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The Micro-politics of Collective Bargaining: The Case of Gender Equality

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3 **The Micro-politics of Collective Bargaining: The Case of Gender**
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6 **Equality**
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39 **Abstract:**

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42 What are the drivers of collective bargaining to achieve gender equality in companies?
43
44 Although much research has been done on this question, answers tend to focus exclusively on
45
46 the institutional perspective and to neglect the social and power relations at work. We address
47
48 this deficiency in this article by taking a micro-political perspective. We trace the trajectory
49
50 of a collectively bargained gender equality policy in a French company over 14 years and
51
52 examine how management and unions contribute to the process. Our results show that the
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54 construction of a coalition between management and unions around gender equality, as well
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56 as the form taken by the bargained policy, are closely linked to the capabilities that these
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3 actors possess and mobilise. This study contributes to the understanding of gender equality
4 bargaining and, more generally, to the micro-politics of collective bargaining. In doing so, it
5
6 aims to connect organisation studies and industrial relations.
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9
10 Keywords: gender equality, collective bargaining, micro-politics, Trade unions, Qualitative
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12

13 14 15 **Introduction**

16
17 The limitations of unilateral managerial decision-making and legal requirements have led
18
19 collective bargaining to be widely considered as an effective means of advancing gender
20
21 equality in companies and the notion of "gender equality bargaining" has become a research
22
23 topic in its own right (Williamson and Baird, 2014). Collective bargaining has the dual
24
25 advantage of constraining reluctant employers while addressing the specific contexts within
26
27 which inequalities occur. However, it soon became clear that bargaining did not
28
29 automatically achieve the desired progress in gender equality and that it was important to
30
31 study the conditions under which it occurs (Colling and Dickens, 1998). Following traditional
32
33 industrial relations research, academic literature tends to focus on the institutional conditions
34
35 of collective bargaining such as: the link between litigation and collective bargaining; the
36
37 strength of the collective bargaining systems; and the commitment of institutional actors,
38
39 particularly trade unions (Heery, 2006). Research on gender equality from the perspective of
40
41 human relations or organisation studies has tended to focus on social and power relations at
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43 work (Acker, 2006; Benschop, 2009) but has largely neglected the issue of gender equality
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45 bargaining. As a result, despite the growing interest in the concept of gender equality
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47 bargaining, little is known about the non-institutional processes.
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53 In this article, we use a longitudinal case study of a large French IT company to examine the
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55 dynamics of a bargained gender equality policy. Drawing on the micro-political analysis, we
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57 show that the bargained gender equality policy is shaped by the social and power relations in
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3 the company. The micro-political arrangement between the gender equality department and
4 the trade unions emerged gradually, through an adaptive process during which opportunities
5 came to light as actors engaged and mobilised their capabilities (Lévesque and Murray,
6 2013).
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11
12 The two main objectives of this article are, first, to report on the processual nature of a
13 bargained gender equality policy and second, to analyse the links between micro-politics and
14 the evolution of this negotiated policy. While previous research has sought to measure
15 substantive effects, in terms of new rights or the reduction of inequalities between men and
16 women (Deakin et al, 2015; Milner et al, 2019), we focus here on procedural outcomes such
17 as the evolution of the definition of gender equality underpinning the collective agreements,
18 the evolution of indicators and other monitoring mechanisms, and the evolution of the
19 mobilisation mechanisms defined in the company agreements. This does not mean that
20 measurable advances are unimportant, but we feel it is useful to open the box and describe
21 the sub-processes of collective bargaining so as to understand the dynamics.
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35 This article contributes to the research on gender equality in the workplace, and more
36 specifically, on gender equality bargaining. By highlighting the importance of power
37 relations at the micro level, it offers a new perspective on equality bargaining, a prominent
38 regulatory tool, and contributes to the understanding of the micro-politics of collective
39 bargaining. As this subject remains central in the study of industrial relations, but is little
40 studied in the area of human relations, we hope to contribute to the dialogue between these
41 two strands.
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51 The article is organised as follows. First, we review hopes for and doubts about the regulatory
52 potential of gender equality bargaining. We then propose a conceptual framework based on
53 the micro-politic perspective in employment relations, and present the methodology used and
54 the findings. By way of conclusion, we discuss the main contributions of this article to the
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3 study of gender equality and collective bargaining and suggest perspectives for future
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5 research.
6

7 **Hopes for and doubts about gender equality bargaining**

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9
10 The idea that collective bargaining is a good way to promote gender equality in the
11
12 workplace has gained ground in the last two decades among policy-makers, notably under the
13
14 influence of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Blackett and Sheppard, 2003; ILO,
15
16 2009) which has regularly published working papers in support of this vision (e.g., Briskin
17
18 and Muller, 2011; Weiler, 2013, etc.). At the academic level, this question has been raised in
19
20 the seminal works of Colling and Dickens (1989; 1998), Dickens (2000), and Heery (2006).
21
22 In a review, Williamson and Baird (2014) clearly show how these works have contributed to
23
24 forging the notion of "gender equality bargaining" and to the emergence of a field of research
25
26 in its own right. According to Dickens (2000), collective bargaining enables companies to go
27
28 beyond the confines of legal requirements and produce acceptable and workable initiatives.
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31
32 Barrientos, Bianchi and Berman (2019) similarly argue that unilateral private governance
33
34 mechanisms (e.g., codes of conduct, social auditing) have failed to advance gender equality
35
36 in the workplace and that "*trade unions and civil society organisations can highlight rights*
37
38 *abuses experienced by women workers and support them in accessing remedy; challenge the*
39
40 *business models of multinational companies that pressure suppliers and reinforce precarious*
41
42 *work and gender discrimination*" (Barrientos et al., 2019, p.732). Collective bargaining is
43
44 presumed to lead to more effective gender equality policies than purely managerial initiatives
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46 by giving workers a more active role and by counteracting any reluctance that may emerge
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48 during implementation.
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52 A field of research has thus emerged that demonstrates the beneficial effects of collective
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54 bargaining on gender equality with a particular focus on three essential institutional
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56 conditions. In their 1998 article, Colling and Dickens posit that one of these conditions is
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3 state regulation as its absence weakens the power of trade union representatives and,
4 consequently, the initiatives launched under the agreement. Subsequent research studies have
5 examined the institutional arrangements that support collective bargaining (e.g. Milner and
6 Gregory, 2014; Milner et al., 2019). The works of Deakin et al. (2015) and Guillaume
7 (2015), published in a special issue of the Cambridge Journal of Economics, explore a second
8 institutional condition for gender equality bargaining whereby trade unionists consider
9 litigation and collective bargaining as complementary tools. The third condition relates to the
10 level of commitment of institutional actors, especially trade unions, to gender equality. Here,
11 union democracy and governance are considered to be critical aspects in gender equality
12 bargaining (Healy and Kirton, 2000). Because union ideology has historically retained the
13 notion of the "male breadwinner" (Williamson and Baird, 2014), reforming union ideologies
14 and structures is a challenge, for example, when gender quotas are introduced, as in the
15 German union *ver.di* (Kirsch and Blaschke, 2014) or when an equality officer function is
16 created (Kirton and Greene, 2006; Bacon and Hoque, 2012). This brief overview of the
17 literature shows that the research on gender equality bargaining, which is largely embedded
18 in industrial relations, is dominated by the institutional approach. Empirical and theoretical
19 analyses aim to identify the institutional rules that need to be adopted for gender equality
20 bargaining to be effective.

