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**Bricolage of identity to cope with crisis.**

**Bank employees in times of turmoil**

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**Abstract**

Financial crisis has damaged the image of the banking sector. Bank employees are in the front line to cope with this crisis of reputation. This article is based upon an exploratory empirical research among bank employees. First, it reveals the difficult situations related to this crisis that employees live and how they impair their professional identity. Second, drawing upon the notion of bricolage, this paper unveils different forms of identity work that bank employees mobilize to restore a respected professional identity. However most of these bricolages of identity appear to be fragile and may have serious consequences for the management of the banking sector.

**Key words:** identity work, bricolage, crisis, bank employees, boundaries

## **Bricolage of identity to cope with crisis.**

### **Bank employees in times of turmoil**

The recent financial crisis put the banking industry in deep water. Corporate banks' behavior is regularly scrutinized and criticized by media and consumer associations (Barbot, 2010). In the case of the financial crisis, banks were pointed out not only by media but also by experts including economists. Their participation in the credit derivatives market which is at the very origin of the crisis was strongly condemned. As a result, their corporate reputation collapsed. For example, in late 2008/early 2009, French young people aged 18-35 associated the banking industry with harsh words such as excessive risk-taking, misappropriation, abuse (Mercanti-Guérin, 2011). Moreover, because of their original activities such as funding, banks acted as a strong transmission belt of the financial crisis to the tangible spheres of the economy (Blot & Timbeau, 2009): « *In all developed countries, banks which were wondering if there were still carrying toxic assets in their portfolios, cut back on lending to many healthy firms.* » (Attali, 2009). This led to even more criticism.

Traders, whose jobs and very high earnings were brought into light at the time of the crisis, were charged by media. But, the entire population of bankers was also held responsible for the crisis: *“The financial crisis revealed to everybody the questionable practices of some bankers”*<sup>1</sup>; *“Bankers have too often speculated for their own. Since they did not earn money with credit and did not have the capability to assess risk any more, they rushed into this diabolical spiral”*<sup>2</sup>. In 2009, Georges Pauget, who was both the chairman of the French Banks Federation and the CEO of one of the major French banks, published a response to these attacks. The title of his book - *“Should bankers be burned?”* - provides evidence of their virulence.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Problèmes économiques, Janvier 2009, Editorial

<sup>2</sup> Source: Le Figaro, Février 2009, “Crise : les banques sont-elles oui ou non coupables ?”

Since the end of the 19th century and the development of commercial banks, *“the banker has ceased to be a natural person and has become an institution.”* (Oudiette, 1955, p. 121). But, the term *“banker”* dominates popular usage when talking about bank employees. In France, it is how customers are used to designating their dedicated banking advisor (Brun-Hutardo, 2005), probably because it gives them a social status. The frequent use of the word *“banker”* in media during the financial crisis brought discredit not only to banks but also to the whole population of their employees. How did these manage to go through the financial crisis?

This issue is all the more important that the banking industry is one of the leading private employers in France: 370 000 bank employees in 2011. Most of them have kept on working in their bank. In France, the banking labour market is a closed one (Dressen, 2002). Most bank employees work in the banking industry through their entire professional life. Those who work in the retail banking activity, which accounts for 70% of the banking workforce, often stay in the same bank (De Larquier et al., 2012)<sup>3</sup>. This was reinforced by the decrease in resignations as a result of the financial crisis<sup>4</sup>.

Most of bank workers did not manage to escape from the loss in reputation of their industry and their employer. Yet, negative organizational events are likely to turn identity work down (Breit, 2014).

This paper focuses on the way French banking workers try to restore a positive work identity. The concept of bricolage of identity we use as an analytical framework is presented in the first part of the paper. The qualitative study involving thirteen bank workers shows four types of bricolage of identity employees adopt in order to cope with difficult situations related to financial crisis. We describe them in the second part of the paper. These processes of remedial

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Bank Professional Observatory

<sup>4</sup> According to Jean-Claude Guéry, Social Affairs Director of the Association of French Banks

identity work have various consequences. They lead to a radical change in the identity work of some bank workers; they enable others to re-establish a more positive professional image but this remains fragile; lastly, they change the representation some workers form of their bank. These findings have real implications as regards management practices in banks. We explain them after discussing our results.

