

# Professional and Managerial Staff in the Knowledge Based Society

RESEARCH,  
TRADE UNIONS  
AND P & MS



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# Definition of professional and managerial staff

## The square of the circle is not in the hexagon

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In international organisations such as EUROCADRES, the thorny question of who are the professionals and managers (*cadres*) only ever seems to be asked for 'other countries', France itself being supposed to have a clear and satisfactory definition of this social category. On a closer look, the vague areas, the contradictions and the ambiguities are bigger than we think. If defining professional and managerial staff (*cadres*) has an element of squaring the circle, the solution is not to be found in the Hexagon (France).

I propose in the present work to give a brief account of these difficulties, which remain intact despite renewed research into professional and managerial staff (*cadres*) and the development of databases that allow extremely detailed knowledge to be accumulated about them. The presentation will be in three stages. Initially, we must recall the historical basis on which this category was built, in order to keep in mind that it has always been a composite with vague lines and ill-established coherence. Current uncertainties in no way reflect some recent crisis or malaise among professionals and managers, but have been a sort of hallmark of the group from its beginning. The second stage will consist of deconstructing commonplace representations of the category of professionals in an attempt to articulate some of the properties which make it possible to situate the place it occupies in the world of work and in French social space. Finally, we will examine some of the more formal and structured definitions, held by emblematic institutions or derived from various legal sources, to determine to what extent belonging to the category is a matter of agreement, of taxonomic tinkering, and of belief.

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## An indeterminacy which has historically characterised the category

For a better understanding of the historical processes which led to the emergence of specialisation on the part of certain employees in the tasks of directing and supervising work, we must certainly go back, as Philippe Lefebvre suggests (2003), to the problems of work organisation which confronted enterprises in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and which this specialisation was able to solve. These long and complex processes, specific to the area of production, and through which emerged the historical figures of the foreman, the technician and the engineer or professional (Eckert, Gadea and Grelon, 2004) were to find, beyond the world of work, favourable social conditions for the creation of a social group. Luc Boltanski (1982) carried out a masterly study of these conditions, painting a vast fresco ranging from the macro-sociological level (changes in the social structure of France at the beginning of the 20th century, with the weakening of the independent petty bourgeoisie, based on property, and the rise, within the middle classes, of a layer of qualified employees, careful to distinguish themselves from the workers but under the power of the bosses) to the micro-sociological level (the paradoxical identification of “minor professionals”, only marginal members of the category but swelling its numbers, with the “true professionals”, having all the distinctive attributes in terms of power, remuneration and cultural and symbolic capital, but statistically few in number). The ambiguity which allows such very disparate social agents to be combined within the same category is for him at the heart of the constitution of professionals into a social group: “it is because it remains vague in the sense of relatively undefined and relatively indeterminate, despite or rather because of the effort of social definition of which it has been the subject, that the category can perform the functions of amalgamation and of neutralising the most powerful antagonisms over an extended portion of social space” (Boltanski, 1982, p. 482). More recent socio-historical research on professionals and managers has criticised the perspective offered by Boltanski from the point of view of

the period (mid-1930s) in which the birth of the category of professionals is situated. André Grelon (2001), in particular, shows that the term *cadre*, understood in its current sense, was in use much earlier<sup>2</sup> (even if not in general use), and that the birth of professional and managerial staff (*cadres*) as a social category was less sudden than Boltanski suggests. At the time of the 1936 strikes, the confrontation and then the negotiations between employers and workers’ organisations brought those who were then often called *techniciens* or *collaborateurs* to the realisation that they needed to band together for their collective existence and to get a place at the negotiating table. While these strikes were certainly experienced as an electric shock, “the mobilisation of engineers’ and professionals and managers’ unions in 1936 is not [...] a spontaneous occurrence but the result of practices implemented since the end of the First World War” (Grelon, 2001, p. 30). Nonetheless, for Grelon too, “it will be a question of putting in place alliances between categories which perceive themselves as very different”, all the more since “engineers do not form a homogeneous block, far from it” (*idem*, p. 27).

So if there are signs of disquiet, of ‘malaise’ or of doubt among professional and managerial staff (*cadres*) as to their identity, we cannot say that these are new phenomena. Quite the contrary: they seem to have been there since the birth of the group and to have accompanied it throughout its history. Thus one could quote whole series of comments like this one:

“The difficulties we encounter today were doubtless foreseeable to the extent that an ambiguity has existed since the beginning in the definition of positions: sometimes the emphasis was on the level of knowledge and on qualifications, sometimes on the functions of command. But isn’t this the fundamental ambiguity of the status of engineers and professional/managerial staff (*cadres*), who are at the same time, and in various proportions, ‘technicians’, ‘specialists’ [...] and ‘managers’ sharing, here again in varying proportions, in the authority of management?”

– 2 – Besides, the use of the new term *cadres* (translated here as “professionals” or “professional and managerial staff”) did not immediately supplant older terms. So, during the *Semaine sociologique* (“Sociology Week”) on the theme of industrialisation and technocracy, organised by the *Centre d’Etudes Sociologiques* in June 1948, there was still talk of *techniciens* (Gurvitch, 1949), and this latter term is found in the work of Jacques Billy which appeared in 1960.

Contrary to what one might think, this was not written in the 2000s, but forty years earlier, in one of the first sociological investigations devoted to professional and managerial staff (cadres) (Maurice et al., 1967, p. 7). The history of professional and managerial staff (cadres) is in reality shot through with these phenomena periodically advanced by the press and by superficial observers as new, but which in reality have often been part of the factors which were brought into play to create the category<sup>3</sup>. By a strange trick with mirrors, some project into the past the idea of a clear and precise image of what professional and managerial staff (cadres) are or were, an image which today is supposedly lost or obscured, whereas history shows a succession of questionings, attempts at clarification, reworkings, as if the players in previous generations had made do with a 'temporary' lack of precision, leaving for the future the resolution in depth of problems they couldn't solve.

