**The new regulations of the intertwining of working and non-working time in post-bureaucracies: the disqualification of seniors’ work experience**

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**Extended abstract:**

Work organic (flexible and non hierarchical) networks destroy the professional reference marks (milestones) of senior employees. They are destabilized by the need of a constant re-definition of the “self at work” (redefinition particularly contradictory to their specificity). Their way to learn pertinent behaviors at work isn’t congruent with organic networks

Requirement of autonomy and participation, typical of the “new management”, reinforce the specific “unsettling” (destabilization) of seniors ; it make them address specific double binds.

Work process and organization based on community-kind teams (i.e. informal and based on mutual coordination) and the use of emotions (more than feeling) at work both knock the own identity of seniors, which is not coherent with market-kind transaction of employability (this being reinforced when they have to make these employability transactions with people they can’t situate in an hierarchical grid or experience-based statutes)

Work stress characterized in post-bureaucracies by hyper-competition is unbearable for seniors who can no more use their stature to restrain internal or external mobility. The hyper-competition damage their motivation to work. The post-bureaucratic employees’ “responsibilization” (employees are responsible of results and not only their means –their skills) is another double bind specifically destabilizing for seniors. Their proper identity refuses the market-kind organizational regulation (through internal competition between employees) and seniors become living symbols of resistance to new forms of work.

In post-bureaucracies seniors have no more legitimacy from their personal work history; but they nevertheless are requested to put the resources gained through this history at disposition of innovation and functional flexibility of work teams: this is an intense negation of their self.

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Work exclusion of seniors is not a contingent factor of new forms of management, but a necessary one. Like many other “psycho-sociological risks” the work relegation of this subpopulation is intrinsically linked to emergence of post-bureaucracies.

Then it would be illusory to develop specific actions aiming the raise of seniors’ employability per se. Seniors are a specific work population, yes; but their work exclusion is a result of the dynamic of post-bureaucratic management as a whole.

**Preamble:**

Excerpts from interviews conducted by the authors, with a 56-year-old executive at a major automaker, 25 years of experience in the industry:

"When I started, the atmosphere [at work] was nothing like today. (...) We had very strict, very precise rules [in the company], and to meet our deadlines, we often had to arrange things. Not really cheating, but we couldn't follow all the rules to the letter... So we needed to consult each other, to work things out among ourselves, without the bosses knowing about it. We had the rules, what we could tell the bosses, and then our own thing, which made it possible. We had to do it a little bit on the sly, it wasn't allowed, well, not officially. As long as we did things without it being too visible, so that the people above us didn't really know, and they didn't want to know, even though they knew we were only doing it that way... but it wasn't official, we managed among ourselves, thanks to our buddy system. (...)

Now, for sure, we have less rules, fussy regulations, precise things... We are more in the vagueness, the important thing is not so much how things must be done, but above all, we must do it. (...) We have more schedules, we know when we are working or not. (...)

The craziest thing is that now, it's official. When I tell my manager that a supplier can't meet a deadline, he tells me to play it cool... "He's still someone you know well, he can make an effort for you." Of course I know him, he used to be in the box! And I've known him for 20 years, his kids were in the same sports clubs as mine. So, instead of leaving work to go home, I call him, I go to see him, even at his house sometimes, and I have to convince him to manage, to use his network so that I can be delivered on time... I'm not sure if I'm talking to a friend who's helping me out or if I'm at work doing my job. (...)

(...) [having fewer formal rules] is a false freedom, you know, because in the evenings, and on Saturdays, I answer letters from clients, suppliers, well, from former employees of the company who now work for us as subcontractors. We mix the news of the children (...) and then we manage the emergencies.

(...) There are days when I find that the requirements have become too strong, too vague, it never goes well. As if I had to prove myself every day, like a young person. My 20 years of experience, phew, that doesn't mean anything to my manager anymore. (...) Every six months, there is a big evaluation interview, and the axe is always hanging over our heads, even for old hands like me. The young people, even though they have less experience than us, are more available, they take a lot of time off from their personal life, and it seems as if they work all the time, there is no more break with their personal life.

What do the words of this senior executive show us? Beyond the ever-present sword of Damocles that is the possibility of exclusion, they show the loss of reference points in the new working conditions for an experienced employee. Two facts stand out: the break with previous ways of managing the boundaries between professional roles and non-work life; the completely reconfigured temporal dynamics in contemporary organizations. Our analysis will conceptualize the processes by which these ruptures occur. It will show that they specifically affect older people, and more particularly in the new ways of constructing time at work.

# Introduction: the place of older workers must be analyzed in the contemporary production context where the question of time is central

In a previous work (Besson, Hen, 2009), we were interested in the way in which the games of actors contribute to the construction of prejudices about the non-employability of older workers, by studying the resources and positions of actors in industrial firms with regard to early retirement plans.

We are taking a more global approach here. We believe that it is not possible to approach the problem of the employment of older workers outside of its global context, i.e. the discourse on current developments in the organization of work[[1]](#footnote-1): new forms of flexible work, competency model, reengineering, networking, empowerment, flat organizations, Lean management, Agile management (Scrum, Kanban), etc... Or, globally, "post-bureaucracy".

Our central argument can be stated as follows.

The discourses and practices on new forms of management break with the "bureaucratic" logic in many ways, especially by readjusting the relationships between individuals and organizations, (elements of) life outside of work and activity at work. In modern organizations, work and non-work roles are clearly distinct. Among the new features of contemporary organizations, individuals themselves are increasingly asked to regulate the boundaries between the professional and the non-professional. In a way, a new skill is required: that of managing, first individually, and then within autonomous collectives, those aspects of personal life that must be instrumentalized in the work. The very meaning of time changes in this new configuration.

This constitutes a cultural rupture as much as a rupture in the organization of work. This rupture directly clashes with the representations of work of the generations that have known and been trained in the "modern" forms of management. For the youngest employees, this change is possible, both materially (in the organization of personal life) and in their representations of work and professional commitment. It even appears to be very consistent with the ways in which professional commitment is represented, which have been developing for several years (Thévenet, 2000). On the other hand, older employees find it more difficult to fit into these new forms of flexibility, and above all, they make no sense to them. They are in opposition to their sense of self at work: the behaviours they thought were normal and legitimate at work are no longer so, and the new demands seem incompatible with their professional identity.

We will explain this analysis in two steps.

First, we propose a synthetic presentation of the emerging characteristics of contemporary organizations. For the sake of convenience, we will use the term bureaucracy to designate the Taylorian forms of organizations and "traditional" or modern management, and the term post-bureaucracy to designate the archetype of contemporary trends in productive organizations.

We will then propose an explanatory scheme for the downgrading of senior citizens through inconsistency between their characteristics, both "positive" and "negative", and those of post-bureaucratic organizations. This schema is an interpretative proposal, which is also based on the words of employees, particularly senior citizens. We are clearly in a symbolic interpretative framework here, rather than in a positivist approach to research hypotheses.

Five characteristics of post-bureaucracies directly affect senior citizens: the transition to an organic network-type structure; the demand for autonomy and personal involvement at work; the functioning of community-type teams and the use of the affective in work; the work pressure characterized by hyper-competition; and finally, last but not least, the questioning of role distinctions between personal and professional life.

These five characteristics explain a new conception of productive time in organizations, which can be very simply summarized as follows[[2]](#footnote-2):

**Bureaucratic time : a clear separation between roles**

Working   
time

Non Working   
time

**Post-Bureaucratic time : a recurrent loop**

Dynamic  
networks

Working   
time

Non Working   
time

# I- New forms of work organization: towards post-bureaucracy?

Concerning the current trends in the evolution of the organization of work, we can, at the very global level of synthesis chosen here, use together two currents that are opposed in their normative aspects, but basically not very far apart in terms of their findings: the authors of a managerial discourse, and those of a critical approach.

The characteristics of post-bureaucratic organizations are close to those that characterize the new (third) "spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski, Chiappello, 1999), in particular via the figure of the manager or coach, "who leads temporary projects and whose main skill is the ability to establish networks.

# 1- Post-bureaucracies: towards networks with blurred borders

Basically, the post-bureaucratic organization is based on two main postulates for these authors. On the one hand, post-bureaucratic organizations are more networks than hierarchies (Child and McGrath, 2001; Hedberg, 1997; Miles and Snow, 1992; Volberta, 1998). On the other hand, they are constituted in rupture with the bureaucratic legacy, they are explicitly anti-bureaucratic (Baker, 1992; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1997; Peters, 1992; Quinn, 1992; Savage, 1996). The flat and organic structures of post-bureaucracies would make them creative and capable of regenerating to deal with a wide variety of problems (Adler, 2001; Benveniste, 1994).

At the time of its emergence, this literature was seen as a renewal of managerial thought. Today, it can be considered as the dominant credo of contemporary modernization of companies (and beyond, of organizations in general, since the modernization of non-market structures is now integrated in this literature).

