people and therefore, by nature, human relation based. However, London and Mone (1987) state that the development of career identity is strongly connected with personal identity.

### **Category 7a1 Mission Work**

This category is characterized by conceptions about the personal identity and its relation to the nature of work. Social workers stress the compatibility of self-concept with the nature of work. Social work is an interactive human relation profession where the work process is based on the supporting, encouraging and motivating other people and this demands from the social worker certain personal characteristics, values and worldview. In choosing the work, a sense of mission was also stressed as an important factor.

*"...I think that a person just knows by oneself whether this work is a calling or a mission or not....it sounds pathetic, but may be it is part of their life purpose, the meaning of their existence on the Earth is to help other people here at the time, that is a social worker.... because we have these questions, 'who am I?' 'Am I in altogether in the right place?' 'What am I doing here and what is happening around me?'. These are all such eternal questions... I think that if a person, in spite of all the rubbish that surrounds us, feels the want to do something and can feel and share joy, then it simply is a part of his or her life task and I think this is why he or she is a social worker, because if you feel that you want to do this you also feel satisfaction and you know that you are at the right place and that is precisely your place and that is indeed important." (I 10)*

Social workers that every day see people's problems in their work, wish to make the world a better place for everyone and regard their work as a mission and as self-actualization.

*"...in my opinion it works like that, if this what I do is my calling, then it is well done and if I touch a person's heart and they feel that they want change and want to start moving ... I can help them make life better, more worth living, this gives joy and satisfaction for me, too..." (I 4)*

*"...if I like my work, then it is my calling, I've told everywhere how interesting our work is, not a single day is like the other, no routine, it is always very demanding, presents challenges... demands learning, new stuff comes out all the time, you have to be ready to take responsibility and you must stay informed, you have to develop, and the same time, you have limitless number of opportunities to make things and create by yourself." (I 7)*

### **Category 7a2 Self-confidence and Willingness to Risk**

This category expresses social workers' conceptions about the growth of self-confidence in the process where knowledge and skills acquired by learning are put into test. Success in work strengthens faith in oneself. Self-confidence is seen as a cohesion factor because it gives courage to try out new methods, success gives pleasure in work and encourages taking new risks.

*"...I'm of the opinion that vocational education gives me more self-confidence, without it I would be more afraid of these challenges, afraid of failure, but now it is not like that. Without the professional skills and knowledge I'd obey the general rules and it would be easier to manipulate me, but now I can say with confidence that this is the management's view, but it could be seen differently. And that's as I do. I can test my abilities, I do it all the time." (I 2)*

*"...self-confidence gives courage to move on, courage to take risk with new things and to be innovative, it gives strength to do new things." (I 1)*

Challenges in work make work more exciting and interesting, helps to soften the more negative aspects and helps to create cohesion with work.

*"...challenge is the raisin in this work, the reason I keep staying in this field. A good work team is also important and why I would in no way want to change the field.... I mentioned I was feeling run down in the previous work, but here I don't feel exhausted, it is in the nature of this work, it offers you constant challenges, tests you, you must take risks... take responsibility, but it is all so interesting, there is not much of routine..." (I 8)*

### **Category 7a3 Commitment to Work**

This category gathers conceptions of the social workers' commitment to the work. The professionals whose work is in harmony with their self-conception, make the maximum effort and are productive in his or her work. Productive work motivates and strengthens the work commitment.

*"...if you work with people or their problems, then this is not a work that finishes off the second you leave and you really can't put it into some sort of frame, there certainly exists the dedication to work, a person's self-concept must fit to the social work ideology, can't be without this... and you can't be calculating all the time if you receive exactly as much back in salary... this 'sausage for sausage' doesn't apply here..." (I 6)*

Maturity and life experience gives understanding of oneself and one's wishes, social workers who know what they need, consciously go for new challenges. It shows a realistic profession idea, there is no place for illusions, but a clear knowledge of one's abilities as a professional.

*"...I think that devotion is important in social work, you must want to do it, otherwise it comes to nothing...and also that the previous life and work experience play an important part... clearly it is difficult for someone straight from school, a childless social worker would find it difficult in the beginning, that I believe.... I had a relatively large life and work experience and also management experience, I was ready to take it all in, I wanted it and there was a sort of courage to start with the new thing, I sincerely thought that I wanted to try if it works... and when I was already in it, I understood that it all suits me." (I 7)*

### **Category 7a4 Recognition and Achievement Need**

The conceptions in this category show that social workers want to be successful in their work and are satisfied when they are recognized for it. If the London and Mone model (1987) explains that the workers' achievement needs on the behavioural level are characterized by the need for rapid career movement and substantial material rewards, then social workers' conceptions about achievement are not connected with benefits, but with good work results and subsequent recognition by clients and supervisors. Social workers have a realistic picture about the low level of salary and benefits and this is not their motive for productive work.

*„...we in this field are such that we want to do something, that we have this achievement need, we want to carry something through and feel good about it..." (I 7)*

Foremost, they see as recognition if their clients can cope with their life again, have dignity and can find their own way.

*"...the first group of unemployed consisted of 17 people and only 3 or 4 of them haven't yet found a job, because of their problems such as alcohol having done great damage or basic education is so poor, but all others have got a job and they have made such a great flight, they are working in all sorts of places, they rediscovered themselves and that is most important for me." (I 4)*

Social workers value clients' heartfelt gratitude, which may be expressed rather modestly, but is nevertheless important for social workers.

*"If there was something brought from the outdoors, [to local government] then it was brought to our social workers room. These could have been catkins or simple field flowers, or whatever, but people wanted to thank and the other thing was that they started to give feedback on their own initiative and that was very positive." (I 4)*

Successful client work is the greatest acknowledgement for social workers and it has strong influence on their work satisfaction.

*"...I'm a client-worker and, well, I love client work, I love all these small advancements, I love it when a person's eyes light up and they say that they are no longer afraid to come to us and that they manage; it shows that we have established this relationship and that they now have someone that they can share their worries with and this is a prerequisite for coping. It means that my message is reaching them and, naturally, in the beginning I walk with the client if there is a very difficult case indeed, but then when it starts to move on by its own, this feedback from the client is valuable for me. A person gets moving, gets out from the pit and then they make their choices and gets positive experiences. I love it when the eyes of an orphanage child light up and they say that I'm different than they thought and that they can tell me everything... It gives delight." (I 5)*

Factors that can bring warmth and satisfaction into professional relations are clients satisfaction and gratitude.

*"One thing that keeps me in this field and gives satisfaction, is client's satisfaction and that I can help a person to cope better in this world. For instance, working with the elderly, although I started to do this work when I was very young, but I actually liked this work, they have incredibly vast life-experience, you see, and for example those who had survived the wars, I really enjoyed hearing their stories and looking together through their photos and finding out what they had experienced in life... this kind of human relationship. Most of our clients are satisfied with our work, but of course there occasionally come those who are not, then they say so themselves and then I have to solve this particular case." (I 9)*

Client satisfaction is concrete, as well as the positive feedback to social workers about their work, where good and rapid work results are not often clearly visible.

*"...the clients' satisfaction and recognition to our work gives the greatest joy in this work. And if clients are content and move on with their life, they give us their thanks, some even write and we constantly get every kind of positive feedback; this positive side is stronger, so this work gives a lot of pleasure. I think two thirds of our work is on the good side." (I 7)*

Social workers have also discussed the issue of recognition and gratitude for good work from the aspect of our cultural context. It appears that according to Estonian values, good work is considered elementary and not worth mentioning. Therefore people are not accustomed to express or receive praise. Nevertheless, this attitude is changing, it has been realized that recognition is an encouraging factor in work and it must be used. It can give motivation and anchors cohesion with work.

*„In our culture tradition and in the Estonian value system, work well done is regarded as normal and nobody really praises or acknowledges it because it is natural that everything has to be done well, so what is there to praise? And the reticence and reserve of our people; but on the other hand, we don't complain about every negative thing, every small worry; the Estonians' distress-measure is huge. Don't expect praise and don't know how to give it either... personally, to me it is also embarrassing to hear praise... although as manager and colleague, I understand its necessity and have deliberately developed this in me that people need recognition.“ (I 1)*

*"...client satisfaction gives strength and satisfaction in this work and, thank God, that Estonians have become more open in communication, and have begun to express their satisfaction and gratitude and this is positive. When we have done something well, then the clients tell us, send e-mails, even to the head of district. Well, everybody likes to get recognition." (I 3)*

### **Category 7a5 Roles of the Social Worker**

This category gathers social workers' conceptions about the internalization of work roles. Social workers see their work role primarily as a helper and supporter, but also as an advocate and enabler. A helper's role means humane support to a client, that perhaps has not ever before have experienced interest nor support of others in their life.

*"...quite often these people who happen to become social worker's clients are often just simply too unobtrusive and honest... they 'don't walk over corpses' and having slipped aside, they just wait for proposal, order or invitation, they don't have courage to initiate anything... they have low self-esteem and as a social worker you help them and they can cope with their lives again and even better than before. It is so important – this role of helper and pathfinder." (I 4)*

The development of a professional identity is shown by the acceptance and interpretation of professional roles. If professional roles are in harmony with self-conception, this process is easy and natural. At the same time the social worker must be able to come out from their work role and this ability is also a sign of professionalism and protection against burnout.

*"Vocational preparation and suitability for social work certainly gives that sort of self-confidence and when I go to work, then I don't have any identity crisis, I know who I am, what I do, what is my role or my place in this team; it comes naturally then, it comes just like by itself." (I 8)*

### **Category 7a6 Need for a Leadership Role**

This category gathers concepts about leadership and wanting a leadership role. It appears that social workers are of the opinion that a leadership role should not be taken up just for having power. Nobody saw leadership as having power, in every conception it was stressed that wanting a leadership position should be justified and motivated. Not many social workers were interested in leadership, this was seen as external stimuli, but that instead they value internal stimuli. Interviewees mentioned that for becoming a leader, one must have clear reasons why you need to have power; is there something you can do better in a leadership role?

*„...if you work with people and aim to become a leader, then you must have comprehensive picture of the whole field that is understandable to others, clear opinions and starting point for your performance as leader. You must see the results of your changes and justify them.“ (I 1)*

### **Category 7b Collective Level**

Category 7b *Collective Level* is gathered from conceptions that reflect the existence of the social workers' collective professional identity. Collective level identity means for the social worker unity with colleagues. Good work results are interpreted as successful teamwork.

Also Lord, Brown and Freiberg (1999) explain identity at the group level, where they identify a particular group such as their work team or organization, using the group prototype as a basis for inter-group comparisons and self-definition. Similarly, organizational identities may be especially important, when the self is defined at the group level.

Selenta and Lord (2002), Lord and Brown (2004) show the collective level as a group identity where an individual defines oneself within a group and the group work result define the workers' personal identity.

### **Category 7b1 Sense of Togetherness**

This category is derived from the social workers' conceptions where they define themselves as members of a profession and a work team. It gives a sense of security if you can trust your colleagues.

*"...our colleagues respect and help each other because working in child protection and with families is not easy." (I 3)*

A good atmosphere in the work team and the support of colleagues in difficult times are important for social workers.

*„This is important, that if you go to your office and see your colleagues, this feeling that you are surrounded by good colleagues and that they are all intelligent people, each thinks how to work better, each has their own line and does everything well there.“ (I 1)*

The sense of togetherness with colleagues as adherents to one's ideas helps in a life of intense work, understanding is near ideal, nothing has to be explained because cooperation models have been formed in the work team. Members are willing to stand for their colleagues and this gives a good sense of security that one can always count on one's colleagues, they understand and appreciate you.

*"...I personally had a colleague, who, when I was thinking that certain something should be done, already came and reported that this something was done... we had this absolute mutual understanding." (I 4)*

*"...colleagues give me strength for most, colleagues and once again colleagues! This knowledge that I can always go and talk and get their support, that gives strength." (I 5)*

Sense of togetherness is also felt between members of the social work profession, not only with close colleagues in the work team.