### Beyond the stereotyped representation of professional and managerial staff (cadres)

Based on Rosch's experiments on mental categories, Boltanski suggested that, just as in social representations some dogs are more 'dog-like' than others (i.e. closer to the popular image of the dog), some professionals are also more 'professional' than others. Certain stereotyped attributes tend to typify the image of the professional in the mind of the public at large, thus acquiring a symbolic value: training in a prestigious business school like the *Ecole de Hautes Etudes de Commerce*, working in a large modern company (IBM), middle aged—around 40—living in Paris or its environs, high income and consumption habits exemplified by cars such as BMWs or Mercedes. This portrait, drawn in the late 1970s, might seem a little dated, but remains largely current<sup>4</sup>.

On many points, it is easy to prove that reality is a long way removed from stereotypes. Take, for

example, the case of the functions it seems natural to attribute to professional and managerial staff (cadres), namely management functions. A recent interesting study reminds us that while professionals have a higher probability (6 out of 10) than other employees of being given hierarchical duties to perform, they are not the largest group among managers (Wolf, 2005). Given that they are almost twice as numerous as professionals, members of the middle-level occupations represent a greater proportion of managers than do professionals, and, what is more, waged and salaried workers, if we combine skilled and unskilled, also supply more managers than do the professionals (table 1).

The trend, between 1984 and 1998, is even towards a reduction in the proportion of professionals in management positions (notably in favour of professionals as experts) and an increase in the proportion among workers and employees (table 2). This distinction between command functions and expert

TABLE 1. QUALIFICATION TYPES OF HIERARCHICAL MANAGERS<sup>5</sup> IN 1998

	Total percentage of employees	Managers
Professionals	11.6%	30.8 %
Middle-level occupations	21.2%	35.3 %
Skilled workers and employees	41.6%	26.1 %
Unskilled workers and employees	25.6%	7.8 %
<b>Total</b>	100%	100 %

Source: INSEE working conditions survey 1998, table taken from Wolf, 2005, p. 108.

– 3 – Recent work by Sophie Pochic (2004) and Nathalie Hugot (2004) gives illuminating examples of this in relation to unemployment of professionals and the difficult situation of older professionals, advanced during the 1930s in order to plead for the creation of special social systems and institutions for professional and managerial staff.

– 4 – Having performed the experiment of asking my bachelor-level students in sociology how they think of professionals, I got a table very close to Boltanski's.

– 5 – Managers are identified according to the answer to the question “Do you have other employees under your command or responsibility?”, which appears in the INSEE's working conditions survey in 1984, 1991 and 1998.

functions is not independent of gender issues: forms of vertical and horizontal separation appear in the distribution of functions and of hierarchical positions.

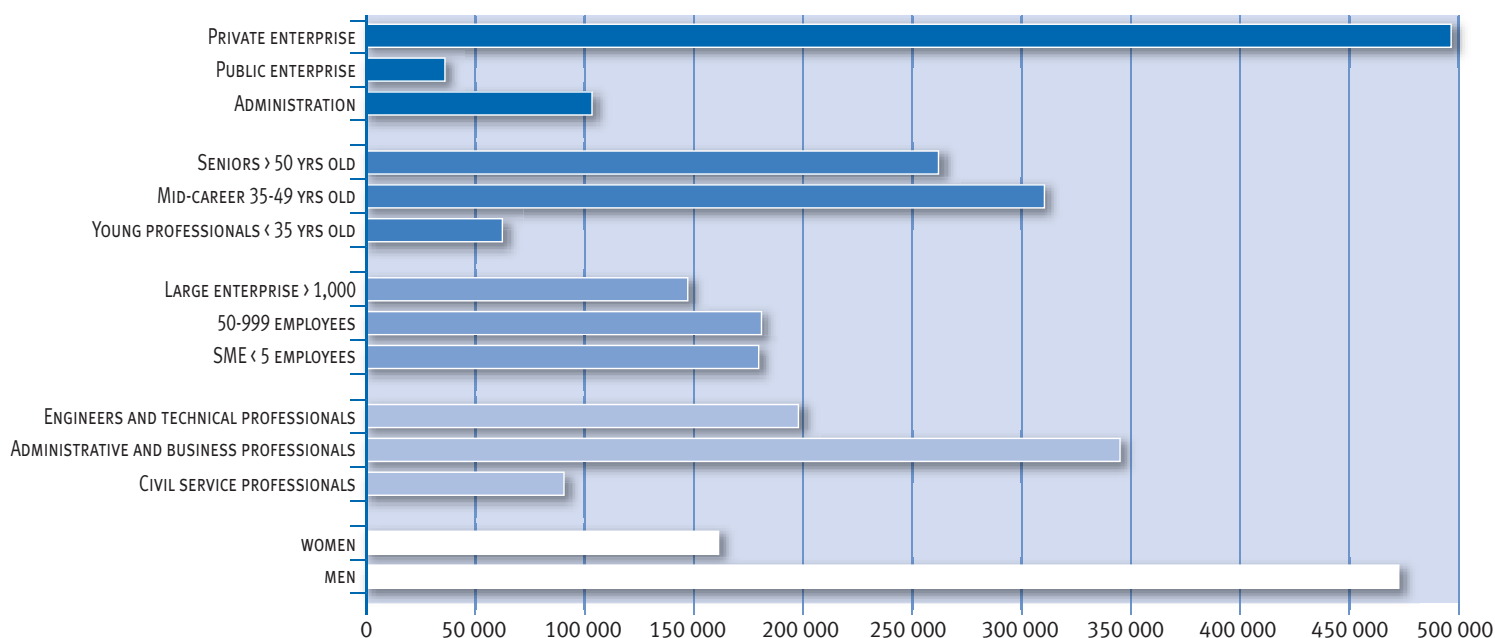
Women, especially in the older generations, are less likely to have access to hierarchical positions and are often found in positions which are predominantly administrative (finance, law, training, communication, human resources) or predominantly relational (teaching, health, information, Laufer and Pochic, 2004). The less 'professional' professionals are often women. Another example of the way perceptions are out of step with statistical reality is the image of the professional as a graduate of the *grandes écoles*, or at least of higher education, ignores the fact that over 600,000 professionals, or 28.6% of the total number, have no higher qualification than the final high-school diploma<sup>6</sup>.