Through participatory and properly emancipatory principles, this type of organization would be able to gain the trust and commitment of its members. Post-bureaucracies use different modes of coordination than bureaucracies. In the latter, the social structure would be based on an artificial and hierarchical role system, which would force individuals into specific/prescribed interaction patterns. On the contrary, post-bureaucracies would be based on an organic and communal system (Heckscher, 1994; Kanter, 1990).

Post-bureaucratic modes of organization include, for example, teamwork, decentralized and consensual decision-making procedures, blurred boundaries between the organization and its environment - between "insiders and outsiders", increased individual autonomy, etc,

In this perspective, people who participate in a post-bureaucratic organization are less employees than members or associates who participate because they are involved in the values and norms that permeate the organization's activities and contribute to the constitution of these norms. They would not feel constrained by role rules, whether general or specific, defining specific behaviors at work. They would feel empowered to act spontaneously through a shared sense of belonging to one or more of the communities that make up the organization (Adler, 2001).

In these discourses, leadership is very far from being a hierarchical role and prescribing missions and activities, it becomes the ability to "coach" individuals in a sense of belonging, of correct self-determination of behavior and more generally in their capacity for self-control. The manager steps aside behind the community leader.

The authors of the so-called critical currents validate these changes in perspective, but they are opposed to the managerial discourse according to which these new forms of work organization are a challenge to Taylorism and bureaucracy. They do not constitute a real challenge to Taylorism, but on the contrary signify the appearance of sophisticated forms of managerial domination (Carr, 2000, Ogbor, 2001, Willmott, 1993). These authors describe managerial discourse as a discourse of efficiency and instrumental control (Barley and Kunda, 1992).

Teamwork, combined with sophisticated recruitment procedures and training programs, and above all a continual emphasis on hyper-competition (both internal and external), makes change, adaptation and continuous improvement mandatory. Management constructs an engineering of organizational culture and identity that forces individuals to be responsible for the rationalization and intensification of their own activities (Sewell, 1998). The target of this control is not directly the behavior of the individuals, but their emotional commitment, their ways of thinking and basically their identity. (Willmott, 1993).

Critical approaches, such as the managerial current, emphasize that post-bureaucracies challenge role distinctions between personal and professional life (Maravelias, 2003). In particular, in these emerging organizations, a new structuring of time between productive time and personal time is constructed.

# 2- Roles, personal time and professional time: from role separation to individualized inclusion

As Maravelias (2003, p.551 ff.) points out, according to Weber, what best characterizes bureaucracy is not a list of characteristics, such as standardization, formalization, centralization and functional specialization. Weber characterizes bureaucracy by a new way of regulating the relationship between the individual and the organization: the "modern" organization in Weber's sense, i.e. the bureaucratic one, integrates individuals in a non-inclusive way. It does not contain individuals in the experiential totality associated with their personality and social position. In other words, bureaucratic organizations are not composed of aggregates of people, as pre-modern organizations were, but of roles and structural patterns generated by role interdependencies. (Du Gay, 2000; Fallinikos, 2003a and b, Luhmann, 1994). The distinction between work time and non-work time is fundamental.

Bureaucratic institutions have made the ability to "take on a role" and thus the ability of each individual to control and improve his or her own actions in accordance with the requirements of the professional role essential. For this purpose, working hours have been specifically determined. Working time has become, progressively, and sometimes with difficulty (Gaudemar, 1979), an essential reference point in the lives of individuals in modern societies.

Bureaucratic organizations have functioned as systems of normalization (Rose, 1999, Besson, 1996, Gaudemar, 1982), not only by establishing professional norms that are clearly separated from private and public personal life, but also and above all in that they have made it normal and "natural" for individuals to play clearly distinct roles and to move from one role to another. Time and space at work have become stable markers, symbols of the work state. When the employee entered the organization, at the scheduled time the work began, he or she knew that he or she had to assume the role(s) specified in his or her contract.

Post-bureaucratic organizations are breaking with this model. Not only their formal capacities and their technical and professional competences are required from the members of the organizations, but also their own personal characteristics and their social and private relations (Besson, 2003 and 2004). The space-time of work is no longer clearly distinguished from other times and spaces. The boundaries are more than blurred: there is an increasingly confused interpenetration between the various roles. Just as professional and personal relationships are intertwined, there are no longer clear sequences of time and duration devoted solely to work and non-work life

At the extreme, as critical authors point out (Ogbor, 2001; Willmott, 1993), in organizations that emphasize shared values and missions, employees are required to develop a personality that is consistent with the organizational culture and to activate a para-professional network both inside and outside the organization, a network that includes relationships based on interpersonal trust. For these critical authors, post-bureaucratic organizations modulate the organization-individual relationship in inclusive terms. They are thus similar to total organizations in the sense of Goffman (1961).

But this inclusion of the personal dimensions of life in work is done in a subtle way (Maravelias, 2003, Du Gay et al., 1996). The post-bureaucratic institution does not completely break with the bureaucratic legacy. It continues to integrate individuals in non-inclusive terms, it is not a return to the pre-modern institution. Only it does not restrict itself, in its relation to individuals, to those aspects of individual life that the bureaucratic institution constitutes as professional. It aims at internalizing precise and particular aspects of the non-professional life of individuals, those which can be valued at work. Another difference with the pre-modern institution is that this instrumentation occurs in one direction only, it is not dialectical. The post-modern organization makes use of some specific elements of the non-professional life, but not the opposite: the post-bureaucratic organization does not serve the non-professional interests of individuals, unlike the pre-modern organization.

The most salient point about the subtlety of the current inclusion of the personal dimensions of life in work is the responsibility for this inclusion. Through formal systems of rules and regulations, bureaucratic organizations took responsibility for defining the boundaries between private and professional life, or at least the requisites of professional roles and their limits. The characteristic of post-bureaucratic institutions is to shift this responsibility: it becomes the responsibility of the individual himself.

Indeed, field studies in the line of this problematic show that post-bureaucracies have only limited control over the places of production of social practices, and thus over the forms of collective and individual identities created by them (Brocklehurst, 2001; Hardt and Negri, 2000). For France, this is also shown by works that revive approaches to strategic analysis (for example, Berrebi-Hoffman (2002, 1997) or those that focus on the dynamics of organizational rules (Nyssen, 2004, 2008). In the latter case, what is most remarkable is the acceptance of rule breaking by the employees themselves to increase efficiency, quality and deadlines.

With regard to social control by peers, Berrebi-Hoffmann, (2002) notes: "To make this type of control viable, it is not a matter of internalizing rules of behavior, but of animating a web of social relations between employees.

These characteristics make post-bureaucratic organizations both more and less capable of controlling the lives and work of individuals (Hardt and Negri, 2000, Sennett, 1999 but also Berrebi-Hoffmann, 2002). They are less powerful because the lack of definition of places and times of production corresponds to the indeterminacy of individual and collective forms of identity produced in work. At the same time, they are more powerful because this lack of definition tends to make them constantly present in the lives of their members, leading them to incorporate into, or subordinate to, their work life the characteristics that bureaucratic organizations exclude from their perimeters. The member of a post-bureaucratic organization risks being always at work (Brocklehurst, 2001).

The issue of time is therefore totally modified. There is no longer a boundary between work time and "free" time, but there is no total confusion between the two either. It is up to each individual to maintain a balance between work and non-work, a balance that must be both professionally efficient, in a context of intense competition between members of the organization, and personally and socially tenable. The increase in work-related stress is a well-known symptom of the difficulty of maintaining this balance (Kieselbach, Jeske D., 2009).

The post-bureaucratic institution does not generate a specific culture, identities and roles from above. The hierarchical principle is no longer at the origin of work/life spaces: the responsibility lies with the members of the organization, including through the relationships of constraint and supervision that are built up in work groups: "It is much easier for managers to encourage the emergence of peer supervision than to convince employees to adhere individually to a corporate culture." (Berrebi-Hoffmann, 2002)

We will specify five of the characteristics of post-bureaucracies, which impact more directly on seniors in the intertwining of professional and "personal" times and roles. We are interested in seniors for two reasons. On the one hand, the issue of senior citizens is a very topical one, and to shed light on certain issues, the analytical framework we have just indicated is particularly useful. On the other hand, the seniors are a population whose discourses and practices clearly reveal the current post-bureaucratic evolutions.

# II- Are seniors de-qualified by post-bureaucratic temporal dynamics?

To what extent are the representations of seniors incompatible with this post-bureaucratic model?

