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Jens Thoemmes

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## **Three worlds of professional and managerial staff in France**

Jens Thoemmes

### **Abstract**

Changes in the work of professional and managerial staff (cadres) in France were studied in a research project based on 100 interviews, conducted in seven private and public companies. through a discourse and correspondence analysis—of a corpus amounting to some 600,000 words—, this study concludes that this particular French employment group can be seen neither as a homogeneous entity, nor as a totally fragmented socio-professional category. rather, reflecting on working life experiences, it describes three groups that correspond to a horizontal division of professional and managerial staff: the serene, the individualized and the resistant.

Keywords: professionals, management, rules, work, discourses analyses.

### **Introduction**

The existing social sciences literature on the upper category of employees in France (cadres) demonstrates the heterogeneity of this social category. It generally underscores the emphasis placed on internal differentiations of these employees by statute, profession, corporate position, class, gender, etc. Our approach goes further with the assumption that, if doubts about the cohesion of a social group do exist, the research framework and the methodological conclusions should allow a possible division of these highly qualified employees into completely different social worlds. These worlds are to be examined in the context of the coexistence of different social systems (Reynaud, 1997) and the everyday life of employees belonging to each of them. Our research consequently shows a gap between a socio-professional category (cadres) that is rooted in historical developments (Desrosières and Thévenot 1988) and current living and working conditions. In what way do the working experiences reflect common or differentiated visions of this social group?

In order to answer this question, we need first to establish the limits of the socio-professional category. In the French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec and more generally in North-America a “cadre” is a “person who exercises a management function in an organization or business, and who holds decision-making powers”<sup>1</sup>. In France the National Statistics Institute (INSEE) defines a category known as “cadres and higher intellectual professions”. This category of employees includes teachers and scientific professionals who, in the fields of exact sciences or humanities, make direct use of in-depth knowledge in areas of general interest for research, teaching or health; information professionals whose activities are related to arts and media; administrative and corporate sales executives; employees holding important responsibilities in the management of companies; engineers and technical managers; employees in positions of responsibility that require further scientific knowledge”<sup>2</sup>. In France this category represented 17,5% of total employment in 2013 (with women: 14,5%, men: 20,2%)<sup>3</sup>. The category of “cadres” encompasses the higher category of employees in business and administration, as recognized by collective agreements. Management is a significant part of it, yet not the whole category. “Cadres” would be translated into English as “professional and managerial staff” (P&MS)<sup>4</sup>. The latter received an international definition from the International Labour Organization following the conference in 1977 and has been translated into an international standard classification of occupations in 1988 (ISCO-88).<sup>5</sup>

The titles of executive, key personnel, white-collar employee, manager, managing director, senior employee, knowledge worker and high-skilled in the Anglo-Saxon and German economies are sociologically and historically differentiated from P&MS (Mills 1951; Pross and Boetticher 1971; Barnard 1982; Boes and Trinks 2006; Kotthoff and Wagner 2008). In France the P&MS have their own universities, trade unions, labour offices, press and educational institutions. In the 1930s, this group was created as a social movement of the middle class, which was demarcated from the labour movement and sought a socio-political

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<sup>1</sup> Quebec office of French language [http://www.granddictionnaire.com/ficheOqlf.aspx?Id\\_Fiche=8350894](http://www.granddictionnaire.com/ficheOqlf.aspx?Id_Fiche=8350894).

Note : The definition of the term employee (salarié) in the Labour Code (Quebec) excludes “cadres”. In contrast, in the Labour Standards Act, “cadres” are considered as employees. However, senior managers are excluded from the application of this law, except for certain provisions.”

<sup>2</sup> [Insee - Nomenclatures - PCS 2003 - 3 - Cadres et professions intellectuelles supérieures.](http://www.insee.fr/fr/methodes/default.asp?page=nomenclatures/pcs2003/n1_3.htm)

[http://www.insee.fr/fr/methodes/default.asp?page=nomenclatures/pcs2003/n1\\_3.htm](http://www.insee.fr/fr/methodes/default.asp?page=nomenclatures/pcs2003/n1_3.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Source : Insee (2015). [http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg\\_id=0&ref\\_id=NATnon03173](http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=NATnon03173)

<sup>4</sup> Our sample of P&MS accounts for about 70 % of “managers”. In the total French population, only 49% of all female and 62% of all male P&MS can be considered as managers, source: DARES 2010. <http://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2010-082-2.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> ILO- <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco88/>

third way between capitalism and collectivism (Boltanski 1982). Following this interpretation, the unity of the P&MS is also historically understood as an actor that restored social order in France after the general strike and factory occupations of 1936. With military origins, the word "cadres" was therefore initially extended to all senior positions in the working world and afterwards to engineers as well. The latter had their own trade union movement and joined the P&MS in 1944, which permitted the founding of the Confédération Générale des Cadres (CGC). The CGC was a union of the middle class and it contributed greatly in the fifties and sixties to the establishment of the "cadres" at work (wage scales, statistical categories), to their unification and to enforce their social weight. Since the early eighties, the research on P&MS has pointed to their increasing diversity and differentiation (Groux 1983). From this time, French researchers have directed their attention to the basis of the social status of the P&MS. For some social scientists, this has resulted in the question of whether there is in fact a social group of cadres, or whether the term alone has survived with all its meanings even when reality indicates the end of a "social figure" (Bouffartigue 2001). For other researchers, the diversity of P&MS and their existence as a group remains a puzzle to be analysed via sociology (Gadéa 2003). The general conclusions stress its heterogeneity / fragmentation based on gender differences, generations, careers, relationship to work, lifestyle, cultural practices and political convictions (Bouffartigue, Gadéa, and Pochic 2011). However, little has been said about the boundaries of this socio-professional category. Neither has a precise definition of that fragmentation been elaborated. That will be the aim of our article. We would like to develop the idea of a multiplicity of P&MS worlds in France based on the experiences of employees themselves. After describing our research methods and our theoretical approach (1), we will present three different worlds coexisting within the socio-professional category (2). Finally, we will discuss the implications of this typology for further analysis.