*„...I know my work and can defend my profession when it is sometimes attacked, and I know this shoulder-feeling with others, us, who have learnt it for so long.“ (I 6)*

*„... We have this shoulder-feeling with other workers and I manage and develop and I have interest to do that work, I've never yet thought that I'd like to go to some other work, I don't have this thought and I have nevertheless worked for years, probably one of the oldest in the social work field.“ (I 7)*

### **Category 7b2 Work Success as Group Success**

This category is titled on the basis of the conception that describes successful work as a success of the work team. Work commitment is connected to work cohesion, but social workers also see it as loyalty to organization and colleagues. This is expressed by a 'we-sense' in the work collective. Successful work is regarded as a united effort of a work collective and they are proud for that.

*“Social work is teamwork and you are loyal to your manager, but you must stand for your work-team to the maximum limit, it is this complete unity; and then also ‘whether I can cooperate with people’. Ability to cooperate is one crucial factor and in social work you generally need a person open to everything, flexible, a social worker must not be fixed within certain frame when working with people. Let’s say that we all are moving in the same direction and it is this inexpressible phenomenon of work-collective, that when one is still thinking about how something should be done, then somebody comes along and is talking about the same thing and then a third person comes along and tells that this is already done. If you have experienced this, if you have felt this feeling and when you are a boss, you trust your workers and know that each is doing their best.” (I 1)*

Social workers themselves stress it and consider it very important that personal characteristics and values suit well with the nature and content of social work. This ensures the ability to fulfil the different work roles of a social worker, this helps to anchor the professional identity which is related to the roles of a social worker.

Social workers are very open and socially sensitive people. In their social identity the interpersonal level shows according to Lord, Freiberg and Brown (1999) (see also Table 2) their wish to take care of and help other people, self is determined by close human relations. Collective identity level of social identity is presented in work team achievements and success.

They see social work as a mission work where commitment and taking of responsibility are natural part of work process. They have strong achievement need and they are also willing to take risks; it offers them challenges and success strengthens self-confidence. Respondents have very well established sense of togetherness with other social workers and social workers have great growth potential that shows strong professional identity.

## 6.5 Social Workers’ Cohesion with Professional Values

In the social work profession, the match between personal values and social work values is important. Social work values are strictly expressed in the ethics code of social work and they are the foundation principles of social work. Du Bois and Miley (1998) interpret the conceptions of social work values of researchers Levy (1976); Loewenberg and Dolgoff (1992) and conclude that values are foundational to social work practice. Therefore, social work is a value-based profession that incorporates a constellation of preferences concerning what merits doing and how it should be done. The value base of the social work profession reflects fundamental beliefs about the nature of humankind, change, and qualities that have intrinsic worth. Codes of ethics tend to be written in general terms to reflect the philosophy of the profession and present a model for professional behaviour (Du Bois & Miley 1998, 123–132). Functionalists Parsons (1954) and Durkheim (1957) show professions as bearers of values in society.

Results show that social workers follow their profession ethics and profession philosophy; in their conceptions, valuing a human is the basis of the social work profession. It also appears that social work values and society’s values may differ considerably.

## Category 8 Profession Philosophy

Category 8: *Profession Philosophy* is derived from three horizontal categories.

Category 8: Profession Philosophy		
<b>Category 8a: Relationship between Social Work Values and Personal Values</b>	<b>Category 8b: Human Conception and Worldview</b>	<b>Category 8c: Social Worker as Bearer of Values</b>

**Figure 16.** Profession philosophy in social work.

### Category 8a Relationship between Social Work Values and Personal Values

Conceptions in this category stressed the importance of harmony between personal values and social work values: valorising human life, acceptance of differences, non-judgemental attitude, care for others are the foundation of social work, the substance of the profession.

*"...you are suited for social work if you are energetic and love people, love life. But if you want to 'press other people' you may study as long as you like – it won't help. It is a mission and empathy and tolerance and unconditional love. Not anything physical of course, you just respect and love other human beings." (I 4)*

The ethical principles of social work must prevail. Even if there is a discrepancy between legislation and humanistic care, the ethical side must win when making a decision.

*"...yes, let's say that ethics and sense of justice has to be more important, we can't always just follow the law literally, we may make a person disservice by respecting the law blindly... In some situations law-abiding is very important for client's help, but in principle a person is more important, that is elementary..." (I 10)*

### Category 8b Human Conception and Worldview

The values of social work and the values of the present day liberal market economy society, where economy and success are appreciated, are seldom in harmony. Also, in the previous totalitarian society where we have come from, humanistic values were only talked about – in real life a double standard morality was applied and an individual human being was not valued. Therefore people in our society have not experienced the humanistic appreciation of an individual in the societal level. Personal freedom is regarded as important in the society, but an appreciation of each member's human value is only starting to develop.

Social workers also come from the same background, but apparently they have more empathy and they have tried to raise the human value in society through their work. They have been the promoters of human dignity by showing in their practice what simple humanity and kindness, fellow feeling and helping can mean during difficult times.

*"...it was very difficult in the beginning, but it is fundamental in this work that you take people as they are. Then you don't have any barriers... the road is open. But if you have some sort of attitude, you may learn as much as you like, but if you can't accept everyone as a unique human being, if you generalize them into some groups like 'drunkards', 'bums', as soon as you have labelled them, then*

*actually you are wearing these labels yourself, you have these with you in your bag... and people can feel it...(I 4)*

In a society heading towards materialism, with so called 'hard values', a social worker may seem like 'don Quijote', a too idealistic person that values people that are not able to manage their lives, are unable to cope, but a social worker still tries to help them and even spends tax money on them. At the same time, it appeared in every respondent's conception that an unconditional appreciation of a human being and faith in human goodness and potential were seen as prerequisites for social work.

*"When we do that work, we can't otherwise, we must believe that people have potential even when they are completely down. /.../ and it is all visible from you and clients recognize it immediately. It doesn't matter what they are like. They understand everything. I have had many trainees from college and in about a month or sometimes even in a few weeks you can see whether he/she will become a social worker or not; they understand everything in theory, and we may even discuss these things and there are some things we have learnt in a similar manner, but if they don't really care, then nothing works out. Eventually we come to the fact that attitudes, values, worldview, are important here – you may keep learning endlessly, but if these things are out of place, one never becomes a good social worker." (I 5)*

### **Category 8c The Social Worker as Bearer of Values**

Conceptions in this category express that social workers are bearers of humanistic values in society, although it is not always an easy task. Functionalists Parsons (1954) and Durkheim (1957) stressed the role of professions as bearers of values in society. It may be said that people today easily accept 'soft values' when they are briefed about them and then their attitude also improves.

*"...at the same, if you care about people yourself, then it is very difficult to be in the social work profession when you see the gap between the values in society. For example, when a postman who has a small disability comes to our office, then I can hear how others view him... I've been in this organization for two years now and my colleagues attitude has changed a lot in that time... before, when a person came who had a bit of a speech impediment or something similar, but otherwise fully adequate, I was happy to see that he has a job, but my colleagues were joking on how he talked, not mean jokes, but still, and I told them that I'm so happy he has a job. Now recently, we went for a lunch with colleagues and there was a catch-word about someone also standing there and was a bit different than others, but he could manage by himself and I said that it is so good that he is coping by himself, comes to the cafeteria by himself and is not afraid to come to among people! Then they looked at him differently and understood everything when we talked about it. But in general, among people outside social work it is so normal to remark something, to make some comments. There is still little understanding, tolerance, sympathy. However, you don't feel like don Quijote fighting with windmills, but you see that if people are given explanations, they know how to be and they understand, but in school or at home they don't teach that kind of Schweitzer-like respect of life. This is a general tendency in the society and at the same time there is a constant talk about providing equal opportunities to people with special needs, it is so full of pathos, but there is not enough natural human warmth." (I 10)*

Social workers value human relations, goodness, and in their work they help others to find it in their life too.

*"...we had this situation: my young colleague arranged a so called drunkard's funeral and she arranged everything so that in the end his brother was there in the funeral... they hadn't met for decades because life drove them apart and alcohol was also in the middle... but the social worker found him and invited him to the brother's funeral and she arranged everything with dignity - we always do it this way, we always have headstone and other necessary attributes, no-one has been*

*buried without it.... Anyway, this man had come and had cried on the brother's grave, may be for his brother, may be not, but because he had been able to meet his brother and could send him away... and it was all arranged by a complete stranger, the social worker... well, then my colleague heard many thanks from this man and then she called me from the graveyard and cried on the phone and told me that there is no single work more beautiful than ours and then she described this day and then we both were crying on the phone: I on the street and she there, on the Metsakalmistu...[graveyard]" (I 4)*

During the turbulent changes in the society, social workers have been with and for the people who were not able to react to changes because they were not ready for these developments. They had grown up in the society that did not value a human life and every kind of initiative was suppressed. Also the continuity of the families that had been based on residence, connection between generations and relatives was shattered. People were forced to leave their ancient homes and they often lost contact with their next to kin, their roots and therefore also lost their identity and values.

Our social workers are professionally committed to making social institutions and Estonian society more humane and responsive to human needs and they also take responsibility for ethical conduct.

## 6.6 Summary of Results

### 6.6.1 Review of Study's Design

The social worker's profession has been present in Estonia for the past fifteen-sixteen years a social system for help has been rebuilt after Soviet regime. During the same period social workers' education has been carried out in the universities. There have been hundreds of young specialists graduated in the social work field, but the number is still not sufficient. Young people want to study social work and there are many student candidates for a single place. After graduation they start in the various areas of social work. In our society many social workers have graduated while working, they have been participants in the development of a new profession. This research focuses mainly on experiences and conceptions of social workers about the development of the social work profession in society and the development of social workers into professionals. It's focus is also on the cohesion of work, professional identity and its context.

The goal of my research is to describe the development of professional identity and opportunities for professional growth of social workers and get an overview of the self-concept tendencies of social workers and social work students; understand how social workers perceive the development of a new profession based on their experiences.

The theoretical framework is derived from the model of London and Mone (1987). The model shows three-dimensionally the personal motivation factors that influence professional growth, one important dimension being professional identity as a prerequisite of professional updating. Theoretical framework of my research is also based on conceptions about the workers' commitment to work and professional identity (Lord and Brown 1999; Selenta and Lord 2002) and different conceptions about professional growth (Farr and Middlebrooks 1991; Maurer and Tarulli 1994; Ruohotie 1995, 1999, 2005).

Research methodology in this research is based on the social constructivism and hermeneutical-phenomenological approach. The social constructivism approach explains different individuals' reality construction as human interaction with environment. An individual interprets one's experiences through interactive process, depending on his or her cultural context through the use of language and it is important what kind of significations are given to own cognition of world and oneself through discourse (Berger & Luckmann 1967; Gergen 1985; Burr 1995). In social constructivism the framework itself has to change and with it our understanding of every aspect of social and psychological life has to change (Burr 1995, 16–31). Therefore, based on the research questions and the goals of this research, my other methodological approach is the hermeneutical (phenomenological) approach. This approach method is characterized by "understanding" and "interpreting". For example, Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1976; 1989) have been of the opinion that human's natural activity is a specific self-expression in interpreting the understanding of reality.

The empirical part of my research consists of two stages, where I aim to unify the *quantitative survey research* with in-depth *qualitative research*.

One reason I decided to use “*mixed methods*” in this research is because the subject has not been studied too extensively and my goal was to give a holistic picture of the phenomenon and develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon. As of so far this field is not sufficiently researched. There are only few basic research studies about the development of social work profession in Estonia or about professional activity of social workers.

In a quantitative survey study (research material gathered by questionnaire, N=122) I performed two factor analysis in order to gather overview of the development tendencies of the self-concept and professional-self of social workers and social works students. In a qualitative section I gathered material by theme interviews (N=10) and used for analysis the qualitative content analysis method. This method helps to describe conceptions of social workers about the development of social work profession in Estonia and the development influencing factors of professional identity. Through qualitative content analysis I formed descriptive categories that are the main result of the research.

In this research I attempted to find answers to following questions:

1. What is the self-concept of the social work student and of the social worker, those engaged in social work, like?
2. What were the motives that brought them to the social work field?
3. What are social workers’ experiences and their conceptions of social work?
4. What kind of identity is the professional identity of social workers?
5. How committed to professional values the social workers are?

Below I give the summary of research results, that has helped to find answers to my research questions.