Let's start with a simple observation. In the "naturalized" representations of older workers (Duyck, Guérin, 2009), lack of dynamism, loss of motivation and lack of productivity are common characteristics, both in representations of older workers and in their own self-representations (Bellini, 2009). But on each of these points, scientific fieldwork shows that these assumptions are unfounded. (Volkoff, 2000; Marbot, 2005, Levasseur S., 2008, among others). It can be said that the downgrading of older workers is largely a self-fulfilling prophecy, which is confirmed by surveys of company practices towards this category of employees (e.g. the ESSA survey, Minni, Topiol, 2002). Organizational practices are based on the stereotype and in turn shape it. Placing older employees in less well-equipped positions, or depriving them of training, on the assumption that they are less productive or less motivated, leads to their loss of productivity and motivation.

On the other hand, the downgrading of older workers in terms of qualification and know-how seems to be more debated. Their supposed experience is not automatically guaranteed by their long activity: in fact, experience is not a "joint product of activity" (Vincens, 2001, p.22, quoted by Bellini, 2009). All analyses of learning processes in organizations by psychosociology contribute to underlining the difference between activity and the enrichment of skills. From Piaget's work based on observation to Bateson's more fundamental reflections, it is clear that age has only a very indirect link with the enrichment of skills. But if it is legitimate to question the stereotype of the older worker's experience, the fact remains that here too we can ask the question of the organizational self-realization of deskilling. The technological downgrading of older workers is also the result of HRM policies (Levasseur S., 2008). Bellini (2009) emphasizes this: "Even if they have a wealth of experience, contemporary management practices, by seeking to formalize, standardize and disseminate know-how or by developing versatility, deprive the most experienced employees of their knowledge in order to disseminate it to others. (p.185). At the very least, the loss of qualifications with age is no more automatic than its opposite. Cognitive functions, no more than physical capacities, do not decrease significantly in older workers, at least in the usual working ages in our societies (Greller and Simpson, 1999). But another question arises, if we consider the knowledge management practices referred to by S. Bellini refers to. Beyond technological knowledge, which is not our subject here, what about "organizational know-how"? Can qualification not also be thought of in terms of mastering networks and controlling "knowledge flows"? (Zarifian, Veltz, 1994)

More generally, can the "downgrading of motivation" and productivity of older workers not be due to their inadequacy to the new forms of work organization and to the post-bureaucratic tendencies noted above?

Their professional experience comes from a long period of work. But this time does not in itself create an "experience bonus". The notion of experience does not only refer to the "stock" of knowledge and know-how that older workers have built up. It relates to the life trajectory, at least professional, both in its personal (individual skills) and collective dimensions. The valorization of the senior citizen is based on the learning of modes of management of time and workplaces in professional relations. Post-bureaucracies completely reconfigure these management modes. They question, to the point of denying it, this relationship to time and to the company.

This hypothesis is reinforced, for example, by the observation that even in the case of high-potential executives who do not integrate a globally negative self-representation, there appears to be a problem of adjustment to new forms of work organization. This is the case for opportunists, and in particular the sub-category of experts, in the study by Duyck and Guérin (2009). What was the basis of an individual's value? In bureaucracies, value was based on time spent in the company, which became synonymous with experience because the stabilization of the alternating rhythms between work and non-work allowed for the fine-tuning of organizational know-how. The post-modern organization no longer allows the accumulation of experience through a patient construction. We will argue this proposition by taking up five characteristics of post-bureaucracies, derived from their description above.

The observations on which we base ourselves come from numerous interviews, often non-formalized, conducted over several years with employees, managers and middle managers in companies. These interviews have been conducted in a variety of settings: during pedagogical relationships (supervision of apprentices or trainees), and during research on specific subjects (GPEC, project management, case studies on companies undergoing transformation as part of a study on the dynamics of organizational change). These interviews were not specifically concerned with the employability of older workers, nor with the question of time or roles at work. As these issues are fundamental to any working life, they were addressed at one point or another in our dealings with these employees, but in a very incidental manner. In total, we have a panel of more than a hundred people in companies of various sizes (mainly medium and large companies) and in all sectors (automobile, mass distribution, banks and financial organizations, construction, logistics, professional telephony, etc.). As the interviews were conducted in a wide variety of settings, they do not lend themselves directly to an analysis of the content of the topics discussed here. Our approach being resolutely interpretative, this does not pose a major methodological problem. For this reason, we will only make a few quotations of statements that are particularly representative of our conceptual framework.

The five main themes that directly affect senior citizens are: the transition to an organic network-type structure; the demand for autonomy and personal involvement at work; the functioning of community-type teams and the use of the affective in work; the work pressure characterized by hyper-competition; and finally, last but not least, the questioning of role distinctions between personal and professional life. Each of these dimensions of post-bureaucracies concerns temporal dynamics at work, each in a specific way.

# 1- Seniors face the challenge of moving from hierarchical structures to networks in flat, organic structures where time changes direction:

A 55-year-old department head in a large construction company: "The new HR director -he's younger than me, not even 10 years in the company- and his 360° evaluation, it's a beautiful bullshit. It means that we're always judging each other, we can't even make a fart, even outside of work! You even have to show your colleagues that you're thinking about your files when you meet at the restaurant. (...) And I'm not talking about relations with suppliers and customers. The HR director tries to know if we are good enough with them, if we take enough care of them so that they supply us in time or pay quickly. He even calls them to get their opinion for his performance evaluations! (...) what surprises me the most is that my young team leaders find this pretty normal."

The first challenge for employees in contemporary, post-bureaucratic organizations is to move out of hierarchical structures and into flat, organic networks. This challenge generates three challenges in the face of modern (bureaucratic) methods of insertion into the work and the organization, which more specifically concern senior citizens.

**a- The loss of professional references built in the personal history:**

The transition from the hierarchical structure to the network is a considerable challenge to all the habits and strategies of positioning employees in the organization, and particularly senior citizens. The senior employee is not so much old as he has built a personal history in the company. They have built a professional career, which contributes to their identity. This identity is both subjective (self-representation, in his own eyes but also in the eyes of his colleagues, subordinates and superiors) and objective (the CV as proof of an ability to have held professional positions and everything that goes with them). Even if his activity path through the positions and functions he has held is not a guarantee of a valorizing experience in productive terms, as we have recalled above, this path is nonetheless what defines him beyond his current position. What he knows how to do today comes from a history and his technical abilities are anchored in this history. He has built his position through a professional trajectory, through an accumulation of positions and functions that he has exercised and that give him the image with which his human environment associates him. We also think of him according to these trajectories. He has moved from such and such a department, from such and such a function, which indicates a capacity to evolve in a given organizational structure. The senior's pathway has a productive meaning as such. In bureaucracies, this path was clearly linked to a temporal accumulation of knowledge of the organization. The long time had a valorizing meaning, provided of course that the employee knew how to manage his or her professional trajectory or even how to make a career. But time also appears in another way.

The bureaucratic structure was hierarchical, therefore ordered and relatively easy to read and decode, the positions were stable over time and well defined, and the missions were situated in relation to each other, in regulated temporalities. Experienced employees' mastery of time was an important factor in their professional value. Knowledge of the rhythms of each workstation, of the different deadlines and rhythms for each function and even for each colleague or external partner, prioritization and therefore the possibility of anticipating bottlenecks and planning, all of these qualities stemming from experience were skills in the bureaucratic structure. This is being challenged by the transition to a flattened, organic network. The reference points that allowed this individual to find his way in his professional evolution, and to be qualified by others thanks to them, are destroyed. The transition to the network tends to destroy the notion of career, in favor of a professional trajectory characterized by instability and (almost) permanent change (Pichault et al., 2002).

This destruction of objective and subjective reference points by the passage to the network does not only concern the individual's past. Any entity is also a projection, from the past (Bateson's determinative memory, 1977), into the future (Dupuy et al., 2006). This may be a career strategy or an inertial continuation of the path begun decades ago. The blurring of the hierarchical structure, calling into question the levels that were once the basis of visibility of the professional future, leads to a loss of direction (and therefore a loss of sense of self in this future). The ability to anticipate is the basis of any motivational process. The theory of expectations, for example, proposes a conceptualization of it. Any behavior is reinforced or rejected according to the foreseeable consequences desired or rejected. The questioning of the hierarchical mesh in favor of a non-verticalized network calls into question the instrumental relationship between the first level (current behavior) and the second level (expected consequences of current behavior).

Joseph Nuttin's conceptualization of motivation can also be used to shed light on this loss of reference points (Nuttin, 1991). All behaviour is aimed at acting on the current situation towards a desired goal, which requires reference points with a certain period of stability. The individual had learned to find his bearings in a vertical network, enabling him to build a professional progression. His experience, which was a resource and an ability to master areas of uncertainty, becomes a handicap. The "young person", without this trajectory, is then better equipped to evolve in a flat and organic network, i.e. a non-hierarchical and moving structure. It is the illogicality of moving from a well-defined career, with expected future steps, to a position with no clear relation to this career, in the old organization's job identification. Everything is blurred, the individual no longer knows who he or she is, because the past can no longer serve as an orientation beacon to guide his or her behavior towards a foreseeable future. Thus the relationship to time changes. A career progression linked to experience is succeeded by a random evolution from the individual's point of view. This evolution is made up of seizing opportunities, and no longer allows for anticipation of the professional future[[3]](#footnote-3).