### **Literature review: Remedial identity work and bricolage of identity**

Identity at work is not stable; it is constructed through an on-going process (Ashforth, 1998; Brown et al., 2006). For Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), identity work refers to « people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (p. 1165). In this modern approach, identity is a reflexive constructed life narrative. The challenge of identity work is to maintain a narrative which is both perceived as authentic by oneself and approved by significant others through interactions (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2003). Identity results from negotiations (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001). Everyday identity work is instinctual, routinized and remains largely unselfconscious. Adaptation to changes in the environment is gradual and individuals are not clearly aware of these effortless identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

In fast changing environment or crises, identity at work may be painfully challenged and even dramatically turned upside down. Individuals engage in remedial identity work to restore a decent self-image. Research has already unveiled different types of strategies to cope with identity threats. Gabriel, Gray and Goregaokar (2010) show how unemployed managers in their fifties incorporate the experience of job loss into their identities to make sense of their dismissal and sustain their sense of selfhood. Interviews with them unveil their narrative coping strategies to face this trauma and to provide them with consolation. While some fall

into despair and tell a story in the past tense, others succeed in recovering from the loss and manage to project into the future. The latter make sense of their dismissal as a temporary career derailment and imagine the future as the comeback of normal affairs.

Lutgen-Sandvick (2008) investigates the remedial identity work of persons who have suffered bullying at work. She provides seven types of identity work related to different phases of remedial work: first and second-level stabilizing, sensemaking, reconciling, repairing, grieving and restructuring.

In the case of reputational crisis of an organization, which is closer to the context of our own research, Breit (2014) also enlightens “intensive remedial work” as Alvesson and Willmott put it. In this research, the crisis does not result from individual stigmatization but stems from persistent public criticism towards a Labor and Welfare administration, which is reproached with being dysfunctional. The researcher analyses how employees face the blame from the media accusing the organization of being an inefficient bureaucracy. The first discursive practice is accepting the critique, internalizing it but projecting a more favorable image for the future. As the organization is recent, it suffers from teething problems that are to be solved over time. The second discursive practice consists in condemning the condemners, in other words, impugning their legitimacy. Facts are opposed to external criticism to set the record straight. Employees construct a narrative in which they appear as victims of libel and restore their self-esteem amongst themselves. The third discursive practice is distancing the identity construction from the critique of the organization. Such a strategy is similar to professional indifference (Lemmergaard & Muhr, 2011), dis-identification (Elsbach & Battacharya, 2001) or othering (Davis & Harré, 1990) wherein people construct their identity through the difference and distance from the reference group. For instance, back-office employees pity those who work in contact with the public and angry users. Interestingly, front-line workers use about the same tactics towards those who hold positions with responsibility. The critique

is distanced and exteriorized to others in the organization. Still others do not feel personally concerned by what is said about a huge administration with hundreds of agencies and thousands of employees. Members use all these discursive practices as different ways to insulate themselves from the stigmatizing aspects of the bashing affecting their organization. The fourth discursive practice is labeled as positive calibrating. It means assigning positive values to the critique, which is turned into a driving force to improve professional practices. Calibration implies to adjust standards used to assess the quality of the work; the critique raises the level of expected performance. The employees acknowledge the inspirational value of the critique that is eventually useful for the organization since it prompts additional endeavors to improve it.

Research aiming at describing identity work in times of crisis has unveiled multiple discursive strategies that are tightly related to the situation. Choosing these contextual typologies to capture how bank employees cope with the crisis is bound to constrain the analysis in a too restrictive framework. In the following analysis, we keep in mind the discursive strategies identified in the literature, especially those highlighted in contexts of reputation crisis, however we analyze the identity work of bank employees without limiting us to these predefined discursive practices.