## 1. Theory and methods

### 1.1 P&MS and the theory of social regulation

In the past, P&MS were considered a social elite largely protected from economic and job-related difficulties. But in the last decade, numerous studies indicate that working conditions have deteriorated. Increasing uncertainty in the employment situation and changing job content are weakening the self-confidence of P&MS (Cousin 2004). The European survey on P&MS's working time and workload made the situation quite clear, well before the global

economic crisis of 2008 (Eurocadres 2005): the requirement to work in various locations and more than 44 hours per week (on average, working time is 4,3 hours longer than that of other employees); between a third and a half of these employees are required to be reachable outside normal working time; between 73% and 95% consider their workload as very heavy or excessive; a large proportion receives no compensation for overtime and would prefer compensation in time off rather than money. Lack of recognition for professional achievement, stress and health problems are increasingly affecting everyday life (Salengro 2005). Uncertainties multiply in the face of rising unemployment and ubiquitous competition, especially for older P&MS who are being excluded from the labor market (Pichon 2008). The holding of key functions and personnel management are perceived as increasingly difficult, especially the supervision of employees in the context of changing management practices, stress and harassment (Mispelblom Beyer 2010). This leads some P&MS to end their careers early. The situation indicates a trend of P&MS opposing or rebelling against a system that no longer guarantees satisfactory living conditions (Courpasson and Thoenig 2008). The deterioration of working conditions could be seen here “negatively” as a common ground for the cohesion of P&MS. However, we will question this general evolution of the large socio-professional category we are dealing with.

In underlining the studies on the P&MS in France we want to deepen the general analysis, and intend to go beyond the thesis that the P&MS social category is heterogeneous. Our goal is to show that the differences and difficulties experienced by this group hint at different worlds, each with their own values and rules. Our point is to understand why and how these different worlds coexist as social systems of professional and private life. From our standpoint, the worlds of P&MS are non-functionalist social systems that come about through social regulations. This theory derives from industrial relations and applies to the analysis of social rules (Reynaud 1980, 1983). The term "social system" refers here to a minimal framework, where the “autonomous” regulation meets the “control” regulation. The main idea linked to P&MS is that different groups are defined by different rules and visions of work. In the theory of social regulation (De Terssac 2003a) the system does not define the “actors”, but is instead itself created by action, arrangements and collective bargaining between the actors themselves. The system refers to the worlds in which such common rules arise (Thoemmes 2011). Social domination, resistance and vulnerability would be seen more as a result rather than as a premise of social regulation. In this perspective the social "world" is not necessarily to be equated with certain companies or sectors. As we demonstrate later, since multiple

social worlds of the P&MS may exist in the same company, it must be assumed that different systems affect both social rules as well as the individual differences experienced in working life. Various rules exist for the P&MS from one work situation to another. Our main objective will be to identify such groups and to characterize them by the diversity of rules governing working lives and by the common vision each group shares about its professional situation. These objective and subjective rules will be observed in different areas: working conditions, such as working-time; income; employment security; work content; economic competition; health; but also private and family life, and collective bargaining. The basis of our analysis will be workplace-recorded discourse of P&MS<sup>6</sup>.

### *1.2 Statistical analysis of qualitative data*

We chose a hybrid method that utilizes extensive interviews and a statistical approach to typology (Ghiglione and Landré 1998). The first step was to select the composition of the group of 100 P&MS we interviewed for this research. These P&MS come from seven companies from different areas of the public and private sector; we would like to call these organizations "Insurance (private, I), Electronics (private, E), Telecommunications (private, T), City council (public, C), Air transportation (private, A), Social services (public, S) and Urban transport (private, U)<sup>7</sup>." To select employees, we took into account the diversity of functions, hierarchical positions and skills (linked to diploma and/or work experience). The largest proportion of P&MS was between 40 and 50 years old (48%), 58 men and 42 women. 62 people were reported married and 12 living with a partner without being married, 16 were divorced or separated and 6 single<sup>8</sup>. 86 had dependent children. 89 P&MS had at least one parent who was still living. The surveyed P&MS were graduates, mostly. Only 12 held no more than a high school degree. 70 people stated that as "managers" they were in charge of one or more employees, and 50 reported that they had completed at least one geographic move during their career. Participation in the interviews was voluntary. On average, 15 P&MS were interviewed from each company (insurance: 16, electronics: 15, telecommunications: 17, city council: 15, air transportation: 13, social services: 12, urban transport: 12). The choice of a particular company for investigation was made in discussion

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<sup>6</sup> The research has been financed between 2008-2011 by the French national agency of research (ANR) through its program: "Companies and forms of economic organization: issues and mutations". We thank Michel Escarboutel and Ryad Kanzari for participation in fieldwork and analysis.

<sup>7</sup> We will maintain strict confidentiality of corporate identity because it was a condition of access to fieldwork. Therefore, the number of employees, location and specific activities of each company may not be revealed.