21
22 The seven preconditions identified by Pillinger and Wintour (2019) contribute to this
23 understanding and focus on institutional structures, whether public or internal to trade unions.
24 It is interesting to note, however, that the success stories analysed by the authors highlight the
25 importance of actors' strategies, and their creativity, in overcoming the obstacles to gender
26 equality. There is good reason to believe that a strictly institutional approach is insufficient
27 and that the micro-political dimension of these negotiations needs to be studied. For example,
28 in their study of the role of trade unions in gender equality policies, Milner *et al.* (2019)
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3 observe that while trade unions are generally little involved in defining the content of gender
4 equality policies, they have a part to play in implementation. They also show that the
5 implementation methods chosen (e.g. monitoring committees, or awareness-raising actions
6 aimed at employees and local managers) can vary depending on the context. These
7 distinctions, we argue, indicate that one of the issues in gender equality bargaining is how
8 power relations are organised. Similarly, Heery (2006) shows that trade union commitment to
9 gender equality is not only explained by the incorporation of women's voices in internal
10 structures but also by the characteristics of trade union leaders and the structure of
11 opportunity provided by management. In other words, trade union involvement in collective
12 bargaining draws not only on trade union ideology and internal governance rules but also on
13 the capabilities and strategies of negotiators.
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28 This is the hypothesis that we propose to explore in the remainder of this paper. We argue
29 that the form taken by collective bargaining on gender equality policy reflects the micro-
30 political dynamics within which it evolves.
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35 **The micro-politics of gender equality bargaining**

36
37 Since the pioneering article by Burns (1961), the micro-political perspective has been applied
38 quite widely to the study of organisations. This perspective now includes a variety of works
39 that share a focus on individuals and processes while questioning meso- or macro
40 phenomena. It is rooted in a degree of scepticism about other perspectives, particularly
41 functionalist perspectives, that overestimate the weight of formal structures and tend to
42 ignore the ambiguities connected with them. Without denying the importance of such
43 structures, the micro-political perspective strives to show how individuals take action and
44 create power beyond structural constraints. It has been most adopted in the field of
45 international management (Dörrenbächer and Geppert, 2006; Morgan and Kristensen, 2006;
46 Edwards, Colling and Ferner, 2007). In fact, multinational companies are particularly useful
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3 contexts for the study of strategic behaviour outside formal structures since headquarter
4 managers seek to increase their power over the managers of subsidiaries, who in turn attempt
5 to preserve their discretionary power. By decoding the strategies adopted by each of these
6 groups of actors, particularly around the construction of coalitions, this literature breaks with
7 the monolithic view of management and shows that structures alone do not determine power
8 relations (Bouquet and Birkinshaw, 2008). The micro-political perspective has also been well
9 received in organisational and human relations studies, particularly for analysing the
10 construction of an organisational field (Maclean et al., 2018) and the practices of resistance
11 applied by individuals in the face of managerial policies (Thomas and Davies, 2005;
12 Kärreman and Alvesson, 2009). It has also been used to analyse the identity work that
13 supports the actions of managers in charge of issues with high societal impact such as climate
14 change initiatives (Wright, Nyberg and Grant, 2012) or issues dealing with gender equality in
15 the workplace (Davies and Thomas, 2005). Benschop (2009) explores the micro-politics of
16 networking in relation to gender. Similarly, some articles on diversity management are part of
17 this same theoretical dynamic even if they do not use the "micro-political" label (Ahonen et
18 al. 2014; Jonsen et al., 2013; Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2011). To distance themselves from the
19 analysis of the structural relationship between capital and labour, these studies have usefully
20 focused on individual subjectivities but have neglected the study of equality bargaining.

21
22 Moreover, a number of studies have integrated the micro-political perspective into their
23 analyses of employment relationships. These studies have explored the transfer of practices in
24 multinational companies (Ferner, Edwards and Tempel, 2011; Belanger et al., 2013); the
25 relationship between trade unions and management (Helfen, Nicklich and Fortwengel, 2017;
26 Bourguignon, Garaudel and Porcher, 2020); the weight of institutions (Ferner et al., 2005;
27 Geppert, Williams and Wortmann, 2015) and, more recently, the influence of geopolitical
28 factors (Hopkinson and Aman, 2019). In particular, these works have shown that to
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3 understand the relationships between trade unions and management, they cannot be
4 conceptualised as relations between two homogeneous sides; the complexity of power
5 relations in the workplace needs to be considered. More specifically, we argue that two
6 micro-political processes, coalition-building and capabilities mobilisation, previously studied
7 separately, need to be linked.
8
9

14 *Collective bargaining as coalition-building*

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16
17 In an important study, Kristensen and Zeitlin (2005) show that local managers and local trade
18 unions found it beneficial to form a coalition to increase their power of resistance vis-a-vis
19 headquarters, an observation shared by Ferner et al. (2005: 721) when they noted that “*in*
20 *unionised situations, local management had a set of interests bound up with and achieved*
21 *through de facto and ad hoc alliances with union protagonists that enabled them to pursue*
22 *their objectives*”. Likewise, Bourguignon et al. (2020) analyse the signing of international
23 framework agreements as an alliance between corporate labour relation directors and trade
24 unions to force subsidiaries to implement social policies decided on at headquarter level. In
25 other words, collective bargaining can be seen as a means for managerial players to increase
26 their power, as well as an opportunity for trade unions to influence managerial behaviours on
27 the ground. This line of reasoning echoes the situation that gender equality managers face in
28 their companies. These managers deal with issues that are only weakly linked to the primary
29 business goals of their companies (Woodhams and Lupton, 2006). For this reason, they may
30 be hindered in their mission, either by other corporate functions or by local management,
31 which give priority to operational objectives over gender equality goals. Therefore, trade
32 unions can become valuable allies of gender equality managers to impose the gender equality
33 policy at other managerial levels.
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55 *Actors' capabilities as fundamental to micro-political arrangements*

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3 The notion of capabilities, variously conceptualised, has an important role in the micro-
4 political perspective. In particular, it has been used to analyse the power that subsidiaries
5 acquire in their relations with head offices (Birkinshaw and Hood, 1998; Dörrenbächer and
6 Gammelgaard, 2006; Belanger et al., 2013). It has also been used to describe the power of
7 trade unions in their relationships with management (Frost, 2000; Lévesque and Murray,
8 2010; Lévesque and Murray, 2013). More recently, Lévesque et al. (2018) have shown that
9 the mobilisation of capabilities by managers and trade union representatives at different
10 organisational levels makes it possible to develop effective transnational collective
11 bargaining. The concept of capabilities is meant to complement that of resources in
12 qualifying the power of players. Following Ferner et al. (2011), the term ‘capabilities’ is to be
13 “preferred to ‘resources’ since power over resources constitutes only one dimension of power
14 (one that is the focus of resource-based views of power that predominate in the business
15 literature)”. In their study of two trade unions within a single multinational company,
16 Lévesque and Murray (2013) show that holding resources is not enough for a trade union to
17 have influence over management. The trade union must have the capacity to take advantage
18 of these resources.