The notion of bricolage of identity seems potentially more fruitful to analyze the processes of identity work of bank employees in a context of crisis without assuming what kind of definite identities result from this work. Bricolage is linked to the resilience which enables an individual or an organization to surmount a crisis situation by maintaining both a consistent identity and the capacity to act (Weick, 1993). Sensemaking enables the bricoleur to improvise to face a difficult situation and to give it an acceptable significance. The bricolage is a kind of identity work that is resorted to when identity is threatened and that may take

various forms. Bricolage is an arrangement combining simultaneously conception and action. It is both a process and a result (Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010).

Concerning the process, bricolage consists in doing things with whatever is at hand; it results from a dialogue with the potential of a repertoire of resources accumulated over time. In the professional environment, identity draws upon three main sources: identification with the profession, the organization or a group (Albert et al., 2003). For instance, constructing one's work identity drawing upon the profession may consist in claiming for a distinct expertise, championing a job well done, exploiting margins of autonomy in one's work to gain recognition from others. Research in management insists on identification with the organization. Managers and leaders are expected to forge a vision and a corporate culture fostering the development of employees' sense of membership (Schein, 1985). This means that members use organizational discourses to construct their own professional identity. In this regard, research explores to what extent and how employees align their self with the collective identity nourished by the organizational discourses (Dutton & al., 1994).

Lastly, identity construction can draw upon group membership: being part of a team, a department, a group sharing the same level of responsibility or some commitment to a common cause. Identity work mobilizes and combines different familiar elements in a complex interplay of diversion, substitution and permutation (Coutu, 2002). Versatility, in other words the flexibility of arrangements, allows for resilience. Arrangements and re-arrangements are always transitional results of the process of identity work.

Using the notion of bricolage of identity, Ellis and Ybema (2010) illustrate one mode of arrangement showing how managers involved in inter-organizational relationships varyingly position themselves with agility. Depending on the interaction, the managers position themselves inside or outside the organization, as experts or non-experts, in or out of the



market, etc. This boundary bricolage allows them to shift identities according to the situation and to borrow more or less to different resources (profession, organization, groups) in order to preserve their professional and organizational status.

Hereafter in this article, we scrutinize the process of bricolage of identity of bank employees faced with crisis.

## **Methodology**

Our exploratory research relies on a qualitative methodology. Our sample includes thirteen bank employees selected for the diversity of their profile (age, seniority) and their professional environment: sort of bank (cooperative or commercial bank), job function (front office, back office, support function), position in the bank (bank headquarters or bank activities of universal banks like retail banking, corporate and investment banking). Semi-structured interviews lasted on average 1:30 hour. They enabled us to understand the professional career of the employees, their perception of the responsibilities and consequences of the crisis as well as their preoccupations and sources of satisfaction in their daily work. The content analysis of the interviews revealed different forms of bricolage of identity.

## **Results**

Only two of the interviewees do not seem to be affected by the financial crisis. As for them, risk taking is “*a core part of the banker’s job*”. Therefore, the financial crisis is almost a natural event for the banking industry. The distance they keep from such an important happening is so important that we may assume they are in a state of denial. On the contrary, all other interviewees are impacted by the financial crisis (1). Their identity work is damaged. In the post-crisis context, they make attempts to restore it with bricolage (2).

### **1 –Bank workers affected in their professional practice by the financial crisis**

As a result of the financial crisis, employees who work in the front office department of the retail banking activity have been facing difficulties with their customers. Banks had to cope with a loss in reputation and consumer confidence: *“there are still people who are branded with a red-hot iron because bankers were thieves and bastards”*. Branch employees had to reassure some customers. But the public blame on banks appears also to increase and legitimate customers’ requirements which have already been growing up for several years. One branch manager emphasizes *“this aggressiveness, this loss of consumer confidence in the banker because we did stupid things”*. They led to tensions between customers and branch employees. These *“stressful situations”* were so difficult and frequent that even interviewees who were not in contact with customers during the crisis mentioned them.