**b- A constant redefinition of the self :**

The very notion of network reinforces this loss of orientation in the organization. The network, by definition, is flexible, constantly redefining itself, in contrast to hierarchical structures that are rigid by construction. Employees who have been in a system of stable positions for a long time must learn to lose their stable reference points. Moreover, instead of being situated in a given structure, even if it could evolve, they become co-constructors of new positions. Self-criticism of their current ways of doing things is required. Instead of adapting to norms coming from "above", they have to enter into negotiations, not to say into transactions of a commercial type, with interlocutors who are no longer identifiable by a hierarchical position. The plasticity of the network is an essential break for the employee who has been in the organizational stability for a long time. Not only do they have to develop their own skills, but they also have to question their own history, because it is anchored in a system that is constantly denigrated. It is no longer possible to rely on the positions previously held, to report on them to work partners, because these positions are constantly being called into question. This is not only a change of structure, but a change in the nature of the structure. It is no longer the positions held that can serve as proof of professional value, there is no longer an objective basis, outside of oneself, to (de)demonstrate one's ability to perform. Everything has to be constantly reinvented, only subjective, personalized and self-centered abilities are valued. In other words, the transition from the hierarchical structure to the network is a destruction of the professional value accumulated by an individual.

The network, in itself, constitutes a complete change in the self-references in the organization. This shift from the precise and well-recognized to the fuzzy and changing requires one to constantly reconstruct one's sense of self in work environments. This is not only a problem of perception, but also of attitude and behavior. The first initiative that the post-bureaucratic organization requires from its members is that of self-managed professional plasticity (this is basically the very problematic of competence models).

One could say, somewhat restrictively, that the seniors had learned the culture of the organization, and that they are ill-adapted when it changes. But the post-bureaucratic notion of the organic network leads to a more radical process: the organic character of the post-bureaucratic network calls into question the stability, if not the very existence, of organizational routines and cultures. In other words, the seniors are affected not only because their learning of previous cultural characteristics (norms of behavior, representation, etc.) is a handicap to them in the new structure (these characteristics are no longer valid), but even more so because they have learned to try to construct their behaviors (to adapt) by taking these characteristics into account, if not from them. If these characteristics are no longer stable, the ability to regulate one's behavior within an organizational culture is an obstacle to professional integration. To use a journalistic term, young people know how to "zap", and older people do not know how to zap, or rather, they have learned not to zap.

In fact, this constant redefinition of the self is matched by new ways of "learning to learn".

**c- New learning patterns:**

To say that structures are organic means that they are alive, capable of regenerating themselves to deal with a wide variety of problems. The biological metaphor is easy, but it forgets that structures are composed of individuals. Structural regeneration constitutes for them constant changes of personal environment, source of tensions and efforts of adaptation which are by definition nervously demanding.

All activity requires a balance between assimilation and accommodation (Piaget, 1936). The first is level I learning (Bateson, 1977) or simple looping (Argyris, Schön, 1978), i.e. the simple use of knowledge and know-how already experienced in situations that do not require them to be questioned, but simply adapted. It is easy, pleasant in the short term, but tends to freeze the person in repetitive behaviors and action patterns, leading to atony and loss of dynamism, the pathological consequences of which have long been known (Friedmann, 1956).

Accommodation (level II learning, or double loop) has the opposite double characteristic. Difficult in its experience, it consumes a lot of psychic energy, but it allows people to progress and to feel this progress, which seems to be a vital need for every human being. However, the intensity and frequency of accommodation must not be excessive for the individual's capacities. It seems that there is no absolute rule to determine the right relative measure of the two types of learning in our lives. On the other hand, a dual process of "learning from learning" occurs.

On the one hand, individuals adapt to the demands of the situations they live in over the course of their lives with respect to this balancing act. In a way, they develop "learning habits". Senior employees in companies are obviously those who, on average, have stabilized their balancing dynamics the most. The network as a living structure that requires a strong modification of this equilibration then hits them hard.

On the other hand, individuals do not only adapt to situations, they also select situations, especially professional ones, with regard to this equilibration. Senior citizens have "chosen", at least in part, the organizations in which they work, or the professional positions in these organizations that present balancing requirements compatible with their own personalities[[4]](#footnote-4). Moreover, individuals do not only select situations, they can change them: "This image of adaptation [the assimilation-accommodation couple] hardly applies to certain forms of human motivation which aim not to adapt or conform the subject's functioning to the existing reality but to change it outright by creating something new." (Nuttin, 1991, p.31). Analyses of human behaviour at work, at the individual or small (“restricted”) group[[5]](#footnote-5) level, show that people organize their situation (individually and within the relational network of the small group) in order to adapt it to their possibilities and goals. This "adaptation of the situation to oneself" (Bernoux, alii, 1987) occurs not only individually, in the more or less large private sphere of work, but also, and above all, within the restricted group, in the work team on a daily basis. The organic network, as a constantly changing structure, makes this adaptation of the situation to the individual very difficult. Moreover, it leads to a high frequency of recomposition of the small groups at work, which reinforces this difficulty: how can one arrange with partners to have a collective hold on a situation, when this requires time, both individual and relational, if the partners change more quickly than the regulation can be built? It is clear that seniors are more directly affected by this consequence of the organic network than juniors[[6]](#footnote-6).

The same is true for the "autonomy requirement", which is characteristic of the new management

# 2- The question of autonomy: the trap of autonomous time

Regional customer service manager, 53 years old, in a subcontractor for telephony and communication for companies (professional telephony): "Twenty years ago, we were overwhelmed by tatillating directives (...). And even the managers were very tightly controlled by the management, you know. You couldn't make decisions on your own, even at department manager levels. There was very little autonomy. You always had to report to the top (...). I remember that my colleagues and I were asking for more freedom. And afterwards, I think that we were quite unconscious in asking for that. Today, it is very different. No more directives from above, we have to manage. So, yes, it's freedom, for sure. We go faster, we do our own thing and we are evaluated afterwards. The other side of the coin is that you're all alone. Well, all alone, we are always torn between the demands of all sides (...), we are subject as before to the requirements [of production], but now, (...) the management does not want to supervise us anymore, "do it yourselves", "do the best you can to make it work", that's their motto. (...) In fact, it's only afterwards that they let us know if it's OK. So you never know if you're not going to get a slap on the wrist when you make a decision, but you'll get the blow afterwards. You know what I mean, I've come back from freedom. Before I wanted more autonomy, now it is imposed on me in every way, it is exhausting. Nervously, it's hard, I have colleagues who break down. Before, we lost time with the hassles and controls, now everything goes fast, yes, but we have more protection, we have to organize everything, even our working time. It has exploded, but it's no longer the pressure of the bosses, it's our sacrosanct autonomy as managers. It's heavy... Especially since it is a general management mode, we apply the same thing with our teams: be autonomous! We don't have to give them a framework in advance, we just see the results indicators go up, and we do an assessment once in a while. It works, it's efficient, but it's exhausting for everyone, we're constantly on the edge, we never know what's going to happen, we're always juggling (...).

Another characteristic of post-bureaucratic organizations is the increased autonomy of the individuals who work there. We have noted that this is achieved through participatory principles that are supposed to gain the trust and commitment of its members. The autonomous behaviour of the latter would result, or at least aim, to generate vitality and organizational flexibility.

The paradoxes of participation at work are well known (Burg, Jardillier, 2001, Besson, 1996 and 2004). It can represent a trap for employees, by making them bear the responsibility for decision-making, a responsibility that is attributed to managers in the bureaucratic organization. Autonomy at work is itself a more than ambiguous concept (Reynaud, 1997, Linhardt, 1991, 2003). Are these paradoxes and ambiguities specific to older workers? Certainly not, but in certain respects, seniors are specifically concerned.

**a- The demand for autonomy and participation reinforces the specific destabilization of seniors in the post-bureaucratic organization**

The required autonomy reinforces in two ways the negative consequences for seniors of the organic network, which we described above.

First, autonomy is learned. Or, more precisely, the margin of autonomy is learned. Throughout his or her career in organizations, the senior employee has learned when and where it is possible, relevant, and even required, to exercise autonomy at work. This learning is all the more effective the longer the senior has spent in an organization. The degree of independence that is permissible or expected of a person in his or her activities, professional or otherwise, is one of those acquisitions that are delicate, and most often made "on the job", by trial and error. The increase in autonomy required disturbs on this point in particular the behavioral adjustments that the senior has established after years of work.

