Reconstructing Identity After a Labor Dispute Against the Closure of a Site: Case Study on Union Leaders

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Abstract. This article describes how union leaders reconstructed their identity after leading a dispute against the closure of their site. Linking together various aspects of critical theories of identity, identity salience, self-categorization, and coping, a survey was carried out by holding semi-structured interviews with 50 union leaders who managed this professional transition. Three identity balances were identified: identity tension, in-between, and turning the page. The first constitutes a refusal to carry out the professional transition. The second exposes an identity tension in which the leader seeks to assume a "double" identity, while the third refers to the completed identity transition. Our work suggests that the capacity to reconstruct identity depends on the interrelation of personal and contextual variables from which the key roles of social support and the nature of union investment emerge. These results contribute to a renewed understanding of both professional transitions and the identity dynamic in a climate of threat.

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While 266 companies with more than 10 employees closed in 2012 and more than a thousand factories have shut down since 2009, leaving 42 000 fewer employees in industry, a report by the Economic and Social Council (Ramonet, 2010) indicates that the rate of re-employment in a stable job[1] after collective redundancy stands at around 60%. Understanding how workers who are made redundant deal with this professional transition constitutes a major issue on several levels (Cascio, 1993; Morris, et al., 1998; Gandolfi, 2008). Firstly, from a societal point of view, it is worth securing the laid-off worker a career path so that the change does not become traumatic, leading to a long-term lack of job security (Luthans & Sommer, 1999; Macky, 2004). Secondly, from a managerial point of view, it is worth ensuring that the employee retains a positive image of him- or herself and of the company as a whole (Pugh, et al., 2003; Eby & Buch, 1995). On the same theme, this research aims to understand how trade-union leaders manage their professional transition after leading the opposition to the closure of their company. More precisely, how do they manage the two-fold identity rupture caused by losing their job and losing their status as a representative of a disbanded body of workers?

Paradoxically, this line of questioning is new to research on flexibility. The literature includes numerous works on redundancy managers (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Schweiger, et al., 1987; Sahdev, 2003; Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2008), survivors (Brockner, et al., 1987; Devine, et al., 2003) or laid-off workers (Cappelli, 1992) which attest to the physical and mental suffering engendered by redundancies (Noer, 2003; Leana & Feldman, 199 ; Molonsky & Margolis, 2005). Yet the academic community has skipped over trade-union leaders while their role is central in the management of employment flexibility

(Beaujolin-Bellet & Schmidt, 2012). As we see in the news (for example, the closures of Peugeot Aulnay and Goodyear Amiens Nord) and research on employer–employee relations (Rojot, 1994), site closures lead to strikes and disputes between workers and management (Fillieule & Pechu, 1993). The trade-union leaders play a key role in the implementation of downsizing projects and in upholding a socially acceptable dispute (Beaujolin-Bellet & Grima, 2012). We emphasize that a laid-off leader differs from the average laid-off employee by his/her high public profile and his/her investment in actions which are sometimes violent, which ruin his/her brand image on the job market, and which may even prompt legal action to be taken against him/her. In attempting to understand how these leaders rebuild their identities, we enrich research on redundancy by considering the central actor, the true extreme case (Yinn, 1994), who faces an exacerbated threat to his identity which has so far been ignored. On the managerial or societal level, we instigate reflection on the support measures available to these actors, who are essential to the peaceful unfolding of company downsizings which are becoming more and more frequent.

This article is divided into three parts. Firstly, we employ the theoretical frameworks of identity salience (Stryker, 1980; Thoits, 2012), self-categorization (Turner, et al., 1987, 1994), and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and the critical analysis of identity (Watson, 2008) in order to define identity and identity work. We present the issues surrounding identity construction (Sainsaulieu, 1985; Watson, 2008; Dubar, 2011) within the framework of career transition (Latack, et al., 1995; Gowan, et al., 1999; Paris & Vickers, 2010) following redundancy, considered as a context of identity threat (Petriglieri, 2011). Then, after explaining our methodology, we shall present the results of our analyses of 50 life stories of trade-union leaders who had to reconstruct their identities after the closure of their company. Finally, the results will be discussed and contextualised.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HOW DO WE DEFINE IDENTITY AND IDENTITY WORK?

Defining identity is such a difficult task that "the more one writes about this topic, the more the word becomes a term for something as unfathomable as it is all-pervasive" (Erikson, 1968; 5). Yet Pratt and Foreman (2000) encourage researchers working on this topic to strive towards a definition. In the works of Dubar (2011), identity may be defined on a basic level as the articulation of a twofold transaction, both internal to the individual (self-identity) and external (social identity) between the individual and the institutions with which he is affiliated. The author defines it as "the simultaneously stable and temporary, individual and collective, subjective and objective, biographical and structural result of the various processes of socialisation which, together, construct individuals and define institutions" (Dubar, 2011: 105). Identity is a continuous balancing act between how the individual defines himself and how he is defined.

Far from being just one thing, identity, particularly its social aspect, is multifaceted. While for some (Merton, 1957; Goode, 1960), this plurality equates to conflicts between different roles and identity tensions, for others, the accumulation of different identities gives the individual the means to better manage his/her social integration into diverse working environments (Marks, 1977; Thoits, 2012). Thoits (2012) points out that engaging in voluntary roles (such as those of trade-unionist or leader) seems to bring more benefits – and greater wellbeing – than engaging in non-voluntary roles (such as gender). Additionally, the theory of identity salience (Caller, 1985; Stryker, 1980; Thoits, 1983) shows that the individual does not accord the same importance to all his

social identities. If he/she prioritises the social identity he/she is pursuing, he/she will be more inclined to accept trade-offs in his/her environment and to reinterpret his biographical identity. However, this is not easy step to take.

The works of Turner et al. (1987, 1994) on the theory of self-categorization show that identity oscillates between a biographical dimension and a social dimension. The individual can experience difficulties in distancing himself from the identity of the group to which he belongs. Relational identity prevails over biographical identity. Consequently, because it is difficult for the individual to perceive himself as different from his/her social group, he/she accords no importance to the judgement of third parties who do not belong to this group. Knowles and Gardner (2008) stress that the mechanism of quasi-fusion between self-identity and the identity of his group intensifies when the individual's sense of threat is shared with his fellow employees. The same applies when there is a marked difference between the group to which he belongs and the outside (Terry & Hogg, 1996) or when the identity salience comes through defining the group identity against other groups (Oakes, 1987).

Whether identity plurality is perceived as bringing increased wellbeing or difficulties, commentators agree that it is complex, particularly its relational aspect. The individual can never know how other people see him/her (Gergen & Gergen, 1997; Ibarra, 1999). This casts doubt over whether identity for oneself and identity for another can indeed match up. The two identities do not always correlate. Adjustments take place, termed "identity strategies" by some and "identity work" by others (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Beech, 2008, 2011)[2]. Adopting a critical approach, Watson (2008:129) defines identity work as "the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieu in which they live their lives."

Building on these works, we will define identity work as the sum of the behaviours and attitudes developed consciously by an individual in order to coordinate his/her biographical and relational identities, which may be plural[3]. Our definition reflects the commitment and investment that such coordination entails, as well as the prime importance that we accord to the professional sphere when accounting for the social aspect of identity (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Sainsaulieu underscores that identity is defined as "the relational and social experience of power" (1985: 342). The individual encounters resistance in his/her self-construction efforts. Relational investments in the areas of identity recognition that he desires are not a foregone conclusion. He/she does not always have the legitimacy or the resources (i.e. training or personal network) to obtain an identity that is desired by others. Identity work can prove ineffective (Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). Other people deny the individual the social identities he/she claims to own (Crossley, 2000; Collinson, 2003).

Our decision to retain the term "identity work" rather than merely "identity" conveys our desire to underline the difficulty, or even the destabilising nature, of the identity dynamic. The malleable nature of identity places the individual in stressful situations. He/she finds him/herself unable to meet the identity demands placed on him/her by his/her environment. The disparity between the identity he/she considers him/herself to have and that assigned to him/her by others is so great that he faces significant cognitive dissonance. He/she is therefore obliged to react via coping mechanisms (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Identity work can be defined as the dynamics of regaining a coherent identity which is constantly threatened because people in the environment question its integrity. At the same time, however, other people can provide identity recognition (Gergen & Gergen, 1997; Sims, 2003; Watson, 2009). Identity work is all the more difficult when the individual must move from one identity to another without being given the choice. The case study of role transitions analysed by Ashforth et al. (2000) shows that

2. We choose to employ the term "identity work" here.

3. We acknowledge, as Petriglieri (2011) urges, that identity work also has unconscious aspects. Nevertheless, following this author's lead, we emphasize the conscious aspects, aware that introducing the unconscious would lead to a theoretical syncretism that would be difficult to justify.

identity flexibility ensues when the stability of the individual's identity is threatened. Being malleable with respect to identity supposes a command of numerous interpersonal and biographical resources which the individual may not have or want to use. Identity work can give rise to an identity threat defined by Petriglieri (2011: 644) as "an experience appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity". This definition of identity work sees the loss of employment as a threat to identity. It is a complex situation in which the individual finds him/herself forced to step up his/her identity work in order to manage the disappearance of his/her old identity as a worker and construct another identity as a jobseeker. Thoits (2012) reminds us that performing a salient role leads to wellbeing, while losing it causes genuine suffering.

IDENTITY WORK WITHIN A PROFESSIONAL TRANSITION CAUSED BY JOB LOSS: MANAGING AN IDENTITY THREAT

The loss of one's job is clearly identified by the literature on professional transitions as a threat to identity (Latack et al., 1995; Gowan & Gatewood, 1997). Nevertheless, as far as we know, no author has so far suggested a model for explaining adjustment to this threat. On the other hand, in a more general context, Petriglieri (2011) proposes an overarching analytical framework. She identifies three aspects around which the concept of identity threat can be structured.