TABLE 2. CHANGES IN PROPORTION OF MANAGERS ACCORDING TO QUALIFICATION TYPE OVER TIME, 1984 TO 1998

	1984	1991	1998
<b>Professionals</b>	73.9%	68.6%	59.4%
<b>Middle-level occupations</b>	44.7%	40.6%	37.2%
<b>Skilled workers and employees</b>	11.8%	13.7%	14.0%
<b>Unskilled workers and employees</b>	5.2%	5.8%	6.8%
<b>Total</b>	21.5%	22.4%	22.4%

Source: INSEE working conditions survey 1998, table taken from Wolf, 2005, p. 108.

FIG 1. PROFILE OF PROFESSIONAL AND MANAGERIAL STAFF (CADRES) QUALIFIED WITH HIGH-SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR LOWER<sup>7</sup>



– 6 – Source: INSEE job survey 2002, the total is calculated by adding the numbers of professionals in the civil service, of administrative and business professionals in enterprises and of engineers and technical professionals in enterprises, categories 33, 38 and 37 of INSEE's 42-category classification.

– 7 – Source: 2002 job survey. Cf Gadea & Pochic 2004.

These low-qualified professionals and managers, who are not necessarily 'self-taught' for all that, are often assimilated to an old type of human resources management under which fairly old employees, after long years of service, were promoted within very large companies which organised employee mobility between the branches of their internal markets. In fact, the 'seniors' (50 years upwards) are far from being in the majority, and the proportion of those who work in an enterprise with more than 1,000 employees is lower than one third (fig. 1).

Still on the subject of diplomas, but this time considering insertion, let us see what one's chances of becoming a professional during the early years of one's working life look like with a higher-education diploma. The case of those leaving the education system in 1992 shows that with a 'bac+2' level qualification (i.e. two years of education after the final high-school diploma), these chances have well and truly collapsed. With at least a three-year degree, the probabilities remained low for the human sciences, less than a half for women (table 3). Not all business schools—far from it—guarantee access to profes-

sional status, and after five years, less than half of the graduates had got a job as an administrative or business professional. Only engineering schools offered nearly all men, but not women, the possibility of being an engineer or professional. Here too, gender effects are worth noting. Women's chances of getting access to professional positions, at the same level of education, are systematically lower than those of men, except in the civil service. The inequality is all the more striking given that women are more likely to be graduates of higher education than men (31% versus 27%). We see, therefore, how naïve it is to equate the possession of a higher-education diploma with professional status, when the relationship, already debatable for many men, is all the more so for women.

More recent figures do not point to a trend towards general improvement in the chances of becoming a professional, beyond the fluctuations in market conditions corresponding to the arrival of each generation of new graduates on the job market. The APEC study on 2005 graduates confirms the extent of the gap between engineering schools and other forms of training: 86% of engineering-school

TABLE 3. PROBABILITY OF BEING A PROFESSIONAL 5 YEARS AFTER LEAVING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM BY LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION (LEAVING IN 1992)

	Professionals		Civil-service professionals, teachers, scientific professions		Administrative and business professionals in enterprises		Engineers and technical professionals in enterprises	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
■ Engineering schools	90	81	10	15	8	7	73	59
■ Three years or more, science, technical	67	53	36	37	3	4	28	11
■ Business schools	60	59	3	7	45	39	12	12
■ Three years or more, human sciences, management	56	40	25	26	16	9	13	2
■ Two years, tertiary	15	5	1	1	7	2	6	1
■ Two years, industrial	7	4	2	3	1	0	4	1
■ High-school diploma, or two years, general	10	5	3	3	3	2	2	0

Source: Céreq Génération 92

graduates gained jobs as engineers or professionals in 2006, compared to 73% of business school graduates and 45% - less by almost a half than for the engineering schools - of university graduates (APEC, 2006). It should also be noted that the generational trend towards higher levels of initial education is reducing the difference in the number of years of education between (blue-collar) workers and (white-collar) employees on the one hand, who may have a high-school diploma or a two-year post-high-school qualification<sup>8</sup>, and professionals with a four- or five-year qualification on the other.

To further this revelation of the objective properties of professionals, it would also be interesting to examine their income in more detail than we can here. Their incomes may appear high—according to statistical indices such as median salary or mean salary, which mask the variations in remuneration and the existence of professional and managerial staff (cadres) who are paid less than some middle-level occupations, or even some skilled workers—but only if the comparison is confined within the space of incomes of remunerated employment. Noting that the mean salary of professionals represents two-and-a-half to three times the minimum wage is still a very relative indicator, because taking into account salaries alone obscures firstly the fact that the fundamental inequalities remain those between the small minority of owners of real and personal property whose revenues are such as to free them of the obligation to work and the mass of those who must submit to the relationship of subordination represented by paid work to earn their living. Above all, it obscures the fact that the largest, most striking inequalities do not emerge in the area of income but in that of wealth. In fact, the median wealth of professional and managerial staff (cadres) in 2004 represents twice the median wealth of all French households<sup>9</sup>, certainly a position of privilege, but which only takes on meaning when compared with that of the liberal professions (3.4 times the median wealth of all households) and that of company heads (five times the median wealth of all households).