Quantitatively, and even more qualitatively, every person demonstrates a certain amount of autonomy at work (Besson, 1996). The post-bureaucratic models presented in management studies are misleading here, by opposing organizations with and without autonomy (see, for example, the blurring of the "mechanical model - organic model" opposition by Burns and Stalker, noted by Desreumaux, 1992). Instead of talking about a level of autonomy, which would be more or less high, it is above all a question of very fine and specific adjustments of attitudes. Senior citizens have experimented and developed these adjustments. The call for autonomy leads to a relative disorientation, particularly in a context of changing external and especially internal environments. The margin of autonomy must then be constantly readjusted. Autonomous time is a trap in which seniors are the first to fall. Attitudinal adjustments concern both quantitative and qualitative time requirements.

Quantitatively, bureaucracies determine standardized times, both in terms of the total volume of work that a person has to do in a job, and in terms of the time needed for specific operations in a function. The required autonomy leads to the very negation of this notion of temporal norms. It is necessary to arrive at a result, by determining oneself the time which it is necessary to spend there. The senior citizen has built up a competence through his knowledge of the necessary times. This knowledge is now a handicap. There is no longer a link between time spent and the value of the work done. It is dangerous to rely on past time experiences. Moreover, in a pressure to achieve results, the senior tends to compensate for his loss of reference points on the results to be achieved by spending more time. Not counting time is dangerous when one does not know how to build performance benchmarks, made of standards. Qualitatively, the question is even more distressing for the "experienced" employee. How intense should the work be? In a bureaucratic framework of heteronormed work, each position was linked to a more or less strong work porosity, with alternations of strong and weak times, which the senior employee could anticipate. In the required autonomy, the senior becomes the only one responsible for his work intensity. He is required to "put pressure" on himself (and, as we shall see below, under the pressure of incessant competition between employees, an inseparable complement to the required autonomy).

Similarly, the issue of autonomy also reinforces the questioning of professional identity that we have seen in the permanent change that the organic network represents. The demand for autonomy changes the strengths of this identity. The criteria for evaluating performance are shifting. The ability to demonstrate autonomy and to enter into participative management is more valued, and becomes a constitutive component of professional value, than the specific knowledge and know-how built up through seniority and experience. Senior employees in companies are particularly affected by this change. Because of their professional seniority, they are more sensitive to, and even more aware of, the manipulation represented by "modern theories of behavior" (H. Arendt, 1988, cited by Le Goff, 2000). If the psycho-sociological implications of these participative management tools are not specific to seniors, the same cannot be said of their consequences in terms of the necessary redefinition of professional value and self-image. Seniors, and particularly executives, are clearly more destabilized. It is obvious that the quantitative and qualitative changes in the adjustment of working hours and rhythms are the first causes of destabilization, or resistance, for senior citizens. The latter, because of their past experience, use time as a reference more than negotiations in the adjustment of relative autonomy between employees (who must do what and within what time limits, in a team). They then appear as representatives of past norms, of a dated identity. Either they suffer as a consequence of a downgrading of their professional value, or they put forward these temporal norms to contest the required autonomy. In both cases, they become the very types of employees who are not adapted to the new forms of work.

But the tools of participative management and the call for autonomy for all members of the organization also affect senior employees in a very specific way.

**b- Participation, generalized autonomy, and professional status: seniors facing specific paradoxical injunctions**

Strictly speaking, in the post-bureaucratic organization, autonomy is required at all hierarchical levels (hierarchies whose flattened and organic network we have seen to be challenged). Senior managers, and particularly supervisors, are the first to be affected by this characteristic.

By pushing the post-bureaucratic model to its extreme, participative management results in putting all members of the organization on the same level as regards the margin of autonomy, responsibility and decision-making latitude. This constitutes a denial of the experience of the seniors compared to the juniors. In bureaucratic organizations, there is an association between hierarchical level, experience and seniority[[7]](#footnote-7). Participative management and the demand for autonomy, in their very definition, call this correlation into question. It is no longer necessary to have "experience", and to be qualified (formally recognized) by seniority and progression in the hierarchical and decision-making levels (even outside of clear job definitions), to have the right to a greater margin of autonomy. Conversely, it is no longer possible, in the name of one's experience, to claim to be in charge of a unit, at least in the usual sense of the term. Participation tends to destroy the power of seniors, especially when this power was previously sanctioned by a professional and hierarchical qualification.

A double contradictory tension can be highlighted, which leads to strong differentiation effects between seniors.

On the one hand, in the post-bureaucratic organization, seniors tend to lose the privilege of being recognized as having a greater zone of uncertainty, of having more power in the sense of Crozier and Friedberg (1977). The members of their teams, even if they are much less experienced, have the right to show autonomy, and this autonomy should even be valued. On the other hand, participative tools are also sometimes ways of locking people into directive frameworks that are more subtle but more effective than the old bureaucratic rules (Besson, 1996, Linhart, 1991, this is even the intrinsic characteristic of "new management" for Le Goff, 2000). Senior managers in management positions therefore gain, for some, a new power over the organization's "collaborators" (through new ways of managing, such as project responsibility, team leadership, 360 degree evaluation, etc.).

This contradiction between the gain and loss of power runs through the status of some senior managers, but also clearly differentiates senior managers from each other, between those who must leave room for the "real" participation and autonomy of all their colleagues and subordinates, and those who can handle more manipulative tools, even if they are presented as participative.

This is a particular manifestation of the paradoxical injunction process that characterizes post-bureaucratic organizations for many critical authors. Among the paradoxes of participative management, the paradoxical injunction it develops is one of the most frequently cited psychosociological processes, particularly by its critics (Watzlawick, 1983, Watzlawick et al., 1967, Linhart, 1991). The very term "autonomy requirement" expresses this paradox well. Can one order a person to be autonomous[[8]](#footnote-8)?

The paradoxical injunction effect of the requirement of autonomy and participation is aggravated by seniority.

The senior employee perceives himself as having passed the stage of technical-professional learning. In the self-image he develops, autonomy is "natural" to him, and he "naturally" expects to participate in the decision-making and management of his work unit. The formalization, or at least the clear expression, of the autonomy requirement is therefore particularly destabilizing for him, much more so than for a junior. He is past the age of being asked to take more initiative. Any management tool which puts forward this requirement is necessarily, in itself, a very paradoxical injunction for the senior[[9]](#footnote-9). The senior thinks of himself as a person capable of showing autonomy because of his experience. Reminding them that they must do so, insisting on this aspect in the work requisitions, especially in evaluation, is indeed an elusion-creating process. Moreover, it disrupts the knowledge of the times and places where the senior had learned that he could and should show initiative at work. There is thus a process of destabilization and loss of self-confidence. From a certain point of view, the demand for autonomy is a challenge to the senior's seniority status,

This disruption of self-confidence is found when the post-bureaucratic organization imposes teamwork, or more precisely a particular modality of it, through the use of the affective dimensions of interpersonal relations between its members.

# 3- Communities and teamwork: the use of the affective dimension clashes with the very identity of the seniors

A 53-year-old executive in a logistics company in the North of France who works as a subcontractor for distance selling companies: "(...) A few years ago, the management, or at least the HRD, launched a whole thing around the company project, saying that we had to strengthen the links between us, to be closer. So they launched cross-functional work groups, mixing people from different departments, to think about our methods, our work stuff. That, in itself, made me feel funny. Being criticized by people in the departments who know nothing about my work... And then young recruits, on top of that, sometimes! (...) After that [the cross-functional focus groups], the waltz of assignments began. Now, almost every year, we change the teams, we change people's assignments. Those who have been here a long time, like me, get lost, you have to constantly relearn how to work with people who don't know (...) But it happened to me too, three years ago, I was assigned to vehicle maintenance, after years spent in the reception department. (...) Not a good memory, that, the old people of maintenance, they did not welcome me with open arms. And the time it took to get used to it, to be accepted, I found myself back at the Reception, but on the customer contact side and no longer in planning as before. (...) You can't find yourself there anymore. (...) And then, in addition, the big thing with the company project was the cronyism. The HR director said that we lacked a social life at the company, that we had too much of a boutique spirit, the young HR director even called us civil servants once. So we had fake internships, supposedly to create a collective spirit. (...) after the internships, we are all supposed to be fine. In the courses, we are in groups, not chosen, so we fight, it's tough sometimes.

Post-bureaucratic organizations are not only characterized by the dynamic character of the network, but also by its communal character, by the sought-after use of affective ties in these communities, supposedly building trust and loyalty among community members.

The insistence on this last aspect in the characterization of post-bureaucratic organizations is initially a factor in favor of the conservation of seniors. If shared history and identity are important for organizational performance, then seniors should be particularly useful, as the privileged bearers of these.