The first aspect is an appraisal of the identity danger prompted by the transition that the person faces. Drawing on coping theories (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Leana and Feldman (1994), like Gowan et al. (1999), show that an employee threatened with unemployment carries out a twofold appraisal of his situation. Firstly, he/she foresees a drop in his standard of living and asks him/herself why this is happening. Secondly, he/she projects him/herself into the future and tries to envisage him/herself in a new job. Petriglieri (2011) suggests that two factors aggravate his perception of his identity threat. The first is the significance he accords to the part of his identity that is directly threatened. On this subject, numerous commentators (Shrout et al., 1989; Sainsaulieu, 1985) consider workplace identity as the core of the identity dynamic. Paris and Vickers (2010) report that employees who are made redundant perceive themselves as "lesser human beings". Their identity work ceases. As Willott and Griffin (2004) note, the transition from employment to unemployment can lead to resignation on the part of the individual (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, 1938). Paris and Vickers (2010) show that the worker never recovers the same tranquillity with regard to his identity, even after returning to work. The second factor is the extent to which the person is exposed to the identity threat. Recurrent or prolonged exposure renders the worker more fragile. Being made unemployed is the situation that engenders the most extreme confrontation. The unemployed person cannot avoid continuous self-questioning (Leana & Feldman, 1992).

The second aspect concerns the perception of a breakdown of the acquired identity. Petriglieri (2011) stresses three points. Firstly, identity becomes devalued as a result of the threat. Leana and Feldman (1992) show that unemployed people are perceived, both in the private and the professional spheres, as being in a problematic situation. The second point is that the meaning given to the worker's life by his identity collapses. Paris and Vickers (2010) and Willott and Griffin (2004) show that the disappearance of this bedrock of identity has repercussions on other aspects of identity, such as gender. The male worker who is no longer able to access resources founded on his masculine identity through his work is forced into resignation (Martin, 1987). His identity becomes overwhelmed by negative stereotypes occasioned by his environment. Finally, the unemployed person sees no way of imagining a future with his identity

thus threatened. He experiences a loss against which he is powerless to act (Devine et al., 2003). The termination of employment for non-personal reasons often engenders a feeling of betrayal in employees who may have devoted many years to the service of their company and its economic success (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Pugh et al., 2003).

The third aspect of identity work concerns the sources of the identity threat. Petriglieri (2011) isolates three: the victims themselves, third parties, and the outside world. As for the first group, the author underlines that a dynamic of identity deconstruction can arise when the individual becomes aware that his/h new identity is not compatible with the former one, which he/she prizes. This perspective corroborates the model devised by Leana and Feldman (1990) which highlights the strain caused by the self-devaluation into which unemployed workers sink. The role of third parties constitutes another source of tension. For unemployed workers, the threats are manifold. Whether in the private sphere, where the partner is destabilised within the couple by his or her new standing (Liem & Liem, 1988) or in the professional domain, where to be out of work is a handicap, the threats the unemployed person faces can multiply. These sources of identity threat can weigh down heavily on him/her as he/she tries to construct his/her identity.

The reconstruction dynamic can engender many diverse situations. In terms of coping, i.e. in terms of all the cognitive and behavioural efforts put in place by the worker to reduce the likelihood of a difficult situation occurring (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), our research shows the importance of taking on board all those resources which the worker in transition has available to him/her and which are not fully covered by Petriglieri's model (2011). Latack and Dozier (1995) point out that the unemployed person may have numerous resources at his/her disposal with which to deal with this undesirable professional transition. They distinguish two groups.

The first group consists of personal characteristics. The less at ease the worker felt in the job he/she has just lost, the more likely he/she is to find new work (Leana & Feldman, 1994). Similarly, the point in the worker's career at which the redundancy occurs also plays a role. The older the employee (or, at the other end of the scale, the younger he/she is), the more his/her transition is likely to be difficult (Kaufman, 1982). Louis (1980) and Wagner et al. (1987) show that seniority in the organisation reinforces links with the company, which makes the rupture more painful. According to Latack and Dozier (1986), the transition is easier in the middle of a career. These authors also stress the importance of the worker's status. A manager will find a new position more easily because he has a good basic education and has also benefitted from continuous training allowing him to maintain this initial advantage. Turner (1995) indicates that low income increases the stress of unemployment. Lastly, gender also influences the management of the transition, although here the results seem less clear. While some claim, as noted above, that unemployment destabilizes masculine identity (Paris & Vickers, 2010); others maintain that low-qualified women who are nearing retirement also encounter serious difficulties (Hepworth, 1980).

A second group of resources comprises environmental characteristics. Possessing sufficient financial resources to cope with future uncertainty occasioned by the threat to one's identity is an important aspect of identity work (Leana & Feldman, 1994). The same is true of social support, whether this is provided by family, friends (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1986) or professionals. Tzafir et al. (2006) show the positive impact of the latter. Thanks to the work of these professionals, affected individuals are able to relativize the difficulties they encounter and throw themselves into active job-seeking (Kinicki, 1985). This aids their professional reconstruction. Lastly, the specific details of the transition play an essential role in the worker's ability to bounce back. The more the approach adopted is explained clearly and perceived as fair by the worker, the less likely

the worker is to experience feelings of resentment of anger which prevent him from looking to the future and encourage him/her to enter into conflict with his former employer (Latack et al., 1995).

By relying on these resources, the unemployed worker can develop adjustment strategies. Gowan et al. (1999) differentiate between approaches focused on the problem, the emotion or the symptom. In the first case, the unemployed person acts on the source of the stress. He/she will put in place an action plan, gather information, and plan a move. In the second case, he/she interprets the situation in such a way that it appears less difficult to cope with. He/she can thus relativize the difficulty he/she is experiencing, or even dismiss it. Finally, in the last case, he/she transfers his energies to activities outside his/her professional sphere. Here, investment in community life brings significant compensations in terms of identity (Jahoda, 1972).

This first typology based on the theoretical coping grid (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) overlaps in part with the work of Petrilieri (201) concerning identity work.

Here we encounter a conflict between the source of the measure and the realignment of the situation. Petrilieri (2011) sets out three configurations observed in the workplace which aim to act on the source of the identity threat in order to protect the threatened identity. In the first case, the person questions the relevance of third parties for validating an identity. He/she no longer accords them legitimacy for validating any identity. In the second, he/she may also hide an identity which he/she feels to be threatened and substitute it for one that is easier to defend. Lastly, in the final case, he/she may act on the source of the identity threat by giving the third party information that is likely to dissuade them from acting.

As for the realignment, Petrilieri (2011) again highlights three possible orientations. The employee who chooses the first orientation will change the threatened identity, recalibrating the weight of this identity within his/her identity balance. Here we once again encounter the concept of identity salience (Styker, 1980). With the second option, the employee attempts to change the meaning given to an identity. He/she mobilises both biographical and relational resources in order to make this change happen. Finally, in the last case, the employer may decide to leave the identity behind. Petrilieri (2011) cites the example of nuns who, after Vatican II, saw the definition of their identity change to such an extent that a number of them did not wish to keep it (Ebaugh, 1988).

Collinson (2003) develops this finding of the heterogeneous nature of the adjustments made by individuals who face an identity threat. For his part, he outlines three possible positions. He judges the individual to have a stronger, more malleable identity than that proposed by the coping perspective. In the first position, which he qualifies as a conformist identity, the individual takes on the proposed identity, even if he is fearful of it. In the second position, called the "dramaturgical" identity, the individual is able to fool those around him by presenting an adapted identity. The individual then navigates between the poles of acceptance and refusal. Finally, in the last option, that of resistance identity, the employee chooses to defend his identity despite the price he may have to pay, such as being side-lined by a reference group.

As this wide-ranging literature attests, when adjusting to an identity threat in a professional transition caused by a job loss, the individual initially believes his/her situation surpasses the resources at his disposition. However, precisely by taking command of different resources, the employee may carry out identity adjustment. The diversity of these resources and their availability make this task difficult to understand, so numerous are the possibilities. The employee seems neither totally free nor totally constrained by his/her social environment. He/she retains his ability to co-author his identity, in both its biographical and relational aspects. All the same, the import of this research, following on from research

previously carried out on trade-union leaders, allows us to propose two research hypotheses in relation to our initial question: "How do the leaders of a labour dispute reconstruct their identities after a site is closed? How do they manage the twofold identity rupture caused by losing their job and losing their status as a representative of a disbanded body of workers?"

First of all, the identity threat is acute for this sector of the population. Leaders not only lose their job, like other employees, but also their status as a trade-unionist and leader of a body of employees on strike (Beaujolin-Bellet and Grima, 2011). They are reduced to the status of the aging unemployed – a condition from which it is difficult to reconstruct one's identity (Brewington & Nassar-McMillan, 2000; Riach & Loretto, 2009). However, as several works about activists stress (Fillieule, 2005; Guillaume, 2007; Leclercq & Pagis, 2011), this dual identity of leader and trade-unionist is important for employees (Fillieule & Pechu, 1993; Andolfatto & Labbé, 2011). Furthermore, the personal stories of numerous former trade-unionists (Larose, 2001; Roupnel-Fuentes, 2011) reveal that they face stigmatisation on the job market. No employer wishes to hire an employee who has demonstrated the ability to lead a labour dispute. These various characteristics make workers an extreme case in the sense given by Yin (1994). We advance the following hypothesis: When former trade-union leaders are deprived of resources with which to structure their identity, the identity reconstruction work they carry out during their professional transition proves difficult. Drawing on identity salience theory (Stryker, 1980), Thoits (2012) stresses that the loss of a person's central identity causes him suffering. According to works on self-categorisation (Turnet et al., 1987, 1994), this transition is difficult. The threat itself and the accompanying stigmatisation serve to reinforce the individual's identity as a trade-union leader in charge of a workforce on strike. Breaking free from this identity seems to necessitate intense identity work (Collinson, 2003) which is by no means certain to be effective. Petriglieri (2011) underlines that this focus on protection strategies for the threatened identity can lead to social isolation or even a feeling of inauthenticity, which amounts to increased stress. The presence of social support reinforces the individual's position with respect to his identity. This implantation is even greater if the identity has been anchored in the person for a long time. Petriglieri (2011) goes further by suggesting that the importance of the identity leads the threatened person to accord greater value to the source of his problems than to dissimulating or negating this identity.