<sup>8</sup> 4 persons did not answer this question.

with a trade union organization (CFDT).<sup>9</sup>The company management has accepted our approach in each of these cases. The purpose of the survey was to investigate the practices and values of P&MS on the basis of two main criteria: time and labour. To allow us to conduct semi-structured interviews (at least 90 minutes per person, recorded and fully transcribed), we designed a five-column grid (career and working hours, working space and social time, environmental and labour relations, working career and well-being) with a total of 26 topics, each of them the object of several questions. In addition, we identified the variables of the person's gender, age, education, marital status, and geographic mobility, and a potential management function. However, these objective variables could not be included in the statistical analysis of discourse.

This was followed by a textual analysis of the 600,000 words of the full transcript of the interviews. We analysed discourse (using the Tropes software) and used a correspondence analysis (SPAD), which together permitted us to delineate P&MS groups and areas. We therefore wrote a semantic scenario based on keywords used by our interviewees. The keywords were chosen on the basis of the frequency of their occurrence in the talks, and then united/tagged into a single variable.

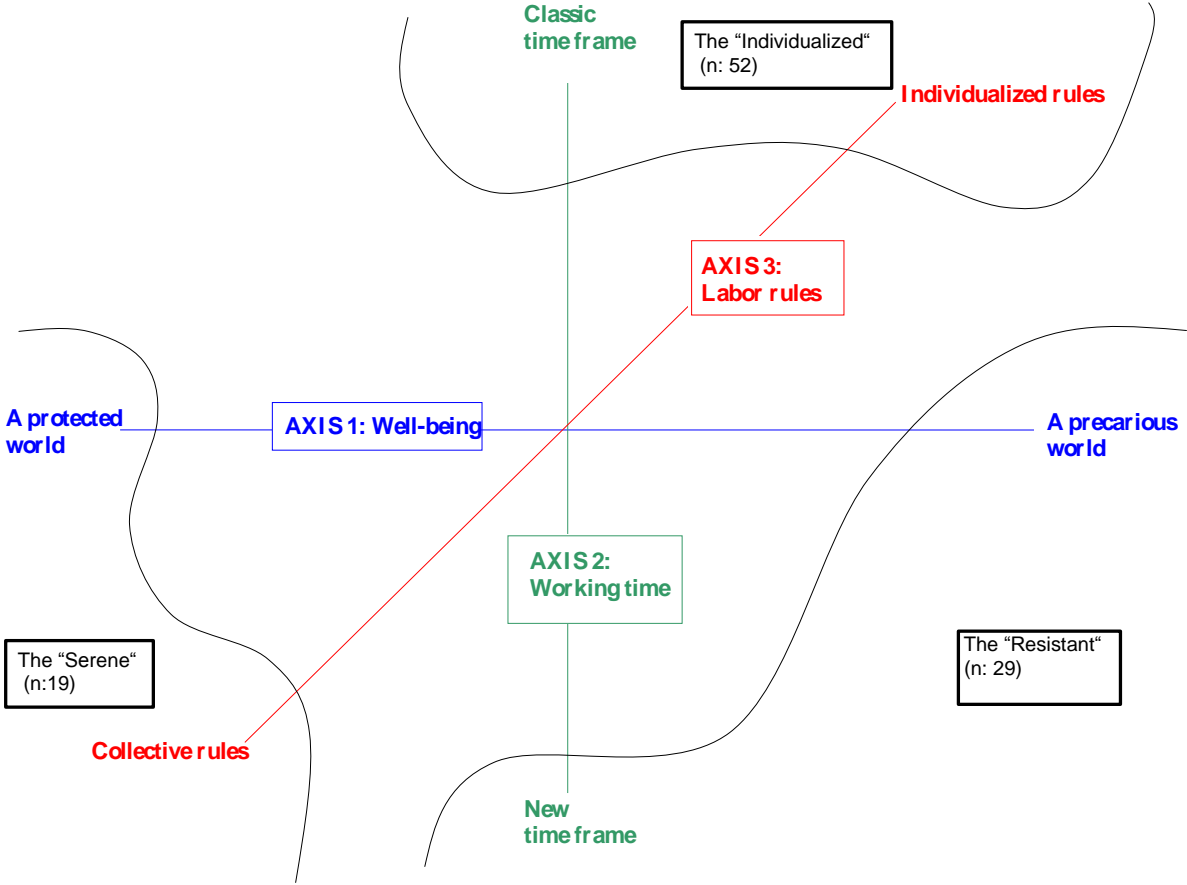
It is while reading the interview scripts that variables were decided upon, based on the frequency of keywords and potential associations among them. The objective was both to find a meaning common to different keywords, and to reduce the number of words by grouping keywords under a common variable. Each keyword used by our interviewees is exclusively linked to one variable. In a few cases, a keyword could have meant two different things and was accordingly changed into two distinct keywords. We then summarized the results of all the statistical analysis. We consequently obtained a set of three groups of points: one for each of the three factorial axes (76 variables and 100 individuals). The rules for determining the best represented individuals, variables and their ranking (Table 1) rely on a set of three coefficients which are: a) the absolute value of the coordinates of the points (each point exclusively representing a variable or an individual), b) the value of the contribution of the point to the construction of the axes and, c) the quality of the representation of points on the axis, which is measured by the cosine value.

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<sup>9</sup>Confédération française démocratique du travail.

The correspondence analysis led us to identify three axes: axis 1 representing the employee’s “well-being” distinguishes two major oppositions (protected world - precarious world); axis 2 representing “working time” opposes P&MS’s classic and new time frame; axis 3 representing “labor rules” differentiates between individualized and collective rules. The sociological interpretation based on variables and individuals leads to three types of P&MS (individualized, serene, resistant)<sup>10</sup>.