However, post-bureaucratic organizations are characterized by this common cultural base not directly, but in that this base allows, and in turn is favored by, the creation of communities with strong affective links between their members. The coordination of activities is essentially based on the involvement of employees in these organizations (Thévenet, 2000). In this model, the members of the organization are no longer employees, respecting role rules. They are not even associates, since associates belong to the company, not to the community (in Simmel's sense). They are members of the community, the most common term currently being collaborators, integrated into the organization by new managerial rules and practices that break with those of bureaucratic organizations (see above). These post-bureaucratic rules and practices are not favourable to seniors, nor does the presence of seniors reinforce them.

This type of teamwork tends to change the basis of authority in work groups with respect to legitimacy, in contrast to bureaucratic organization. Using the Weberian framework, we can interpret this change in terms of a shift from legitimacy based on so-called rational rules (formal position) to legitimacy based on charisma (emotional ties). This raises the question of the relative status of people in affective relationships.

In the post-bureaucratic model, it is the individuals who are convincing because of their personal characteristics and their specific type of individual relationships that can be the vectors of dynamism, flexibility and innovation, regardless of their seniority or hierarchical position. To a large extent, proponents of post-bureaucracies (under various names, from the third type of company to the qualifying organization) attribute bureaucratic rigidity to formal rules and respect for statutes and hierarchical lines; Flexibility therefore tends to be built by transgressing established positions in groups, primarily formal positions (hierarchical positions, hence the search for flattened organization charts), but also informal positions (legitimacy of the old, in particular, "youth" being equated with innovation, hence the call for constant mobility and recourse to the external labor market).

This tendency to disregard status (which, for the sake of simplicity, we call an "egalitarian tendency") clashes with the very identity of senior citizens. What makes them special is precisely their special status due to their seniority. This seniority is reinforced if it has led to a professional experience that is still relevant (in terms of current skills). In this case, at best, community egalitarianism allows them to rebuild their lost status through their skills. However, older workers are weakened by this, since they have to demonstrate their skills again and again. It is no longer self-evident that the senior citizen is experienced, he must prove it. In terms of emotional and self-esteem, this is a destabilization that is generally difficult to live with.

Thus, operating as a community forces members to constantly negotiate their internal employability. For a recent recruit, it is an extension of the job market and its competition. One has to prove oneself, convince employers and (future) colleagues of one's skills and abilities to contribute to performance, and exchange them for rewards. A senior person experiences this in a more intense and negative way than a more recently recruited person. In the case where he is indeed competent, it is not necessarily dramatic. But it does become dramatic if they are professionally downgraded.

Indeed, in the case where seniority has led to obsolete skills for the senior, the functioning via the affective is very ambiguous, and generates two clearly opposed consequences.

In the best of cases, the senior can compensate for his loss of status resulting from his loss of competence by the use of affective links: charisma, attachment of the other members of the group to his person, and especially, managerial capacity (formal or not, since we are here in a community framework) of the senior towards the members with less seniority. He can be perceived by the other members of the community group as the one who is "naturally competent to regulate the life of the group" (competent in the sense of the one who has the right). In particular, he becomes the regulator of time. In a non-hierarchical network where temporal reference points have dissolved in the required autonomy, the role of the elders goes through their ability to prioritize and distribute tasks in the work groups. If they are accepted by the other members of the group, they are the ones who "set the tempo" and indicate whether the time spent on such and such a task, for a given result, is normal and corresponds to an effective competence of the members of the collective.

This recognition of the "natural" pre-eminence of the senior to regulate the group and its temporalities, if it is a possible consequence of community functioning (and its most favorable case for the professional integration of seniors), is however not compatible with the spirit of post-bureaucracy. The latter aims at opening up the creativity and flexibility of groups, and therefore at questioning the habits of working groups... It is no longer possible to validate natural, obvious, acquired authority, and it is necessary to make room for questioning, innovation and flexibility; in other words, no privilege of position, and therefore of age. The contestation of the way in which the senior employee can regulate the time and rhythm of work is a clear expression of this. Even in the case where he has retained a certain hierarchical position in the work group, his legitimacy to normalize the intensity of work and the time needed for activities is questioned. The community network destroys the possibility of the "old" to claim to know better than the youngest the time commitment to be put in the work, both in quantity (on the schedules, in particular) and in quality (should the work time be porous or intense, which tasks should take more or less time, be given priority, etc.).

Thus, functioning via the affective can be dramatic for the senior who has become incompetent. It is the professional exclusion (the loss of job) doubled by a negatively affected self-image, at the same time directly (rejection of the community, which is quite other thing than a loss of job or an exclusion of a working position) and indirectly (feeling of injustice since the seniority at the origin of the loss of competence is also at the origin of the negativity of the affective bonds in the group).

We can therefore see that teamwork in the community spirit that would characterize the post-bureaucratic organization tends more to exclude the seniors than to integrate them[[10]](#footnote-10). The use of emotional and affective dimensions -particularly reinforced, as we shall see, by the link to non-work roles- poses a problem of personal status for senior citizens. It is a problem that can be described as cultural, but with caution: it is cultural not so much in terms of the norms and values of reference, as in terms of the questioning of the relative positioning of senior citizens to other members of the work groups.

This is reinforced by the fact that post-bureaucratic organizations use internal competition, between employees, as a mode of regulation (reinforced by the "non-inclusive" character of post-bureaucratic organizations, which we will deal with later).

# 4- Regulation by hyper-competition:

Recruitment manager in the international department of a large distribution group, 25 years of seniority in the company, in her early fifties: "My son works in a software company, it's crazy how they are constantly competing with each other. It's insidious, because there's nothing clear-cut, defined in advance. But every week, his agency manager checks in with each of them, visiting them individually. And they always tell them that their colleague what's-his-name has done better in terms of customer satisfaction, or revenue, or even deadlines. There is always someone else who has done better on something. (...) My son, how long will he last? I couldn't. It's a total stress, they're always looking at each other, "how much did he do last month?", "his client X how does he call the boss [head of the unit] to congratulate him? (...) I'm starting to see that progress here. Until now, we had very square evaluation interview support sheets for the annual interview. But for a few years now, we have been told that these forms are too bureaucratic, and that we need to take a step back. The most important thing is to respect the objectives of the forms, it's the "company spirit", the philosophy of the company... I'm too old for this crap. Young people, they see it as great. "Yeah, the cards are paperwork, and they can't evaluate everything." OK, I agree that you can't put everything on the evaluation sheets. But if we question them, what is left to judge objectively? Without them, the door is open to a haphazard assessment, or even worse, by the "hearsay" of colleagues, clients, etc.

This aspect of contemporary organizations and the post-bureaucratic model is certainly the most often cited, at least in critical writings and on the occasion of painful consequences for employees. Suffering at work is very often correlated with increased competition between employees, with all that it entails (Le Goff, 2000, Huez, 2008, among many other authors).

Teamwork is indeed accompanied, in the post-bureaucratic model, by the implementation of a system that establishes hyper-competition, both internally (between employees) and externally: between organizations, between departments, with the organization of customer feedback allowing a direct expression of customer expectations on the members of the organization. These increasingly pressing expectations are solicited by the organizations' communication. Hyper-competition also comes from the fact that post-bureaucratic organizations are built on customer-driven production (in contrast to bureaucratic organizations with high production). It is a system built on and for this hyper-competition, whether it is through comparative dashboards, increasingly frequent or even continuous evaluations, with the use of new technologies (NICT) so that each member and each group of the organization receives continuous automatic feedback on its performance criteria, which are increasingly broadened (cost reductions, deadlines and quality being simultaneously required with levels of excellence to be reached). The question of time is doubly central here. On the one hand, time is becoming a fundamental criterion of judgment (both in formal evaluation and in the implicit judgment of peers): one must do things quickly and well, and this without any benchmark other than what colleagues can do themselves. There is constant temporal "benchmarking" between employees of an organization, or with employees or departments of other partner or competitor organizations. On the other hand, competition also involves the required synchronization of each other's activities. We have explained above that the functioning of an organic network, the required autonomy and the community-type functioning destroy the possibility of constructing temporal norms and reference points. The competition between employees is then based on the "urgency challenge": the best is the one who is always ahead of the others, the one who waits and urges his colleagues (or external partners) to finish their activity as soon as possible because he is already ready. The time spiral becomes one of the axes of hyper-competition.

These competitive assessments make change, adaptation and continuous improvement mandatory. Above all, individuals become responsible for the rationalization and intensification of their own activities. These are no longer directly driven by hierarchical superiors who embody the productive pressure; self-organization ("self-pressure" and "self-organization of competition") of groups and individual work is required (Berrebi-Hoffman, 2002, 1997).

These new modes of regulation of work performance also cause numerous psychosociological problems for the members of organizations (the famous "psychosociological risks"). But do they have specific effects on older workers? It seems to us that in three respects, seniors are specifically impacted by this hyper-competition and the related accountability.

First, such work pressure is hardly sustainable in the long term. We are not being original here. All occupational physicians and studies in sociology of work and human resources management underline the wear and tear of people subjected to this continuous short-term feedback[[11]](#footnote-11).