Nonetheless, the loss in reputation of banks affected most of the bank workers. Even though they do not have the same view on the responsibility of the banks in the financial crisis, they feel a great injustice done by media and public opinion. Some believe that their employer cannot be held liable. As for them, the financial crisis is due to public debt, the United States or even the financial system at large. Its origins are far from the French banks: *“It was in the United States. Anyway, the crisis is the debt crisis; and it is the subprime crisis too. Subprimes are a bit volatile financial products. And there was a cascade effect”*. As for other interviewees, French banks contributed to the crisis while marketing sophisticated financial products. Sometimes, they have harsh words: *“What I think is that we have played the sorcerer's apprentice. We attempted to create products we were not able to control”*. But whatever their opinion as regards the responsibility of banks in the crisis, most of the bank workers feel personally incriminated by media and public opinion.

The loss in reputation of their employers contributes to lower their self-esteem at work. *“The fact is that hearing criticism regarding banks or ourselves all the time was disheartening”*. This was specially the case when they were directly condemned, for example by customers or

more occasionally by their family. One interviewee is explicit: *“For a while, I really felt like being Jérôme Kerviel<sup>5</sup>”*. But the poor collective representation of the industry they are associated with deeply contrasts with their positive evaluation of the quality of their work. *“True. There was no relation at all between what was stated on TV and radio and what we thought about our work”*. So, media and public opinion sounded unfair. *“We feel that we really do a good job. And we are controlled anytime. In fact, we say to ourselves: it is incredible, controls are not carried out at the right place!”*

Some bank workers are not only overwhelmed by a sentiment of injustice. They also feel ashamed because they have been working for long in an industry which led to the economic crisis following the financial one. As for example, one interviewee who has been working in a bank for over 20 years explains us he fails to understand why students want to work in the banking industry, in the post-crisis period. Even if he held human resources positions in the past and has to hire people in his present job, he cannot definitively help the students confirm their choice. The pride he developed working in a bank seems to have been flouted.

Being *“stigmatized”* is not the only reason why interviewees are in trouble because of the crisis. The professional identity of manager of some of them is undermined. They disapprove the decisions their top management took. But, in the same time, as they are manager, they feel forced to endorse these choices: *“as for me, there need to be a solidarity within the management team”*. Other interviewees experience difficulties in understanding the very origins of the crisis. Obviously, they know the main mechanisms of the spreading of the crisis. But they fail in understanding deeply its foundations and its links with the functioning of the whole financial system they are familiar with: *“I take part in something that boggles my mind”*

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<sup>5</sup> Jérôme Kerviel is a French trader who was convicted in the 2008 Société Générale trading loss for breach of trust and forgery resulting in losses valued at € 4.9 billion.

This lack of comprehension concerns interviewees who work in support functions at a senior level. One of them *“ha[s] doubts regarding the utility of [his] job”*. Other employees worry about the sustainability of banking activities. One of them is all the more concerned as the investment banking activity she is working on has fallen drastically since the financial crisis. However, they are not afraid of losing their jobs. None of the interviewees expressed any fear of being dismissed because of the crisis. This issue was raised only twice by managers who were not speaking about their own concern but those of some of their team members.

The financial crisis has consequences for most of the bank workers: some of them have serious questions regarding the foundations and the utility of the core banking activity and most of them are affected because of the loss in reputation of banks. In the former case, the crisis alters their work identity. In the latter one, it leads to the degradation of their self-esteem. They try to restore it with bricolage.

## 2 – Bricolage of identity, a response to tricky situations resulting from the financial crisis

Four types of bricolage of identity were observed. Each of them is described paying attention to give details on the process of bricolage, the resources bank workers take support on and the results of these remedial works.