19 We also fully recognise the relevance and usefulness of the notion of capability in analysing
20 micro-political arrangements. We argue that capabilities are fundamental for coalition-
21 building since, for example, labour relations directors can engage in collective bargaining
22 with the more or less explicit aim of mobilising, or even developing, capabilities that enable
23 the trade unions to support the companies’ policies. It follows that, depending on the
24 capabilities mobilised by the actors, collective bargaining can be assigned different
25 objectives. This relationship between capabilities and coalition-building should, from our
26 point of view, be conceptualised in a dynamic way because it is in the course of action that
27 the supposed capabilities of the actors are confirmed or invalidated. This leads actors to
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3 continually review the scope and type of their coalitions relative to the partners' capabilities.
4
5 The most robust and widely used model to analyse the role played by capabilities in labour
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7 relations is one developed by Lévesque and Murray (2010, 2013). In this model, capabilities
8
9 are conceptualised as discrete factors of which the authors make flexible use. For example, in
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11 Lévesque et al. (2018), they used three of the four capabilities identified in their seminal
12
13 articles of 2010 and 2013. In other words, the model can be adapted to the context of the
14
15 study. For our part, and because this model has never been applied to gender equality
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17 bargaining, we propose to adopt the extensive one considering the four capabilities as
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19 follows:
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24 **Framing** This is the ability to define a reference framework, particularly in normative and
25
26 cognitive terms, to guide future actions. Reference frameworks legitimise demands and forms
27
28 of action and are, for this reason, of key importance for actors engaged in political interplay.
29
30 The ability of a trade union to mobilise its network and of head office to mobilise its
31
32 subsidiaries to transfer employment practices are mainly dependent on framing capabilities
33
34 (Ferner et al. 2011). Gender equality can be framed in different ways (Stringfellow, 2018)
35
36 and it is assumed that this impacts on the ability to mobilise stakeholders, as shown by Yates
37
38 (2010) in her study on the unionisation of childcare providers.
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43 **Intermediating** This is the ability to consider and articulate a wide range of interests in order
44
45 to stimulate collaborative action. A gender equality policy may be perceived to run counter to
46
47 existing interests. It is important for unions that the defence of women does not appear to be
48
49 at the expense of other categories of employees who could then distance themselves from the
50
51 initiative or even actively resist it. In addition, when resources are limited, commitment to a
52
53 gender equality policy could lead to a lowering of other traditional trade union demands.
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55 Trade unions that succeed in reconciling these contradictory expectations and in promoting
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57 the collective interest are better able to influence collective bargaining processes. The same
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3 applies to management, where a multiplicity of objectives is in play and where gender
4
5 equality can be seen as a cost far from the operational and economic concerns of the business
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8 (Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly, 2006)
9

10 **Articulating** A gender equality policy needs to be adapted to local specificities, a particular
11
12 problem for multinational companies. To deploy this policy at different levels of the
13
14 organisation requires articulating capabilities (Lévesque and Murray, 2013). The more
15
16 complex an environment is, the more difficult the coordination work is spatially and
17
18 temporally (Syed and Özbilgin, 2009) and the more critical articulating capabilities become
19
20 to mobilise local actors and/or to adapt policy at the local level.
21
22

23
24 **Learning** This is the capability to derive lessons from past events and adjust organisational
25
26 practices and routines accordingly. Players lacking learning capabilities tend to reproduce the
27
28 same responses to the situations they encounter and do not adapt to new circumstances; for
29
30 this reason, these players lose relevance. One of the challenges for individuals involved in
31
32 collective bargaining on gender equality is knowing how to review their decisions and, most
33
34 importantly, how to share this learning with their partners.
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37
38 In the remainder of this article, we apply a longitudinal assessment to the negotiation of a
39
40 gender equality policy by ITcom, a French IT company, to study the micro-political
41
42 arrangement underlying gender equality bargaining and the importance of actors' capabilities.
43
44 Did goals evolve over time? Do these evolutions reflect a transformation of the advocating
45
46 coalition? How do the capabilities of the coalition members explain these transformations?
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48

49 **Method**

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51 The French case is particularly relevant for this study. While French law has long recognised
52
53 the principle of gender equality, particularly with regard to equal pay, it has, since 2001,
54
55 imposed an obligation of collective bargaining on gender equality. Collective bargaining is
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57 thus considered a complementary mechanism to increase the effectiveness of the law (box 1).
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3 INSERT BOX 1 HERE
4

5 *The case*
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7
8 The case study here is of a French multinational in the IT sector, referred to as ITcom in the
9
10 paper. This case is of particular interest because the negotiated gender equality policy became
11
12 much more ambitious between the signing of the first agreement in 2004 and the latest one in
13
14 2018. However, the company is standard enough to allow the results to be generalised to
15
16 other French companies, which operate under the same obligations and in the same social
17
18 context.
19

20
21 ITcom is an international company headquartered in France. Our study focuses on the French
22
23 division of the group: 90,000 French employees (140,000 employees in the whole company),
24
25 44% of whom are managers and 36% of whom are women (the IT field is traditionally a
26
27 masculine field due to the gendered segregation of training programmes in schools). ITcom
28
29 encounters several gender equality issues, notably under-representation of women (e.g., in
30
31 2014, women represented 36% of the overall workforce and held 24% of the top 1,200
32
33 positions), and a gender pay gap of around 8%. To respond to these problems, the company
34
35 has defined a proactive gender policy negotiated through successive agreements (2004, 2007,
36
37 2011, 2014, and in 2018, signed after our study). Table 1 shows how the content evolved.
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42 INSERT TABLE 1 HERE
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44
45 The table shows that the number of pages and topics covered increased. One of the
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47 negotiation players, the diversity department (which includes the gender equality
48
49 department), represents management and reports to the human resource department (HRD) at
50
51 the same level as the recruitment or remuneration department. It is a so-called corporate
52
53 department which has no hierarchical network at the local level. The management negotiation
54
55 team is comprised of representatives from the recruitment, remuneration, and social relations
56
57 departments. ITcom unions (who negotiated the gender equality agreement) are, in
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3 decreasing order of size (as of the 2011 elections), CGT (23%), CFDT (22%), SUD (19%),
4
5 CFE-CGC (15%), and FO (14%)¹.
6

7 *Material*

8
9
10 We opted for a qualitative approach, drawing on different types of materials (Table 2).
11
12 Indeed, a qualitative inquiry seemed particularly appropriate to investigate the capabilities
13
14 used and developed by the actors during the policy negotiation and definition. As in other
15
16 research on capabilities, we drew on multiple sources of evidence (Lévesque et al., 2018).
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INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Document review. We first reviewed the evolution of the texts of the five successive agreements (2004, 2007, 2011, 2014, 2018). As shown in Table 1, these agreements form a substantial corpus of 206 pages. We also had access to documents produced by the gender equality department prior to the 2011 and 2014 negotiations presenting the targeted measures to the HRD group (55 pages) as well as various monitoring documents (e.g., reports presented at national monitoring committee meetings) (240 pages). As one of the authors (Author 2) was employed as a manager by the ITcom gender equality department between 2013 and 2015, we had unique insight into the thinking behind these documents.