If senior citizens are directly concerned, it is of course because of the wear and tear they feel. But another process is added. The regulation of many employees in the face of such pressures is through... escape, i.e. changing jobs. There is a particularly intense, and ethically very questionable, coherence here between hyper-competition, self-management and professional mobility erected as a dogma. In recent years, the discourse on the end of the job for life and the frequent change of job has become dominant. The coherence of these mobilities with the pressure of hyper-competition is often underlined. In addition to the wear and tear factor, this explains the exclusion of older workers. If professional mobility can be envisaged in certain stages of life, it becomes much more costly in other stages (the consequences on family life, financial commitments, living environment and friendships become more important as one "settles into life"). Senior citizens can no longer manage in this hyper-competition: they must accept it permanently, until the point of rupture. The rupture will then concern not only work, but also the whole of their personal life. Senior citizens become difficult to manage, costly in social plans and support...

Secondly, hyper-competition modifies the terms of motivation at work. Seniors lack the projections into the future necessary to enter into hyper-competitive patterns. Indeed, hyper-competition is a contribution of individuals to work and to the organization with a high valence[[12]](#footnote-12). The effort that it represents requires that, in the face of this strong contribution, the individual seeks to perceive an important reward, in the form of the anticipation of future positive consequences, in terms of internal or external employability. This is often the case for young employees, who are able to endure strong professional pressures and to insert themselves into testing competitive games while expecting important positive returns from their current organization or from future employers. To put it another way, in contrast to juniors, seniors rather exhibit intrinsic motivational traits ("self-actualization", getting involved in a meaningful project, seeking satisfaction of real needs for the social and physical environment, etc.), which generally are not those represented by competition or short-term customer satisfaction. Extrinsic elements of motivation are more consistent with intense and continuous competition. In particular, the "time overkill" (and rhythms) is in total contradiction with the values linked to seniority. Seniors are in the "time of values", and give time a totally different value than the young people in the contemporary generations. Taking the time to listen to the customer and build a relationship, for example, is symptomatic of the senior at the reception. Against the rhythms linked to the densification of quantifiable results (x minutes per interview, so many seconds to resolve a customer call, even if it means that the customer has to call back several times), the senior aims at a more qualitative and "longer" type of result, in every sense of the word. Here again, the recent events in the France Telecom group offer an illustration.

Finally, hyper-competition in post-bureaucratic organizations is accompanied by a demand for responsiveness and, above all, for people to be held accountable for their behavior. The accountability linked to hyper-competition is another destabilizing paradoxical injunction. Maturity and the fact of assuming one's actions, of no longer considering them as constrained by an external authority and above all a hierarchical power, is not consistent with putting people in competition, which is, if not infantilization, at least an intrinsic denial of responsibility. A mature person is not "more mature" because he or she is put in competition with other people, and particularly with junior colleagues who are considered - rightly or wrongly - as not having gone through the stages of maturity leading to accountability and "natural" autonomy, i.e. not enjoined. As a result, the competition for the assumed initiative - to be the one who brings "the most" in the productive improvement - will be even more difficult for the seniors, if not even refused, because the very basis of the competition is in contradiction with one of their ontological characteristics. The seniors will therefore react all the more negatively to the instrumentality of their competition. The demand for autonomy, the use of emotions at work, and hyper-competition are three categories of injunction that are particularly paradoxical for older workers. Their destabilization will contribute to their exclusion, either through ill-adapted behaviors on their part (destabilization), or because they appear as those who cannot fit into these behavioral contradictions.

This trait will be aggravated if post-bureaucratic organizations are defined as inclusive organizations without cultural steering by a hard core.

# 5- Fitting into "inclusive" organizations but without a "cultural control center": destroying seniority's legitimacy but drawing on its resources

An assistant in the customer relations department of a bank, 52 years old, has spent his entire career in the bank: "You see, now I am asked to be, perhaps not friends, but buddies with the customers. To care about their children, the rest of their family, their friends. Now, to give good financial advice, knowing things about someone's family is helpful. But to call them on their birthday and their children's birthdays, well, that's just not good enough. Another executive from the same bank, with the same profile: "I'm in a chess association, you see. Well, my department head told me straight out that I had to make customers out of them. Can you imagine? That during the sessions, even on weekends, as a player, I talk to them about our products, I encourage them to come to our agency... I already bring ads to tournaments, I don't think that's normal, so on top of that, I'm advertising among my club mates!

An important ambiguity in defining the model of post-bureaucratic organizations concerns their ability to create a strong corporate culture. We pointed out above that post-bureaucracies tend to unify the domains of life, challenging the clear dichotomies that bureaucracies had established between work and leisure, reason and emotion, pleasure and duty (work), etc. In other words, they modulate the organization-individual relationship in inclusive terms. Some theorists of these organizations confuse this with a culturalist management of the organization. We have followed Maravelias (2003) in arguing that the new forms of work organization are not a return to pre-modern organizations. If members of organizations are required to "put to work" not only their formal capacities and technical and professional skills, but also their own personal characteristics and social and private relationships, this does not mean a return to the confusion of roles, including professional and non-professional. The demands for adaptive flexibility in post-bureaucratic organizations make it necessary to maintain the distinction between professional and personal, family and public (community) life, including in organic networks.

This distinction, however, requires a change in temporality. Employees must distinguish their professional time from their non-professional time, in particular to be aware of their efficiency, to measure it and to display it. It is true that they have to do a lot in a short period of time, but above all they have to do it at the right time, and be able to judge this right time for themselves, which shows its value in the context of hyper-competition. Moreover, employees (if we can still call them that) must be able to juggle at high speed between roles, and therefore between the time allocated to these roles. The postmodern employee is not always working. On the other hand, he is always ready to switch from non-work time to work involvement. He is constantly available, but not by default: he knows how to regulate his life time in order to be efficient both in his work life and in his personal roles. It is up to him, in particular, to build this perfect availability, this "potential omnipresence". The debates around working time following successive laws over the last 15 years (from "Aubry I" to "Fillon 4") have clearly shown this. It is less and less easy to define what can be a working time, or even a working time, and even more, a time of on-call. NICTs have become the tool of this "high rhythm of alternation" organization of time.

We have seen that as a consequence of this individual responsibility, post-bureaucracies no longer present a clear distinction between, on the one hand, an organizational center that elaborates and controls procedures, and in so doing generates individual and collective identities, and on the other hand, a mass of employees who execute these procedures and confirm themselves to these identities. They do not create a specific culture, identities and roles "from above". They create for their members the need to fill the lack of organizational culture and collective and individual identities. These members are led to include all their resources, including non-professional ones, in their work life in order to (re)construct their identities and contribute to organizational cultures. Moreover, each individual is required by the other members of the work community to contribute to this collective identity. The self-management of work rhythms cannot be done in isolation: collective rhythms must be self-managed by each employee, in order to optimize the overall efficiency of the productive network. Post-modern employees must also take charge of their own limits: they must know when to let go, and know how to measure their efforts and work time capacities (globally, over the year for example, and in terms of duration, on their capacity to "hold" during a given time period). There is no longer any hierarchical center or cultural reference points to guide him. Involvement and time are his responsibility (it is his business), although they remain heteronormative, since the regulation of them only has meaning for productive efficiency.

This subtle inclusion of the personal dimensions of life in work is obviously particularly problematic for senior citizens. Let us not forget that seniors' status is destabilized by the use of emotional and affective dimensions in work groups (see above). This destabilization is particularly reinforced by the link to life outside work. In the life of the work groups, statutory "egalitarianism" is sought, but this contradicts the fact that seniors and juniors have different positions in the stages of life. This contradiction will have even more profound consequences when non-work roles are integrated into work life itself.

The senior manager no longer has legitimacy because of his or her personal professional history, but must nevertheless put the resources that come from this history at the service of the group's innovation and functional flexibility. Even more important are the resources that come from non-work roles (personal relationships outside of work, abilities and attitudes built up in very personal life experiences, family, friends, even intimate ones, emotional skills, etc.). These are strongly impregnated with his seniority, since they have been built throughout a life of several decades. There is thus a requirement of an instrumental use of the personal in the professional, but also of the singular (related to seniority which contributed to build an image of oneself) in the undifferentiated ("all equal" in work and the search for performances). In other words, each one must merge into the productive mass by bringing all his individualized characteristics. For a senior citizen, this instrumentalization is particularly difficult to live with. On the one hand, he or she must (re)become a lambda individual at work, like the others, by denying his or her long history from the point of view of his or her position in the work groups (a bureaucratic characteristic). His professional life time is thus denied. But on the other hand, the organization asks him to contribute productively all his personal history (pre-bureaucratic characteristic). This is not to establish his status, but only instrumentally, for the performance of the group in the work. His working time is then of high (added) value. The tension thus created is typical of post-bureaucracy.