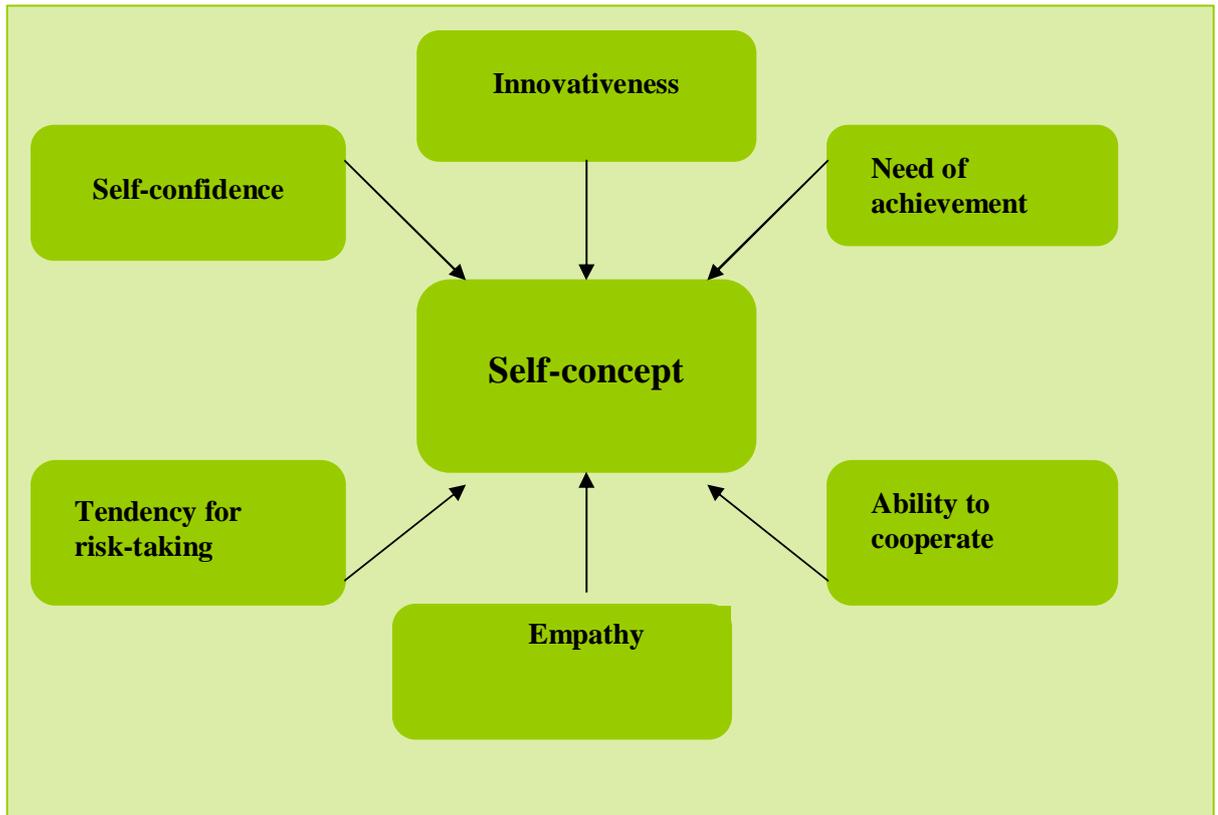
### 6.6.2 The Self-concept of the of the Social Workers and Social Work Students

In social work the workers’ personal characteristics, their values and the self-concept that allows them to identify with the nature of profession are important.

I researched the self-concept tendencies of social workers and social work students by the analysis of material gathered by questionnaire as a survey research. The sample has N=122, 93 of them social workers with an average work span of seven years and 29 students. Eighteen of these students have short period of work experience.

To describe the self-concepts I used a factor analysis method. Through factor analysis I derived six factors of self-concept: F1 = *Innovativeness*, F2 = *Self-confidence* F3 = *Need of achievement* F4 = *Tendency for risk-taking* F5 = *Ability to cooperate* and F6 = *Empathy*.

Figure 17 describes personal characteristics as components of the self-concept of social workers and social work students.



**Figure 17.** Components of the self-concept of social workers and social work students (N==122).

The factors were titled on the basis of factor-loadings that explain the nature of self-concept and the relation with the development of the professional self. Results showed that self-concept tendencies both of social workers and social work students are openness for new, sensitivity towards other people in the society and willingness to cooperate.

It seems also that social workers and social work students are innovative – they are willing to take risks and ready to try new methods in their work. They are attracted by the novelty and the challenge of social work and they are interested in solving difficult problems. Novelty of the social work profession and need to meet challenges were mentioned by the respondents as the main motives to start working in and/or studying social work. At the same time, the realistic understanding of the profession has emerged, that means trust in oneself and strength needed to achieve the set purposes. Social workers need to be professionals that manage to achieve the results they have aimed for. Therefore, a social worker must be an understanding, empathic, considerate person. He or she must also be rational and have a good analyzer and equipped with exceptional professional skills. Co-operation is needed when working with clients, as well as with colleagues and in networking.

They also have a strong achievement need and they want to be acknowledged for their good work. The results also show that social workers are flexible and co-operative. Having chosen a human relation profession, they believe in their abilities in managing their work.

### 6.6.3 The Motives of Respondents for Entering to the Social Work Field

Fundamental changes in Estonia's society during 1990s offered plenty of opportunities to the people who sought new challenges. On one hand people were brought to the social work field by dissatisfaction with or loss of a previous work; and on the other hand young high-school graduates who came to study and/or work a completely new profession that had not even existed in our society before.

There are several different motives for learning social work. The three main reasons that were given are: an interest in social work (77% respondents, N=122), and the need to acquire academic vocational education (72% respondents, N=122) and the lack of professional skills (43% respondents, N=122). Eighteen percent of respondents (N= 122) mentioned sense of mission as a learning motive. Qualitative content analysis brings out conceptions about coming to the social work field. The important motive is to find new challenges offered by the development of the new profession and another important motive was also a personal need for growth. People who have come to social work had a strong need for personal development that they could not fulfil in their previous occupation. According to Ruohotie (1995) people with growth needs react positively to opportunities for development and grasp them immediately.

### 6.6.4 Social Workers' Experiences and their Conceptions of Social Work

From the material gathered by the interviews were derived by an analysis eight main categories and fifty-three subcategories) (see Figure 18). Categories show different aspects of social work on the base of conceptions of social workers: about their experiences in their personal development and about the development of social work profession on in the newly independent Estonia.

<b>Category 1: Entering Social Work</b>		
<b>Category 1a: Career Choice Model</b>	<b>Category 1b: Motives for Entering the Field</b>	
<b>Category 1a1: Incidental Choice</b>	<b>Category 1b1: New Profession as Challenge</b>	
<b>Category 1a2: Conscious Choice</b>	<b>Category 1b2: Novelty and Autonomy</b>	
<b>Category 2: Content and Nature of Social Work</b>		
<b>Category 2a: Work with Human Relations</b>	<b>Category 2b: Coping Strategies</b>	
<b>Category 2a1: Helping and Changing Work</b>	<b>Category 2b1: Support Network</b>	
<b>Category 2a2 :Stressful Work and Burnout</b>	<b>Category 2b2: Supervision and Recreation</b>	
<b>Category 3: Professional Growth and Competence</b>		
<b>Category 3a: Development of Professionalism</b>	<b>Category 3b: Professional Growth</b>	<b>Category 3c: Work Environment and Competence</b>
<b>Category 3a1: Vocational Education</b>	<b>Category 3b1: Life-long Learning</b>	<b>Category 3c1: Competence of Work Team</b>
<b>Category 3a2: Personal Characteristics</b>	<b>Category 3b2: Self-directedness</b>	<b>Category 3c2: Work Organization as Supporter of Professional Growth</b>

<b>Category 3a3: Self-awareness</b>	<b>Category 3b3: Learning from Work and Reflectivity</b>	<b>Category 3c3: Continuing Education and Professional Standards</b>
<b>Category 3a4: Coping with Work</b>		
<b>Category 3a5: Relationship between Theory and Practice</b>		
<b>Category 4: Work Environment: Societal and Organizational Factors</b>		
<b>Category 4a: Societal Factors</b>	<b>Category 4b: Organizational Factors and Work Environment</b>	
<b>Category 4a1: Politicization of Social Work</b>	<b>Category 4b1: Work Management and Leadership</b>	
<b>Category 4a2: Contradiction of Social Work</b>	<b>Category 4b2: Recognition and Support</b>	
	<b>Category 4b3: Work Team as a Basis</b>	
<b>Category 5: Cooperation with Adjoining Fields and Networking</b>		
<b>Category 5a: Social Worker as Cooperation Initiator</b>	<b>Category 5b: Impact of the Absence of Cooperation</b>	<b>Category 5c: Cooperation and Profession Boundaries</b>
<b>Category 6: Social Work Position in the Society, Prestige and Career</b>		
<b>Category 6a: Social Work Position</b>	<b>Category 6b: Social Work Prestige</b>	<b>Category 6c: Career in Social Work</b>
<b>Category 7: Professional Identity</b>		
<b>Category 7a: Personal and Interpersonal Level</b>	<b>Category 7b: Collective Level</b>	
<b>Category 7a1: Mission Work</b>	<b>Category 7b1: Sense of Togetherness</b>	
<b>Category 7a2: Self-confidence and Willingness to risk-taking</b>	<b>Category 7b2: Work Success as Group Success</b>	
<b>Category 7a3: Commitment to Work</b>		
<b>Category 7a4: Recognition and Achievement Need</b>		
<b>Category 7a5: Work Roles</b>		
<b>Category 7a6: Need for a Leadership Role</b>		
<b>Category 8: Professional Philosophy</b>		
<b>Category 8a: Relationship between Work Values and Personal Values</b>	<b>Category 8b: Human Conception and Worldview</b>	<b>Category 8c: Social Worker as Bearer of Values</b>

**Figure 18.** Social workers' conceptions of their experiences in social work.

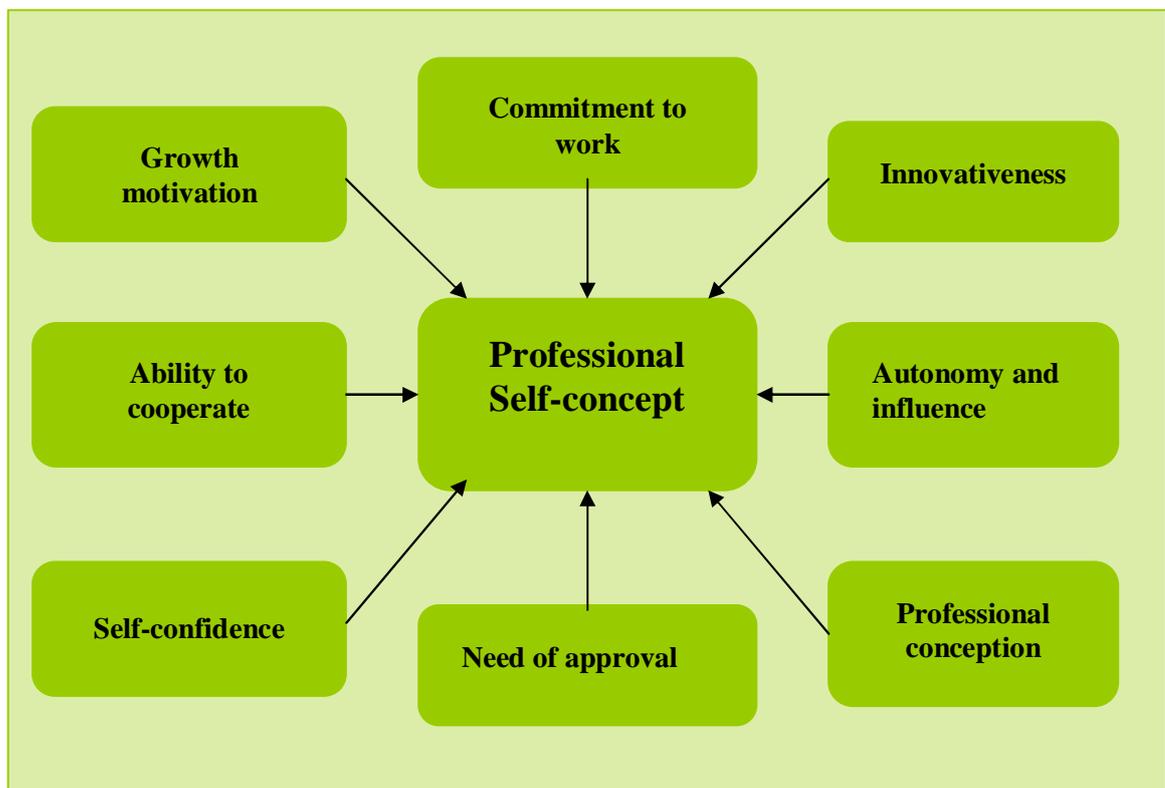
### 6.6.5 The Professional Identity of Social Workers

I derived through the second factor analysis 20 summation indexes, that show the relations between self-concept and professional identity. Those summation variables explain the holistic picture of professional-self of social workers and social work students with work experience ( $N1+N2+N3/18=111$ ).