Participant observation. Author 2, as project manager in the gender equality department, attended all 13 of the negotiation sessions for the 2014 agreement. In addition, the same author took part in the preparatory sessions during which the management negotiation team discussed which measures to include. Finally, this author participated in the agreement writing-up process. We did not have permission to record these sessions but the author took

¹ CGT: *Confédération Générale du Travail* ; CFDT: *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* ; SUD: *Solidaire Unitaire Démocratique* ; CFE-CGC: *Confédération Française de l'Encadrement-Confédération Générale des Cadres* ; FO: *Forces Ouvrières*.

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2
3 notes during them. This internal observation proved to be enlightening as it gave us access to
4 certain relevant materials. However, in order to maintain an external critical distance, we
5 conducted interviews with the main negotiators. Also, the materials were analysed by both
6 authors to ensure objectivity.
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12 *Interviews with negotiators.* After the negotiations in 2014, we conducted five semi-
13 structured interviews (average duration: 1 h 30) with the lead union negotiators who signed
14 the agreement (CFDT: 1 negotiator, FO: 1, SUD: 1, and CFE-CGC: 2). To further refine our
15 results, we conducted five additional interviews (average duration: 1 h 30): one with a
16 representative of the labour relations department, three with negotiators that had already been
17 interviewed, and one with a diversity director who negotiated the 2007 agreement. All of
18 these interviewees were female, as gender equality is often negotiated by women (Heery,
19 2006). To allow interviewees to speak openly or even critically, notes were taken during the
20 interviews rather than recording them. The purpose of the first five interviews was to gather
21 their impressions of the negotiation, as well as to better understand certain union logic and
22 strategy (e.g., level of commitment to gender equality). The purpose of the last four
23 interviews was to identify the specifics of gender equality negotiation compared to other
24 types of negotiation, as these respondents (from management and the unions) had participated
25 in other negotiations (e.g., on wages or intergenerational issues).
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44 *Interviews with gender equality officers.* In 2013-2014, 17 semi-structured interviews
45 (average duration: 1 h 15) were conducted with the main gender equality officers. These are
46 ITcom employees, often HR practitioners, responsible for the implementation of the policy
47 and relationships with unions at the local level. Some of them manage teams (1-3
48 employees), while the others are not managers. There are 20 main officers who coordinate
49 around 100 secondary officers (one per ITcom entity). Extensive notes rather than recordings
50 were taken during the interviews to allow the interviewees to speak freely. The interviews
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3 addressed the gender equality policy and their perceptions of it, their roles, their relationships
4 with other actors, the quality of the relationships with the unions, their resources and
5 difficulties encountered as well as their perceptions about gender equality in general.
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9
10 *Analysis of the material*
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12 We analysed the materials using themes corresponding to three sub-processes that
13 characterise policy-making in the field of gender equality drawn from previous literature.
14

15
16 1) Defining the concept of gender equality and the content of the policy. Previous research
17 has shown that gender equality is a polysemous concept (Coron and Pigeyre, 2019),
18 encompassing both varied dimensions (workforce diversity, wage equality, equal access to
19 promotion, etc.) and varied action rationales, between a radical approach and a liberal
20 approach (van den Brink et al., 2010).
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28 2) Structuring the monitoring bodies and tools. Monitoring is a way of ensuring that an
29 agreement is duly implemented (Milner et al, 2019). To do this, measurable indicators need
30 to be defined, and supported by procedures (auditing and reporting) to produce reliable and
31 precise information (Pochic and Chappe, 2019).
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37 3) Involving local actors in implementation. This sub-process deals with the measures taken
38 to mobilise local actors (Scala and Paterson, 2017). The importance of the resources made
39 available to local negotiators is highlighted by Milner et al. (2019), for example. These
40 resources are also useful to players involved in implementation (e.g., employees, local union
41 representatives, or local management). They may include awareness-raising initiatives,
42 training or even incentives.
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51 We started by conducting a documentary analysis of the text of the agreements. We sought to
52 identify in each agreement the constituent elements of each sub-process referred to above to
53 trace their longitudinal development by manually coding the text of each agreement in
54 relation to each sub-process. This analytical process, conducted by both authors, defined the
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3 analytical themes and verified agreement on the meaning of each sub-process. Sub-process 1,
4 “*Defining the concept of gender equality and the content of the policy*”, required lengthy
5 discussion because it tends to overlap with the other sub-processes. Other documents
6 (notably, the monitoring reports) enabled us to improve our study of each sub-process,
7 especially sub-process 2 (*Monitoring bodies and tools*), even though they were not
8 systematically coded.
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17 Second, we sought to establish a link between the capabilities and coalition-building set out
18 above. To do this, we used the participatory observation of the 2014 negotiation to pinpoint
19 the compromise-seeking process between the managerial and trade union players. For each
20 negotiation sequence, we identified which capability was used by which actor by coding the
21 notes taken by capability. We also coded the interviews with the negotiators, taking a
22 historical perspective on capabilities, as several of the negotiators interviewed had
23 participated in multiple negotiations. This allowed us to identify whether the capabilities
24 varied over time. Finally, we coded the interviews with the gender equality officers to
25 identify capabilities on the management side at the local level. We identified which
26 capabilities seemed necessary for them to play their roles as officers and whether they
27 managed to mobilise those capabilities or not. Again, this coding process, conducted by both
28 authors, helped to achieve agreement on the definition of each capability and led us to adapt
29 slightly the analytical framework and coding categories. For example, discussion was
30 required on the “Intermediating” and “Articulating” capabilities which sometimes seemed to
31 overlap.
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51 Interviews were conducted in French and all documentation was in French. The analytical
52 process took place in French as that is the language of both authors and the empirical
53 material. Author translations were undertaken into English to prepare this article.
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58 **Findings**

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3 ITcom is an interesting case for the study of coalitions and micro-political arrangements
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5 between management and trade unions and the associated processual outcomes, as its gender
6
7 equality department was particularly aware of the need to involve trade unions at the local
8
9 level
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11
12 in the process of defining and implementing an agreement. As stated in a framework
13
14 document for the 2014 agreement mandate, *“the entire ITcom ‘house’ must be on board,*
15
16 *starting with the trade unions”*. Most of the trade unions were stakeholders in this micro-
17
18 political arrangement, as they believed that the negotiation of the gender equality agreement
19
20 would enable them to influence other negotiations.
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22

23
24 *“What we [the trade union, SUD] wanted was to come away with as many advances*
25
26 *as possible on gender equality, which would then set a binding framework for other*
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28 *agreements, for example, slightly constraining the GPEC [HR planning]*
29
30 *agreement. - Trade union negotiator (SUD)*
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32

33
34 This micro-political arrangement allowed management and unions to define a proactive and
35
36 ambitious policy throughout successive agreements. Table 1 shows that the agreements
37
38 became more ambitious until 2014 and then stabilised between 2014 and 2018. This
39
40 progression in the policy reflects a more comprehensive approach to the definition of gender
41
42 equality, going so far as to include domestic violence in 2018. Institutional mechanisms were
43
44 also gradually strengthened, with the creation of local monitoring commissions and an
45
46 increase in the frequency of meetings of national and local commissions.
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50 We present our results by first highlighting the sub-processes. For each sub-process, we focus
51
52 on the processual outcomes, i.e. how the negotiated gender equality policy evolved. We
53
54 characterise each sub-process using documentary analysis (the text of the agreements and
55
56 monitoring documents, in particular), and then identify the capabilities required for each sub-
57
58 process based on the negotiations and interviews with the various players. We dedicate the
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3 final section to the two-way link between the sub-processes and capabilities, showing how
4 the capabilities act as intermediaries between the sub-processes. This enables us to explain
5 the ramping-up of sub-processes 1 and 2 and the weakening of sub-process 3.
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12 *Sub-process 1: Defining the concept of gender equality*
13