Furthermore, the career paths of people such as Monsieur Lepaon, an ex-CGT leader at Moulinex and the new general secretary of this same trade-union, and Monsieur Rabbi, an ex-CGT leader of the Cellatex company and the head of the textile federation for this same trade union, show that it is possible to find a new job, in these cases within a trade-union organisation. These facts lead us to our second hypothesis: some ex-leaders will enact a professional transition within their trade-union organisation. It is possible for an individual to reconstruct his identity within his trade-union. Active coping can be effective (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Contrary to the picture painted by identity salience theory (Thoits, 2012) and self-categorisation theory (Turner et al., 1987, 1994), the trade-union leader, like other employees, appears to possess the resources with which to create identity work, i.e. a professional rebound. Critical research (Collinson, 2003: Watson, 2008) on identity work, like that on coping, can constitute a theoretical basis for this proposition, which contradicts our first one. Thanks to the relational resources within his trade union, the leader has the ability to carry out his professional transition and identity transition. Petriglieri (2011) stresses that a serious identity threat encourages the person to choose to change his identity. The view that the old identity is on the way out encourages this choice. However, we do not have enough information to assert anything beyond the fact that

reconstruction within the trade-union organisation is possible, as the various cited examples attest.

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

In order to achieve our research objectives, our data collection was based on the life-story approach (Essers, 2009: Goodley et al., 2004: McAdams, 1993). This is a pertinent method for obtaining a profound understanding of identity work (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008) and one which has already been mobilised in the context of career transitions (Cohen and Mallon, 2001: Marshall, 2000).

The data were collected between September 2007 and December 2012. Fifty people who had led resistance to proposed job cuts and subsequently lost their jobs were interviewed. In order to find these people, we linked together several methods/processes. Firstly, we identified individuals by going through the archives of several national daily newspapers (l'Humanité, Libération, and Le Monde) to find the most widely covered labour disputes from the past fifteen years. Secondly, we contacted leaders of departmental and branch trade-unions, and lawyers and experts on business committees that we knew, and asked them to tell us the names of trade-union leaders who had led such movements. In order to ensure that they were "trade-union leaders" we triangulated several sources of information, from the press and contact networks, taking care to have at least two concurring sources of information for each case. We then had to move from the research to finding these people, some of whom no longer had any contact with their former colleagues or with trade union members. To do this, we conducted simultaneous research in telephone directories and contact networks. Afterwards, we proceeded by snowball sampling. When making the first contact with a view to organizing a meeting, we asked a few questions in order to verify that the person had indeed played a major role in the conflict (that they attended negotiations to devise a plan to save jobs, gave interviews to the media, filed lawsuits where applicable, held a position on the works council, etc.).

Seeking to expose both public and private life and, often, to talk about traumatic and painful events, we made sure, following the example of Essers (2009), to inspire trust. Through the process of identification by reputation and through snowball sampling, we contacted only individuals for whom we received recommendations. We let them choose the interview place – their current place of work, the departmental trade union premises or, most often, their home. We systematically took the time to introduce ourselves to each participant, setting out our approach, and answering their questions before we started the interview proper. We undertook to treat the data collected anonymously and to send the participants the results of our research. In the end we received very few interview refusals, and we often had the feeling that the interview was fulfilling a freedom of speech role, for people who had possibly never spoken about these events since they occurred. Overall our stance was to accord these people recognition for the role they performed and to empathise with them.

In conjunction with the snowball method of identification, we took care to obtain interviews with a wide range of different personal profiles (regarding age, sex, trade union to which they belonged, current professional status) who had acted in different contexts (varying size and sector of the company, region, and scale of the restructuring). Our interviewees were as follows: 15 women and 35 men, aged between 38 and 64 years old (average age: 48 years), resident in 17 French departments, with 23 affiliated with the CGT, 19 with the CFDT, 5 with the FO and 3 to the CFTC. Before their redundancy, they were either manual workers

(28) or technicians or supervisors (22); they had been with their company for an average of 23 years. They worked in industrial sectors often said to be in crisis (metalworking, the defense industry, textiles and clothing, leather, food processing, photography, etc.). These individuals lost their jobs in downsizing operations that occurred 2 to 3 years before our interview. At the time of the interview, 21 people were absent from the job market or retired (i.e. in long-term unemployment, unstable contract work, early retirement or retirement) and 29 people had found a job or had signed up to a professional redevelopment programme.

The interviews lasted between one and three hours. Following the recommendations of McAdams (1993), we asked the people we met to tell us their personal stories in chapters structured around the following events: the start of their working life, the start of their engagement in the trade-union, the announcement of the final redundancy measures they witnessed, the unfolding of the labour dispute, their departure from the company, and their current situation. We wanted to gain a broad overview of the professional trajectory of the leader in order to better understand the resources to which he had access. The interviews were designed to draw out the individuals' interpretations. They were not carried out in a very leading fashion, meaning that participants could express on their own any possible links between the events, ambiguities or contradictions that they experienced (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). At the end of the interviews, if the interviewees had not spontaneously broached these issues, we asked them more precise questions about their identity as a trade-union leader, as an employee, as a laid-off worker, as a parent and as a spouse. We also asked them about the image fed back to them during and after the dispute by employees, company directors, job market intermediaries, trade-union heads, and their own family members. We supplemented and enriched our understanding of labour disputes in response to planned job cuts – the context in which each interviewee acted – by conducting a press review of each case.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis was carried out in line with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in three phases. In the first phase, we reconstructed the chain of events for each person, paying particular attention to moments of rupture and the articulation of forms of change in the identity work.   In the second phase, we carried out a thematic content analysis supported by double coding. The process was iterative. Each new interview served to question the interpretative structure applied up until then. We especially took our cues from phrases that signified self-definition (e.g. "I'm someone who…": "I've never been able to stand…") or which pointed to emotions that the person felt (e.g. "And then I knew that…", "Then, I broke down", "It was really hard…", etc.) or those that showed how the person felt themselves observed by others (For the employees, I was…"). In the last phase, we classed each individual and drew up a table composed of 33 criteria (e.g. sex, age, age when they joined the union, union organization, seniority, post occupied pre-redundancy, current situation, number of downsizing operations experienced, role played in the trade-union, acceptance of the trade-union engagement by the spouse, marital situation before and after the labour dispute, initial qualifications, etc.) We then examined these three elements in order to frame our analysis in terms of the nature of the specific identity threats faced by these resistance leaders who led disputes against proposed job cuts, and in order to construct a typology of reconstruction dynamics developed by individuals.

More precisely, taking inspiration from Gioia et al. (2012), we firstly employed an initial interpretative grid based essentially on the words of our interviewees (first level of analysis). However, unlike these authors, our first look at the data was theoretically oriented (Locke, 2001). We were able to integrate

theoretical grids from the start of our analysis, so developed was our theoretically-constructed background when we arrived in the field. Afterwards, a second coding was carried out, based even more strongly on the literature. At the end of this process, we isolated three identity balances characterised by the strategies and tactics used to mobilise resources. We maintain the definitions of Rojot (1994), who conceives strategy as "the organising framework that underpins actions, attitudes and behaviours" and tactics as "specific movements selected with the aim of implementing the chosen strategy" (Rojot, 1004: 100). This led us to produce what we will call a data structure similar to that proposed by Gioia et al. (2012) (Table 1). This in turn allows us to update the structure of our thought by moving from an analysis of tactics to strategies and resources, and concluding with identity balances (Table 2).

Table 1. Data structure

Tactics	Strategies	Resources	Identity balances
Discredit the validity of the discourse of the sources of the threat Maintain the dynamic of the resistant collective	Continue the Fight	Perceived betrayal by management Limited activist capital Family tradition of trade-union engagement Lack of economic constraint	Identity tension
Reframe past actions Minimise grudges and disagreements in the collective	Use one's memory		
Become a re-employment officer Promote re-employment	Be effective in each person's professional reconstruction	Augmented activist capital Absence of family tradition of trade-union engagement Strong economic constraint	In-between
Emotional and behavioural overinvestment Assist by proxy	Extend the meaning of these tasks		
Build oneself a warrior image Give more prestige to the new professional identity	Stay positive about career prospects	Augmented activist capital Absence of family tradition of trade-union engagement Disillusionment with trade-union practices Strong economic constraint Social revenge	Turning the page
Gather information on the transition Embrace the old identity	Be effective in personal reconstruction		

At the end of this process, we sought to validate our analyses. We used two separate means. Firstly, we presented our results to 11 trade-union leaders both from the sample (5 cases) and outside of it (6 cases). This gave rise to a sustained debate which led us to develop our analyses, particularly with respect to the resources used. Next, we undertook a double coding analysis. We employed the method of Miles and Huberman (1994) to evaluate the inter-coder reliability (number of agreements/number of agreements plus number of disagreements) relative to the identity work strategies and the resources mobilised. We arrived at a result of 80% (higher than 70%, Miles & Huberman, 1994). Three cases were problematic to interpret. There was some toing and froing between the two coders before they reached full agreement.