Of those summation indexes 12 (*F1 Self-confidence; F2 Flexibility; F3 Need of achievement; F4 Tendency for risk-taking; F5 Ability to cooperate; F6 Empathy; F7 Commitment to work; F8 Commitment to organization; F9 Growth motivation; F10 Innovativeness; F11 Professional conception; F12 Need for recognition*) were related to professional self-concept and eight (*F13 Efficacy beliefs; F14 Collective efficacy beliefs; F15 Collective outcome expectations; F16 Work demands and responsibility; F17 Need of approval; F18 Autonomy and influence; F19 Change and development; F20 Work obstacles*) were related to work and work environment (transitions in work, work developmental factors and obstacles).

The highest of the scale scored summation indexes were *Growth motivation; Commitment to work; Innovativeness; Professional conception; Need of approval; Self-confidence; Ability to cooperate and Autonomy and influence*.

*Growth motivation* (Mean 4.00; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.75$ ), *Commitment to work* (Mean 4.00; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.67$ ), *Professional conception* (Mean 4.00; Cronbach  $\alpha=0.70$ ) scored the highest on the scale of the summation variables (see Table 11 and Figure 19). Figure 19 describes main components of the professional self-concept of social workers.



**Figure 19.** Main components of the professional self-concept of social workers and social work students with work experience (N1+N2+N3/18=111).

Professional-self tendencies derived from two factor analysis may be viewed as prerequisites of development of professional identity of social workers.

<b>Category 7: Professional Identity</b>	
<b>Category 7a: Personal and Interpersonal Level</b>	<b>Category 7b: Collective Level</b>
<b>Category 7a1: Mission Work</b>	<b>Category 7b1: Sense of Togetherness</b>
<b>Category 7a2: Self-confidence and Willingness to risk</b>	<b>Category 7b2: Work Success as Group Success</b>
<b>Category 7a3: Commitment to Work</b>	
<b>Category 7a4: Recognition and Achievement Need</b>	
<b>Category 7a5: Roles of the Social Worker</b>	
<b>Category 7a6: Need for a Leadership Role</b>	

**Figure 20.** Professional identity elements of social workers.

The results of the analysis of the research material gathered via theme interviews derived in *Category 7 Professional Identity* describe the base of conception of social workers different elements of the professional identity (see Figure 20).

#### 6.6.6 Social Workers Commitment to Professional Values

Social work is a value-based profession that includes a profession philosophy that in a broader perspective may be seen as professional ethics, values and also a humanistic worldview.

Category 8 sums together social workers' conceptions about the importance of values in their work, this category broadly presents social workers' role as an advocate and a keeper of humanistic values.

<b>Category 8: Profession Philosophy</b>		
<b>Category 8a: Relationship between Social Work Values and Personal Values</b>	<b>Category 8b: Human Conception and Worldview</b>	<b>Category 8c: Social worker as Bearer of Values</b>

**Figure 21.** Social workers' conceptions about values of social work.

Conceptions in this category stressed the importance of harmony between personal values and social work values: appreciation of human life, acceptance of differences, non-judgemental attitude, care for others are the foundation of social work, the substance of the profession. Results show that the importance of values is stressed in all conceptions, and certain conceptions of values have been gathered under the eight major categories. However, the issue of values was in fact important in all the social work conceptions of respondents.

## 7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

After approximately fifty years of break there are again in Estonia professional social workers that help to establish welfare system and to build the basis for the development of social work profession. It is natural for them by now to reflect this process based on the conceptions of social workers that have participated in it. This has been a rapid process and therefore there has been only a little time and a few opportunities so far to research the development of social work profession and social workers work and work environment in Estonia. So far the major research topics of social work have been related with questions about production of wellbeing – building of social work services network for different client groups and factors supporting the functioning of social system and hindering it from working.

This research is the first research report about the development of Estonian social work and social work conceptions among social workers that have academic vocational education and those who are studying social work in the university. Earlier research reports from Tulva (1995) and Tamm (1998) have been focusing on the development of social work profession in Estonia among the social workers that have received different training.

In this research my goal has been to describe the development of professional identity and opportunities for professional growth of social workers and to get an overview of the self-concept tendencies of social workers and social work students.

This research has started the analysis of the development of social work profession in re-independent Estonia based on the conceptions of social workers with vocational academic education and which gives basis for researching different factors of social work profession. Many-sided research about social-workers' professional activities would also be needed so that the instances that manage and direct social field would have all-round information available when deciding on matters influencing social work and social workers and they would appreciate people with suitable characteristics and vocational education staying in the field.

Respondents have participated in the building and development of social work system, some from the beginning some for shorter period. They have applied new social welfare forms and new social work methods. It has to be kept in mind that Estonian social workers started from the situation where main social welfare form was institutional welfare in the closed institutions. These institutions violated human right of the clients who were completely cut off the life in the society. In sixteen years we have built up social system that is based on human rights and social justice. Social work is carried out not only within welfare system, but also in education, medicine and juridical systems.

Naturally, the quick development has not been easy, there has been opposition, misunderstanding, etc but respondents see that as a natural part of the development process and difficulties have not persuaded them to leave the chosen path.

Although we have learnt a lot from the societies with well established social systems, e.g. Nordic countries especially Finland, we have to build our social system and models of social work professional practice.

Theorist Malcolm Payne (1995; 1997) explains social work as a social phenomenon that we may understand from a social and cultural context – it meaning, that social work is socially constructed. Although the theoretical basis of social work is interdisciplinary, it may only be interpreted within the frame of certain cultural context. Berger and Luckmann (1967; 1971) present that in the approach of social constructivism, the human understanding of reality forms cognition/knowledge which directs the behaviour, but everyone's understanding of reality is different. In the social constructivistic approach of Capra (1996), people are part of the holistic world and create constantly everything that we call reality (Peavy 1999, 39). Results show that social workers have constructed both their self-concept as well as participated in the development of the Estonian social work by developing work environment, work methods and cooperation with colleagues within social work system and have developed networks with colleagues of adjoining fields.

Research participants have experienced joy and satisfaction in helping other people and creating a better life. For them one of the positive factors that has offered great satisfaction is the coping with the work. Respondents stressed the importance of vocational academic education that has given them basis for successful work. Participants also stressed the importance of the suitable personal characteristics for successful social work.

The nature of self-concept and the relation with the development of the professional self explain the factors were titled on the basis of factor-loadings. Results of qualitative content analysis confirmed this picture of social workers. Results showed that self-concept tendencies both of social workers and social work students are openness for new, sensitivity towards other people in the society and willingness to co-operate.

Social worker's self-identity has to be strong when working with clients, because he or she has to help client to create his or her self. Jorma Niemelä (2002, 77) views the development of self-identity as the development of conceptions of self and of general understanding of life. All this together gives a client control over his or her life and ability to manage it, which is the basis for coping with life: at best he or she is capable of act differently and manage different problems in his or her life. In that case an individual becomes a subject.

This does not mean that the self-concept of a social-worker (a grown person) would not change. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967) there is always interaction of between a person and social environment and all social phenomena are constructed through social reality, which shows that social environment has strong influence on the development of self-identity.

It was interesting to find out the social workers' conceptions about the development of their self-concept during the studies and during the practice. They described their diffuseness of identity before university; individuals did not know who they were and what they wanted, what are their purposes in life and work. They stressed the significance of the new social environment in their identity development. Although the reasons for coming to study social work or to work on that field were different, the conscious choice, the worldview and social work values strengthened already during the studies. Those respondents who worked and studied at the same time valued the raise of self-assurance and self-awareness during that period. Niemelä (2002, 78) presents researchers Bauman (1996; 1997) and Castells (1997) conclusions that in the globalizing information society the changes in the society and culture are so significant that people today are forced to find themselves constantly, they have to be in the continuous process of self-creation. Besides professional self-concept, personal self-concept was also reconstructed in the new and different environment. The main components of social workers professional-self are based on the 20 summation indexes that were derived

from factor analysis (see Table 11). In the research it came apparent that social workers have strong growth motivation and are committed to work. However, they are not fanatical workaholics but people with realistic professional concepts, they know their limits. They are innovative and oriented to professional development, meaning that they wish to develop themselves and experience new things. London and Mone (1987) have studied growth motivation, where personal factors such as self-reliance, need to perform, willingness to take risks, setting of career goals and self-awareness as to one's weaknesses and strengths, together with commitment to work, are connected with active participation in development of professional skills and professional identity.

According to the 3-dimensional model by London and Mone (1987) growth motivation, commitment to work as job involvement are among the more important personal factors for the development of professional identity and motivating professional growth. London and Mone (1987) interpret commitment to work as involvement with job. This is also a necessary component for the development of professional identity. People with strong job involvement are willing to work hard, even long hours and weekends, if necessary, and they are success oriented. Work is most important part of their life. Social workers view social work as a mission work, where workers' have strong commitment and they stress, the importance of human-centred worldview, values and suitable personal characteristics.

The results show also that social workers and social work students are innovative – they are willing to take risks and ready to try new methods in their work. They are attracted by the novelty and the challenge of social work and they are interested in solving difficult problems. At the same time, the realistic understanding of the profession has emerged, that means trust in oneself and strength needed to achieve the set purposes. Social workers need to be professionals that manage to achieve the results they have aimed for. Therefore, a social worker must be an understanding, empathic, considerate person. Strive for autonomy was important to all of the respondents because autonomy gives opportunity to carry out their conceptions by applying creativity and innovativity. Autonomy gives space to take risks with new approaches, test his or her abilities and to prove oneself when necessary. It became evident that social workers have to prove the importance of their work sphere to local government officials.

He or she must also be rational and have a good analyzer and equipped with exceptional professional skills. A realistic professional conception strengthens commitment to work, supports the development of professional identity and helps to set realistic goals for professional growth.

It came apparent from the results that social workers in this study are flexible and they have willingness to cooperate. This feature is an important component in every work field. However, in social work field it is virtually impossible to have good work results without the ability to cooperate. Co-operation is needed when working with clients, as well as with colleagues and in networking.

Having chosen a human relation profession, they believe in their abilities in managing their work. Self-confidence is connected with readiness to take risk, that is also one of the self-concept tendencies of the social worker. Risks can be taken by a worker who believes in himself or herself, but worker must also believe that the management is supporting innovation and readiness to take risks. Ruohotie (1995) stresses the importance of managerial support in the realization of the workers' innovation and willingness to take risks.

Respondents also have a strong achievement need and they want to be acknowledged for their good work. Need of approval is strongly connected with the need of achievement and need of recognition. London & Mone (1987) stress that the need of recognition is connected with wish to be successful and to show good work performance and receive recognition. Results show that all these components of professional-self are expressed by the social workers. The raise of need of approval might be connected with weak organizational support as quite often the management support or recognition are lacking and therefore social workers have to constantly prove how good they are in their professional activity in order to justify their vocational position as such. There are still local governments where the only social worker (in the position of social counsellor) is also responsible for the educational and cultural life in the community. Especially little recognition is given to preventive social work, as the importance of this work is not yet understood. That is probably due to the fact that its benefits are hard to measure and prove.

Category 7 (*Professional Identity*) with ten subcategories derived by qualitative content analysis draws together conceptions of social workers about identification with work roles (see Figure 19 and Figure 20).