14 *Evolution between 2004 and 2018.* We note a change in the definition of the principle of
15 equality with each new agreement. To wit, the 2004 and 2007 agreements only set out
16 measures aimed at guaranteeing equal rights for women and men, while the agreements
17 signed from 2011 onwards also defined measures aimed at providing equal opportunities and
18 affirmative action. For example, the 2011 agreement required gender diversity in recruitment
19 short-lists: *“During external recruitment, the short-list of candidates includes at least 4*
20 *people in order to promote balanced representation of women and men. The lists include an*
21 *equal number of women and men when the number of candidates with equal skills allows”.*
22
23 This increase in the requirements and obligations imposed on local players reflects a change
24 in the definition of the principle of equality.
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37 There was also a change in the number of dimensions covered by the agreements. While the
38 2004 agreement focused on core components of gender equality (equality in access to
39 employment, equal training and responsibilities, wage equality, work-life balance, and gender
40 diversity within unions), successive agreements added new dimensions related to
41 communication and raising awareness on the subject (2007), retirement, women’s networks
42 (2011), fighting sexual harassment and sexism (2014), and assistance to victims of domestic
43 violence (2018).
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53 We thus see an increase in both the importance placed on the principle and in the scope of the
54 definition of equality. It should be noted that the direction of this shift is an increase in
55 agreement provisions with no agreement receding (by removing content, for example).
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3 Changes in content went hand in hand with changes in the framing of the agreements and an
4 increased importance placed on gender equality. By way of illustration, the preamble to the
5 2004 agreement explained that the company sought to engage in the agreement negotiation
6 process to comply with legal obligations (*“This desire is in step with the law of 9 May 2001*
7 *on gender equality between men and women...”*), while the 2018 agreement states that ITcom
8 is *“convinced that equality between women and men is a guarantee of economic performance*
9 *and social performance”*.

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19 *Required capabilities.* This sub-process required both the management and trade union
20 players to have framing capabilities to establish a framework in the text of the agreements
21 outlining the concept and policy of gender equality. During the negotiation process, they
22 demonstrated framing capabilities, sometimes proposing opposing content for the policy.
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The SUD trade union criticises the company's transformation of the principle of
“equality in professional development” into the principle of “women's access to
decision-making positions”. It deems that the term “women's access to decision-
making positions” is restrictive because it tends to focus attention on access to the
highest levels of responsibility. (Observation Notes, Negotiation Session 2, 19
December 2013)

Similarly, the diversity director who negotiated the agreement in 2007 explained that during
this negotiation, she sought to obtain a commitment by the trade unions to reach a certain
percentage of women but this request was refused and hence, the measure was muted.

“At the time, I asked the unions to make commitments on the percentage of women,
and they refused at the time”. - Diversity Director, negotiator of the 2007
agreement

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3 *Commitment as set out in the agreement: “The trade unions will try to ensure that*
4 *the percentage of women on the lists of candidates for elected office is at least equal*
5 *to the percentage of women in the entity”.*
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10 The involvement of trade union negotiators in determining the content of commitments
11 requires initial intermediation work within the trade unions. Any negotiation process entails a
12 resource outlay, the subjects on which a trade union team must engage have to be prioritised.
13
14 One risk for gender equality is that it is perceived as secondary to subjects that affect all
15 employees, such as employment, wages or working conditions. In the case of ITcom, it
16 appears that the trade union negotiators endeavoured to make this subject an opportunity for
17 progress on other subjects. To illustrate, the negotiator from the trade union SUD explained
18 that commitment to gender equality was a means of influencing wage negotiations:
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28 *“We decided to take a positive stance because we want to have some influence on*
29 *the implementation of equal pay. Actually, we can't really sign the wage agreements*
30 *because usually they don't contain the measures we want. But in wage negotiations,*
31 *even if they know that we will not sign, we have our say because we sign the gender*
32 *equality agreement.” - SUD trade union negotiator*
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40 Thus, to legitimise and promote a gender equality policy, it is of interest to connect
41 commitments on gender equality to other subjects to show a collective benefit. This
42 intermediation work appears very clearly in the text of the 2014 agreement.
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46 *“For the company, gender equality contributes to quality of work life. This requires*
47 *that no form of discrimination exists and is tolerated, both in terms of access to*
48 *employment and promotion and in wage policy and other determinants of working*
49 *conditions. Furthermore, progress in gender equality benefits both men and women.*
50 *That is why our approach is deliberately inclusive.”- 2014 agreement*
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3 Similarly, various trade union players proposed demands that went beyond the sole
4 framework of gender equality and took into account other forms of inequality (between
5
6 managers and non-managers, for example).
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10 *“The topic of professional development is very sensitive. The problem is that we*
11 *ended up with a CEO who arrived like the Messiah and suddenly tossed out that*
12 *'35% of the company's governing bodies will be women by 2015'. The big risk is of*
13 *the tree hiding the forest. There are two worlds in this company: the production*
14 *world that is underpaid and overlooked and the management world that gets much*
15 *more recognition. There is a big problem with the move to managerial positions.” -*
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23
24 *Trade union negotiator (SUD)*
25

26 This example illustrates how being able to influence the content of the gender equality policy
27 required trade union actors to develop intermediating capabilities to reconcile seemingly
28 contradictory interests.
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33 The fact that the corporate players could call upon framing and intermediating capabilities
34 enabled a gradual ramp-up of the content of the agreements and their ambition as negotiations
35 continued.
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42 *Sub-process 2: Structuring the monitoring bodies and tools*
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44 *Evolution between 2004 and 2018.* The number of follow-up and monitoring bodies tended to
45 increase over time, except between 2014 and 2018, when ITcom seems to have scaled back
46 its monitoring.
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50
51 Reinforcement came from both the creation of new bodies and increased meeting frequency.
52 For instance, the 2004 agreement created a national monitoring commission (composed of the
53 signatory trade union organisations and the diversity department) with annual meetings,
54 which became semi-annual in 2007 and then quarterly in 2011. They returned to semi-annual
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3 frequency in the 2018 agreement. The local monitoring committees (composed of the gender
4 equality officers, the signatory trade union organisations and non-signatory local
5 representative organisations) were created by the 2011 agreement. In 2014, they were
6 restricted to the signatory trade unions. Ultimately, the players formed a multilevel
7 monitoring structure for reporting. More precisely, the reporting took place at three levels: at
8 the “secondary establishment” level (entities composed of 500 to 1,000 employees), at the
9 “main establishment” level (20 entities in ITcom, composed of 4 to 6 secondary
10 establishments) and at the national level.
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21 In addition to defining the monitoring bodies, the sequential agreements also defined
22 increasingly numerous and precise monitoring indicators. In 2004, the company only used the
23 25 legal indicators established in 1983 but it added 12 indicators at the national level in 2007,
24 including the proportion of women on management committees and the proportion of women
25 recruited externally on permanent contracts by socio-professional category, and defined four
26 indicators at the local level that were not required by law. In addition to the 25 legally
27 required indicators, the 2011 agreement defined 18 indicators at the national level and 30 at
28 the local level while the 2014 agreement set out 30 national and 33 local indicators and the
29 2018 agreement set out 37 national and 34 local indicators. Therefore, sub-process 2 shows
30 significant increase in the activity of the monitoring bodies and in indicators.
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44 *Required capabilities.* Learning capabilities are essential for this monitoring sub-process.
45 Regular dissemination of information, at both the corporate and local levels, was intended to
46 provide better situational knowledge so that new demands could be formed and existing
47 demands could be developed.
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54 *“On diversity issues, you have indicators, which give information—this is good,*
55 *because it forces you to look at some possibly painful realities”.* Negotiator on the
56 *management side (labour relations department)*
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3 For example, during negotiations in 2014, projected percentages of female participation in the
4 company were circulated. In fact, the commitment of the 2011 agreement to increase the
5 percentage of women in the company (from 36% to 39% in three years, replacing 15,000 men
6 with 15,000 women) was unattainable. The figures shared were thus intended to demonstrate
7 to the trade unions that it would be impossible to achieve this type of commitment.
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15 *A reporting manager said that the projections of a 3-point increase in the*
16 *percentage of women in the company over the three years of the agreement were*
17 *impossible to achieve. One of the unions, FO, agreed, explaining that increasing the*
18 *overall proportion of women was less important for them than female professional*
19 *development. (Observation Note, Negotiation Session 4, 7 February 2014)*
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26 These comments show how the information collected to monitor the appropriate application
27 of the agreements by the employer, provided learning opportunities to the trade unions to
28 change their approach to the gender equality policy.
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35 *Sub-process 3: Involving local actors in implementation*