Even for people recently integrated into the world of work, this post-bureaucratic utilitarianism can create very intense life problems: putting the self at the service of the work, being able to sort out in one's own characteristics of the self what can and must be put to productive use. Let's give as an example the contribution of friendships and personal mutual aid (built in the work, but also outside the work) for work and performance. In contrast to pre-modern organizations, this is only allowed in one direction, to serve the organization and performance. The opposite, using work resources for non-work purposes, is not admissible (whereas this was the case in pre-modern organizations). Time is thus non-symmetrical in post-bureaucracies.

For the senior citizen, such an approach is a negation of his specific identity. His personal positioning in human relations (what the Palo-Alto school has characterized as imago, or self-image) is deeply denied. It is a mode of communication of the organization towards the senior citizen which is a matter of non-congruent communication: one channel of communication is in complete incoherence with another channel. The senior is required as an experienced, mature, constructed person, thus as a senior. But he must destructure his personality in order to keep, in each work activity, only what is useful for the productive purpose. He cannot thus use to build his self-image at work the very resources that the organization asks him to "put at work". His totality as a senior person is denied. He must structure his time (and his rhythms) in order to be efficient through his knowledge of his own temporal capacities and possibilities and those of others, knowledge that he has built through experimentation throughout his working life. But at the same time, he cannot use these experiments in the recognition of his global value. His time is no more valuable than that of a junior, since all of them must be productive to the same degree (only the result counts), even though his productive specificity is based on the double value of his time: time of knowledge (his past professional and personal life and the construction of resources that it has allowed) and knowledge of times (ability to manage his own work rhythms, and those of others)

The resulting discomfort makes the senior citizen ill-suited to this use of differentiated roles (work-non-work) in an inclusive approach (the roles remain determined by the productive purpose).

We will conclude with two final clarifications.

The first concerns the dialectic of identity and culture. Senior citizens have built an identity throughout their life trajectory. This identity has been shaped in multiple cultural contexts, including references to simultaneous or successive organizational cultures (Alvesson, 2002). These references are not simple inclusions: the dynamics of individual identity are those of assimilation - differentiation. Culture is external to the individual, allowing him or her to define him or herself not so much in, but in relation to it (Lahire, 2004). Senior citizens have thus stabilized their roles and established boundaries between their different domains of life. Post-bureaucracies challenge them in two ways. First, the inclusion of non-professional roles in the professional sphere is a destruction of the life experience thus established. But this is not a simple change of cultural referent. Post-bureaucracy creates a cultural vacuum, it no longer offers a cultural referent in itself. Individuals must be at the origin of the organizational culture, they must reconstruct it, and this constantly. They can no longer stabilize cultural patterns, but constantly question them, based on work-related demands. Not only is the use of non-professional roles in the workplace destructive of identity, but the constant re-creation of referents under the constraint of performance, for performance's sake, under one's own responsibility (and no longer under the responsibility of the organization's hierarchical representatives), is a questioning of what a personal identity is and of its differentiation from a professional identity.

The second concerns a somewhat illusory solution to this tension. A return to a stabilization of the identity of senior citizens would be possible, a priori, by envisaging a pre-retirement type of wage relationship, where the globality of life and its various roles is involved, in the face of problems of professional identity. Somewhat on the model of the strong solidarities of milieus where profession, community and family are merged. A historically dated example can be found in the communities built around very strongly singularized professions, such as the miners of Northern France. A more anhistorical example would be ethnic-based enterprises, common in the USA but also present in France. One could imagine specific roles for seniors where, for example, mutual aid would be mobilized for the supervision of juniors, or in projects that cut across the company and the surrounding communities (ethical projects, links to schools, etc.). However, we can see that this new specific role for seniors is not compatible with all the characteristics of post-bureaucratic organizations: these instrumentalize non-professional roles for performance, and not the other way around. Either in these ethical or mentoring approaches the roles are clearly differentiated, and one is in a bureaucratic structure (the employee is seconded part of the time to "paid" volunteer work in local schools or to participate in ecological projects independently; the "old experienced worker trains the young one"). Or they are not, and we fall back into the previous contradiction (the senior must use his activity outside the company to reinforce the competitive position of his organization, or take advantage of it to increase his notoriety and attract clients; the trainer must challenge himself as much as the younger one). The seniors are going to see what was the basis of their identity called into question.

# Conclusion: senior citizens are excluded because they are a category incompatible with the characteristics of post-bureaucratic organizations

Each of the five characteristics of the post-bureaucratic organization model that we have taken up causes particularly strong difficulties of integration for senior citizens. Each of them has characteristics that give a central role to questions of time and rhythm.

The transition to an organic network type structure destroys the professional references of the seniors as they have built them in their personal histories. They are destabilized by the necessity of a constant redefinition of themselves in contradiction with their specific character. The way they learn relevant behaviors at work is totally inadequate to the organization of flexible non-hierarchical networks.

The demand for autonomy and participation specific to the "new management" reinforces the specific destabilization of seniors in the post-bureaucratic organization and places them in front of specific paradoxical injunctions.

The functioning of community-type teams and the use of emotions in the workplace clashes with the very identity of senior citizens, which is contradictory to the market transaction of employability, especially when negotiations are conducted with interlocutors who are no longer identifiable by a hierarchical position or status linked to experience (peer control).

The work pressure characterized by hyper-competition is untenable for them, as they can no longer use their status to limit internal or external mobility. It destroys their work motivation processes and the accountability linked to these new forms of competition within organizations is another paradoxical injunction that is just as destabilizing. Their very identity is opposed to market regulation through internal competition and sets them up as living symbols of the contestation of new forms of work.

Finally, in post-bureaucracies, senior employees no longer have any legitimacy because of their personal professional history, but they must nevertheless put the resources that come from this history at the service of the group's innovation and functional flexibility, which constitutes an intense factor of negation of their identity.

We therefore believe that the exclusion of older workers is not a contingent factor, but a necessary one, in new forms of management. Like other phenomena linked to psychosociological risks, their exclusion is intrinsically linked to the emergence of the post-bureaucratic organization model.

It is therefore illusory to think of developing specific forms of action aimed at improving the employability of senior citizens per se. Senior citizens are certainly a specific category of personnel. But their exclusion is the result of the whole dynamic of new forms of work. Acting on this exclusion requires questioning the global model of organizations that is currently emerging, and not taking specific measures. The latter can only be superficial measures, and will only lead to an increase in the differentiated treatment, and therefore probably exclusion, of this population. We therefore believe, at the end of this journey in post-bureaucratic organizations, that it would be wrong to advocate distinctive HRM measures oriented towards this particular population only. It is the global management model that is at stake, and it is at this "holistic" level that action should be taken. The values of time that senior citizens have built through their professional and personal life are antinomic to the current developments in the construction of a new form of employment.

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1. Several of these post-fordist management principles are not so recent – The Agile Manifesto dates of 2000, Lean Management since long time before – and TQM (Total Quality Management) is even older. But since one or two decades, they are the leading principles of many firms – in discourses, since long time, and in actual changes, more and more. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. - We are here in a stylized approach, at the level of conceptual models and interpretation schemes, and not in a positivist approach of hypotheses to test. The quotations made are thus illustrative, not demonstrative. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The case of suicide at *France Telecom* a few years ago in France provides a dramatic illustration. One of the suicides was facing a new position in a call center, after a long career as a service technician. It is not so much the new skills to be implemented that pose a problem, but rather the denial of professional identity that the change of affection they represent, especially since these changes are repeated, and individuals cannot know beyond a few months what the existing functions will be, on which they could be assigned, and what this would represent in terms of self-image - progress, or regression? [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Of course, this is not the case for all seniors. But this is what on average also helps to differentiate them from "juniors". [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. - A “restricted” group is characterized by the fact that all people know each other personally. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. - We could use J.-D. Reynaud's (1997) concept of *joint regulation* to emphasize that the dynamic network is, in itself, a change in the articulation of *control regulation* and *autonomous regulation* in favor of the former. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. - Admittedly, not always strictly respected, far from it. But the principle is there, and it is part of the professional identity of the seniors [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. - We know that one of the behavioral consequences of paradoxical injunctions is the dangerous process of elusion (Laing, 1971). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. - News gives examples of this. The cases of suffering at work that have recently led to suicides in large companies in France are often related to this destruction of self-image. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. - This also helps to explain the weakness of vocational training for older workers, or at least the beginning of the infernal self-fulfilling prophecy "no training -> loss of skills-> no training" whose outcome is professional exclusion (loss of employability). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. - Let us note here the very perverse effect of certain approaches to motivation in terms of variables isolated from each other, like in MacClelland approach. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. - In psychosociological terms, the valence of a behavior is the preference for the second-order outcomes of that behavior over the first-order outcomes. The conceptual framework of *expectancy theory* can be developed within the framework of equity theory, by the process of balancing by the individual between contributions and rewards in a situation. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)