Development of professional identity is also expressed by the acquisition of work roles. According to Super (1990), readiness to acquire the necessary work roles, is connected to professional maturity, therefore it is a promoting factor of development of professional identity. Professional maturity refers to the understanding of the purposes and nature of profession and it is defined as an individual's readiness to cope with certain work tasks, individual phases in their work life, stemming from society's expectations. Parsons, Jorgensen and Hernandez (1994) also stress that the social workers' roles that anchor workers in their profession emerge from the occupational picture. Professional roles are instrumental for the development of professional identity, because to adopt a professional role means to accept work tasks and expectations of the society. Parsons, Jorgensen and Hernandez (1994) also Compton and Callaway (1994) present different roles of social workers in every professional procedure in intervention: a conferee, an enabler, a broker, an advocate, a mediator and certainly a guardian.

Respondents identified as their important work roles *a supporter* and *a helper*, but also as *an advocate* and *an enabler*. Enabler is according to Du Bois and Miley (1999, 244) a usual microlevel role of a social work (see Figure 1). They enable clients by focusing on their strengths, recognizing their potential for change, and enhancing their capabilities. Miley, O'Melia and Du Bois (1995, 18) show that practitioners, as enablers, consult with individual, family, and small group client system to improve social functioning by modifying behaviours, relationship patterns, and social and physical environments.

It came apparent from the results that an enabler is their most common work role in everyday work, However, social worker must often take the role of an advocate as well. Since networking is not working sufficiently in a whole social work system, a social worker must often be an advocate not just for multiproblem clients, but also for regular clients. Reasons might also be lack of knowledge (even ignorance) of workers of other profession or that they are just not accustomed with cooperation for the benefit of a client.

Hall (1971, 1990) describes sub-identities as collection of characteristics that come apparent when individual identifies with different roles. Based on the results of this study it is not possible to draw conclusions about other sub-identities of social workers. Other roles of the respondents as a parent, spouse, etc. have not been covered in this study (if, then indirectly through a work role). It may be that strong professional identity of the respondents shows the

domination of a work role and other roles of social workers as individuals may contradict with it.

All roles can not be active at the same time, therefore Robert Lord, Douglas Brown and Steven Freiberg (1999) have taken into use an idea of working self-concept in order to show a operating mechanism that activates a certain identity of an individual through a role and context.

Self-identity is a dynamic phenomenon and it depends on the context in which a self-concept of identity is activated. When individual is in his or her work role, then because of the influence of the context, the professional self is active. Lord, Brown and Freiberg (1999) and Lord and Brown (2004) present three-dimensional structure of working self-identity elements (personal, interpersonal and collective identity level) (see Figure 5 and Table 2).

Based on the conceptions of social workers it is possible to distinguish between different dimensions of self-identity - personal, interpersonal as well as collective level. Latter two levels can be viewed as interpretation of social identity. It appears that in the concepts of social workers the personal level identity means autonomy, but also comparison with others, based on the strong need for achievement and need for recognition.

Social work as social profession requires strong social identity and therefore it was to be expected that social workers' interpersonal level comes apparent in their wish to work with other people, take care for other people and help them to determine their self. According to Lord, Brown and Freiberg (1999), Selenta and Lord (2002) and Lord and Brown (2004) the collective level of professional identity expresses their belonging to a group, and work success is also seen as an achievement of the work group.

Collective level identity involves social dynamics that are quite different from the other two identity levels as this is based on the organizational culture or on collective norms. When group identities (e.g., a work group, department or branch, or whole organization) are salient, group members view themselves in terms of the group prototype, and they generally evaluate themselves positively on aspects of the self that are similar to the group prototype. (Lord & Brown 2004, 47.)

Results show that a collective level of professional identity of social workers in this study emerges from a sense of togetherness. Respondents also stressed the importance of team-work for successful work. In case of a strong group identity, workers focus to group achievements. As sense of togetherness is very strong and self is defined through the belonging to a work group, the work group recognition is one of the important factors of work motivation. It also came evident that social workers have given up career opportunities because they are not confident that they could find another team with similar sense of togetherness and understanding.

Although social workers in this study consider work success and good results as success of a work group, they still believe in their own abilities to meet the work challenges, they have strong self-confidence. It came evident that self-confidence is one of the marked tendencies of professional self-concept. This motivational feature gives stability and helps one to believe in one's own professionalism, it gives good understanding of own strengths and weaknesses. Self-confidence is an important feature as this work involves great deal of individual responsibility and also demands responsibility for other people (clients, members of a work team). Decisions have to be made without delay and he or she must be able to analyze situations and foresee the effects of his or her decision. A social worker must believe in

himself or herself; otherwise it is not possible to have good results: he or she is not able to empower clients, who have a low self-confidence.

Therefore, based on the foresaid it may be concluded that self-confidence of social workers means in this study the trust in their abilities in the work process, but studying and professional activity together have also increased their self-confidence not only on workfield, but have improved balance, courage and self-assuredness in their other life situations as well.

Factor that supports social workers' self-confidence is competence that is achieved due to vocational education and work experience. Work success increases self-confidence and social workers in this study considered this an important factor for professional growth. Social workers regard vocational education as their basis of competence. It is the phase where their personal development and self-awareness process took place; and this process has influenced their self-concept (competence gives self-confidence). The professionalism of social workers is constructed on the basis of different competence elements — suitable personal characteristics, abilities and professional knowledge/skills. Ruohotie (2002, 241), based on the works of researchers Evers, Rush and Berdrow (1998) has presented competence definition, where the skills and ability are divided into four areas of competence: self-management (life management), communication skills, management of people and tasks, and mobilisation of innovation and change.

According to Kanfer and Ackerman (2005, 336–337) the definition of competence based on Landy and Conte (2004) is sets of behaviours, usually learned by experience, that are instrumental in the accomplishment of various activities. Industrial-organizational psychologists often characterize work competence as a complex function of four broad components – knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes. This conceptualization takes a similar but not entirely identical categorization. They consider the following components: abilities, knowledge and skills, motivation, personality, and self-concept (which includes self-confidence and self-efficacy).

On the basis of respondents' conceptions there are many areas of competence, that are extremely important for social workers. Self-management (life management) refers the ability to learn and organize and schedule things, awareness and utilisation of personal strengths, problem solving skills, and analytical capacity. Problem solving skills are needed every day, as well as organizational and analytical skills. Social competence skills as communication skills are important because every social work process is established on the interactive human relationships. Communication skills require the ability to interact, listen, and communicate effectively in oral and written modes.

Trevithick (2002, 3) stresses that a social worker cannot be an effective practitioner without being an effective communicator. This includes being able to take in and communicate what we think using reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Social competence aside, social workers must constantly develop other elements of professionalism, in order to remain at the level of high competence. Miley, O'Melia and Du Bois (1995, 406) view professional growth as resources for professionals: when social workers are functioning as case managers, identifying and filling service delivery gaps, advocating social change, influencing legislative policy, or modifying physical environments.

It appears that life-long learning process through which social workers have developed into self-directed learners is self-evident for social workers. Also the learning from work is not strange for social workers; years have developed critical reflectivity, that helps to learn from

the work experience. Inevitability of professional growth is completely accepted by social workers as natural part of their life. According to Ruohotie (2000a, 9) professional growth and updating are individual's life process where his or her knowledge and skills, beliefs and observations develop and change.

A realistic profession concept (see London and Mone 1987), clear career goals, the need for achievement, the need for a leadership role in order to direct processes towards the desired course – all this characterizes a worker with a strong self-concept who has the required prerequisites of the development of professional identity. Such a worker is capable of professional work, because he or she integrates the knowledge and skills with personal characteristics and values. The consequent feeling of achievement it is encouraging and strengthens the cohesion and commitment with work. Respondents know their strengths and weaknesses, they have strong need for achievement and therefore they have strong motivation to direct the processes. These factors have helped to shape social workers' solid professional identity. Social workers have strong personalities and they have clear career goals.

The factors of work and work environment are also important for the development of professional identity. Creative, innovative work accomplishments are founded on supportive work environment, opportunities for professional growth and variety in work tasks. The status of social work in the society and its validation of social work profession practices are also important for the development of cohesion with work and therefore for the development of professional identity.

Based on the results, it appears that professional identity elements have developed during the long-term work and learning process. Burr (1995) and Berger and Luckmann (1967) present social constructivism approach, where self and identity are seen as self-concept, that is constructed through interactive relation with social environment.

Results of the analysis show that social workers have a strong professional identity since they have chosen social work because of their self-concept and their personal beliefs are suitable for the social work profession; the choice of profession is based on the goals the individual wishes to attain in their life. The development of professional identity is a dynamic process where the harmony of self-concept with work roles becomes apparent. Besides personal characteristics, the worldview of professional representative of social work, humanistic values and social work values are important. Acknowledgement of professional roles gives foundation for the development of cohesion with work.

The results show that social workers have strong cohesion with their work and with their work team. It appears that cohesion is weaker with the whole work organization (especially when that organization does not support the social worker). Social workers also have strong achievement needs, and they would like to receive recognition for their work, but that does not happen often in every organization.

It became apparent that social workers explained the lack of recognition through the shortcomings of the management culture, but also with our historical protestant culture tradition, where work is the most important element in life and it should be done well, without expecting acknowledgement.

Social workers themselves consider their work well done when their client is able to cope independently with life. Also, the recognition from colleagues gives satisfaction; all this ties with the profession, gives them self-confidence and encourages them taking risk for better

results. All this supports the development of professional identity which is necessary for professional growth during the career.

Both among social workers and students one of the components of self-concept is empathy. In a helping profession understanding and empathy are necessary. Payne (1997, 178) present positions of researchers Rogers (1961) and Carkhuff (1967) that stress in the attitude of social worker the importance of the positive regard and empathy towards the client, emphasizes honesty and genuineness, warmth, respect, acceptance and empathic understanding.

Interestingly the social work professionals are on one hand empathic and sensitive individuals and on the other hand they are resourceful and enterprising, they are good in organizing and show a good management potential; they are willing to shoulder responsibilities and they are also willing to sail against the wind.

It is somewhat surprising that research results describe social workers so innovative and ready to take risks – enterprising and creative people with strong self-confidence and strong need for achievement. In many ways these features reminds one of successful entrepreneurs in the business field. All this might be explained by the fact that in our society both social system and social work profession are in developmental phase, the well-organised system waits yet to be established. During the developmental phase the people participating in the process have more opportunities to find different workable solutions but they also have to be more creative and driven to implement a vision. They have to be willing to lead the process, too. This offers a challenge for enterprising people. When a system has been functioning well for years, even decades, it is probably more difficult to put changes and reforms into practice and try out alternative options. A developed system and professional activities give stability and sense of security but perhaps also routine that may not be interesting enough for a person looking for challenges.

At the same time the work difficulties bring social workers too often to the limits of their endurance – there is too much bureaucracy and politicization. All this leaves less time for work for clients' wellbeing. Since social work is stressful to workers psyche, the worker's psychosocial coping should not be just their personal work problem. In reality, both organizational and societal support for social workers limited. Social worker has to find suitable strategies for their psychosocial coping. Organizational support mechanisms such as supervision services should be available for every social worker. However, that is not the case today. Therefore, a social worker has cope alone or to rely on support from the colleagues (who are also burdened) or family and network of friends that help to overcome difficult periods. Respondents presented these coping strategies that had helped them personally and therefore had helped them to stay in the field.

It also appears that these positive and necessary developments are negatively influenced by lukewarm attitude of work organizations. Partly, the attitude in the society can be unsupportive towards social work, too. There is a clear need in the society for social work professionals and already the structures that administrate and govern social work should acknowledge and value the profession's activity e.g. with salary rise and by enabling every social worker with supervision service. Otherwise, the number of those leaving from the field due to the burnout increases.

Based on results of my research it may be concluded that in the future social work may be threatened by lack of recognition. In the local governments social workers are often left alone with their great workload and they do not receive necessary understanding and support from

organization. Lack of recognition is evident from the relatively low level of salaries and general lack of acknowledgement by the society.

According to the study one of the restrictive aspects of everyday social work seems to be an extensive politicization. Higher level decisions are often made according to the political popularity and the present political situation not based on the nature of the problem. Socio-political concepts, development programmes and allocation of funds should not depend on short-term policy, but they should depend on evidence-based needs. Hopefully this situation improves with increase of political and economical stability and balance.

There have also been cases where social worker's position in the local government is tied with belonging to the party in the power at the present. Management and the support of social worker depend often on managerial competence, knowledge and awareness of social work. Good manager understands the organizational benefits of well-running social system and supports social worker's educational pursuits and professional growth and at the same time leaves social worker space to work, gives trust and support.