36
37 Analysis of this sub-process is based on the measures adopted to involve local actors
38 (awareness, training and incentive measures).
39
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41
42 *Evolution between 2004 and 2018.* The notion of awareness appeared in the 2007 agreement,
43 which dedicated an entire chapter to communication and awareness. Awareness-raising
44 mainly targeted the network of HR players at the corporate level, but it also targeted the local
45 level by mentioning gender equality officers and HR managers. Moreover, awareness-raising
46 and communication focused on ensuring knowledge of the content of the agreement (*“The*
47 *HR managers will also ensure that managers, within their scope, are aware of the provisions*
48 *relating to gender equality”*), particularly by producing and distributing communication kits
49 on the actions mandated by the agreement. The 2011 agreement also devoted a chapter to
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3 communication and awareness-raising. However, the scope of these two themes was broader
4
5 in the 2011 agreement, encompassing, for example, awareness of the existence of stereotypes,
6
7 and aiming to “*develop a mind-set favourable to gender equality, at all levels of the*
8
9 *company*”. The measures of the 2007 agreement on communication and awareness-raising
10
11 about the content of the agreement were therefore included, but they were supplemented by a
12
13 new section entitled “*Helping bring about an evolution in representations*”, which began
14
15 with the following sentence: “*The signatories agree that communication on the agreement*
16
17 *alone is not sufficient to change mentalities and combat gender stereotypes which still form a*
18
19 *major obstacle to real gender equality.*” The following actions were listed: awareness-raising
20
21 actions for all employees (poster campaigns, web TV, etc.) and a specific training module on
22
23 gender equality for managers, HR practitioners, and all employees (also open to union
24
25 representatives). Furthermore, the company undertook to combat gender stereotypes in all of
26
27 its communication (internal and external). Thus, clearly, the 2011 agreement broadened the
28
29 scope of communication and awareness-raising, as well as the scope of the players involved
30
31 to include employees and union representatives.
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37 The 2014 agreement also dedicated a prominent chapter to the subject. The negotiators of the
38
39 2014 agreement aimed to more directly mobilise local players on this issue. Chapter 1
40
41 consists largely of measures from the previous agreement but emphasises the role of gender
42
43 equality officers specifically trained on the subject. This agreement committed the company
44
45 (in the chapter dedicated to the role of trade unions) to funding training sessions for trade
46
47 unions (up to 30 days per year per representative trade union) “*in order to promote their*
48
49 *assimilation of gender equality issues*”. This last measure thus explicitly aimed to raise the
50
51 trade union players’ awareness, particularly at the local level.
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54

55 What was new in 2014 was the creation of semi-annual “local councils” incorporating the
56
57 representative trade unions. These councils had a different function from the monitoring
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3 bodies, as they were not expected to monitor the enforcement of the gender equality
4 agreement but were intended as a space for local dialogue between management and unions
5 in which the players could build action plans. These councils were supposed to involve these
6 players in the company's gender equality policy and implement the agreement within the
7 limits of local constraints and issues.
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15 *“So what I do in terms of facilitation with the gender equality officers at the local*
16 *level [secondary establishment level] is that I hold a face-to-face meeting at the*
17 *beginning of the year, in late January, which gives me the chance to share the news*
18 *of the last quarter, which is considerable, with the monitoring commission and the*
19 *council, and typically, we will talk about our action plan for the coming year”.*
20
21
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25

26 *Gender equality officer*
27

28 Overall, in 2014, this sub-process was characterised by extended awareness and
29 communication actions (initially restricted to the content of the agreement and then extended
30 to gender stereotypes); by an increase in the number of players involved, at the local level in
31 particular (initially restricted to HR players and then including employees and union
32 representatives) and by an increase in the number of measures and actions implemented
33 (including organising one week of events, at the national and local levels).
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42 However, these arrangements did not have the effects expected by the negotiators who
43 subsequently decided to do away with the local councils during the 2018 negotiations. The
44 lack of commitment on the part of local players made these spaces for local dialogue between
45 management and unions redundant as indicators were discussed without drawing up action
46 plans, as underlined by many gender equality officers.
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53
54 *“The unions pay attention to the result, but they are passive—on everything I put*
55 *forward, they are passive. When I hold the local council, I come in with my action*
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3 *plan, we are open to discussion, but they are more sitting back and waiting.”*

4
5 *Gender equality officer*

6
7
8 *Required capabilities.* The interviews showed that the involvement of local actors requires
9
10 not only the adoption of collective bargaining mechanisms but also a second stage of
11
12 intermediation, not within trade unions, but with local actors and articulation.

13
14 It was the lack of these intermediating and articulating capabilities, on the part of both the
15
16 gender equality officers and the trade union negotiators, that explains the difficulty in
17
18 mobilising local players, as illustrated by the comments received.

19
20
21 *“People are completely focused on business issues, they are under incredible*
22
23 *pressure to achieve the targets, so gender equality looks like the icing on the cake, a*
24
25 *bit of a gimmick. We really do seem to be people enjoying ourselves while everyone*
26
27 *else is working.” - Gender equality officer*

28
29
30 This form of resistance was thus a significant obstacle to the policy’s implementation and
31
32 effectiveness at the local level. The lack of articulating capabilities and the low
33
34 intermediating capability at the local level were behind both the creation of new awareness-
35
36 raising and training measures to mobilise this level and the reduced expectations for local
37
38 players (in particular in constructing local action plans).

39
40
41 *Capabilities that serve as intermediaries between sub-processes*

42
43 We structured the above paragraphs by sub-process and examined which capabilities were
44
45 required for each sub-process. However, this layout conceals the fact that capabilities, when
46
47 sufficiently developed, can also create links between sub-processes. We offer four examples.