Figure 1. Three axes of correspondence analysis and the types of P&MS



<sup>10</sup> The total inertia in terms of the Pearson chi-square statistic is 32.65% (Axis 1: 12.55%, axis 2: 11.71%, axis 3: 8.38%). All concepts will be examined later in the paper.



This approach, based on the position of variables and individuals in the three-dimensional space (Figure 1), allows a return to the sections of the interviews. After identifying a particular variable in Figure 1 we looked for the underlying keywords in the interview scripts in order to check the meaning of entire sentences and paragraphs pronounced by the individuals. These sentences and paragraphs are presented in the course of the article as interview excerpts and are related exclusively to the variables of the correspondence analysis. Therefore, each excerpt contains the following information: personal information; company identification and number of interviewed employees (T15); the variable selected in the correspondence analysis (in brackets, table 1); and the key words of our interlocutor (in bold type). This information makes it possible to provide our interpretation of the correspondence analysis and to submit it for discussion. The following table (1) gives an overview about the groups of variables and individuals leading us to the development of the three axes. As said, being in the same group is linked to the value of the coordinates (variables and individuals), the quality of the representation and the importance of the contribution to the three axes (Fig.1). Consequently, we have associated variables and individuals, differentiating three groups of P&MS: the serene, the individualized and the resistant. By indicating the number of P&MS for each group we have also classified the variables characterising each group. The position of each variable in the table reflects the importance for the group.

**Table 1, Three Worlds of professional and managerial staff (title, number of employees, discourse variables sorted by importance)**

<b>The „Serene“ (19)</b>
<b>Company: Urban Transport</b>
<b>Company: City Council</b>
<b>Civil servant status</b>
<b>Top management</b>
<b>Organization</b>
<b>Law and work rules</b>
<b>Scheduling of working</b>
<b>Unions and staff representatives</b>
<b>Closing hours (late)</b>
<b>Hours of work: 35 hours per week</b>
<b>Human Resources</b>
<b>Evaluation interview</b>
<b>Negotiations and agreements</b>
<b>Skills and education</b>
<b>Private life</b>

<b>The “Resistant “(29)</b>
<b>Company: Social Services</b>
<b>Non-P&amp;MS</b>
<b>Company: Insurance</b>
<b>Overtime</b>
<b>Colleague</b>
<b>Personnel management</b>
<b>Measurement of working time</b>
<b>Collective work</b>
<b>Absence due to illness</b>
<b>High travel time to work</b>
<b>Origin of negative stress</b>
<b>Annual leave</b>
<b>Family (core)</b>
<b>Weekly working time: 37 -39 hours</b>
<b>Negative stress related to time</b>
<b>Positive behaviour</b>
<b>Arrival: between 8 and 10 clock</b>
<b>Quality of life</b>
<b>Leisure time</b>
<b>Time Management</b>
<b>Stress and manifestations</b>
<b>Favourable working conditions</b>

<b>The „Individualized“(52)</b>
<b>Company: Electronics</b>
<b>Company: Air Transportation</b>
<b>Business (in general)</b>
<b>Company: Telecommunications</b>
<b>Economic and market</b>
<b>Motivation and commitment</b>
<b>Engineer</b>
<b>Part-time</b>
<b>Occupational mobility</b>
<b>Contacts and business travel</b>
<b>Lay-offs and Employment</b>
<b>Non-civil servant status</b>
<b>Individual work and achievements</b>
<b>Arrival in the morning (early)</b>
<b>Communication</b>
<b>Computer science</b>
<b>Technicians</b>
<b>Holiday, working time account</b>
<b>Income</b>
<b>Measurement of working time in days</b>
<b>Positive stress</b>
<b>Number of employees</b>
<b>Environment</b>
<b>Career</b>
<b>Daily working hours: from 1 to 8 hours</b>
<b>Professional work at home</b>
<b>Meeting</b>
<b>Breaks and lunch</b>
<b>Lower P&amp;MS</b>
<b>Email and phone</b>
<b>Weekly working time: more than 50 hours</b>
<b>Daily working time: more than 8 hours</b>
<b>Leave and working time reduction</b>
<b>Extended family</b>
<b>Professional life</b>

## **2. Three worlds for professional and managerial staff**

This method allows us to answer the question of how do P&MS assess their living and working conditions in the context of rules and values. As a result, we can distinguish between three worlds. As explained above, these worlds are differentiated both by the number of P&MS and by the variables for each group. They point to the existence of very different rules governing each social system.

### *2.1 The "serene"*

The claim that the P&MS are “happy” at work runs rather against the current of recent sociological literature, even if this is quite frequently mentioned in opinion polls<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, the results of a sociological research study with 6,000 employees show that in general, the work still offers more reasons for satisfaction than dissatisfaction. The higher one rises on the social scale, the more "happiness" at work increases: 70% of P&MS are satisfied with their work situation (Baudelot and Gollac 2003). Even if we replace the term "happiness" with that of "serenity", this attitude corresponds quite well to the first group of P&MS revealed by our correspondence analysis. The main companies related to this group are the city council (C) and a private urban transport company (U). First, these P&MS have a working week of 35 hours that neither includes nor measures existing overtime. They are comfortable with their performance evaluation in individual discussions with their supervisors. These employees benefit from training and education initiatives that boost their career. They believe themselves to live in a protected world. The strong emphasis laid on the fundamental role of collective bargaining and negotiated rules characterizes the organization of the work. The connection between a protected professional and personal life, and negotiated work rules is very significant here.