The same exercise in deconstruction ought to be repeated in relation to career paths, particularly in relation to contemporary discourse about the 'nomadism' of professionals, which is seen to be one modality among others of their relationship with their work rather than a general rule, including in the communication and information technology sector (Zune, 2005). This exercise would also allow us to throw light on the question of the exposure of professionals to the risk of unemployment, not to repeat yet again the hackneyed statements about the trivialisation of professionals and their alleged proletarianisation—because the probability of being unemployed remains three times lower for professionals than for workers—but to show that this risk is real for some of them, that it is accompanied by the possibility of career destabilisation and the permanent loss of professional status (Pochic, 2000). So there is also a hidden side to the world of professional and managerial staff (cadres), composed of precarious access to official status, of threats of loss of position, of periods in the wilderness, of being sidelined, or simply of obscure careers, of submission and silence to avoid landing in these situations. This side is admittedly no more representative statistically, nor more 'authentic' than the other, that of the 'professionals with promise', of triumphant nomadism and comfortable salaries, but still it exists, and, if it is subject to such a taboo, it is because it carries a message whose power is demonstrated by the fear it inspires: the status of a professional cannot be defined as definitive.

## Regulations, agreements and negotiations

What best ensures the anchoring of professional and managerial staff (cadres) as a category in social reality is the institutionalisation of their special status, be it by organisations specifically dedicated to them, or by legal provisions of diverse kinds which give them a place apart in the system of rules and regulations governing labour relationships. May we hope to find a definition of professional and managerial staff (cadres) in this vast

– 8 – Of the graduates leaving in 1992, 31% of men and 51% of women with a two-year qualification were workers or employees five years after finishing their studies.

– 9 – Source: INSEE's survey of household wealth 2004. For a recent account, see the report of the *Conseil de l'Emploi, des Revenus et de la Cohésion sociale*, entitled *La France en transition 1997-2005*, Paris. La documentation française, 2006.

conglomerate? Yes, certainly, but the problem remains intact, for there is not one definition, but several definitions, which only partly coincide with one another, and whose juxtaposition engenders more confusion than clarity.

This is not the place to trace the long series<sup>10</sup> of successive transformations to the codes and nomenclatures of official statistics, from the first appearance of professional and managerial staff (cadres) in the workings of the 1946 census, their appearance in the first code of socio-professional categories (CSP) of 1954, the disappearance of *cadres moyens* (middle-level professional and managerial staff (cadres)) and their transformation into *professions intermédiaires* (middle-level occupations), and the integration of three categories of professionals/managers into the socio-professional group (GSP) of “professionals/managers and higher intellectual occupations” in 1982. Despite the intensive work carried out in this area, the refinement of the procedures for passing from the level of occupations to that of socio-professional categories and groups, and the acknowledged reliability of the data produced by the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), uncertainties remain, and it is notably around the borders of the category of professional and managerial staff (cadres) that risks of coding error have been identified<sup>11</sup>. When we compare the figures on the number of professionals in France compiled by INSEE with those compiled by some major organisations such as AGIRC<sup>12</sup>, an association created in 1947 to manage contributions and retirements for private-sector professionals, we observe that there is no

agreement. In fact, from the outset, the notion of professional applied by AGIRC has been marked by the ambiguity introduced by Articles 4 and 4a of the national collective agreement on retirement and social security for professionals of 14 March 1947<sup>13</sup>. Article 4 refers to engineers and professional and managerial staff (cadres) defined according to the national agreements signed in 1945<sup>14</sup>, known as the Parodi accords (which have become largely obsolete); it adds to the list of occupations concerned commercial travellers and representatives “having the qualification or the privileges of engineers or professionals”; it also refers to salaried physicians and professions which have now disappeared such as graduate work counsellors and factory superintendents. As for Article 4a, it is the source of long-lasting problems brought about by the category of *assimilés cadres* (“assimilated professionals/managers”) which it establishes, extending the obligation to contribute to a professionals’ and managers’ retirement fund to “employees, technicians and lower management”, provided that they are classed at a certain minimum level (level 300) in the salary scale decisions. The latter are no longer current but are in theory updated in the sectoral collective agreements. Moreover, Article 36 of Annex 1 to this agreement allows for the possibility of including other employees whose classification is at least 200 and less than 300, when their company requests its application, and what is more, the activities of enterprises considered as being in the scope of AGIRC can change over time. The social consistency of professional/managerial status also rests on its being inscribed under various headings in the labour laws. Professional

– 10 – The development of the place of professionals in official French nomenclature is traced in Gadea (2003), pp. 183-197.

– 11 – “This uncertainty of coding affects primarily the fringes between the socio-professional groups of professional and managerial staff and mid-level occupations, mid-level occupations and employees, and employees and workers.” F. Heran (2001) p. 99. A group from the *Conseil national de l'information statistique* worked specifically on changes to be made to the category of professional and managerial staff in the nomenclature of occupations and socio-professional categories.

– 12 – *Association générale des institutions de retraite des cadres*. (Lit. “General association of retirement funds for professionals”.) For an analysis of the conditions in which it was created and the societal issues, see the work of the Centre d’Etude des Relations Sociales (1962), as well as Pitrou (1974) and Friot (1995).

– 13 – I thank Hélène Alexandre, of the Department of Studies and Research of the *Association pour l'emploi des cadres* (APEC), for her help with the preparation of this part.