Ruohotie (1999) and Leino (1999) are of the opinion that a manager should be more like a coach, "facilitator" and a provider of resources rather than a controller. Social workers appreciate the type of leaders who view subordinates as peers and valuable partners in attaining the organizational goals.

Research results show that social work is by nature stressful. London and Mone (1987, 148–149, 160) regard stress as positive when an individual is still motivated to balance the situation. Stress becomes negative when individual is unable to respond the surrounding demands. Different professional groups have different stressors in their work. The continued negative stress results in burnout. Maslach and Schaufeli (1993, 9–10) present the differences of these two phenomena – stress and burnout – from the starting point of the process, where burnout is the effect of unresolved work stress.

The social workers who participated in this research have all experienced stress, but they have mostly managed to find solutions and been able to maintain their work motivation. They know, however, of the colleagues who have left the field because of burnout. Those who participated in the research have stayed in the field, therefore it can be said that so far they have coped with the stress, although sometimes it has been remarkably difficult. Supervision service offered by the organizational management has been of help, but such assistance is available only to a few and mainly in larger organizations (towns). Social work is also more stressful there because especially in the towns there are more clients with multiple problems. However, the social workers from smaller local governments have to assist to solve problems that put serious stress on psyche – violence, child abuse etc. Therefore they would also need help in coping with stress. It also came evident that when supervision service is not available, members of the work team help one another when necessary. Thanks to the understanding and support of team members one's stress can be managed and burnout can be avoided; in other words – they manage to stay in the field. However, this cannot continue indefinitely; professional support service is also needed for the social workers of smaller local governments. In their work context additional burden is that social worker is an representative of the profession all the time – after hours and holidays included. In the small community it is virtually impossible to distance from the professional role.

Without supervision service or other supportive and empowering activities, the psychically demanding work may become unbearable. As of now the professional stability is yet strong, but there are already people leaving from that field (Olesk 2003). It means that more attention

should be paid to the recreation of social workers, their ability to work and their support in difficult and problematical work situations; supervision service should be available for each social worker. Burnout danger may influence decisions to leave the social work sphere, although according Niinemets (2001) the social workers graduated from the university have so far been stable in their choice of field, but being left alone during difficult times does not support this tendency.

Social workers in this study do not accept ignorance of social work values, because they see their profession as a bearer of humanistic values in the society, even though it may cause them conflicts with officials and politicians. Hepworth, Rooney and Larsen (1997) note that professional ethics is related to the theoretical basis and practice of profession. Values and knowledge are often confused, because all value dimensions of human life influence in one or another way the knowledge base of practice. Du Bois and Miley (1999) are in opinion that values are foundational to social work practice; social work is a value-based profession that incorporates a constellation of preferences concerning what merits doing and how it should be done. According to conceptions based on Parsons (1954) and Durkheim (1957) the social work profession may be regarded as a bearer of the consensus value. Du Bois and Miley (1999, 50–51) describe professional values of social work on three areas: values about people, values about social work in relation to society, and values that inform professional behaviour. *Values about People* refers to seeing the worth of all people regardless of their condition, cultural background and life-style. They have unconditional positive attitude toward others. *Values about Society* refers to taking responsibility about social system and being champion for social justice. *Values about Professional Behaviour* guide social workers efforts with client systems and that they value quality and ethical conduct in their practice.

In work there may arise conflicts (based on legislation, etc) concerning any of the three value areas of social work. The values based solution of a situation is in conflict with solution allowed in legislation or decision of management or organizational interests. Respondents gave such examples of their work where they solved problems on the basis of social work values and as the result faced even opposition of management or members of community.

Despite problems and setbacks social workers have strong motivation and they are even enthusiastic for their work. However, if they encounter too many restrictions and too little support their sense of security will be damaged. When the burden may become too heavy they may choose to leave the field. That would be a loss for the society.

From social workers conceptions it came evident that their motivation to continue with their work is strengthened by variety and challenges of their work. To manage these challenges they need professional knowledge and skills. In their view professional skills and knowledge are obtained through higher vocational education. They stress that incompetence, even if with good intentions, may bring damaging result.

Conceptions of respondents reflect the commitment of social workers and their professional identity is expressed through professional roles. Their experiences show those usually guarantee good work; results then give satisfaction and motivation for professional growth. Professional identity is one of the strongest motivational factors of professional growth.

### *Reflections*

When comparing the development and position of social work in other new EU countries, it comes evident that there are similar development tendencies.

Marinowicz-Hetka (2000, 44–55) describes the development of social work on post-communist Poland as the development of a new profession on the background of social pedagogic that is natural to many Central-European countries. Social pedagogical education has been available since 1925 and since 1945 many social occupations have been taught there with varying success. The profession name “social work” has been in use since 1990 when Social Welfare Law was approved. The position of social work is developing, so far social work is not recognized as a profession, it is viewed as one of social occupations. Researcher recognises that social work has been relatively nonexistent for decades, its worth as profession has to be proved.

Wodz and Faliczek (2000, 67) list educational levels and occupational specialists that are also suitable to work as social work specialists: firstly those that have graduated from Higher Social Service Vocational Institution, but also specialists that have education in social politics, sociology, psychology or pedagogic. Social work in Poland is developing and there are discussions about the social work education and position of social work in the society. In Poland there is extensive co-operation with other EU countries, most noticeably with Germany, where there is shared social pedagogical background from which social work has to develop from.

Although Germany is an old EU country, the social work profession and its context are not single-valued. Steinert (2000, 28–29) recognises that there are still discussions about whether social work is profession or not. In Germany the position of social work is shadowed by social pedagogic professions that have longstanding traditions and strong position. Professional social work has been viewed as an area of indefinite functions. However, one of the main criterion in a profession is definition is that it has clearly determined work area. Therefore there are questions presented whether social work is really profession. Also, representatives of classical profession (lawyers, doctors) manage important work areas on society and they are well paid for it, but the same can not be said about social workers. Their salary is relatively small in comparison with practitioners of classical professions and therefore the prestige of social work is also relatively low. Social work is also viewed as post-modern, alternative profession (semiprofession) that is not equal with classical professions.

Steinert (2000) and Heitkamp (2000) present different positions of various researchers, who are members of evaluation commission of social work educational programs. They consider it necessary to develop the social work science (there is already movement to that direction) and they stress the importance of acquiring better different social work methods and the use of these in complex manner in the work process. This is the task for higher vocational education institutions and academic institutions today. So, what is the competence of social workers? Steinert (2000, 32–33) shows three dimensions of competence of a social worker. The central components are: 1) general vocational theoretical competence (*Fachkompetenz*), 2) social competence (*Sozialkompetenz*) and 3) competence in methods (*Methodenkompetenz*). Discussion topic cannot be any longer “professionalization” (that has already happened) but “professionalism”.

Czech researcher Chytil (2000, 76–80) shows how development of social work in Czech Republic differs from Polish and German development. In Czech Republic social pedagogy has had only marginal position, but social work education was started already in 1918. However, during the period of socialistic republic the teaching of social work was finished in 1953 because was thought that in socialism there are no social problems and therefore there is no need for social workers. Since 1989 both social work profession and vocational education of social work have rapidly been developed in democratic Czech Republic. Therefore, due to forty years of interruption in social work, there were in the beginning of 1990s discussions about whether social work is a scientific discipline and if social workers have to be educated in universities. However, social work education has been started both in higher vocational institutions and universities. They have offered even doctorate level education, although there have been some development difficulties (limited number of teachers, lack of educational material, etc.).

In Czech Republic, as in Estonia, the social work professional activities have expanded from welfare to educational, medical and juridical sphere. All this marks the rapid progress of social work profession in Czech Republic.

It can be concluded that in postcommunist countries – due to greater need for social work during transition – social work has reached the position of profession. However, because of the interrupted development, the prestige of social work still has to raise in comparison with classical professions.

Rossell (1999, 215) summarizes different contributions on the European dimension of social work summarises based on the conceptions of Marynowicz-Hetka (1998) in two principal tendencies: one that pushes towards unification by means of the imposition of prevalent approaches and standards of performance and the other that tries to find a balance between individual national identity – and the collective, European identity. The second tendency must be favoured, to do that it is important to maintain attention to social needs in order to increase the capacity of the combined answer, and at the same time respect idiosyncrasy of the social and professional culture of each country and each particular context.

Professional culture of any society is related to the culture and values of this particular society. It is important what is valued in society because this has direct impact on which professions are highly appreciated and which professions prestige is lower.

On the basis of conceptions of respondents Estonian social workers perceive social work prestige as low as in other transit societies: however the position of social work is viewed as solid. Social work is needed in our society, its work areas are determined and expanding. This development, according to Abbott (1988), can be seen as supporting factor for the strengthening of profession position.

The position of social work in Estonia is strengthened also by the fact that since the new beginning (1990`s) the importance of research in social work is recognised in the universities. Also the fact that in education both the importance of theoretical basis and the acquirement of different methods have been understood. In this all the Finnish researchers of social policy and social work have had a great role, also Finnish practitioners and theoreticians of social work have helped to create a welfare system and helped to develop social work education in Estonia. This has helped to greatly raise the competence of Estonian social workers.

The competence and commitment of social workers is important: their skills and knowledge have major impact on the social work results. They have to balance the lack of resources in

the transit society where there is not fully developed network of social services. This helps to explain why the respondents stress the importance of competence in social work. They have experienced that competence warrants coping with work and coping influences work satisfaction and it also strengthens cohesion with work and creates motivation to continue with work and possibly professional growth, too. All of the participants of this research have academic vocational education. Next it would be necessary to research competence and cohesion with work of social workers with different educational backgrounds. Knowledge from such research would be useful for vocational education of social workers and would help in planning continuing education. Because the development of social work profession and social workers' work context have been little researched, there is extra plenty of research topics and aspects.

Based on the results of this research it may also be concluded that social work is diverse and challenging. Many workers in the social field have developed from novice workers to professionals with strong professional identity. Due to long-term study and working process they have developed into self-directed learners – professional growth has become a natural part of their life. As the context and content of social work is constantly changing, universities and higher vocational schools – where social workers are educated – must quickly respond to the changes in the demands of work-market. The dynamics and major changes in the work process present great challenges to social workers, and it is clear that education should match the demands. Social worker him- or herself needs to be self-reflective and critically thinking in order to be able to analyse and predict processes.

The results of this study show that people who had come to social work wanted to participate in the development of a social system of the society in transition. The social work profession is in their conceptions a helping profession, even a mission work that should not be done by someone without suitable personal characteristics. Respondents see their work as varied and constantly changing and offering challenges that test their professionalism every day. All this makes social work interesting and motivating to remain in this rather complicated workfield. One can conclude that the social workers have solid professional identities and a lot of personal potential for their work and professional updating. Another important point to consider is that their efforts are not always supported by the organization or by the society in general.

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# ANNEXES

## Annex 1

### QUESTIONNAIRE: Context of Social Work

#### I Personal data

1. Age.....
2. Gender                    male                    1  
                                  female                    2
3. You are                    unmarried                1  
                                  married                    2  
                                  in open-marriage        3  
                                  divorced                    4  
                                  widowed                    5
4. Higher education in social work:
- diploma studies                    1  
bachelor's degree                    2  
bachelor's degree in open university        3  
continuing education                    4  
studying at the university, year ...        5  
studying at the open university, year ..... 6
5. Your present work position .....
6. How long have you worked on the field of social work?  
.....

#### II Social work as profession

7. Which group of people needing assistance you have most contact at your work?
- Children                                    1  
Families with children                    2  
Elderly                                        3  
Disabled                                        4  
Mentally ill                                    5  
Unemployed                                    6  
Alcoholics                                     7  
Addicts                                         8  
Homeless                                        9  
People released from prison                10  
.....    11
8. Which social problem is most prevalent in our society?
- Poverty                                         1

Unemployment	2
Alcoholism and drug addiction	3
Crime	4
.....	5

9. Does national social politics help you in planning your work?

10. Is the legislation your work is based on clear to understand and applicable in everyday work?

11. What is your opinion about professional evaluation (dividing social workers into categories based on their education and work experience)? What are your proposals in the matter?