*A protected World.* The first dimension in the world of “serene” P&MS is that of a protected space in which the employees receive a series of guarantees that allows him / her to practice professional life under "peaceful" conditions. Working hours are not a problem, even if they occasionally exceed the specified working hours in the week. The possibility of access to skills and training, job security and the existence of periodic evaluations enable such employees to feel secure in their position.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, in spring 2010 a large majority of P&MS said they were “happy at work” (87 %), Baromètre des Cadres, ViaVoice.

"The management of the city undergoes no formal overtime, because there is a flat-rate benefit system that includes all overtime beyond **35 hours**,<sup>12</sup> which I consider as normal." (C15, Hours of work: 35 hours per week)<sup>13</sup>: *Male, 31 to 35 years, divorced or separated, 1 child.*

Working hours are not considered as problematic, and a positive attitude in relation to the evaluation of their work shows that these P&MS feel secure. The archetype of this protected world in our research seems to be located in the realm of public service. For example, about half (8/15) of the officers of a town hall in southwest France live in a world of protection and wellbeing. But the other half of these public officials (7/15) is not "serene." They belong to the group of the "individualized", which we will introduce later. For us, this is an indication that at least two social worlds coexist within a single organization. Social regulations, conventions and forms of coordination are not only based on objectified rules, but also on variables of subjective work experiences, as Table 1 clearly shows. These discourses show that at least a portion of the P&MS feel they are protected from the dangers of slipping into unemployment or diminished status.

"Compared to the private sector, labour is not as well paid here at City Hall, but we have **job protection** and they cannot show us the door." C10 (Civil servant status): *Male, 36 to 40 years, unmarried couple, and no children.*

These "serene" employees move in an environment where access to employment is regulated through a public competition (entrance examinations). The employees also pay special attention to the relationship with their superiors, which they want to be "positive". This aspect is demonstrated by the fact that professional relationships are based on an informal familial mode. Of course it may seem problematic to some P&MS that the concept of hierarchy should be subordinated to personal relationships. Yet, despite this risk, these employees enjoy a positive working environment, built up over a long period of time, and which allows them to consider their future career with "serenity".

*Collective rules.* The other aspect of the serenity enjoyed by the first group of P&MS is grounded in social rules that apply to their work. Rules are seen as resulting from the

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<sup>12</sup> Keyword (as explained above)

<sup>13</sup> Variable (combination of several keywords, see Tab.1)

collaborative work of a community. Incidentally, it goes both ways, and the very existence of this community also materializes through this common rule (De Terssac 2003b). The plurality of worlds of P&MS would translate into several ideas of effective rules. In their discourses on rules, the "serene" P&MS stick to collectively negotiated agreements with the employer, or to the Labour Code (law). These collective rules are opposed to face-to-face negotiations on working conditions. This can be seen in the case of an urban transport company in a large French city: trade unions and collective agreements constitute the core elements of a clearly defined and regulated working life.

"I think that in our company we have today a good **compromise** between working conditions and compensation." U10 (Negotiations and agreements): *male, 41-45 years old, married, 3 children.*

Collective agreements are understood here as being rules that protect these employees. Business planning and work organization are part of this world in the hands of the negotiating groups. Conflicts and compromises are the processes that determine the working activities. Although voices critical of the functioning of the social dialogue are sometimes heard, it is clear how much this dialogue contributes to the structure of this work (Thoemmes 2013). The term "service to the public" dominates the discourse and gives meaning to the work activity, as the recurrence of these variables in the correspondence analysis underscores (Table 1). This particular P&MS world largely ignores the increasing difficulties that we have preliminarily discussed. The "serene" have a professional environment that is "familiar and friendly." They can work and conceive the future in the best light. Various forms of solidarity and companionship shelter the person in his/her work. These are clearly missing from the second world of the P&MS.

## *2.2 The "individualized"*

Individualism and / or individualization seem to be either features or social processes of modern societies (Beck 1992; Bauman 2001). The question of identity plays a central role in this process (Dubar 2000) and the view that any society produces given types of individuals is widely discussed (Lallement 2007). The individualization of P&MS is primarily a historical characteristic of this group. Presumably, this is due to the special position of the P&MS between the employer and workers in non-managerial positions. It is also, however, the result of the individual efforts of in-house P&MS. These employees have gained their status not by

diploma, but they have been recruited as low-level employees and in-house career advancement have made them P&MS. The efforts to achieve such status go hand in hand with important sacrifices made in their private lives (Boltanski 1982). Individualization is, in this case, the result of an increase in competition and the valorization of individual skills and performance; it is also a result of merit systems and individual rewards. The second P&MS type in our research seems to largely accept this "individualistic" attitude: it is neither criticized nor praised. For these P&MS, individualism seems "natural" in the framework of an economy that encourages individual commitment and competition.

The language used by these employees is infused with references to the products, the market and their company, especially in electronic (E), air transportation (A) and telecom companies (T). Here, the individual is the acting subject and the recipient of rules. Individual work and performance, and all aspects that will relate to professional life are discussed: career, time spent on various activities, "positive" stress, pay and free time. In this group, the reference to the private sector is very strong. The discourses on labour mobility and employment are dominant. But this individualization is also accompanied by significant constraints on the individual's professional future: forced mobility, problematic experiences with part-time work leading to marginalization from full time staff, downsizing, restructuring, and threats related to employment.

*The classic working time regime of the individualized.* The world of "individualized" employees is as homogeneous in relation to social rules as that of their "serene" counterparts. This traditional model of the P&MS distinguishes itself by different rules. The working time is measured in the number of days per year, so that a considerable amount of time autonomy is created for the individual. However, this autonomy is often characterized by particularly long working hours (more than 50 hours per week). In this group, we find not only, for example, engineers, technical managers, computer specialists, but also technicians and employees without managerial functions. The "individualized" employees live in a world of personal commitment and availability, which brings long daily working hours with it.