### *Playing on boundaries inside and outside the bank*

Some bank workers draw a frontier between the various activities of their banks. As for example, one interviewee isolates the back office department in which she works within an investment banking subsidiary from the front office one; other interviewees separate within their bank the retail banking activity they contribute to from the investment banking one. One branch manager told us: *“there are two core activities in banks: investment banking and ours, retail banking; they have nothing to do with each other.”* In both cases, the bank workers use the boundary they draw inside their firm in order to exempt their immediate professional

environment from the liability of the crisis. So, they do not have to shoulder it and they manage to restore a positive work identity. In order to do it, they mainly take support on internal organizational discourses. These are communication supports which explain to employees the mechanisms and impacts of the financial crisis and *“arguments regularly prepared by the group Communication Department”* in order to help banking counselors to answer back customers’ questions during the crisis.

However, despite the bricolage of identity, the situation of these employees is fragile. As soon as he has highlighted the existence of a boundary between investment banking and retail banking, one interviewee challenges it. He concedes: *“My job is not investment banking but we are in the same banking group. Therefore it is somehow about the same job”*. Other interviewed people draw boundaries within the market. Two of them isolate the cooperative banks they work for from commercial banks. The process of bricolage is nearby the former one. Since the end of the financial crisis, cooperative banks have advertised their particular status in order to restore their image. As for example, in its advertising campaign *“a bank that belongs to its customers makes all the difference”*, the Crédit Mutuel puts forward that it is not only seeking *“short term profitability”*. It distinguishes itself from banks which *“were unable to stop in time”*, *“wanted more and more”*, *“have had growing voracious appetite”* resulting in the negative impacts media denounced.

Therefore, bank workers use the content of the communication made by cooperative banks for their customers in order to clear their employer of any responsibility in the financial crisis: *“The bank xx is a cooperative bank; our organizational functioning is much more secure”*. Therefore, they escape from the unfair condemnation against them. In these cases, when bank workers use boundaries between banks or bank activities in order to do bricolage, their professional identity changes very little. Their individual relationship with their job and their

firm membership are not deeply modified. This is also the case when their draw temporal boundaries.

*Playing on temporal boundaries and highlighting one's employer's post-crisis choices*

Some interviewees draw borderlines not in the market nor in their banks but within a time frame. They take support on the evolution of their bank's behavior in the post-crisis context to justify the very existence of this temporal frontier. Some of them specify that *"now, all is improved [...]"*, *"the trading desks of [their] bank do not speculate any more"*, *"their bank takes the crisis into account in its strategy"*. They do not deny the responsibility of their employer but it belongs to the past. Therefore, working in their company becomes acceptable again.

One similar process is when employees value the orientations adopted by their company in the post-crisis period. For example, they emphasize the priority given by their bank to *"less volatile activities"* or a change from a product-oriented commercial policy from a customer-oriented one. Improving the way profitability is calculated is also put forward by an interviewee who works in the investment banking activity: *"When looking closely at the financial results, they appear to be precise or refined. And today, it is fair to say that we are more lightened because results were cleaned up"*.

Finally, one interviewee highlights the validity of the arrangements implemented by the Human Resource Department of his bank in order to help employees cope with their concerns in the crisis context.

This type of bricolage takes support on both the new projects or practices banks implement and managerial discourses: *"our boss said: now, I want to sell products I do understand myself. He said all of the right. And true, it has changed"*. It contributes to closer links between the interviewees and their employers. The sense of belonging of the employees is

restored. But their professional identity is not deeply changed as it is when employees draw hierarchical boundaries within the firm.

*Exploiting hierarchical boundaries and focusing on the quality of one's work*

Some interviewees draw a boundary within the hierarchical line of their bank so as to differentiate decision-makers and performers. The deputy director of an investment banking back-office department including more than 30 employees does not hesitate to say that she “do [es] what she is told to do”. As for these bank workers who think their firm is partly responsible for the crisis, exploiting hierarchical boundaries help them not only escape from an issue regarding their loyalty as a manager but also appropriate the good professional image they have of lower-level employees. These are people who are deeply attached to tidy work and who, “*[do] a good job at their own level*”. In order to restore their work identity, they draw upon the image they have built during their professional experience and their more recent roles as a manager.