– 14 – By way of example, the decision of 22 September 1945 relating to the “fixing of salaries of engineers and professionals” gives the following definitions: “Article 2. The following persons shall be deemed to be 1) Engineers - employees who, without exercising command functions, have a technical training, generally certified by a diploma or recognised as equivalent, who occupy a position in the enterprise in which they use the knowledge they have acquired. 2) Professional and administrative staff – agents having a technical, administrative, legal, commercial or financial training who exercise, by delegation from the employer, command over employees of every kind: workers, white-collar employees, technicians, lower management, engineers, administrative or commercial employees. ...”. Thus the main reference points were training and qualifications, but, as we can see, the text did not specify too rigidly what qualifications and, in the context of a shortage of qualified staff, left the door open to training “recognised as equivalent”.

and managerial staff (cadres) may have their own electoral college at occupational elections: staff delegates, employee representatives on Works Councils, on health, safety and working conditions councils (*Comités d'hygiène et sécurité et conditions de travail*—CHSCT), as well as, in cases of dispute, the labour courts. The boundary of this legal version of the notion of professional remains more or less free-floating; professionals' and managers' representatives are often mixed up with those of lower management and of commercial travellers<sup>15</sup>. Case law shows that the same individual may be counted as a member of the professional/managerial electoral college and not be able to be part of this electorate if he has been delegated authority over a department or an establishment allowing him to be assimilated to a company head (Favennec, 2003, p. 15). Recent developments in labour legislation resulting from the Aubry laws introducing a 35-hour working week have confirmed in principle the recognition of a separate category for professional and managerial staff (cadres), who consequently have special systems for counting their working hours. They have also shown once more the shifting and heterogeneous nature of this category, which is divided by the legislation into three sub-classes: top managers, whose working hours are not limited by the law, "integrated" professional and managerial staff (cadres), whose activities follow the timetable of their team or workshop, and "autonomous" professionals and managers, who are offered, instead of a weekly limit, a fixed number of hours or days, which may be either per month or per year. The fact that a group representing 10% of employees cannot be handled by lawmakers other than by dividing it into three parts is itself a clear sign of its heterogeneity. Finally, these laws—and those which have followed or amended them—adjust to and perpetuate the existing vagueness<sup>16</sup>.

'In 2000 lawmakers built three working-hours systems for three different categories of professionals, while the concept of professional is itself

not defined by the law. Broad at the inter-occupational level, diversified between the various professions and even within a single profession, the definition of a professional can be classified into several versions: at the community and national levels, inter-occupational and occupational, by agreement or by case law. Sometimes the predominant criteria are competence, technicality, qualifications or experience. Sometimes the existence of decision-making power or authority over other staff is highlighted. Sometimes a much wider field is adopted.' (Favennec, 2003, p. 16).

What is more, as soon as the law is applied it creates loopholes: work on the ground shows that some companies have taken advantage of the fixed numbers of days to invent a new special category of employees, who find themselves promoted to professional rank overnight, but with no change in their duties or pay, simply to be removed from the 35-hour working regulations.

We can see that there is more or less no legal basis for the notion of professional at the European level, apart from a few references to top management in some directives. So in the end it is primarily in the collective agreements that the concept of professional has its legal roots, but there are some 150 collective agreements, each carrying its own load of national legislation, special cases, and negotiations and compromises specific to its area. A memo from the Study and Research Department of the Association for the Employment of Professional and Managerial Staff (*Association pour l'emploi des cadres*—APEC) takes a brave dive into this ocean. Several guiding principles emerge; professionals are distinguished by an emphasis on certain features of the competence expected of them: creativity and the ability to react to new situations, capacity to cope with the unexpected, "expanded" competences, capacity to form and manage relationships with the institutional or professional environment, demand for commitment in the realisation of missions and goals. As can be

– 15 – For example, professionals vote for the labour court in the management college, with lower management and travellers, representatives and salespersons. "The following are voters in the management section: engineers along with employees who, even if they do not exercise command, have an equivalent training certified in some cases by a qualification; employees who, having acquired a technical, administrative, legal, commercial or financial training, exercise command by delegation of the employer; lower managers who have a written delegation of authority; travellers, representatives and salespersons." Labour code, Book V, Part I, Chap. III, Section 1, Article L513-1.

– 16 – A circular of March 2000 explains that this new categorisation of professional and managerial staff is based on the pre-existing definitions: top management, professional and managerial staff as defined by the sectoral collective agreements, professional and managerial staff in the national collective agreement on retirement and social security of March 1947.

seen, while there is something specific about them, these criteria are far from being unambiguous and easily measurable. Everything is thus a matter of evaluation, of agreement between those involved, rather than of rigorous determination. Collective agreements often mention qualifications, and sometimes even age criteria, in their definition of professionals, but these criteria, which may apply in a particular sector, cannot be generalised to professionals as a whole. Furthermore, the study inevitably finds that the category of professionals is sometimes little differentiated from that of technicians and lower management.

In any case it is not surprising that collective agreements cannot produce a uniform classification, given that the agents elected by employees to sign them are themselves divided over the boundaries of the “relevant communities of collective action<sup>17</sup>” to which professional and managerial staff (*cadres*) belong. Some unions, such as the Union of Professional and Managerial Staff and Engineers (*Union des Cadres et Ingénieurs-Force Ouvrière*), rely on the basis of Articles 4 and 4a of AGIRC to define their potential membership, at least in the private sector. Others, such as the Confederated Union of Engineers and Professional and Managerial Staff (*Union confédérale des ingénieurs et cadres*), part of the CFDT, and the General Union of Professional and Technical Staff and Technicians (*Union générale des cadres et techniciens*) (which also includes lower management), confederated within the CGT, refer to international classifications, in particular to categories 1 and 2 of ISCO 88. The General Union of Engineers, Professional and Managerial Staff and Assimilated Occupations (*Union générale des ingénieurs, cadres et assimilés*), which is linked to the CFTC, includes within its purview not only *assimilés* (assimilated occupations), but also travellers, representatives and salespersons and teachers. The General Confederation of Professional and Managerial Staff (*Confédération générale des cadres*—CGC), a union which, from its creation, was devoted to protecting the interests of professional and managerial staff (*cadres*) alone, without any integration with other employees’ unions, became the French Management

Confederation (*Confédération Française de l’Encadrement*—CFE-CGC) in 1981, so as to extend its coverage to technicians, lower management and sales staff.