"I'm usually in at **7:00** or **7:30 o'clock** in the morning and look through my e-mails when I have not seen to it the day before. Then it will depend on whether we are in the first week of the month and have reporting. In this case and in general, there is a sandwich for lunch. In the evenings I leave work at 8 pm. " E11 (Arrival in the morning: early) *Female, 46-50 years old, married, 2 children.*

In this world, modern management approaches are currently practiced focusing on autonomy, which means also being available for customers and frequent overtime (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Mayer-Ahuja and Wolf 2007). These employees are in a competitive situation and in an ongoing relationship with the customer. They praise the products and services of their company.

"But today we are increasingly in **competition** with other companies and our customers make this very clear to us." E1 (Economic and Market): *Male, 36-40 years old, single, no children.*

The question of motivation and personal commitment, as well as travel and external contacts important for the performing of their duties, are often mentioned by the "individualized". These P&MS do not hesitate to put family relationships and recreational activities on the backburner for the benefit of their professional life. Of all social activities, work occupies first place.

"**My work** comes first, and I'm not made for anything else. I love my job, even at the expense of my personal time." A1 (Motivation and commitment): *Female, 46 to 50 years, divorced or separated, 1 child.*

References relating to computer specialists and technical personnel, as well as professional work at home, completes the picture of a world which coincides entirely with the stereotype of P&MS and especially engineers (Kunda 2006). They are experts in their field, stimulated by their company and its products, and in professional exchanges with colleagues outside the company, they do not hesitate to dedicate themselves to professional responsibilities at the expense of their private life. The values of limitless work and performance are prioritized in these discourses (Peticca-Harris, Weststar, and McKenna 2015). It is not surprising that this type of employee carries out his/her daily activities in adherence to entirely different rules. From the working time regime to other social activities, the individual is encouraged to be the principle regulator of his/her own daily routine.

*Individualized rules.* "Individualized" employees describe a worldview in which the person is the acting subject. The P&MS are responsible for their own career path. They regret the time that they "waste" in meetings, in the processing of correspondence or email. They are subject to a constant evaluation of their work and their individual performance, and have ambitious plans for their career, even if their rise hurts others.

"I know what I need to do to get promoted, which among the P&MS sometimes means stepping on your neighbour's toes." T6 (Career): *Male, 36-40 years old, married with 4 children.*

The individualized employee is a "self-made person," and therefore subject to the risk of being left unprotected when economic problems occur. The flip side of this situation thus seems clear. The P&MS remain alone with their problems, mainly in connection with employment, and they can only rely on their own skills to solve them or to renegotiate a difficult work situation. Reflection on the threat of dismissal or on the general employment situation in the company is experienced in an individual and subjective manner. One would have thought the issue of restructuring and dismissal would be addressed by the correspondence analysis in the previously mentioned collective rules, negotiations and agreements. But this is not the case: the P&MS regard these threats as directed against themselves as individuals. The possibility of seeking collective solutions for these problems is not envisaged. The unions seem to play no role here.

"The other problem is that there is a difficult **employment situation** in the telecommunications sector, so that people are seeing store closures and restructuring every six months. They are alone and pay no attention to the others. They want to save their own skin. I do not know what to do." T10 (Layoffs and Employment): *Female, 41 to 45 years old, married, 2 children.*

The individualization of the P&MS refers to a conception of the rule as being neither the result of a collective action nor of negotiations between representative organizations. This can be seen as a result of the lack of industrial relations (Reynaud 1997). Individualization here is a value shared by the community of P&MS and thus also a common principle. The traditional rule, for example, that the P&MS do not measure their working hours still prevails here. The value of "work" remains strong. The internal and external competition for a promotion, a customer or a market is elemental in the structure of the discourse. Regarding the employment situation, individualization leads to isolation. The P&MS are in this sense destitute, because they can hardly influence the course of events without any collective protection. Given these weaknesses of individualization, a number of P&MS have decided, "to stop playing the game" and to go beyond the traditional borders of the P&MS.



### *2.3 The P&MS in resistance*

The view that P&MS can defy their working conditions is not new. First, fundamental research has shown that the movement of white-collar employees emerged in the 1930s in order to express an opposition to both capitalism and collectivism (Mills 1951; Boltanski 1982). The proposal for a third way concerning the middle class was, in France, a contributing factor in the invention of the social category of P&MS. Recent studies show a new tendency for this kind of criticism, indicating that more and more managers are in a state of rebellion, with a variety of forms of opposition ranging from withdrawal and resignation to ordinary protest and collective mobilization. There are also diverse reasons leading to rebellion (Courpasson and Thoenig 2008): management approaches defining unrealistic performance targets, dilution of identity in international companies, dissolution of hierarchies, negation of privacy and non-recognition of professional accomplishments by the company.

What are the contours of this opposition in our case studies? Against whom or against what is it intended? In order to explain our results, we use the term 'resistance' to describe the existence of an opposition against a system. This resistance is based on objective and subjective rules expressed in the interviews.