Table 2. Tactics mobilised

Tactics	Exemplary quotes
Discredit the validity of the discourse of the sources of the threat	"The prefect is trying to make us believe that it is useless to continue to protest, but he's wrong. Without this action we have no chance of achieving our goals." "The local press thinks the movement is dying out but it's not. We're united and willing to keep up the pressure. I regularly invite them to come and see us."
Maintain the dynamic of the resistant collective	"I'm duty-bound to act so that the collective stays together. I can't do it alone. We organise our friends. We send emails. I'm going to visit people at their homes to tell them how we're getting on." "It's not easy to keep things together because the "every man for himself" approach quickly takes over. There are people who don't want to hear a word about the company but I'm fighting for us to stay together to obtain results. I call people, I see people in their homes. I invite them to call in. I send them copies of the letters I write."
Reframe past actions	"Thanks to all of our efforts, the redundancy scheme we negotiated is an example in the region. The press highlighted the results we obtained."
Minimise grudges and disagreements in the collective	"It's true that that the movement sometimes went too far. Certain people were heckled, and buildings and machines were damaged. But that's a very small element. This is not war!" "We don't always agree but we always manage to find a solution together. Everyone makes an effort because we can't afford not to agree. We have to move forward."
Become a re-employment officer	"I go to the redeployment unit every day and talk to the advisors and each of the workers. If some people stop coming, I call them or I go to see them." "If I hear that someone has problems with their re-employment strategies and I know someone who can help them, I don't hesitate. I did it recently with a worker by calling a person from head office who was able to help him choose the right legal status for his business."
Promote re-employment	"People get discouraged all the time. In our region it's not easy. So I go to see them and I remind them about so-and-so who succeeded, and I tell them that they still have time, there are still avenues to explore." "Last week I reminded X that given his age and what he'd done in the company, he was entitled to apply for a premature departure from active life."
Emotional and behavioural overinvestment	"I don't want to leave my ex-colleagues with no assistance even if I know that everything's been done. So I go to see them, I listen to them; I try to make them feel better."
Assist by proxy	"In my union organisation I'm committed to being flexible. People in the region know that I have experience and they ask for me. I never say no. For me it's a moral obligation."
Build oneself a warrior image	"I made myself what I am. Everything I know professionally, I owe to my work. I know how to deal with change so I know that I'll come through this."
Give more prestige to the new professional identity	"I'm going to do the exams to become a social worker. Working with young people has always appealed to me. I come from a rough area. It is a good job. You keep a taste of the collective. It's a job that makes sense."
Gather information on the transition	"I knew I had to act fast. I had already thought about it, made contacts. In the centre I had a good relationship with the advisor. As the company gave money, I was able to set up my bar very quickly."
Embrace the old identity	"I'm not leaving (my role as a trade-union leader) with nothing. It has been an extraordinary experience. I learned a lot in a very short time. In an emergency you have to find solutions, otherwise it costs you. I know I can't mention it on my CV but I also know that I can do things now that I wouldn't have done before. For example, I'm much less impressionable. I find it easier to speak in front of a group, even if it's big."

RESULTS

Our data analysis allowed us to identify three identity balances[1]: identity tension (21 cases), in-between (13 cases) and identity rupture (16 cases). A choice governs this typology: whether to continue being the union leader of a body of workers on strike, or whether to stop in order to acquire a new professional identity.

TENSION, IN-BETWEEN AND IDENTITY RUPTURE

Identity tension signals the leader's desire to remain the leader of this group, which gets smaller and smaller over time. The strike called in response to the closure is conceived as a moment of brotherhood that people want to prolong. A veritable fusional identity is born for the leader, which he or she wants to make last: "My role is to make sure we stay united to win our case. Together we've already gained a lot, but if we stay together we'll gain even more". The identity work looks to the past and the maintenance of the past identity. The leader makes no individual identity projection. He or she becomes the "guardian of the temple" of the strikers - the former body of employers of a company that has disappeared. On this point, in 5 cases we had the option of gaining access to other laid-off employees who had never held the position of leader. Their words on the subject were very clear: "She (the leader) is the soul of the dispute. She isn't alone but she has a unique role. She carries the group. She gives herself to it completely". The leader considers having a debt to the group that he or she represents.

In contrast, the two other balances – the in-between and the rupture – focus on giving prestige to the emerging professional identity. In the first case, the leader refuses to choose between his past identity of leader and the new identity being constructed: "I can't choose. I'm both at the same time: a leader of the former employees of X and a national head of the trade-union". Very quickly re-employed or promised to be re-employed within the trade-union structure, individuals try to maintain their commitment to the group by continuing to identify as a leader of a body of ex-strikers of a defunct company, at the same time as reconstructing themselves as trade-unionists acting on a regional or national level. A functional duality of identity emerges: the investment in the role of leader of a group on strike constitutes an identity resource which is then used in the new trade-union activity: "Having been one of the leaders lends a certain legitimacy to my new role. No-one can call me an apparatchik. I know what leading a dispute entails". Finally, with the identity rupture, the leader chooses to focus on developing his new professional identity independently of the former strikers and the world of the trade union. His or her reconstruction occurs in isolation from these reference points. The identity of leader now belongs to his or her professional past. It is no longer mobilized the new professional activity as such, even though the skills and experiences are useful to the ex-leader in his or her new professional identity: "I'm no longer the leader of X dispute. I was, but I am no more. Now I'm a training specialist. I learned a lot during that fight about myself and about others. It stays with me, I make use of it in my work, but the fact of having been a leader has no direct bearing on my professional practice".

After introducing the strategies and tactics used in each case, we will present the resources behind them and their results in terms of professional re-employment and personal balance.

IDENTITY TENSION: REMAINING A LEADER

Carrying on the fight

The leader refuses to perceive the closure of the company as the end of his unionist and leader identities. For him the fight continues. Here he develops two tactics.

With the first, according to the analyses of Petriglieri (2011) and Collinson (2003), he discredits the validity of the discourse of the sources of the identity threat: "For me the dispute isn't over. Management would have us believe it, as would many politicians. But for me, the closure is one stage in a process that comprises many legal phases. I am the representative of a collective which is still fighting even though the fight has taken on other forms." The action concerns the company management, public authorities and the press, or even other trade unions. The passage of time does not help the cause, and being understood by those around them proves difficult: "We don't have the same audience in the region now, let alone across the country!" Several interviewees underline that this downturn is sometimes reinforced by the emergence of other closures which are more of a media sensation because they involve bigger companies: "How on earth can we make ourselves heard when a group like T is closing a site?" This weak presence on the television or in the press drives the leader to prefer other sources of communication for his counter-discourse, such as the internet: "We've set up a blog". Leaders also stress the benefit of participating in solidarity protests with other movements: "We show that we're still alive and still capable of mobilising".

The second tactic consists of keeping together the collective who went on strike. The first tactic was about making the group present in the outside world; here, the aim is to make the collective live on internally in resistance. Once again, the work is not easy. The leader can no longer count on the coordinating space of the workplace or on media pressure to bind the collective together. He or she then takes on outreach work which takes the form of regular telephone calls to check up on the most vulnerable workers: "I keep in touch with my old colleagues. I see them at their houses. I encourage the most motivated among them to see those who we feel are losing heart. I try to maintain the solidarity dynamic that was present during the strike". The leader also organises meetings to keep former colleagues up to date on the legal action taken, as well as informal evenings at which he or she aims to keep attendance high by introducing a convivial element such as a barbecue.

Making use of memory

In order to remain the leader of a group that is objectively disappearing, the leader carries out significant memory work based on the employment of two tactics.

With the first, the leader re-casts the meaning of past events. This tactic may be compared to the positive distinction work described by Petriglieri (2011) or the symptom-focused threat management strategy (Gowan et al., 1999). It is about re-interpreting the first results obtained in a positive light. The 21 individuals who took on this profile claim to have obtained "the best redundancy package ever seen in France". They stress that the diverse interests of the workers (youths, seniors, permanent employees and contract workers) were respected: "We really achieved a redundancy scheme that respected everyone. There were no favourites". This judgement was supported in every case by the opinion of a third-party specialist (journalist, work inspector, trade unionist): "you only need to read the press to see that the package is very good." The collective is described as motivated and still active.

Through memory work, the leader becomes the head of an association of former workers which produces books of personal stories and poems, or even a

film which retells the dispute: "The association is both a force of opposition and a place to recharge for many people. For me, it's the place where I can keep the group alive". The ex-leader puts forward a new weighting of the key elements of the dispute by advancing a global view of it. Far from making a clear distinction between the dispute and its aftermath, he brings together these two phases and suggests looking at the results at the end of the legal process: "It's at the end of the ball that you pay the musicians. The closure is just the first stage. Let's wait until the end of the proceedings. On the other side, they're not calm. I understand them. Here on our side, we know we're going to win".

The second strategy accompanies the first move to accord prestige. The leader tends to omit or minimise the negative elements of the collective dynamic, like disagreements between strikers or violence, which is explained away as acts by desperate or extremist elements: "You can't control everything. The source of the violence should be examined before the strikers are blamed. Who is behind this violence? It's the bosses, whose behaviour drives employees to extremes." On the contrary, the leader insists that the strikers proved they were responsible by stressing that the public authorities recognised this aspect: "In the face of humiliation we kept our dignity. They weren't able to make us crack and resort to violence. The labour movement is first and foremost about the dignity of the fight. The police commissioner recognised our efforts." Without denying the disagreements that occurred between the strikers, the union leader stresses the democratic operation of the collective: "We decide everything together".

As we have seen with these two tactics, the leader does not undertake any action to construct him/herself a new identity. He or she remains the trade-union leader of a group that went on strike: "When you have those kinds of responsibilities, you can't think about yourself. You have to think about the group. In any case, I stayed on after the dispute to look after my colleagues' interests. I'll think about myself later."