The balance between preserving the specific interests of professionals and expanding the base of members and supporters to a maximum requires subtle strategies of marking and controlling the border between professionals and non-professionals on the part of union head offices, so as to keep it sufficiently porous (attract marginal occupations) without voiding it of its substance (losing the core of central occupations recognised as characteristic).

## Conclusion

One could add to this list of divergences and approximations those deriving from classifications of jobs or occupations at the international level<sup>18</sup>, or again those from academia and the world of sociological and economic research into professionals, but this would not result in any more clarity. The only conclusion that it seems possible to draw is that the notion of professional has, in Boltanski’s words, “the strength of loose aggregates”. It is not easy to trace its limits, except by a sort of second-order convention which has a somewhat tautological quality: most French observers are currently stuck on the three socio-professional categories of professionals used by INSEE, which themselves are based on a coding of the stated occupation relying on judicious doses of criteria, including qualifications, the nature of the employer, but also whether the individuals concerned contribute to a professionals’ retirement fund and their classification in the collective agreements. Basically, a professional or manager is someone who is recognised and paid as such.

By definition, collective agreements are the result of negotiations and compromise reflecting the interests of those that these agreements define as professional and administrative staff, based on previous agreements and compromises centring around the definition of the category. For these to arise, there needed to be a sufficient number of individuals sharing a sufficiently strong belief in

– 17 – To use the phrase of D. Segrestin (1980).

– 18 – See, for example, Mermet, 2000.

the existence of this category and of its specific interests to commit themselves to collective action for its recognition. The success of this belief has never prevented (and has doubtless rather required) the maintenance of vagueness at the borders of the group, and the play of forces which historically has allowed its creation continues to feed an unstable equilibrium whose oscillations are at the same time a sign both of its vitality—the day no one finds it useful or desirable to identify with professional and managerial staff (cadres) the category will cease to exist—and of the relativity of its consistency.

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# Research on professional and managerial staff – a national trade union confederation prospective

*Eugen Koev*<sup>19</sup>

## Who are we?

AKAVA - the Confederation of Unions for Academic Professionals in Finland - is a trade union confederation for those with university, professional or other high-level education, formed by 31 affiliates and with about 461 000 members both in public and private sectors

Membership in the affiliates of AKAVA is based on a particular degree or membership in a certain profession. The qualification criteria vary from one affiliate to another. Roughly speaking a third of AKAVA members are teaching professionals, a third are other professionals and one third hold managerial or leading positions. The average AKAVA member is 43 years old, most of them hold at least a Master's-level university degree, their average monthly salary is about euro 3600, though this varies considerably by branch. Most members hold full-time jobs, and over half of them are employed by the public sector. The number of those working in the private sector has increased steadily for the past few years. The number of women members is slightly above 50%.

AKAVA protects and promotes the common financial, professional, educational and other social interests of its members, as well as safeguards their status and prestige in society. AKAVA is politically unaffiliated and independent of any political party.

– 19 – Eugen Koev is a graduate of Social Sciences (Economics) and Head of Research in AKAVA (Confederation of Unions for Academic Professionals in Finland)

Together with other central confederations, AKAVA conducts negotiations over collective wage and labour agreements at national level. The central confederations and the Finnish government can conclude income policy agreements, which contain, in addition to the wage agreement, agreements on taxation and social policy schemes. The social partners' negotiation mandate includes unemployment benefits, pensions, financial support to adult education and individual working time account schemes.

AKAVA's central tasks include a general watching over of its members' interest in society. AKAVA lobbies decision-makers in the fields of taxation, labour, education and social policy, among others. The lobbying is supported by research and training, as well as local, regional and national activity and publicity work.

AKAVA is active in the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), and especially its division EUROCADRES, which looks after professional and managerial staff. Finnish trade union federations operate a joint office in Brussels. Moreover, AKAVA's representative is a member of the European Union's Economic and Social Committee.

AKAVA's international activity extends beyond the European Union. AKAVA has co-operation with all the Nordic countries, the Baltic countries and Russia. AKAVA is also a member of OECD's Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and of the Finnish ILO Committee.

The role of research in trade union activities from AKAVA's point of view  
Research is not a core activity of a trade union, but there are a number of reasons why trade unions are and should be interested in research in the field of social sciences. First, research is needed to support decision making within the confederation in defining the areas of action, goals and priorities so that they reflect the needs and wishes of the members. Second, research is used to clarify what arguments in the public debate are supported by scientific theories and facts. Third, research provides assessment of how a particular political proposal will affect our members. Fourth, research is needed to follow-up whether a policy really had the anticipated effects.

It is obvious, that our confederation - and I am sure this is also true for any other trade union - does not have either the resources or the expertise to conduct massive research activities. Hence, the most important task of a trade union researcher is to be aware of the existing and ongoing research in the relevant fields and to be able to summarise research results from the point of view of the union he/she works for. Decision-makers within the trade union will expect a union researcher to provide them with the information they need to be able to participate convincingly in the public debate along the following lines:

1. Interpretation of the research results – what existing research actually says and what are the controversial issues.
2. Are the research results of relevance also to the interest group we represent? Is there a consistent line of reasoning and/or empirical evidence suggesting that P&MS are in a different situation than workers in general?
3. Can we draw reasonably firm policy conclusions from existing research or is more research needed?

To be able to answer such questions, researchers in AKAVA regularly follow publications by Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Finance, European Commission (i.e. the yearly “Employment in Europe”-report) governmental and independent research institutes, Statistics Finland and Eurostat. We also participate actively in seminars and conferences presenting research in the fields of interest.

Researchers in AKAVA also actively disseminate their knowledge by writing background papers, articles, giving lectures and presentations to the decision makers and members of the confederation and its unions.