12. In your opinion who has the right to evaluate social workers?

Management of organization	1
Professional association	2
National committee	3
Committee of local government association	4

13. Do you feel need for professional association? Which problems this association should help to solve:

Ethical problems	1
Conflicts on the workfield	2
Problems related to competence	3
Issues related to in-service training	4
Attestation of competence	5
Salary issues	6

14. What you enjoy most at your work?

15. What you don't like at all in your work?

16. Do you think that social work is getting more recognition in Estonian society?

### III Vocational education and training

17. What motivated you to study social work?

(Choose three main motives)

1. Acquirement of academic education
2. Acquirement of diploma
3. Lack of professional skills
4. Interest in social work
5. Altruistic reasons
6. Danger of losing my job
7. Sense of mission
- 8.....

18. What were your expectations when you started to study social work?

19. Is base education received in the university sufficient to cope with work?

20. Is there something you would like to add?

**Annex 1 (cont.)****QUESTIONNAIRE:****Professional Self-concept Components and Work-related Factors**

<b>Professional Self-concept</b>	not at all descriptive	slightly descriptive	moderately descriptive	quite descriptive	fully descriptive
1. I have the courage to express opinions that differ from the others' opinions.					
2. My work results are better than average.					
3. I think my subordinates/colleagues respect me.					
4. I like the work where somebody else makes the decisions and tells me what to do.					
5. I often feel that others are using me.					
6. I think that I have only very limited influence on what is happening to me.					
7. I see in myself a lot that I would like to change if I could.					
8. I trust my abilities even in difficult situations.					
9. I have enough determination to reach my goals.					
10. I am flexible in human relationships.					
11. I adapt my behaviour as soon as I notice that I am doing something wrong.					
12. I have non-judgemental attitude towards others opinions and proposals.					
13. I can change my opinion about someone if I receive new information.					
14. I easily adapt to changes (technology, new legislative acts, work methods, etc.).					
15. I receive criticism about me well.					
16. I have a strong wish to show others what I am capable of.					
17. It is important for me to do well in everything I take up.					
18. I have ambition to achieve as much as possible.					
19. It is important for me to receive acknowledgement and recognition.					
20. I take on a lot of responsibilities in my job.					
21. Outcome oriented responsibility does not inspire me.					
22. I avoid being highly demanding on myself.					
23. I have a tendency to set to myself high outcome-oriented goals.					
24. If given new tasks, I am usually excited about them.					
25. The others find it difficult to keep up with me when working together.					
26. I believe that a right amount of risk is like a pinch of salt in life.					
27. I cope with uncertainty and stress well.					
28. In operation I have a tendency to be careful.					
29. I think it is tempting to take risks.					
30. I want work which involves changes and variety, although it may seem unstable.					
31. I willingly test everything new.					
32. I like situations that demand speedy action.					
33. It is easy for me to find friend.					
34. I like to work in a team.					
35. I like to help others.					
36. I would rather work alone than with others.					
37. I find listening to others' worries tiresome.					
38. It is not difficult for me to understand another person.					
39. I have no difficulty in seeing differences between people.					
40. I never know what others are expecting from me and what they think of me.					
41. I can easily make another person to open up.					
42. In general, during communication I understand a speaker's message and emotions.					
43. I think it is tiresome to work in the job that demands long-term concentration.					

44. I get tired of routine work faster than others.
45. I am able to work hard regardless of difficulties in order to achieve an important goal.
46. I usually don't give up before reaching my goal.
47. I think that long-term planning is a waste of time because there will always happen something that forces the change of plans.
48. I am so committed to my work that I could be considered a workaholic.
49. Going to work is usually unpleasant to me.
50. I highly value belonging to my present work collective.
51. Everyone has the responsibility to give the best to one's employer who has hired him/her.
52. I don't think that one has to be all the time loyal to one's organization where he/she is working.
53. I feel I'm a family with my colleagues.
54. I feel special attachment to this job.
55. I'd lose a lot if I left this job.
56. I think I'm employed by the best company/organization in the country.
57. I'm really excited about my work.
58. I don't have an alternative for my current job.
59. I don't want to change my current job with any other.
60. The development goals of our organization are so far from me that I even can't be interested in them.
61. I follow actively the developments of my field.
62. I read a lot of specialty literature (journals, books, articles).
63. My present job is too demanding.
64. I gladly participate in the development programme of my work collective (trainings, project, additional tasks).
65. I'm interested in additional training if it allows to get new interesting worktasks.
66. I have development ideas that could be used in our present work.
67. Self-development is my constant challenge.
68. I like to solve difficult problems.
69. I attempt to find alternative solutions to problems.
70. I am interested in problems that have no ready-made solutions.
71. I like tasks where I can find new solutions.
72. I often ponder on the reasons people behave the way they do.
73. I often discuss work-related problems and their solutions with others.
74. I don't analyze my thoughts and feelings much.
75. I know my strengths and weaknesses.
76. I feel I am in the right field.
77. I have clear objectives in my professional development.
78. I constantly set new challenges for myself.
79. I have quite realistic understanding of what I'm capable of.
80. I use the feedback from work and colleagues to support my development.
81. I have positive attitude about received towards receiving feedback.
82. I like that when people respect me.
83. It is important for me that I'm known to be influential in the organization.
84. It is important for me to receive public acknowledgement.
85. Social standing is an important incentive to me.
86. I expect others acknowledgement for my results.
87. I'm inspired by job with high social standing.
88. I want to get a valued position in the organization where I work.
89. I appreciate every acknowledgement given on the basis of the years served.

### **Efficacy Beliefs and Outcome Expectations**

90. In work I only count on my own abilities.
91. There are task-related to my work that I don't know how to perform.
92. I doubt my abilities to cope with this job.
93. I have all preparedness needed for this job.
94. Most of my colleagues can work better than me.
95. I am especially good at this job.
96. My future in my current job is unstable because of my insufficient workskills.
97. I'm proud of my preparedness and workskills.
98. I'm confused when others criticize my work.
99. I'm well paid for my job.
100. I'm not paid for my actual job although I work well.
101. I have the opportunity to advance in my profession, if I work well.
102. Most of my well-done work is left unnoticed.
103. In my current job both the salary and career advancement depend on how well I work.
104. In my current job I receive the same salary for both good or bad work.
105. I have to work well in order to reach the goals I have set for myself.
106. My work-team is above average.
107. My work-team is below average.
108. My work-team does not advance as well as it should be.
109. My work-team members are competent.
110. Some my work-team members should be fired because of their poor workskills.
111. My work-team does not work particularly effectively.
112. Some my work-team members don't know how to work properly.
113. From the work-team's standpoint it is important to work well.
114. It is useful for many people if our work-team works well.
115. Nobody would even notice if our work-team would work poorly.
116. Our organization depends greatly on the high quality work of our work-team.
117. Work collective where I work does not need our work-team's contribution.
118. My work-team expects to be well paid for good work.

### **Developmental Challenge Profile: Transitions, Developmental Job Components and Obstacles**

119. My professional view has expanded so much in my current job, that it includes most of the work stages.
120. In my current job I have been given tasks that require extensive technical skills.
121. In my current job I have had plenty of opportunities to carry responsibility.
122. I've had opportunities to show my skills in this job.
123. I have attempted to prove to the management that I'm a right person for this job.
124. I have wanted to prove my colleagues that I can fulfil my worktasks as well as others.
125. I have an opportunity to complete different tasks on my own accord, where I can test my workfield abilities.
126. I am expected to use new workmethods.
127. My current employer expects me to command the job that requires complex technical skills.
128. My employer has taken responsibility for my development so that I can meet the rising quality requirements.

129. When starting out in my current job, my work was supervised by experienced workers.
130. Experienced workers were welcoming me when I was starting out.
131. As a new worker I have had difficulties in adapting in a new job.
132. In this job I decide myself which workmethods to use.
133. In this job I decide myself on how to organize my work.
134. I decide myself which work task I complete on which workstage.
135. Others think I lack experience in this job.
136. Others think that I am not qualified for this job.
137. Others don't accept me.
138. Management demands high quality work from me.
139. My worktasks have strict deadlines.
140. Decisions made during work process have impact on the success of my work.
141. I am given tasks that require wide-ranging technical skills.
142. I am expected to participate in teamwork in order to reach common goals.
143. I have advanced in this job so when necessary, I could move on to more demanding work.
144. This job puts considerable stress on me.
145. In this job I constantly take care of my professional skills so they were up to date.
146. This job is physically demanding.
147. I consider demands for this job (deadlines, quality, professional skills) extreme/unfair.
148. Changing demands of clients bring constant change into this job.
149. In this job I am responsible for demands my clients present me with.
150. The nature of this job changes constantly.
151. This job requires constant learning of new things.
152. I discuss questions arising from carrying out the worktasks with other workers.
153. I attempt to influence management to remove drawbacks that became apparent during work process.
154. I offer proposals to make this job more effective.
155. Economic instability of this establishment forces to constantly develop this job.
156. Keeping this job means increasing of my work input.
157. Regarding work conditions there is plenty of room for development.
158. Management in this job does not organize work according to work requirements.
159. Management in this job does not attempt to fully utilize workers professional skills.
160. Management does not encourage us to develop this job.
161. I have attempted to develop this job by myself because my colleagues don't consider it important.
162. I have attempted to initiate cooperation because others have avoided it.
163. Others don't really want to work with me.
164. I have developed my workskills myself, because earlier preparation doesn't meet the requirements of this job.
165. I participate in every undertaking that helps me to fill the gaps in my professional skills.
166. I actively attempt to visualize the whole of which I work as part.

## Annex 2

### FRAME QUESTIONS OF THEMEINTERVIEW

#### **I. About choosing of this profession, motives and etc.**

Is this field a mission for you?

What kinds of conflicts have you encountered in your work?

#### **II. Description of work tasks.**

Would you say your work tasks are routine or varied?

Which client groups you work (have worked) with?

#### **III. About sufficiency of education and its limits.**

How important is academic vocational education in work practice? Is it possible at all to be a social worker without vocational education?

What in your opinion has been lacking in education?

#### **IV. Evaluation of own competence, commitment to work, being a member of a team, demands of profession.**

Which characteristics are in your opinion important on social worker?

Is it important for you to be a member of a work team?

What are the relations in work group like?

Is the good work of a work team also your good work?

Is the competence of colleagues important here?

Are you sufficiently competent for your present work? Are your colleagues as competent as you or more/less competent?

Which is your main role in everyday work?

How you experience constant change in work life?

#### **V. Career, professional development, factors limiting work.**

Do you have opportunities to rise in career?

Would you like to lead a work team?

What gives you satisfaction in your work?

If there won't be an rise in career ladder, would you leave that profession?

Do you have good opportunities for growth and development?

What prohibits you to work the way you want to?

#### **VI. Work organization/work team, working conditions, management style and traditions.**

What is the work environment in your organization like? Do you have the trust of the organization's management?

Is your good work acknowledged by management?

What is your relation with work team like?

What in your opinion makes a good work team?

#### **VII. Cooperation, networking.**

Who are your main partners within organization?

Cooperation with social networks in adjoining work fields?

(education, health care, police, etc.)

Is the cooperation working in a work team?

#### **VIII. Prestige of work and position of profession in society. work organization.**

Is your profession acknowledged in your work organization?

What is the position of your profession in a society?

What factors professional prestige of social work depends on?

Is it also up to social workers themselves?

#### **XI. About opportunities and ideas to make things differently; do wish you could change circumstances and what obstacles are preventing you from doing so?**

### Annex 3

#### Summation variables (20) derived from next variables (81):

##### With professional self-concept-related summation indexes

###### 1. Summation index *Self-confidence*:

1. I have the courage to express opinions that differ from the others' opinions.
2. My work results are better than average.
3. I think my subordinates/colleagues respect me.
8. I trust my abilities even in difficult situations.
9. I have enough determination to reach my goals.

###### 2. Summation index *Flexibility*:

10. I am flexible in human relationships.
11. I adapt my behaviour as soon as I notice that I am doing something wrong.
12. I have non-judgemental attitude towards others opinions and proposals.
13. I can change my opinion about someone if I receive new information.
14. I easily adapt to changes (technology, new legislative acts, work methods, etc.).
15. I receive criticism about me well.

###### 3. Summation index *Need of achievement*:

16. I have a strong wish to show others what I am capable of.
17. It is important for me to do well in everything I take up.
18. I have ambition to achieve as much as possible.
20. I take on a lot of responsibilities in my job.
23. I have a tendency to set to myself high outcome-oriented goals.
24. If given new tasks, I am usually excited about them.
25. The others find it difficult to keep up with me when working together.