48
49
50 As we have seen, the regular publication of indicators at the corporate and local levels (sub-
51
52 process 2) was intended to build a set of demands in line with the various situations faced in
53
54 the company. This assumed that the players would develop learning capabilities, since they
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3 were required to advance their vision or conception of the subject. This change in the body of
4
5 claims led to a change in the content of the policy (sub-process 1).
6

7
8 *“With gender equality, it's complicated. We can move ahead on certain demands,*
9
10 *for example, on the issue of violence against women, or on leave authorisations for*
11
12 *sick children. In 2011, some trade unions wanted to push for equal sharing of those*
13
14 *leave authorisations between women and men. I was completely against it, but now*
15
16 *I understand. So it is possible to evolve, possibly even more so than on other topics,*
17
18 *even though the process is slow. - Trade union negotiator (FO)*
19

20
21 Furthermore, as we saw previously, setting up bodies and monitoring tools (sub-process 2)
22
23 required articulating capabilities, since it meant both trade unions and management
24
25 coordinating different levels of action. However, the major difficulty encountered by unions
26
27 and management with this capability was the lack of involvement by local players, an issue
28
29 raised by both the managerial and trade union networks. Yet, involving local players was the
30
31 main purpose of sub-process 3: in other words, sub-process 2 can lead to the development of
32
33 sub-process 3 through the mobilisation of articulating capability.
34
35

36
37 *“With the gender equality officer at the local level [secondary establishment level]*
38
39 *we have good relations, I follow up with them once a month, these are volunteers,*
40
41 *but they put in the time they can. (...) Sometimes you have to ask several times*
42
43 *before something gets done, that's true... For example, the last time in June I asked*
44
45 *them to analyse the agreement indicators (percentage of women in the workforce,*
46
47 *recruitment, promotion). And, although I asked for this very early on, I had to come*
48
49 *back to them several times, particularly at the monthly meetings, to tell them to*
50
51 *request appointments with the HR directors....” - Gender equality officer*
52
53

54
55
56 The desire to mobilise local players (sub-process 3) necessitated developing their framing
57
58 capability so that they could channel local action. However, this framing capability largely
59
60

1
2
3 depended on how gender equality was defined and on the gender equality policy (sub-process
4
5 1), which was more or less easy to implement for local players depending on how well
6
7 adapted the policy was to local contingencies. For instance, trade unionists explained that
8
9 affirmative action was sometimes difficult to support within their trade union, even when
10
11 these measures were in the agreement.
12
13

14
15 *“On the FO side, people will tell you that they are against all discrimination, and*
16
17 *thus positive discrimination is just as reprehensible as negative discrimination. My*
18
19 *argument is that men have been squashing women for so many years that if for once*
20
21 *we get a bit of an advantage, it's not so bad. - Trade union negotiator (FO)*
22
23

24 This struggle to have affirmative action accepted locally is also experienced by management.

25
26 *Results of a quantitative survey conducted among managers at the end of 2013:*
27
28 *while some advocate affirmative action, others see this type of measure as*
29
30 *unfavourable to both men (who are penalised) and women (who are affected by a*
31
32 *lack of legitimacy).*
33
34

35 Finally, as we have seen, the concept of gender equality and the definition of the policy (sub-
36
37 process 1) has broadened over time. Therefore, the trade unions had a particular articulating
38
39 role to play in bringing demands related to gender equality into other negotiations (for
40
41 example, negotiations on remuneration). The monitoring indicators connected with gender
42
43 equality (sub-process 2) were thus key to enabling them to advocate for these claims in other
44
45 bodies.
46
47

48
49 *“I'm the one who asked to be part of the negotiations on wages as well. I asked*
50
51 *because M*** [SUD negotiator] said to me 'you wouldn't want to come to the pay*
52
53 *negotiation, would you? Because all alone I can't do it anymore, C*** [CFDT*
54
55 *negotiator] is there, but if there were more of us, it would help us defend the*
56
57 *demands on equal pay'. (...) Now that I've taken up the matter, I'm sure it's dealt*
58
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3 *with. I think it is good that we're on both; if we are not there, gender equality is not*
4
5 *dealt with in the negotiations on pay. - Trade union negotiator (FO)*
6
7

8 Capabilities therefore play an intermediary role between the sub-processes in the sense that
9
10 the development of certain capabilities needed for certain sub-processes may influence other
11
12 sub-processes.
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14 **Discussion**

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17 In this article, we analysed the gender equality bargaining process taking a micro-political
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19 perspective in organisations. In addition to its contribution to the research on gender equality
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21 bargaining, our article brings broader insights to the research on gender equality and to the
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23 research on the micro-politics of collective bargaining.
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26 First, this article contributes to the research on gender equality bargaining. While collective
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28 bargaining is increasingly seen by policy-makers as a promising regulatory mechanism to
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30 move towards gender equality, academic studies are characterised by a certain inconsistency.
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32 Our research concludes that this reflects the fact that gender equality bargaining covers a
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34 variety of approaches. Attempting to identify general substantive effects is therefore doomed
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36 to failure. It is, in fact, necessary to consider the diversity of the trajectories that collective
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38 bargaining can take and the micro-political arrangements on which they are based. For
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40 example, it can be hypothesised that a collective agreement involving local actors would
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42 produce very different substantive effects than a highly centralised agreement limited to
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44 defining the content of a gender equality policy. It was not the aim of this article to measure
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46 these substantive effects, but we believe that future research should focus on identifying these
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48 differentiated effects. Moreover, by highlighting relevant micro-political conditions, our
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50 article has implications for practitioners on both the managerial and trade union sides. Indeed,
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52 it shows that without the development of capabilities at different levels of a company, it is
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54 difficult to establish complementary action between management and trade unions.
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3 Second, our article contributes to the literature on gender equality. Indeed, the analytical grid
4 we used to analyse and interpret our empirical material is derived from previous studies on
5 gender equality and underlines the three issues involved in defining a gender equality policy:
6 defining the concept of gender equality (van den Brink et al., 2010; Coron and Pigeyre,
7 2019); defining monitoring bodies and tools (Milner et al, 2019; Pochic and Chappe, 2019);
8 involving local actors (Özbilgin and Tatli, 2011; Scala and Paterson, 2017). To our
9 knowledge, the combination of this research and analytical grid has not been applied before
10 to analyse gender equality issues. Our case study highlights these critical issues that need to
11 be considered in the study of gender equality policies. Indeed, the definition of gender
12 equality is the subject of much debate between unions and management but also within
13 unions. Some of these debates refer to vocabulary issues (equality in professional
14 development *versus* women's access to decision-making positions) and others refer to the
15 topics to be included in gender equality policies (e.g. company day care). The acceptance of
16 affirmative action in recent agreements also indicates that the concept of gender equality is
17 not carved in stone. Our results on monitoring bodies and tools show that defining these is
18 not enough: learning capabilities are required to properly apply these tools to define an
19 adequate gender equality policy. Our results on the involvement of local actors, such as
20 managers (Allard et al, 2011), are in line with previous research as they show the growing
21 importance for negotiators of mobilising local players. Our results also indicate that a lack of
22 intermediating and articulating capabilities on the part of unions and management explains
23 some of the difficulties in mobilising local actors. These three issues seem appropriate and
24 sufficient when studying companies already committed to gender equality. However, they
25 may be inadequate when studying the numerous companies which do the minimum required
26 to comply with legal obligations.
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3 Third, our article makes a more general contribution to the micro-political analysis of
4 collective bargaining. As our brief review of the literature has shown, this type of analysis of
5 the specificities of transnational collective bargaining has only recently developed. This
6 research has highlighted the counterintuitive coalitions between actors, for example, between
7 local management and local unions to better resist the demands of central actors (Ferner et
8 al., 2005) or between central management and union leaders to bring subsidiaries under
9 control (Bourguignon et al., 2020). Other research on this dynamic has highlighted the
10 importance of identifying actors' capabilities, beyond the resources at their disposal, to
11 analyse their power (Lévesque et al, 2018). The conceptual framework developed in our
12 article and supported by the ITcom case shows that these two dimensions are intimately
13 linked because the building of coalitions can be understood in light of the capabilities
14 mobilised by the actors. Future research on the micro-political conditions of collective
15 bargaining will have to consider these two dimensions simultaneously. This observation
16 appears to us to be particularly important for the study of collective bargaining because it
17 highlights the role of managers and their agency in the dynamics of industrial relations.
18 Beyond the respective interests of employers, workers and institutional structures, it shows
19 the decisive role the commitment of managers can play in the vitality of collective
20 bargaining. Recent work on social dialogue in global value chains points in the same
21 direction (Gansemans, Louche, D'Haese and 2021; Bourguignon and Hennebert, 2021). It
22 invites us to extend the analysis of managers' agency which could be done by exploring a
23 third dimension of micro-political games: individual subjectivity. Indeed, because they are
24 counterintuitive and even counternatural, these coalitions are ambivalent by nature and
25 generate tensions for the individuals involved. To fully understand these phenomena, it is
26 therefore important to analyse the identity work carried out by individuals.