We perform in-house research only on topics that are very important to us but of no direct interest to society as a whole. Within this category fall surveys and reports on the salaries, employment and working conditions of our members as well as member opinion polls. Even in this case we try to make maximal use of existing sources. Research based on existing sources is not only cost efficient, but also its results are more credible in the eyes of the general public. For example we report statistics on unemployment for the major occupations our union represents based on the Ministry of Labour

data. We also evaluate the wage development of the P&MS represented by AKAVA in comparison to general wage developments by using salary statistics provided by the employers for purposes of wage negotiations at sector level.

There are cases where it turns out that there is no comprehensive research available on topics which are of particular interest both to AKAVA and to the general public including and the policy makers. Then AKAVA lobbies funding and/or itself funds - partly or completely - research projects. In cases when we provide substantial research funding we are actively working together with the project researchers to formulate appropriately the questions on which we wish the research to concentrate taking into account time, money and data available. In this way everybody has the same understanding as regards the purpose of the project. We will normally require two to three meetings with the research team during the course of the project. At the meetings we get informed as to how the work proceeds, are there some unexpected difficulties and how the researchers intend to overcome them, do we have to re-think or clarify some aspects of the research topic etc. We want that research we finance fully adheres to the scientific standards. The researchers decide on the research methodology, reporting and interpretations of the results. We always give researchers the right to decide on how the research report will be published and presented to the public. Normally a press conference will be organised at which the authors will summarise their findings. We will also comment the results from our point of view. Should there be a disagreement between AKAVA's researchers and the authors concerning the conclusions, we will express our criticism openly and state clearly on what grounds we disagree.

Quality of employment of young university graduates provides an example of why we finance research and how we use it to foster our lobbying. The background is that relatively few university graduates are unemployed in comparison to less qualified persons. This fact has been persistently used as the main argument in favour of further expansion of university education (and tertiary education in general). The funding of universities and polytechnics in Finland is rather strongly linked to the number of completed academic degrees. As representatives of most academic graduates, we have been for quite some time

aware that at least in some educational fields there are problems in terms of the quality aspects of employment. The proportion of academic graduates on fixed term contracts is high and the job requirements may be far less demanding than the formal qualifications of the employee. There has been very limited research on this topic and, despite our attempts, we have not until now succeeded in convincing the government that in order to evaluate the demand for academic graduates appropriately, changes in the quality aspects of employment should be scrutinised alongside standard figures on unemployment.

To make our point clear we, together with a network of Academic Career Services representing 19 Finnish universities, lounded a research project named "Five years in working life" whose aim was to examine the career of persons, who graduated from 9 multi-field universities in 2000. In 2005 over 8.000 graduates got a questionnaire and 4500 answers were obtained. Researchers employed by the Academic Career Services prepared a report with separate chapters on the graduates by field of education as well as a summary chapter. The findings were that every fourth person who answered the questionnaire was on a fixed-term contract, even five years after graduation. Furthermore it was shown that, depending on the measure used, between 4 to 6 per cent are employed in a job where skills grossly exceed job requirements, while only 2 % reported being unemployed. Average figures conceal large differences by education fields – a holder of degree in humanities is clearly much more likely to face unemployment or have problems with the quality of his/her employment than a medical doctor. Overall the research supports AKAVA's view that quality of employment is more serious and also more subtle problem than unemployment for academic graduates. The report got wide coverage in the Finnish press.

We will use the report to motivate our demands that qualitative aspects of academic employment should be surveyed and reported on a regular basis by government-financed research and that both level and quality of employment of academic graduates should be taken into considerations in determining public university funding. At the same time we continue to work together with the Academic Career Services network to expand the coverage of the survey to specialised universities (i.e. universities of economics and technology) as

well as to the polytechnics. We expect that quality of employment will become a particularly serious problem for certain polytechnics degrees. The questionnaire for 2001 graduates includes more questions on the first post-graduation job, so that we can examine the question of how the quality of the first post-graduation job affects careers later. We will also focus on the issue of the persistence of employment of unsatisfactory quality.

Finally some words on what we expect from European research on P&MS and what the role of EUROCADRES should be. It cannot be overemphasised that the P&MS group of workers has a key role to play in the knowledge based society and this is seen, among other things, by their growing numbers. It follows that research on P&MS should be a topic of special interest not only to EUROCADRES, but to EU-institutions as well. From the point of view of EUROCADRES the need for research on P&MS is very much the same as for a

national confederation – to be able to protect and promote the interests of European P&MS in its areas of action – employment, education and training, working conditions. Also the methods for obtaining research information should be the same – extensive use of existing sources and lobbying for research on topics where current knowledge is insufficient. Gathering comprehensive information on researchers and research topics concerning P&MS within the project “Professional and Managerial Staff in the Knowledge Based Society” is an important step in the direction of creating a network which will benefit researchers, EUROCADRES and EU-decision makers at the same time. As a national confederation covering P&MS AKAVA hopes that the project will provide us with European benchmarks for our national research results. We and our member organisations consider it of primary importance to be able to put the situation of Finnish P&MS in a broad European context.

## Co-operation between researchers, trade unionists and professional and managerial staff (P&MS): a question of status or orientations?

*About some closely guarded secrets*

*Frederik Mispelblom Beyer<sup>20</sup>*

Co-operation between researchers and trade unionists on the subject of P & MS (cadres) in Europe is not easy, for many differences separate them. But to get a clearer picture, we thought it would be useful to distinguish between two types of 'bases' for such co-operation, one in terms of 'status' (and institutional allegiances) and the other from the point of view of 'sharing certain orientations'. The two do not overlap, and just as the different types of status can give some guarantees as to the 'values' which they are supposed to defend, in the same way the 'orientations' actually applied in the everyday deeds fall within the personal responsibility of each individual.