This remedial process means that they abdicate their decision-maker role. Yet, these interviewees have worked hard for becoming manager and thus decision-maker. They become closer to the bank workers who focus on the quality of their work in order to make the situation more bearable: “*ensuring the best possible quality with the means at one's disposal*”, “*being well appreciated by one's customers*”, “*serving customer well*”, “*getting the job done well*” satisfy them: “*we receive really good ratings from customers; it's great, anyway*”. They appropriate a reputation for professionalism they put forward since they suffer from the poor image of their employer with the financial crisis.

The last type of bricolage regards interviewees who give more value to the usefulness of their work.

### Putting forward one's usefulness for the firm

Two interviewees who benefit from high rank in support function hierarchy and have a comprehensive view of their firm, put forward the role they had in the pre-crisis period and their attempts to alert the top management to internal excesses and risks. One of the two confided us that *“it was a foregone conclusion”, “[he] made it clear during some meetings”*. These warnings were not followed up. But their very existence allows the bank workers to put some distance between themselves and the firm they consider responsible for the crisis. They also highlight their usefulness for the firm in order to make sense of their work commitment. One of the two is proactive. She asks directors about the evolution of the business model of the bank and proposes those of the activity she is at the head of. The other one, who was recently appointed Ethics Officer in a universal bank, stresses that *« today, [he is] useful to prevent it for happening again »*

Two more interviewees focus on their usefulness as managers. They do not have alerted their top managers in the pre-crisis period as the former ones. But their work commitment gets sense when they listen to their team members, when they reassure, support and train them. The work identity of one of them is restored thanks to the positive perceptions his team members have of him: *“employees who come working smiling and without dragging their feet. That's all! I know, at least, that they are satisfied to work, that they want to work with me”*. The identity remedial processes of each case are close. They contribute to strengthen the professional identity of the bank workers. But the resources they take support on are different. These are the expertise of the interviewees in the former case and their missions in the latter one. Nevertheless, this type of bricolage is fragile. Admittedly, the work situation of the interviewees seems to them bearable. But as expressed in the wishes of some of them, their future prospects seem uncertain: *“I do expect to be given some hope (laughs) because I don't*



*know what we'll do tomorrow"; "I hope for a bank in which the Ethics and Compliance line wouldn't exist anymore because it would have helped people to understand and change".*

As a conclusion, we may observe that the type of bricolage used by bank workers doesn't depend on whether they think their bank is responsible for the crisis or not. It doesn't depend on the function/job bank workers have either. Moreover, the same interviewee can use several types of bricolage. Our small-sized sample does not allow us to determine what leads to one type or another. Nevertheless, as shown in the next section, the various kinds of bricolage have real consequences for the employees and for the banks themselves.

## **Discussion**

The first contribution of this research is the description of the situations challenging the professional identities of bank employees because of the financial crisis. This article has shown that they feel singled out by customers, public opinion, if not their own family members for whom they epitomize the whole bank sector. As the target of many recriminations, they suffer from what they perceive to be a lack of distinction between the quality of their work and the disrepute of the sector as a whole. This confusion between their particular job and "bankers" at large seems very unfair to them. Furthermore, some employees are quite uncomfortable because they feel overwhelmed; they are part of a big picture that is out of control and not intelligible. And the lack of control over what is going is acknowledged to be a strong stress factor at work (Dejours, 1993).

The second contribution of this research relies in unveiling the strategies of bricolage of identities to cope with the crisis. We did not find all the discursive practices identified in the extant literature. For example, no employee from our sample considers the crisis as a welcome opportunity to improve the organization. However, several employees draw upon their job to maintain a positive self-image. The love of a job well done, let it be about risk

management or service quality for customers, is a powerful resource for professional recognition. In this strategy, employees take over organizational discourses (customer-centered organization, risk limitation, etc.)

Insulating oneself is also a commonly used discursive practice. Employees build borders to separate them and keep a distance from criticized banking practices. They draw a line between retail and investment banks, between cooperative and commercial banks, etc. The delimited area restores a safe space around them and the professional pride impaired at the scale of the whole banking sector.