Varied identity resources

This identity balance mobilises four resources that underpin the strategies used. Bitterness and resentment aside, the examination of the closure of the company was not transparent. On the contrary, the leader clearly felt betrayed: "After all the years you gave to the company, the personal sacrifices you made in terms of hours of work and money, when you learn all of a sudden that your site is being shut down although its making 9% profit, you can't help but feel anger, resentment, and a desire to smash everything up". This leader found out by accident about the closure of the site. A trade-union representative describes how he discovered the site was closing when he found some articles manufactured by another site among the stock in transit, whereas only stock made on that site should have been present. Another recalls how he, along with some colleagues, was providing security surveillance on weekends in May, on one of which he saw the local director in the process of dismantling the machines. Several interviewees pointed to the duplicity of managers who continued until the last minute to insist that the site would remain open. One representative recalled how he found himself in a delicate situation on the shop floor when a government representative had just announced the closure of the site whereas the Human Resources director had assured groups of workers assembled in the yard just one hour earlier that the company would never close. Another remembered one of the establishment's directors wishing the site a long life – four months later he closed it. A strong wish for revenge was in evidence: "When you're faced with so much injustice and so many lies, you can't sweep it under the carpet. You have to react."

Afterwards, leaders possess activist capital (Matonti & Poupeau, 2004). Their engagement in the trade-union is on the local level. Having worked in the same business for many years (more than 25 on average), they have never been

called by the local branch of the trade-union to carry out training or do a piece of work. They have no mentor within the structure to help their career change. Furthermore, we were told in one interview with a local director that his profile was not considered attractive by his regional trade-union structure. He had joined the union on a local level, when young, and had fought to extend the influence of his organisation: "For me, trade-unionism is in-the-field, not in the umbrella group's offices. I never wanted to be there." This leader's engagement caused him to be overtaken quickly in technical matters in his professional field. A lack of training and experience in the field often lead to professional marginalisation which the individual accepts: "It's true that I'm not very employable now. I would no longer describe myself as a good professional."

Thirdly, the leader may follow in a family traditional which legitimizes his trade-union engagement. In several cases, the ex-leader knew people in his situation before the dispute who provided behavioural models of investment in the collective after the dispute. One ex-leader explains: "In my family, no-one would have understood if I'd deserted my colleagues after the closure of the site. When you're the leader of a dispute, like a military general, you don't leave your troops alone after a lost battle. On the contrary, that's when they need you most. I'm not a hero, but a guy who does what he has to do." Here we saw cases of siblings, couples or generations of the same family who had led disputes together. Aside from family traditions, it seems that leaders could not leave their former colleagues alone after the closure without risking serious conflict in the private sphere. Paradoxically, although the literature presents social support, in all its forms, as a resource which facilitates professional transition, here it is the opposite. It is a powerful obstacle to an identity transition towards a new identity, since its biographical resources (family ties) perpetuate identity tension.

Finally, this orientation away from a return to the employment market relies on overcoming an economic constraint. The ex-leader was often (in 15 cases) an elderly manual worker (over 55), with no dependent children in 14 out of 21 cases. In such cases, the redundancy scheme provided that he did not have to look for new work, granting him a premature departure from active life or a work dispensation. In 8 cases, the leader could count on the financial support of his wife. His economic stability was therefore assured.

Identity tension implies intense identity work which is heightened if the situation becomes increasingly different from the scenario envisaged, i.e. a group of strikers standing shoulder to shoulder around their leader. One leader explained, "I've lost my battalion. I'm like a General without an army". Although leaders perceive this discrepancy, their belief in a remedy from the Justice system for the prejudice suffered, combined with the different resources described above, mean that they do not experience identity-related suffering. On the contrary, they feel firmly on-track and socially useful to the group to which they are committed: "I'm where I should be. I'm not suffering because I'm where it's at. I'm fighting unacceptable injustices. I'm sure that by collective action we'll achieve good results together. I admit that I'm a bit weary. People come less often. That's only natural, but on big occasions, everyone's here! Everyone plays their part and has a duty to play it for the common good."

BETWEEN TWO IDENTITIES: REDEFINING ONESELF FROM THE TOP DOWN?

Being effective in each person's professional reconstruction

The leader is dedicated to the professional re-employment of his colleagues. This is a tactic for resolving identity questioning which is focused on the source of the problem. Two tactics are implemented.

With the first, the leader becomes a re-employment officer. He or she participates actively in the choices of re-employment providers. In order to do so,

he or she makes enquiries to the union of the individual concerned and asks for information on the professionalism of the consultants: "I called the trade-union at national level to get advices about the choice of the redeployment unit. I asked to be given the telephone numbers of other people who had used their services." Leaders regularly ask, in follow-up meetings, for the results for each staff category, and do not hesitate to switch to other means if the situation calls for it. In addition, they contact their former Human Resources manager to plead the cases of certain people: "There were several people in the group who had been worn down. There was one in particular who we felt was on the verge of doing something stupid. To avoid the worst, I paid particular attention to his file and managed to obtain him a transfer to another site." Leaders may even mobilise public authorities or the press to achieve their aims: "I had no hesitation in giving an interview to the local press explaining how the re-deployment unit worked. The prefect didn't like it, and nor did the former Human Resources Manager. Nevertheless I felt a change among the advisors afterwards…"

Leaders use their new position in the trade-union to facilitate the identity reconstruction of their ex-colleagues by drawing on the support of outside specialists: "My contacts in the trade-union umbrella organisation helped me find experts in restructuring. I strengthened links with some of them that I had already established during the redundancy procedure. They gave me food for thought and explained the options. I use all that when I return each week to the re-employment centre. That gives the workers some guiding principles. They have a better idea of where they can go." In doing this, leaders remain leaders of a body of strikers but not in the same way as the first profile. While in the first case, leaders worked to retain their identity by anchoring their colleagues in the past and turning the time of the strike into a golden moment to be cherished, here leaders work to disband the collective in favour of the emergence of individual professional construction that mirrors their own case. "You have to look forward. The future is no longer at X. X has closed. It has to be mourned. My role is to help workers to rebuild themselves and not to shut them up in the past."

With the second tactic, leaders promote the effectiveness of re-employment tools. They organise meetings to make workers aware of the quality of the service. They tell them about various possibilities for training or for pursuing personal projects. On this last point, they are on the look-out to ensure that fragile workers do not present unrealistic projects: "I know that the centre has pressure on it to achieve results and that the Human Resources Manager wants to attain high rates of re-employment. Consultants may be tempted to accept career-change files a bit too easily. So I follow all the dossiers that progress too quickly. I call the colleague and we discuss their project. I make sure its solid. I advise them to speak to such and such a person who I know is well informed about their subject. If I see that it's not really serious in the follow-up meeting I intervene. Or, I call the head of the centre to find a solution with him". This leader went to visit these same people in their homes, and telephoned them regularly. Leaders use their knowledge both for finding colleagues new work and for making sure that their malaise does not turn into a depression, which would lead to long-term exclusion from the job market.

Extending the meaning of these tasks

Leaders have to contend with a high degree of emotional tension. In effect, their commitment to the ex-workers causes them to be exposed to strong cases of social distress, while their personal professional situation is rather good: "I have to say, the strike did give me recognition in my trade-union. You could say that I got a promotion, even though I don't see it like that." Here the leader is forced to acknowledge the difference between his situation and that of the other workers who are job seeking while he has attained a sure and stable future

without having to profoundly change his professional identity. A feeling of betrayal takes hold, which will motivate two adjustment tactics.

With the first, leaders devote themselves to the workers who are in distress. A tactic of emotional and behavioural over-investment develops. The leader fights his culpability by re-presenting his identity reconstruction in a light favourable to his ex-colleagues: "I'm struggling with the difficulties my colleagues are facing and my personal situation. I feel embarrassed. So I'm doing everything I can for them, especially for the weakest ones." This identity work is characterised by a quasi-devotion to the most difficult cases. The leader goes to see them every day, telephones them, and listens to them. Such action is not always easy because the ex-workers are also conscious of the disparity between them and the leader. The leader is not seen as a saviour. His/her devotion is sometimes not understood. The worker who is having difficulties can even be harsh: "I've faced difficult situations where workers were wounded. Some can be aggressive. I had one worker who told me that I'd taken advantage of the closure to dig myself in. Others, who I helped for months, no longer want to know me. They cross the street when they see me in town." As this example shows, this tactic does not reduce the blame placed on the leader since his personal investment goes unrecognised.

With the second tactic, leaders draw attention to their activity within the trade-union organisation in order to help other leaders to manage similar situations. They develop a tactic of relief by proxy. They become their union's point of reference for local stakeholders on the subject of the reorganisation. They devote their time to internal committees and working groups. They complete training, whether as a preventive measure or a remedial measure (during disputes). They insist on the importance of skill transfer and eagerly give talks and encourage local debate: "You have to share your experience. That's vital. Other representatives have to be able to benefit from our experience on order to be more effective in managing their dispute. It's like a long chain of mutual aid in which I'm just a link." The identity of the leader is not seen as a failure but rather as an opportunity for learning which it is urgent to share so that it may benefit other activists: "My experience can help others, I'm sure of it. That's why I tell my story as often as I can." Here some interaction appears between the two identities. The identity of "leader of a striking workforce" gives the individuals legitimacy in their new identity of national or regional trade-union leaders, and this enables them to help former colleagues more effectively through their raised profile and their extended personal networks.

Unbalanced resources

Three resources underpin this identity balance. Unlike with the first profile, ex-leaders have considerable activist capital (Matonti & Poupeau, 2004). Their work in the trade union goes beyond the local level: "Very early on in my career as an activist I had contacts outside the company. I started out in the local union where I looked after the legal files. Next, on the federal level, I completed training and then I became a trainer. I was also entrusted assignments on economic topics such as the direction in which our industry was headed." Recognition in the local union or umbrella group, contact with trade union managers and legal training all point to the beginning of a promising trade-union career. Leaders have supporters in the organisation who see potential for the union in them. Managing the dispute advances the leaders' trade-union career. It highlights that they are responsible organisers.