The world of the resisting P&MS (29 out of 100 people) is found in companies related to social security (S) and insurance (I), giving these employees the same working-time regime as non- P&MS. In this environment, we also find employees who are struggling with difficult working conditions. On the one hand, this group demands the accurate accounting of hours worked. The resisting P&MS decry unpaid overtime and criticize high travel time to work. Their world is characterized by strong internal solidarity, which fosters horizontal cooperation and collective and cooperative behaviour, while great importance is attached to the family. On the other hand, this group seems particularly susceptible to various kinds of psychological and physiological stress: unrealistic time constraints and technical constraints which are very difficult to implement, often leading to problematic relationships with superiors or colleagues, as well as difficult relationships with subordinates, and stress in the private life.

*The professional difficulties of the resisting P&MS.* These employees are striving to achieve a certain standard of living and working conditions, not least as a way to overcome the negative

effects of daily work. Their resistance is directed against a system that both demands the devotion of their lives to work, with more than 50 hours put in per week, as well as strong competition amongst P&MS for winning internal promotion. In particular, reports of "stress" at work are numerous. In our approach, we are not starting from a predetermined definition of "stress". In the interviews, we asked whether this term had meaning for the employees. Based on these observations, we then distinguished in the correspondence analysis between positive and negative stress, and between the origins and the manifestations of stress. For example, in the context of our question about the existence of stress, the response including the keyword "deadline" refers systematically to unease (negative stress related to time, table 1). Of course deadlines are quite widespread, but only negatively impacted P&MS mention them in relation to stress.

"Yes, I have to consider a lot of **deadlines**. We have sophisticated and precisely quantified targets for March and December. "S8 (Negative stress related to time): *female, 51-55 years, single, no children*.

"But the **stress** hits me also physically. I feel a pressure in my chest." S9 (Stress and manifestations): *Male 41 to 45 years, divorced or separated, no children*.

A particular problem arises when the resisting individual has other employees under his responsibility. This responsibility can be problematic when personal relationships suffer because of the hierarchy gap, when the pressure that has to be exerted in terms of performance objectives affects interpersonal relations and relationships with customers, and finally, when competence problems occur. The interviews show that employees in middle management are particularly vulnerable. It is therefore not surprising that the presence of managers with supervisory functions should be particularly significant in this group. Individualized and serene P&MS seem to be less concerned by this problem not only because management activities are less widespread, but while existing, constraints seem less important, individual professional skills are recognized and horizontal relations prevail over hierarchical relations.

Leading a group of employees is indeed perceived here as a heavy workload, and the lack of appropriate strategies is criticized. Our research indeed confirms the results of other studies highlighting the difficulties of daily management activities: overwork, and limited autonomy as regards decision making (Bolduc and Baril-Gingras 2010; Mispelblom Beyer 2010). The pressure stemming from their intermediate position differentiates them from other P&MS.

Our discussions revealed that management activities were often perceived as a source of stress, while at the same time, an activity little recognized by upper management.

*A new working time regime for the resisting P&MS.* Stress accompanies the working lives of these employees. These P&MS in resistance hint at a new way to experience work, namely, with new rules that treat the P&MS as any other employee. Time autonomy, including the ability to organize one's own working hours at the discretion of tasks, regardless of hierarchical control, does not characterise this group. In contrast to the other two groups (serene and individualized), the time-management approach for resisting P&MS is defined by a strict time regime. It refers to the 1998 law in France where P&MS are distinguished by time measurement: whereas individualized and serene are largely submitted to the count of work days in a year without a strict reference to hours, the resistant count each hour of his/her work. For this reason, the individualized frequently experiences long working hours as shown by the variable "working longer than 50 hours" a week (table 1). That is definitely not the case for the resistant.

But these rules are not exempt from potential abuse: for example, some P&MS stamp their card in the time recording machine at the end of the working day, but then return to their desks in order to perform tasks considered as "urgent". A part of the employee's working time is thus made invisible, not being recorded on timesheets. These practices are both sometimes tacitly tolerated or penalised by the management. In the latter case, it turns out that the exact recording of working time is of high importance.

"We have a **time clock**, in the morning we **clock in** on arriving. We **clock out** when we go to lunch or leave the premises, we **clock in** again after lunch and in the evening. And for smokers, we **clock out** the time we go outside to smoke. That's new. But some do not. We can also **record** the time on the **computer**." I6 (Measurement of working time in hours): *Female, 31 to 35, divorced or separated, 2 children.*

In our discussions with these managers, we often heard mention of the refusal of "too much" work. The term "too much" indicates a clear break with the traditional perception of the P&MS. In contrast, the resisting P&MS count the working hours like non-managerial employees. Modern time and attendance systems allow working hours to be measured accurately. Mention of the existence of « invisible work » recur frequently. The reference to unpaid overtime and hours that "disappear" from the meter confirms this interpretation. In

addition, we frequently observe that many of these managers no longer feel devoted to their work.

"To be honest, **37 hours and 30 minutes** is too much, I am bored, that's too long."I4 (Weekly working time 37 to 39 hours): *Male, 46 to 50 years, married, one child.*

This group follows a common rule: working time is strictly organised and measured in hours and minutes. Resistance is made obvious by the general recognition of the legitimacy of this working-time rule. This time regime openly contradicts the traditional picture of the P&MS. The objective and subjective conditions of work go against the traditional representation, since it consists of little autonomy and motivation, together with a labour input that is measured and limited. Just as for the working class, -technicians and professionals included- (Touraine 1964), a strong internal solidarity is characteristic of this group. Being considered as low-level P&MS, these employees experience objective rules in a form of internal cohesion and values linked to mutual aid. These P&MS place great emphasis on the "positive behaviour" of employees in general. Collegial behaviour and cohesion are keys to this discourse. In opposition to the individualized, who are not embedded into collective action, the resistant extend this value to the outside, to the family (keywords: spouse and children), and its importance to daily life and work-life balance (Tremblay 2008). Interpersonal relations are more important than individual work performance. For that reason, a collaborative attitude in the workplace and a strong attachment to the family are key variables of this discourse.