Beyond these strategies already available in the literature, our research brings out three new bricolages. The first one consists in building a temporal border between the past, questionable but over, and the present characterized by new rules. This strategy is significantly distinct from “accepting critique” as Breit (2014) puts it because the criticism is not internalized. Oppositely, the temporal border is a kind of rationalization to discard the critique. The distinction between before and after the crisis sets free from the opprobrium associated with the old world and re-establishes the legitimacy of the professional role in a cleaned up organization. The professional identity does not change much; it can be preserved by turning the page and assuming that the threatening mistakes have been corrected.

The second new strategy is to put one’s own usefulness in a de-legitimized organization to help improve it. It is because they can contribute to make a better organization by promoting deontology or calling for in-depth discussions about the future of the bank that these people make sense of their professional role.

The third strategy consists in distinguishing oneself from the top hierarchy that bears responsibility for the errors. Professional identity is not constructed around career progression and the projection to higher levels of management; employees find a shelter in the identity of efficient field workers and operational staff who can claim to do a good job. This deepens the

gap between some field workers and their immediate hierarchy on the one hand and the higher hierarchy on the other hand.

### **Managerial implications**

Thanks to various forms of bricolage, some employees manage to cope with the tricky situations while remaining at peace with themselves. However, the bricolage is not always enough to preserve a respected image of one's profession. For instance, the employee, who endorses the organizational discourse about efficient measures taken to cope with the crisis, is at the same time puzzled that streams of young people still apply and expect to have a career in the banks. In a few cases, the discredit on the image of banks, which depreciates the professional identity, may even generate suffering at work. In this article, we do not detail the consequences of putting the professional identity into question because the prevention and treatment of psychosocial risks are already developed in the literature. We rather focus on less well known effects of the unveiled remedial identity works. The building of a temporal border, which means to stick to present positive aspects of organizational discourses to break with the past, appears a frail strategy. New media campaign questioning some employer's practice or the banking sector at large is likely to undermine the positive self image they attempted to restore and on the mid-term to harm their professional involvement.

The mental construction of borders within the company also has important managerial consequences. Historical French banks have all developed as universal banks. They provide several activities such as retail, investment, asset management and insurance (Bellon et al., 2005). How to sustain the membership of employees towards a common corporate culture if they willingly insulate themselves from other departments to save their professional identity? The fragmentation, which is the response to the challenged identity, contributes to degrading mutual perceptions and may damage the quality of the cooperation between bank units, while

this cooperation is required for economies of scope. The mobility policy, especially between support and back office functions, is likely to suffer from these job isolation strategies.

Even more jeopardizing organizational cohesion are the strategies consisting in defining oneself as basic performers when used by employees who are formally in a management position. How to keep one's organizational engagement when such a distance is maintained with the top managers? And above all, how can these managers play their management role? This role is crucial. In the banking sector, training through "compagnonnage" and buddy system plays a key role in learning the job and socialization (Dressen, 2002; Commeiras et al. 2010). Indeed, French banks employ about 8000 apprentices each year.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we mention the main limitations of our research. First, specialists of the banking sector could find surprising that we dealt with very different jobs inside the banks while professional identities vary a lot with the kind of job people hold. However we were less interested in the professional identities themselves than in the process of bricolage of identity through which employees cope with the crisis. As far as the process is concerned, we have found that the job of the interviewees was not a key factor to determine the form of bricolage of identity. However we had just over a dozen of interviewees and could not reach saturation. A research on a larger sample would probably reveal other strategies and enable to find out regularities between some contextual elements and forms of bricolage that we could not detect in an exploratory study. Finally, let's mention that identity work related to the financial crisis just adds to a series of identity evolutions that came with the deep changes that the banking sector has been going through for the last thirty years. Therefore, it is not easy to disentangle the bricolage of identity related to the crisis from the long-term identity work which has deeply changed the images of the banker (Lazarus, 2012).

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