This secure path enables the leader to bypass the economic difficulties to which he or she would otherwise be susceptible. Although better trained than leaders who have the first profile (8 of these 13 leaders were technicians, compared to only 6 out of 21 in the first profile), the leader's relative youth (the average age was 45 years and the average length of service was 17 years)

means that he or she is not immune from some job seeking, which must be conducted against the backdrop of a bad reputation: "It's true that if I didn't have this job in the union, I think I'd have to move away. The employers in the area know me well now and I'm sure I'm on their blacklist." Several tried out job seeking and found themselves discriminated against: "At the job centre, the advisor told me that I was a particular kind of job seeker. He compared my situation to having a criminal record. All the same, I wanted to see for myself, so I went to a recruitment session. I passed the first two interviews no problem. The third was with the Human Resources Manager. He told me that he knew who I was and that there would be no place for me in his company – not now and not ever."

Lastly, on a personal level, leaders face a grave threat to their private lives. The people around them do not see the intensity of their commitment as legitimate like in the first case. They are often the first in their families to follow such a career path. This lack of precedent has important consequences. The more the immediate family understood the commitment during the dispute, the less it appears unjustified to them afterwards. Support gives way to incomprehension, or even to anger which led in four cases (2 out of 4 women and 2 out of 9 men) to relationship breakdown or to rejection by the community: "My husband couldn't handle my role in the dispute in the long term. I can't say it was the only reason for our break-up, but it didn't help our relationship." In all cases, especially those involving women (3 cases out of 4), ex-leaders were expected to return to some kind of normality regarding their share of the household tasks. Their inability to stop their worklife affecting their personal life caused their partners to ask them to make a choice between activism and family commitments: "My husband reminded me several times that trade-unionism isn't compatible with being in a couple. At some point, I had to choose."

In contrast to the previous profile, the "in-between" identity implies identity tensions. Leaders must manage their feelings of guilt about advancing in their personal career in the union while many former colleagues face instability: "When you are making progress and you see that others around you are stuck in the past and starting to sink, it affects you." Despite identity work which coordinates action on the source of the identity threat and reframing the dual identity, especially its new dimension, the leader still suffers. He or she is weakened by every concrete reminder of the difficulties his or her former colleagues are facing.

TURNING THE PAGE: FORGETTING AND REBUILDING A CAREER ELSEWHERE

Staying positive about career prospects

Here, leaders express optimism about their futures, developing two tactics. With the first, the leader completes an important re-evaluation of his or her capacity to bounce back by re-interpreting his or her career path as voluntary. Leaders construct an image of themselves as a warrior. This is an example of an emotion-focused strategy. The person describes him- or herself as someone who faces challenges. They liken their career path to that of an entrepreneur who made judicious choices: "I haven't had an easy career. I've had to overcome numerous obstacles. To obtain my mechanics diploma I had to convince my team leader and also the head of the course that I was capable of it." The leader is not a victim of job cutbacks but a strategist who has taken advantage of his or her opportunities. They have patiently built up their skill-set and planned a project that the money provided by the redundancy scheme finally gives them the chance to put into action. They do not see themselves as a victim of stigmatisation: "I don't think I have the image of an activist. I led a legitimate dispute and employed moderate means. Everyone recognised that. No-one can hold it against me. What's more, I have proven technical skills. There's a lack of

technicians who can do arc welding in the region. I'm not worried about finding my next job."

With the second, the leader describes his or her new professional identity with enthusiasm. This identity is seen as rebound, a long-buried desire which at last found an opportunity: "I've always dreamed of being a beekeeper. Now I have the chance to make this dream a reality. At the same time, I'll carry on the trade-union movement by joining the French farmers' association (Confédération paysanne)." This new professional identity comes at a good time. It allows the reader to regain their enthusiasm at a time when it was waning: "I've gone as far as I can in my job. I'm going to try the selection procedure for a supervisor role. That's a real profession that corresponds to what I want to do: defend the workers. I'm staying loyal to my ideas and moving forward professionally."

Being effective in the professional reconstruction process

Two tactics are developed here. With the first, ex-leaders acts on the source of their unstable identity. They take charge of their professional transition by firstly gathering information. Unlike in the previous profile, which relies on a group dynamic at this level, this is a uniquely personal affair. The leader, who is well placed to understand the re-employment procedure, manages things as well as possible: "Very early on in the redundancies, I thought about my professional future. I got information from the national association for professional training. I met people from the career centre. I put together an application for some trainer training financed by the redundancy scheme." The professional projects are daring. Sometimes leaders plan to start up a business. Some also plan to take a professional role in Human Resources: "After evaluating my skills, I quickly arrived at the conclusion that Human Resources was the only place I could go. It's true that it seemed strange at first, both for me and for my colleagues, but it was the solution that fit me best and so I went with it". Two of them managed to seize this professional opportunity in their own region. The ex-leader may also become a civil servant either in an activity associated with the company (lifelong professional development) or, in contrast, in a field which is completely new to him or her (social development). The leader devises action plans to meet his or her objectives. He or she may also think about moving: "If I have to move up North, I'll do it. That's not a problem. You have to be mobile these days".

With the second tactic, leaders seek to take advantage of their experience as a trade-union leader both before and during the strike. Their role as leader of an industrial strike allows them to make professional discoveries that can help them in their identity transition. They concentrate on these new leadership abilities. They extend their legal and economic knowledge and may access new training: "Leading a group on strike helped me learn a lot, especially about myself. I've grown in confidence. I've learned how to talk to people in authority, whereas before I'd have stayed in the background. Now I know how to cope. Later, I developed my ability to analyse both personal and group situations. I acquired the basics of law and economics. I'm no longer the same person."

Extended resources

Four resources shape this identity balance. Firstly, the leader relies on moderate trade-union engagement. The trade-union identity is not as absorbing as in the first case: "I don't deny my commitment to the union. I have values and I fight injustice but I never saw myself being a trade-unionist forever. It was a phase in my life. I measure myself based on other things such as my work and my private life." Ex-leaders reject what they call an "over-commitment to activism", where professional life and public life become subordinate to participation in the union. These leaders are not identified as potentials for the union hierarchy like in the second configuration we describe. On the contrary, they maintain a three-fold identity (trade-union, professional and familial). Their

initial commitment was the result of particular circumstances such as sympathy for a representative or a request by other workers or even the management. More infrequently, it may have been carried out during the dispute or just before. This was the case of one female leader who was pressurised into accepting the role by her colleagues, who were disappointed with their representatives.

Secondly, the leader's activism has shaky foundations, with no support coming from the private sphere: "I can't claim to be from an activist background. I'm the first. My wife wasn't overjoyed when she learned of my decision. She didn't stop me, but she didn't encourage me either!" The person is often the only one in his or her circle to have joined a union, which facilitates trade-union withdrawal. The family's removal from the trade-union world means that they support the leader in his or her professional reorientation, unlike in the first case: "When I decided to distance myself from the union, neither my husband nor my children opposed my choice. In fact, I felt they were in favour of it. That helped, for sure." Here we see that the third profile differs from the second by the presence of a family unit that tolerates the leader's trade-union commitment rather than understands it.

Thirdly, the leader's identity reconstruction is facilitated by the fact that he or she feels disillusioned with certain trade-union practices. Ex-leaders explained that they experienced trade-union hypocrisy in the handling of the dispute. Two aspects were regularly cited: the absence or inefficiency of the central structure, and the presence of corruption or attempts to bribe trade-union representatives. One representative revealed: "During the final redundancy scheme negotiations I saw that the management had bribed one representative. I was sure that his union knew about it but did nothing. It's sickening to see what he got compared to the others, when he was saying all along that everyone should receive the same amount!" Such practices lead to injustices and feelings of betrayal which are hard to bear. Lastly, several ex-leaders were refused permanent status by their union at times when they felt they deserved it. This professional disappointment was keenly felt after they had invested so much and jeopardized their employability: "Even if you don't do it for that, you expect support from your union during tough times. For me, that didn't happen. I could have kicked the bucket and they wouldn't have done anything!"

This rejection is even more keenly felt if ex-leaders are under strong economic pressure. Their image as a strike leader harms their career transition, and they must act as quickly as possible to reposition themselves. The 8 manual workers and 8 clerical, technical and supervisory staff that made up this group were all in difficult financial situations that restricted their ability to earn a living. Four of the five women in this group were raising their children alone. Among the 11 men, 2 had a wife who did not work or worked part-time. Although their shorter length of service (under 15 years) and their younger age (under 40 years on average) should enable them to reposition themselves more easily on the job market, it still proves difficult.

When faced with this lack of empathy, ex-leaders feel disillusioned and seek to extricate themselves. They feel they have no debt towards the collective: "I can look at myself in the mirror. I know what I've done. You can always say that you could have got more, but that's easy. I gave to the group. Now that the dispute is over, it's time to think a bit about myself." The commitment to the collective during the dispute exempts the leader from all judgement concerning his or her future career.

Lastly, in-depth analysis of leader's career path revealed a strong desire to succeed which had been frustrated by financial reasons (a poor family) or personal reasons (becoming a mother at an early age). Composed of members aged between 35 and 53, with 8 of them technicians, this group was younger and better educated than the first group but not the second. By holding the position of leader and realising that they had achieved results, these individuals were

suddenly made aware of their potential: "The dispute made me see that I can cope in situations I couldn't have before. It showed me that I'm capable of things I thought I couldn't do." Leaders admitted that they thought they had previously been undervalued. A desire to catch up was born.