"I'm always there for my team. I'm always **listening**, and my door is always open."I11 (Positive behaviour): *female, 56-60 years old, married, 2 children.*

"If I had the choice (between work and family), I would always choose **family**."I2 (Family: core): *Male, 51-55 years old, married, 2 children.*

This group of P&MS sees a levelling of social differences with non-P&MS. Work is not appreciated because of its content, but because of the social relationships provided by the workplace. In this sense, resistance is not individual or uncontrolled. It means the rejection of an employee's world in which one invests boundless time and effort even at the expense of a private life. It indicates a common project against the top management that favours individual performance and the deprioritization of an employee's private life in favour of professional activities.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

Different types of social rules govern the three worlds of P&MS. These rules can be considered as the result of social regulation (Reynaud 1983) between each of the three figures of P&MS and the top-management of the company. Differences appear in the way work is conceived, and in the role of collective bargaining within each of these social systems. Objective work conditions and subjective perceptions of working lives go hand in hand. Our discourse and correspondence analysis allow us to describe these P&MS types.

"Serene" employees perceive their professional life as being free of major problems. Their career trajectory goes up, leading to senior positions in the organization. Training opportunities are used and personal assessment by supervisors is seen as a favourable orientation. This world is stabilized by law or by collectively negotiated agreements. The reference to "service to the public" characterizing a city council and private transportation company, together with a strong guarantee of employment, make it easier to ignore existing wage differentials with other private companies. This type of P&MS is characterised by autonomy and by concern for the common good, which are the basis of their beliefs.

The second case refers to the "individualized" employee, as it corresponds to existing stereotypes and prejudices. This P&MS figure is a "self-made person". They consider themselves responsible for their own success and to be the architects of their careers. They dedicate countless hours of service, arriving early in the morning and going home late in the evening. They prioritize work over family. They aim to be active in highly competitive markets. Individual accomplishment is their starting point. Their world is characterized by the technical complexity of products, of which they are experts. These P&MS have everything needed to be "happy", except that work leaves them very little time for their private lives. In addition, these employees fear threats to job security and to their career. In this second case, union action is missing and collective bargaining out of reach.

The third case describes resistance to the traditional P&MS world. Since 1998, the working time of these employees has been, measured strictly in hours and minutes, and in accordance with the standards applicable to non-P&MS. Unpaid overtime is refused. This strict regulation of working time is nevertheless accompanied by a considerable workload. Deadlines are difficult to respect. Manifestations of stress, heavy responsibilities in personnel management lead the resisting employee to a negative view of work. This negative attitude is linked to the working conditions and to the work itself, but it is compensated for by a positive view of

colleagues and friendly horizontal relationships. The importance of sociability in and outside of work compensates for the loss of the traditional prestige of these P&MS.

These different examples of P&MS show that each world has its own social system limited to a variety of actions, rules and values that differ across the studied areas: working time regimes, division between private life and professional life, and the position of individuals and groups in the workplace. Further research could pay attention to how these three worlds match with social stratification of P&MS (Goldthorpe et al. 1969). The group of the resisting P&MS suffers mainly from stress and its subsequent manifestations, which could lead to a demotion to the lower rank of non-P&MS. However, this portion of the workforce is, according to our results, also entrusted with essential management tasks. So this is not only an issue of class or of the levelling of living conditions, but is also linked to the specific context of the supervision of other employees. In addition, we observe the problem of the weakening protective status of the P&MS as lower-skilled employees can perform more and more of their tasks. The other two worlds of P&MS (serene and individualized) comprise the majority of the interviewees. For them, the professional way is always up, never down. In their discourses, a levelling of living conditions between P&MS and non-P&MS will not take place. These individuals assert their (perceived) independence and neither want to be confused with the non-P&MS, nor share their working conditions. Interestingly, no fundamental (bourdieusien) class struggle<sup>14</sup> between management staff and professionals (Noordegraaf and Schinkel 2011) is reflected in our research typology. This argument could lead to the assumption that these two main components of the social category of P&MS do not represent potential breaklines.

Further research into the three worlds could tackle the mostly "gender-blind" discourses of P&MS. This does not mean that gender differences do not exist, but only that our interlocutors assess them as non-decisive. The women, who make up 42% of the interviewed P&MS, do not see themselves as different or as disadvantaged in their professional lives. Neither the reconciliation of professional with private life, nor the possibility of a professional career is distinguished in male and female discourses. Although our study did not validate this approach, we can in our research qualitatively maintain the hypothesis of a gendered world, to the extent that the composition of the various groups of high-skilled individuals differ greatly

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<sup>14</sup> In Bourdieu's theory classes and class fractions are explained by the combination of social, economic, and cultural capital of their members (Bourdieu 1986).

one from the other. While the "serene" have relatively few women (6 of 19) and the same can be noted in the "individualized", (18 of 52), they are strongly represented in the resisting group (18 of 29). Although the small number of total interviewees (100) and the choice of interlocutors call for caution here, the hypothesis of an overrepresentation of women in the world of resistance is an exciting prospect for the future. The often-noted gender differential of higher professions could be reintroduced into the analysis (Crompton and Feuvre 1996). Future research could clarify this, and refine the analysis of the three worlds through a systematic integration of the discourse analysis and objective variables. Here the indication of the exact position of the P&MS in professional and social space, as well as what their characteristics are (age, gender, education, type of work, career), would be suitable for a methodological comparison.

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