###### 4. Summation index *Tendency for risk-taking*:

26. I believe that a right amount of risk is like a pinch of salt in life.
27. I cope with uncertainty and stress well.
29. I think it is tempting to take risks.
30. I want work which involves changes and variety, although it may seem unstable.
31. I willingly test everything new.
32. I like situations that demand speedy action.

###### 5. Summation index *Ability to cooperate*:

33. It is easy for me to find friend.
41. I can easily make another person to open up.
42. In general, during communication I understand a speaker's message and emotions.

###### 6. Summation index *Empathy*:

38. It is not difficult for me to understand another person.
39. I have no difficulty in seeing differences between people.

###### 7. Summation index *Commitment to work*:

45. I am able to work hard regardless of difficulties in order to achieve an important goal.
46. I usually don't give up before reaching my goal.

###### 8. Summation index *Commitment to work-collective*:

50. I highly value belonging to my present work collective.
53. I feel I'm a family with my colleagues.
54. I feel special attachment to this job.
55. I'd lose a lot if I left this job.
56. I think I'm employed by the best company/organization in the country.

**9. Summation index *Growth motivation:***

- 61. I follow actively the developments of my field.
- 62. I read a lot of specialty literature (journals, books, articles).
- 64. I gladly participate in the development programme of my work collective (trainings, project, additional tasks).
- 65. I'm interested in additional training if it allows to get new interesting worktasks.
- 66. I have development ideas that could be used in our establishments work.
- 67. Self-development is my constant challenge.

**10. Summation index *Innovativeness:***

- 68. I like to solve difficult problems.
- 69. I attempt to find alternative solutions to problems.
- 70. I am interested in problems that have no readymade solutions.
- 71. I like tasks which I can find new solutions for.

**11. Summation index *Professional conception:***

- 75. I know my strenghts and weaknesses.
- 79. I have quite realistic understanding of what I'm capable of.
- 80. I use the feedack from work and colleagues to support my development.
- 81. I have positive attitude about received feedback.

**12. Summation index *Need for recognition:***

- 83. It is important for me that I'm known to be influential in the organization.
- 84. It is important for me to receive public acknowledgement.
- 85. Social standing is an important incentive to me.
- 86. I expect others acknowledgment for my results.
- 88. I want to get a valued position in the organization where I work.

**Work-related summation indexes****13. Summation index *Efficacy beliefs:***

- 101. I have the opportunity to advance in my profession, if I work well.
- 103. In my current job both the salary and career advancement depend on how well I work.

**14. Summation index *Collective efficacy beliefs:***

- 108. My work-team does not advance as well as it should be.
- 111. My work-team does not work particularly effectively.
- 112. Some my work-team members don't know how to work properly.

**15. Summation index *Collective outcome expectations:***

- 115. Nobody would even notice if our work-team would work poorly.
- 117. Work collective where I work does not need our work-team's contribution.

**16. Summation index *Work demands and responsibility:***

- 121. In my current job I have had plenty of opportunities to carry responsibility.
- 122. I've had opportunities to show my skills in this job.
- 125. I have an opportunity to complete different tasks on my own accord, where I can test my workfield abilities.

**17. Summation index *Need of approval:***

- 123. I have attempted to prove to the management that I'm right for this job.
- 124. I have wanted to prove my colleagues that I can fulfil my worktasks as well as others.

**18. Summation index *Autonomy and influence:***

- 132. In this job I decide myself which workmethods to use.
- 133. In this job I decide myself on how to organize my work.
- 134. I decide myself which work task I complete on which workstage.

153.I attempt to influence management to remove drawbacks that became apparent during work process.

154.I offer proposals to make this job more effective.

**19. Summation index *Change and development:***

148. Changing demands of clients bring constant change into this job.

149. In this job I am responsible for demands my clients present me with.

150. The nature of this job changes constantly.

151. This job requires constant learning of new things.

**20. Summation index *Work obstacles:***

158. Management in this job does not organize work according to work requirements.

159. Management in this job does not attempt to fully utilize workers professional skills.

160.Management does not encourage us to develop this job.

161.I have attempted to develop this job by myself because my colleagues don't consider it important.

162. I have attempted to initiate cooperation because others have avoided it.

**Annex 4**

Development of professional identity: intercorrelation of personal characteristics and the professional self-concept components.  
(Correlation matrix of summation variables)

Summation variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1.Selfconf	—																			
2.Flexib	.220*	—																		
3.Achiev	.364**	.359**	—																	
4.Risk	.427**	.406**	.498**	—																
5.Cooper	.370**	.392**	.202*	.249**	—															
6.Emp	.040	.137	-.115	.047	.013	—														
7.Comwoik	.337**	.297**	.395**	.338**	.204*	.152	—													
8.Comcoll	-.003	.182*	.150	.116	.006	-.053	-.032	—												
9.Growthm	.389**	.360**	.406**	.388**	.197*	.143	.468**	.131	—											
10.Innov	.414**	.339**	.501**	.541**	.216*	.187*	.533**	.037	.518**	—										
11.Profconc	.387**	.446**	.199*	.232*	.516**	.046	.315**	.084	.269**	.178*	—									
12.Recogn	.117	.082	.394**	.139	.235*	.023	.034	.068	.106	.156	.154	—								
13.Effbel	-.162	.055	.016	.076	-.121	.094	-.017	.206*	-.208*	-.030	-.142	.071	—							
14.Colleffic	-.025	-.197*	-.052	-.037	-.034	.073	.016-	-.462**	-.151	-.039	-.057	.130	-.071	—						
15.Colloutc	.110	-.101	.020	.157	.081	-.117	-.102	-.163	-.019	-.157	-.020	-.011	-.119	-.343**	—					
16.Demand	.124	.001	.319**	.113	.009	.055	.124	.069	.113	.200*	.181	.164	.080	-.175	-.225*	—				
17.Approv	.067	.170	.091	.097	.096	-.007	-.091	.108	.039	.088	.110	.195*	.042	-.002	.109	.024	—			
18.Auton	.249**	.094	.253**	.174	.211*	-.116	.079	.019	.122	.080	.227*	.083	-.084	-.220*	-.062	.508**	-.040	—		
19.Change	.068	.177	.268**	.126	.086	-.077	.248**	.020	.217*	.133	.268**	.134	-.066	-.059	-.125	.103*	-.015	.269**	—	
20.Obstad	.110	.033	-.007	.142	.067	-.003	-.003	-.353**	.082	-.034	.017	.063	-.205	.520**	.402**	-.304**	.191*	-.082	-.111	—

\*\*Pearson's correlations significant r at the 0.01 level ( $p < 0.01$ )

\* Pearson's correlations significant r at the 0.05 level ( $p < 0,05$ )

1. Self-confidence= Selfconf; 2. Flexibility=Flexib; 3. Need of achievement=Achiev; 4. Tendency for risk-taking=Risk; 5. Ability to cooperate=Cooper; 6. Empathy=Emp; 7. Commitment to work=comwork; 8. Commitment to work-collective=Comcoll; 9. Growth motivation=Growthm; 10. Innovativeness=Innov; 11. Professional conception=Profconc; 12. Need of recognition=Recogn; 13. Efficacy beliefs=Effbel; 14. Collective efficacy beliefs=Colleffic; 15. Collective outcome beliefs=Colloutc; 16. Work demands and responsibility=Demand; 17. Need of approval =Approv. 18. Autonomy and influence=Auton; 19. Change and development= Change; 20. Work obstacles=Obstadl:

## Annex 5

## Post Hoc Tests

## Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: **growthmo**  
Bonferroni

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) rühm	(J) rühm	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound
lõpetajad	vilistlased	,32036	,60749	1,000	-1,1570	1,7977
	statsionaar	3,71138(*)	,82242	,000	1,7114	5,7114
vilistlased	lõpetajad	-,32036	,60749	1,000	-1,7977	1,1570
	statsionaar	3,39103(*)	,79544	,000	1,4567	5,3254
statsionaar	lõpetajad	-3,71138(*)	,82242	,000	-5,7114	-1,7114
	vilistlased	-3,39103(*)	,79544	,000	-5,3254	-1,4567

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

## Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: **cooperab**  
Bonferroni

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) rühm	(J) rühm	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound
lõpetajad	vilistlased	,44465	,26955	,306	-,2109	1,1002
	statsionaar	,94038(*)	,36491	,034	,0530	1,8278
vilistlased	lõpetajad	-,44465	,26955	,306	-1,1002	,2109
	statsionaar	,49573	,35294	,489	-,3626	1,3540
statsionaar	lõpetajad	-,94038(*)	,36491	,034	-1,8278	-,0530
	vilistlased	-,49573	,35294	,489	-1,3540	,3626

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

## Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: **innov**  
Bonferroni

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) rühm	(J) rühm	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound
lõpetajad	vilistlased	,39775	,51111	1,000	-,8452	1,6407
	statsionaar	1,68835(*)	,69193	,049	,0057	3,3710
vilistlased	lõpetajad	-,39775	,51111	1,000	-1,6407	,8452
	statsionaar	1,29060	,66923	,169	-,3369	2,9181
statsionaar	lõpetajad	-1,68835(*)	,69193	,049	-3,3710	-,0057
	vilistlased	-1,29060	,66923	,169	-2,9181	,3369

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

## Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: **effbel**  
Bonferroni

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) rühm	(J) rühm	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound
lõpetajad	vilistlased	-,30675	,42085	1,000	-1,3317	,7182
	statsionaar	-3,26829(*)	,74174	,000	-5,0747	-1,4619
vilistlased	lõpetajad	,30675	,42085	1,000	-,7182	1,3317
	statsionaar	-2,96154(*)	,72748	,000	-4,7332	-1,1899
statsionaar	lõpetajad	3,26829(*)	,74174	,000	1,4619	5,0747
	vilistlased	2,96154(*)	,72748	,000	1,1899	4,7332

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

## Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: **demands**  
Bonferroni

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) rühm	(J) rühm	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound
lõpetajad	vilistlased	,85647	,44698	,175	-,2323	1,9452
	statsionaar	2,17378(*)	,82718	,030	,1590	4,1886
vilistlased	lõpetajad	-,85647	,44698	,175	-1,9452	,2323
	statsionaar	1,31731	,81277	,325	-,6624	3,2970
statsionaar	lõpetajad	-2,17378(*)	,82718	,030	-4,1886	-,1590
	vilistlased	-1,31731	,81277	,325	-3,2970	,6624

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

## Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: **autonomy**  
Bonferroni

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) rühm	(J) rühm	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound
lõpetajad	vilistlased	1,48780(*)	,51083	,013	,2437	2,7319
	statsionaar	2,15447	,90034	,056	-,0382	4,3471
vilistlased	lõpetajad	-1,48780(*)	,51083	,013	-2,7319	-,2437
	statsionaar	,66667	,88303	1,000	-1,4838	2,8171
statsionaar	lõpetajad	-2,15447	,90034	,056	-4,3471	,0382
	vilistlased	-,66667	,88303	1,000	-2,8171	1,4838

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

## Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: **selfconf**

Bonferroni

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) rühm	(J) rühm	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound
lõpetajad	vilistlased	,52017	,39816	,583	-,4481	1,4884
	statsionaar	1,84282(*)	,53902	,003	,5320	3,1536
vilistlased	lõpetajad	-,52017	,39816	,583	-1,4884	,4481
	statsionaar	1,32265(*)	,52134	,038	,0548	2,5905
statsionaar	lõpetajad	-1,84282(*)	,53902	,003	-3,1536	-,5320
	vilistlased	-1,32265(*)	,52134	,038	-2,5905	-,0548

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

## Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: **risk**

Bonferroni

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) rühm	(J) rühm	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound
lõpetajad	vilistlased	1,34756	,81939	,309	-,6451	3,3402
	statsionaar	3,04201(*)	1,10928	,021	,3444	5,7396
vilistlased	lõpetajad	-1,34756	,81939	,309	-3,3402	,6451
	statsionaar	1,69444	1,07289	,352	-,9146	4,3035
statsionaar	lõpetajad	-3,04201(*)	1,10928	,021	-5,7396	-,3444
	vilistlased	-1,69444	1,07289	,352	-4,3035	,9146

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.