This identity transition proves successful in the majority of cases. The leader turns the page and distances himself from his past identity to embrace a new one which he prizes. He or she is proud of this transformation and experiences no regret with regard to the strikers that he or she led: "I did my bit. I made a commitment for the others. I took personal and professional risks. As to those who tried to make me feel guilty about turning the page, I'm waiting to see what they've done!" However, this audacity can also lead to failure which then overtakes the financial threat in the ex-leader's worries. A difficult economic climate, boundless enthusiasm, and ignorance regarding the new activity lead to the failure of entrepreneurial adventures in the restaurant industry, bike hire or bar management. The experience of a second failure plunges the impoverished ex-leader into depression and sometimes alcohol dependency: "After the closure, I opened a bar with my severance pay. Because I'm a member of a biker club that I've been in charge of for many years, I thought I had a ready-made clientele. The measures against drink-driving came at a bad time for me. I didn't have many punters at all. The venture didn't work and I had to sell it. Then I had nothing so I sunk into depression and drinking. I came out of the whole two years later, thanks to my wife."

DISCUSSION

At a time of multiple site closures, this paper aims to analyse how the leaders of a labour dispute in response to the closure of a site reconstruct themselves in terms of their identity. How do they manage the two-fold identity rupture associated with their job loss and the ending of their role as a representative of a disbanded body of workers? By combining the contributions of critical theories of identity, identity salience, self-categorisation and coping, we advanced two hypotheses:

When former trade-union leaders are deprived of resources with which to structure their identity, the identity reconstruction work they carry out during their professional transition proves difficult. Their sacrifices are so great that this identity work goes hand in hand with suffering.
Some ex-leaders will enact a professional transition within their trade-union organisation.

Basing our analysis on 50 life stories, we can state that these hypotheses are only partially valid. Our work contributes to furthering understanding of identity work within a context rarely studied which spans leadership, disputes, resistance and stigmatisation. Aside from the diverse identity adjustments that it brings to light, this study confirms elements previously identified by the literature on both transitions and identity threats while it questions others, making some original points which offer promising avenues for future research.

This research showcases three identity balances (identity tension, in-between and turning the page), linking resources to identity constructs which are as distinct in their aims as in their behavioural and/or cognitive processes. Contrary to what several research works propose (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, 1938; Martin, 1987; Willott & Griffin, 2004; Paris & Vickers, 2010), this research maintains that the individual refuses to renounce his or her identity independence in a particularly threatening situation (Devine et al., 2003). This identity work is conscious and intense (Collinson, 2003). Far from being passive, the ex-leader stages an identity combat to establish his or her new professional identity, even if

the latter partially or even completely resembles the former, such as in the in-between and identity tension phases. The identity strategies adopted are varied and sometimes contradictory. On this point, our research questions Petriglieri's (2011) model, which underscores the fact that an individual who feels threatened will tend to shun his or her old identity and invest in one that is more comforting. Nevertheless, rather than presenting a clear picture, our article shows that identity strategies are intermeshed by detailing the tactics employed. In so doing, we show that ex-leaders combine contradictory tactics.

This analysis constitutes one of the first contributions pertaining to the strategies developed, in particular in relation to Petriglieri's (2011) model and the literature on professional transitions. In both the in-between balance and the turning the page option, the ex-leader combines problem-focused and emotion-focused management strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Gowan et al., 1999). Here, in the same move, the ex-leader manages the transition by placing this strategic contradiction at the heart of his identity work. This joint development of protection strategies for the former identity and construction strategies for the future identity calls into question the sequences proposed by Petriglieri (2011). Although Petriglieri claims that all identity reconstruction strategies such as the positive distinction strategy make the identity threat disappear, while discrediting and dissimulation strategies cause it to remain, our research only partially confirms this theory.

In the turning the page option, which is the only one that can really be likened to a professional transition as described by the literature, our results confirm the work of Petriglieri (2011). The identity restructuring which takes place in a behavioural and cognitive context effectively engenders a diminished perception of the threat. Here, works on coping are also relevant. As Leana and Feldman (1994) observe, professional repositioning only operates successfully – i.e. a new job is only found – if the person in transition is capable of managing the stress of the situation. Strategies which are focused on the problem must later become emotion-focused.

On the other hand, the tension option shows that strategies of discrediting the source of the tension and the denial strategies set out in the coping strategy framework can prove effective. The ex-leader, who still identifies as a leader, successfully eliminates the identity threat, even if there is no professional rebound. On this level, the symptom-management strategy (Jahoda, 1972; Gowan et al., 1999) is shown to be valid. Conversely, there is validation of the theories of self-categorisation (Turner et al., 1987, 1994) and identity salience (Stryker, 1980).

Our work shows that with the in-between identity balance, the reaction to the identity threat is ternary rather than binary. This third way constitutes a painful path along the course of which a new identity is constructed and the identity threat is eliminated. However, for Petriglieri (2011), as for analysis in terms of coping (Gowan et al., 1999), an individual cannot experience such a situation. This result questions the effectiveness of coping strategies focusing on the source of the tension, as well as those oriented towards reconstruction. In addition, it calls for a reconceptualization of adjustment in response to identity threat. In contrast to Petriglieri (2011), it shows that one can build oneself a new identity while conserving the old one and continuing to suffer. This result leads us to question the effectiveness of coping strategies (Bandura, 1988) and their goals in the context of aging and unemployed workers (Brewington & Nassar-McMillan, 2000; Riach & Loretto, 2009).

By taking into account the contextual factors identified by Petriglieri (2011) and the literature on professional transitions, we may deepen our analysis of this effectiveness. The first factor is the perception that the identity threat is intense. A consensus emerges (Latack et al., 1995; Petriglieri, 2011) that there is a link between this and identity reconstruction strategies. On this basis, one might think

that leaders in a phase of identity tension get stuck in this identity balance out of fear that they could never become anything else, whereas with the other two options they would look forward because they would have a surer future. However, this blueprint does not really apply. Leaders who become stuck in a state of identity tension choose never to imagine any other identity than remaining leaders of a collective of ex-strikers. There is still some identity reconstruction because the collective is not the same – it has fewer and fewer members, it is no longer on strike and it is no longer in the company.

This identity reconstruction based on symptom-focused and emotion-focused strategies is facilitated by a collective that provides social support, allowing the threatened identity to be defended. This result confirms the work of Petriglieri (2011). On the other hand, our analyses on the ability to act on the source of the threat and the centrality of the identity proved less pertinent here. Contrary to what Petriglieri (2011) shows, the leaders in identity tension consider themselves able to act on the source of the identity threat both in an individual and a collective capacity. Yet they develop strategies for negating the value of the discourse of this target (here, the management of the company making the job cuts). In the same way, the identity tension balance shows that the centrality of the identity also leads to the development of discreditation strategies. For reconstruction strategies, the role of the idea of the outgoing identity and the recurrence of the threatened identity are fully validated in the "turning the page" and "in-between" identities, and even in identity tension. On the other hand, the perception of the intensity of the threat does not lead to a reduction in the importance of the identity that is left behind.

This complexity leads us to advance, as does Kaufman (1982) in his work on transition frameworks, that the identity adjustment of former trade-union leaders following a redundancy scheme has a special feature. Our research shows that leaving behind an identity constitutes a much more difficult task than turning to a new one. In this respect, it confirms the importance of identity construction work (Sainsaulieu, 1985). The theoretical frameworks of identity salience (Stryker, 1980; Callero, 1985; Thoits, 1983; 2012) and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) provide us with valuable frameworks of analysis. It appears that the identity of the leader is central to the identity portfolio of the ex-leader. Its importance is such that its disappearance provokes an identity crisis that is too much for the leader to bear (Petriglieri, 2011).

The work of Sainsaulieu (1985) allows us to define our aim even more precisely since it extends Petriglieri's (2011) analysis grid by offering an approach that integrates the socialisation dynamic of the worker. In the first two types of identity work (tension and in-between), the leader finds him/herself in the midst of a fusional identity whereas in the last he relies on an affinity identity. Leaving behind the first seems much harder than leaving behind the second. Here we find a validation of the theory of self-categorisation (Turnet et al., 1987; 1994). It would be logical to conclude that the leader in the first case must face a much higher number of significant third parties than in the second, which renders his or her deconstruction work more difficult (Ashforth et al., 2000; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). The enveloping fusional identity is stronger than the affinity one. Additionally, being confronted with difficult cases of job instability reinforces the difficulty of the adjustment and increases the identity closure within the group in point. This recalls the critical analysis of Collinson (2003) in terms of resistance.

More broadly, this study enriches the understanding of identity threat proposed by Petriglieri (2011) by introducing resources. While analysing identity work gives a short-term view (Leana & Feldman, 1994; Gowan et al., 1999), taking resources into account resituates identity construction in a long-term context, that of the ex-leader's life. In this respect, this study answers Petriglieri's (2011) call to integrate time in our understanding of adaptation to identity threat.

The ex-leaders appear restricted in their identity reconstruction by both their past identity work and the resources they can use to construct meaning. It appears that searching for a balance between the professional, private and trade-union spheres facilitates a professional rebound, while focusing exclusively on the latter leads to an inability to say goodbye to the old identity. Despite this, this study does not draw the conclusion that leaders who choose the "turning the page" option primarily define themselves in terms of activities outside their work or union. They try to find a balance. Seniority in a post also hinders mobility (Wagner et al., 1987; Louis, 1980). A high level of education (Turner, 1995) is shown to be a point in favour of mobility when faced with identity threat. Although the "turning the page" balance comprised a higher proportion of women than the other two groups, we are reluctant to conclude that they have a greater aptitude for it than men. Our study confirms the absence of clarity regarding the influence of gender on the management of identity threat (Hepworth, 1980; Fallick, 1996; Kletzer, 1998). Paradoxically, this research shows that social support from the family can impede professional mobility, even though the literature has always affirmed the contrary (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1986; Tzafir et al.; 2006). This difference can be accounted for, in our opinion, by the weight of family traditions of collective engagement, which are not as strong in other studies on professional transitions. The theory of self-categorisation (Turner et al., 1994) explains this paradoxical result: the leader cannot leave his identity reference group. The stronger the identity threat, the stronger this group's hold over him is. Conversely, identity flexibility at the moment of transition seems related to the absence of trade-union identity reinforcements in the familial environment, and to the experience of ethically questionable union practices. Feeling betrayed also plays a role in identity tension (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Pugh, et al., 2003). On the other hand, although being promoted within a trade union facilitates mobility, it proves painful.