27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 **Conclusion** 59 60

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3 In studying the micro-political foundations of gender equality bargaining, our paper builds a
4 bridge between industrial relations research and management research. These two approaches
5 are traditionally considered as opposing approaches to the study of the employment
6 relationship. However, the conceptual framework we have developed and empirically tested
7 shows that a better understanding of the dynamics is obtained by considering both the
8 institutional and the human relations issues at the micro level. Obviously, our results have
9 their limitations since the case studied, even though the case is typical of a large French
10 company, does not claim to be representative at the international level. Future research
11 should therefore test the analytical model in other organisational and institutional contexts.
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23 Our paper also contributes to the public debate on gender equality. Among policymakers,
24 there is intense debate on the interest of supporting collective bargaining on this issue. Our
25 article shows that gender equality bargaining can follow different trajectories and provides
26 avenues for controlling it, in particular through the development of actors' capabilities. A
27 natural extension of this research will then be to link these trajectories with substantive
28 outcomes in terms of equality between women and men.
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37 To conclude, we would like to point out that this research was conducted prior to the Covid-
38 19 pandemic. It has not been possible to consider any effects this might have had on gender
39 equality bargaining at ITcom although there is evidence that the pandemic has strongly
40 affected collective action at the micro level and questions of its implications have been
41 raised. The micro-political analysis outlined in this paper gives a central place to the
42 organisational context and interactions, viewed as providing opportunities for union and
43 managerial actors to build coalitions. Will the sudden transformation of these micro-political
44 conditions weaken these coalitions and relegate the issue of gender equality to the
45 background? Or, on the contrary, will the capabilities (and, in this case, which ones?) held by
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3 gender equality actors enable them to renew their strategies and adapt the form of collective
4 bargaining?
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52 53 **Biographies**

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Box 1. The French legal framework on social dialogue and gender equality

The French legal framework rests on a stacking of successive laws. We list only the founding laws here.

1972: The principle of equal pay for women and men is enshrined in the law.

1983: The Roudy Act requires companies to produce annual reports on gender equality.

2001: The Génisson Act requires companies to negotiate company agreements on gender equality every three years.

2006: The Ameline Act requires companies to address pay inequality in their annual pay negotiations.

2010: A decree resulting from a law on pension reform establishes penalties for companies that have not negotiated an agreement on gender equality.

Peer Review Version

Table 1. Evolution of the agreements

	2004 Agreement	2007 Agreement	2011 Agreement	2014 Agreement	2018 Agreement
Number of pages	6	18 + 5 p. of appendices	41 + 8 p. of appendices	45 + 22 p. of appendices	40 + 21 p. of appendices
Measures	primarily non-discrimination principles; preservation of variable pay in the event of maternity or adoption leave; additional inexpensive measures	new flagship measures: budget for correcting wage gaps; wage equality in recruitment; training for recruiters on gender equality; school-relations policy integrating the theme of gender diversity, etc.	new flagship measures: affirmative actions (priority recruitment for women assuming equivalent skills levels; gender equality in short-lists; formalised additional promotion budget for women; action to ensure the presence of female candidates in open positions on the management board, etc.); company contribution to employee pension scheme in the event of parental leave for 6 months, etc.	new flagship measures: gender equality given consideration in all company projects; vigilance about qualification requirements at time of recruitment; training of advisers on wage equality and additional promotion budgets for women, etc.	new flagship measures: platform created to help employees find social assistance; opportunity study of a day-care centre on the premises; occupational social services to which victims of domestic violence can turn
Quantified commitments	no	on recruitment and promotion	on recruitment, promotion and training	on recruitment, promotion and training	on recruitment, promotion and training
Actors and institutions	few concrete obligations for HR and managers; no mention of actors in gender equality; creation of an annual national monitoring commission	new or increased obligations for HR and managers; creation of gender equality officer positions; creation of local dialogue spaces; national commission becomes semi-annual	creation of additional gender equality officer positions (within each establishment); the national commission meets three times a year; semi-annual local commissions created	in the preamble: "gender equality is everyone's business"; the national commission continues to meet three times a year; local commission meetings become annual but are supplemented by local council meetings every six months	national and local committees meet twice a year; local councils are removed
Main themes	recruitment, training, maternity, remuneration, promotion, work organisation, diversity of union bodies	new focuses: masculinisation of feminised professions; communication; awareness-raising and information; etc.	new focuses: retirement; women's networks; women's talent networks, occupational health; fighting gender stereotypes; etc.	new focuses: fighting sexual harassment, sexism, violence against women, etc.	new focuses: in-company day-care; domestic violence, etc.

Table 2. Material

Type of material	Details
Documents	5 agreements (206 pages) Internal documents produced by the gender equality department prior to the 2011 and 2014 negotiations (55 pages) Monitoring documents (reports) (240 pages)
Participant observation	All the 13 negotiation sessions of the 2014 gender equality agreement All the preparatory sessions which took place before the negotiation sessions Writing process of the 2014 gender equality agreement
Interviews with negotiators	First round: 5 semi-structured interviews (average duration 1h30) with the lead negotiators of each union who signed the 2014 agreement Second round: 5 semi-structured interviews (average duration 1h30) (1 with a representative of the labour relations department, 3 with key negotiators that had already been interviewed, and 1 with a diversity director who negotiated the 2007 agreement)
Interviews with gender equality officers	17 semi-structured interviews (average duration 1h15) with gender equality officers