This affirmation of identity rigidity contrasts with the flexibility shown in other contexts such as that of Moroccan female entrepreneurs described by Essers and Benschop (2007). Leaving aside the cultural differences between the Netherlands and France, the difference in the nature of the stigmatisation faced by these two groups could explain this difference. While the female entrepreneurs must not renounce their identity as women, which they instead amend or keep alive in other domains, the ex-leaders are confronted by an irretrievable loss of an already long-standing identity (Louis, 1980; Wagner, et al., 1987). Furthermore, it seems clear that while female entrepreneurs can base their identity construction strategy on social recognition gained from their activity, trade-union ex-leaders do not dispose of any positive element on which to build an identity strategy. Moreover, it seems likely that identity specialisation in trade-unionism serves to limit the number of substitutable identities when the trade-union identity is suddenly destroyed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Going further, this research contributes to questioning the way the career paths of trade-unionists engaged in fights by collectives have been represented. This study does not point to any automatic trajectory, but rather to multiple possible paths framed, and not determined, by past investments in private, professional and trade-union spheres. This leads us to the managerial issues our study raises.

Although not commissioned by any institution, this study constitutes a call to public authorities, employers and trade unions to rethink their actions with regard to the essential figures in peacekeeping activities during the closure of a site. The diverse profiles of these individuals nevertheless encourage caution. Some leaders seem easier to help than others in the management of their

transition. By the same token, different partner institutions can play different roles according to the individual's needs. It is therefore apt to mention here the role of managerial support in terms of combining State, employer and trade-union support.

Regarding the identity tension profile, it is not easy to know which measures to put in place given that the person does not want to extricate himself from his role of leader. This attachment to a disappearing group does not help the employer's or the trade-union's efforts since the trade-unionist is not looking for a job. Only the State, by facilitating the legal provisions of end-of-career social management, can help these people to attain retirement age without suffering great economic hardship (Turner, 1995). This intervention does not only serve altruistic purposes. The identity tension profile plays an important societal role despite the demise of the company. The ex-leader constitutes a rallying point, a point of identification for the former workers. He plays an essential role in encouraging their association (Jahoda, 1972). Because of this, the leader helps to keep alive a social link which becomes indispensable to the physical and psychological wellbeing of jobseekers or retired workers struggling to cope with the manner in which they were forced to stop work. In several cases, we observed that the former employer provided a place for the association while the trade union kept in touch with the workers. Through this aid, this symbolic support, these two actors keep alive the associations that were necessary for the health of both the leader and the collective.

For the in-between profile, our data shows that trade-unions play a central role. However, the current low rates of union membership in France make this orientation more and more difficult. Progressing in this way is selective. Nevertheless, of the three options, it seems to be the one that enables people who have essential experience managing external flexibility to stay in the field of employer/employee relations. Could we not plan to make the employer a bigger part of this professional translation? Although in many cases the experience of leadership in a site closure constitutes a major handicap to professional progress, which means re-employment proposals which are difficult for workers to accept, in other cases it constitutes an experience that allows skills to be gained which can be useful for the company. Here the company should rethink its conception of trade-union careers either by taking on larger numbers of full-time trade-union workers or by showing workers that professional advancement is possible outside the trade union, even if they have led a dispute during a closure. Here the State can play a role in monitoring practices or even co-financing career change training in partnership with trade unions and employment organisations.

In the end, the bifurcation profile is a radical option, which makes the trade union's role difficult. On the other hand, both the employer and the State can play an important role. This is already partly the case thanks to the specific negotiation process in place in cases where   trade-union leaders can keep their jobs. However, one might think, given the difficulties encountered by certain trade-unionists that progress remains to be made to facilitate these transitions. Could we not plan to put in place equal management measures concerning the employment expectancy of these people? More broadly, could we not plan to assemble personal transition stories in order to inform people of the risks associated with different identity balances within the framework of trade-union training, given that it is likely that activists will have to face these kinds of situation? Furthermore, this study encourages both trade unions and employers to reflect on the significance of the activists' memories. The lack of monitoring or at least of visible willingness to provide support in these circumstances may lead to the development of escape behaviour by key actors in the management of external flexibility. In this sense, the company's involvement is seen as a manifestation of its social responsibility.

LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Our study contains several limitations which constitute promising avenues for future research.

The first limitation concerns the retrospective character of the date collected. In addition, with a few exceptions (13 cases), our work is solely based on leaders' perceptions of their own situations. It would be worthwhile to triangulate the sources of information. We judged the case study to be appropriate for our aims. Longitudinal approaches that would allow researchers to observe the identity work of ex-leaders from within a redeployment unit would allow us to control this bias. Given the difficulties posed by this process, it could be useful to put together several groups of people who were made redundant at different times. The literature provides no information on this point.

Nevertheless, it seems that the first group could be composed of recently laid-off individuals. A duration of one year seems appropriate, since this is the time that redeployment units often take to carry out their work. A second group would gather together people made redundant between 2 and 3 years earlier, like our study. Lastly, it would be interesting to analyse the long-term effects of redundancy on employability, particularly on trust in the company. A period of 8 to 10 years seems a good scope. On this methodological basis, the progression of our three profiles could be analysed. In our opinion, the main question remains how the "in-between" identity balance progresses. We believe this situation to be rather untenable in the long term. How and in what conditions does it transform into "turning the page"? Is the trade-union the best place in which to carry out such a transformation? Questions could also be posed about identity tension. How does the leader react to the irreversible break-up of the collective of strikers? Does he compensate for this change by investing in the creation of a new group composed of the same individuals? This observation of the temporal dimension of identity tension underlines that unlike the other two profiles, this one seems destined to fail, as Petriglieri (2011) suggests, i.e. to be a form of social isolation at odds with the working environment. Nevertheless, the cases observed reveal that leaders stay leaders of the group after the end of the redundancy procedure. Numerous former worker associations boast healthy numbers years later. Thanks to these different defensive strategies, the leader therefore succeeds where the theory predicts failure. He succeeds in keeping alive a group and an identity which no longer have an economic reason for existing. It would be interesting to enhance understanding of this apparently paradoxical dynamic over the long term. We could examine how radical the severance with the trade union is in the "turning the page" balance. After a few years, does the leader have no links left with the trade union? If he does, what form do they take? This analysis could enable us to distinguish types of career paths that our research and data collection were not able to reveal.

Secondly, although our sample of 50 cases constitutes a sound analytical basis covering a large diversity of trade-unionist profiles in terms of age, gender, experience and sectors, some bias was unavoidable. The number of women interviewed was still low (15 cases). The same applies to the service industry, which occupies a marginal position in our sample, although our focus on manufacturing can be explained by the large-scale deindustrialisation which took place in France over the 1990s and 2000s. Finally, both average length of service and average age of the interviewees were particularly high. Conversely, the level of basic education was low. In light of the literature on transitions (Brewington Nassar-McMillan, 2000), it seems that these characteristics do not favour professional re-employment. A bias is evident here. It would therefore be useful to undertake new data collection, taking care to include individuals that differ in these aspects. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that such an undertaking could prove difficult. We experienced first-hand the extent to which employers, re-

employment organisations, trade-unions and trade-unionists had misgivings about this kind of research project. Furthermore, as Fillieule (2005) notes, trade-union activism is dying out and remains dominated by men. Interviewing women and younger activists could prove complex (Guillaume, 2007). It seems that a fertile avenue for research would be to approach a union interested in developing such a project, for example with the aim of putting assistance measures in place.

Several other variables seem pertinent. The first is culture. Indeed, our analysis is based solely on a sample of French workers. A fruitful comparison could be drawn with ex-leaders from the English-speaking world. Furthermore, given the number of closures that has taken place in both the industrial and commercial sectors and the violence that has accompanied them, it would be interesting to redo our study in several years to see whether the time period has any effect. The second variable is identification with an organisation. This does not appear in our analyses except in the profile of identity tension where the leader attests to having put this affiliation in perspective. Nevertheless, given the length of service it seems reasonable to assume that this variable may play a role in their identity work. Integrating it could therefore enhance our analysis.

Furthermore, it could be interesting to improve our understanding of the links between the strategies developed and the resources mobilised. Dubar (2011) stresses that identity is constructed through a twofold relational and biographical transaction. It would be useful to develop this analytical framework by studying the second aspect in more detail. We began to sketch an argument in terms of life stages, emphasising the role of social revenge, in the "turning the page" orientation only. The effects of learning could also be examined. Our analysis of the career path of Monsieur Lepaon shows that he had to face several redundancies due to downsizing operations. From this example, could we not conclude that the leader acquires experience in such situations which increases his chances of a professional rebound within the trade-union structure? Conversely, it would be apt to look at the effect that repeated redundancies exert on a leader's employability outside the union. This could lead to incorporating the media coverage of the dispute as an aggravating or facilitating factor in the leader's ability to enact a professional transition.

On this last point, our study only partially integrates the work of re-employment professionals (Ramonet, 2010), while the literature unanimously recognises the importance of managing the split in the most professional and peaceful way possible. It could be interesting to analyse the contribution of these professionals according to their status. Commonly, the redeployment unit has a significant number of precarious workers on its staff. One could analyse how leaders are perceived differently depending on the employment status of the professional and his or her knowledge of the profession concerned.

Lastly, this qualitative study could provide a basis for a quantitative study. Gowan et al. (1999) stress the importance of developing tools that are appropriate for different contexts. It could be possible to gain first-hand access to the subject by asking leaders to keep a journal detailing the strategies they employ in their identity adjustment over the course of their professional transition.

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