### A three-way game?

Research into P & MS (cadres) and the use of the results delivered forms a three-way game, which is made even more complex with the addition of the European dimension. The French 'cadres' are not quite the same as the 'professionals and managerial staff' of other European countries. The French cadres unions are not organised in the same way as elsewhere, as can be seen for example from the text by Eugen Koev: the rate of unionisation among P & MS in France varies from 5 to 8%, whereas in Finland it seems to cover the vast majority of P & MS. As to social science researchers, they conduct their research in a very different way from one country to another, and neither do they have the same conceptions on the role of the social sciences. So to try and

develop some ideas about the possible usefulness of social science research on P & MS in Europe seems to be a real uphill task. In any case, it is likely that the point of view proposed here is very heavily steeped in 'franco-French debates', but we do hope that some ideas have a more general relevance and can help to stimulate a debate within EUROCADRES.

The core issue raised by this text is this: what research, for what unionisms, for which P & MS (cadres)? And our theory is that the only way to respond to this is by making some 'choices' in the orientations or the political lines defended with regard to the role and the future of P & MS in Europe.

### **'Cadres' and professional and managerial staff**

The text by Charles Gadéa clearly shows, in the case of the French situation, the complexity of the concept of a 'cadre', which it is essential for trade unionism to take into account. From this point of view, a number of fundamental questions arise:

Do professionals and managers (cadres) form a homogeneous group, which a single trade union strategy can claim to organise? And are the 'technical' P & MS, whose work nowadays is very routinised, who 'work their 35 hours' (and thus count their time) in the same position as the managers who are paid far more, who do not count the hours and are very clearly the defenders of their employers' policies? If we look 'downwards', are P & MS in the same position as supervisors and foremen in factories, or 'line managers' in department stores, who, despite not having the status of 'cadres' in France do provide supervision and would be considered in other countries as 'managers', a term which is also beginning to be widely used in France? More generally, are these people wage earners like others?

### **The question of the orientations within the supervision**

The answer to this last question is perforce ambivalent, because on the one hand we can say that yes, they are indeed wage earners, and the wages earned by lower-ranking P & MS (cadres) are not so far off those earned by non-P & MS

wage earners. In addition, professionals and managers also share with the other wage earners problems around retirement pensions (and have protested against the extension of the number of years to be worked in order to enjoy them, like other wage earners), and can, like them, be affected if jobs are axed or businesses closed down. From that point of view, they can be affected by forms of trade unionism comparable to those of other wage earners.

But from another angle, the answer is no, they are not, because some P & MS either supervise other wage earners and thus have authority over them, or else act, perhaps as engineers, in a role representing and defending projects by the employer, which may be opposed by some of the other wage earners. This difference between P & MS and other wage earners is very clearly defined by the leaders of the CGC in France, who call P & MS the 'locomotives' of the business, and criticise the political slogan of Nicolas Sarkozy which runs 'work more to earn more', which is valid for the other wage earners but not for P & MS (cadres), who 'do not count their time and therefore cannot earn more by working more'. From that point of view, therefore, we need specific forms of trade unionism, or 'corporatist' forms of organisation which are not trade union-based, such as professional associations, clubs (Rotary etc) and others.

In France at least, the question then arises of finding out 'which way the management leans': towards forms of solidarity with other wage earners, or towards a dutiful bond with the employers' strategies? That is what is at the heart of what we call the 'divergences of orientations' within the management.

These divergences do not emerge primarily through joining or not joining a trade union. They are far less visible, more silent, or even in a way, hidden. There may, for example, be the case of a higher executive in a private telephone company, managing a group of ten team leaders, each responsible for fifteen or so workers and technicians. When one of these team leaders is going through a rough patch, perhaps feeling depressed, and cannot work as he or she used to, this executive decides, after discussions with the other team leaders, to 'cover' this situation (vis-à-vis his / her own higher hierarchy), by getting some of that team leader's work handled by his / her

colleagues, for two years. The majority of that higher executive's peers would have initiated dismissal proceedings in such a case.

The group organised in that way on a basis of 'solidarity' always hand in their work on time, and with very few quality failings, unlike the other teams, where the ethos is 'every man for himself'. Yet the managing circles of this company decide to 'block' the career of that higher executive, because in their mind, unless you sack at least one person a year, you're not a 'real manager'.

In France, therefore, we can to some extent raise the question of the orientations within the supervisors in the following terms: do P & MS (cadres) behave in their everyday work in such a way as to foster close ties with the other wage earners, and maintain forms of solidarity with them, or do they distinguish themselves from them? The trade unionism of P & MS is obviously not indifferent to this matter.

### Differences in definitions between 'cadres' and 'P and MS'

If we now look at other countries in Europe, we can assume that this 'exceptional' position among P & MS does not exist, or is far less prevalent, in some countries such as those in the North (Scandinavian countries, Netherlands, Germany). This does not mean that there are no wage earners who exercise functions comparable to those of the French cadres, with particular responsibilities, notably in terms of supervision, but they are probably not so 'distant' and so 'different' from the other wage earners, as is also apparent from their titles. In Germany, for example, they distinguish between 'workers' on the one hand and 'employees', including P & MS, on the other, a system which places those P & MS in a much wider band of wage earners than in France. With the rates of unionisation being far higher in those countries across all wage earners, that is also the case for these P & MS.

If we now compare the terminology 'cadres' on the one hand, 'Professional and managerial staff' or 'P & MS' on the other, there is also no guarantee that these terms cover the same realities<sup>21</sup>. The term 'cadre' makes no distinction between non-supervi-

sory P & MS (technical) and supervisory P & MS, and excludes supervisory managers, whereas the term 'professional' refers to qualifications, skills, methods and techniques which are characteristic of well-established 'professionals', which is also not necessarily the situation of some of the French cadres, who are self-taught ('cadres maison'). The term 'managerial staff', though, distinguishes clearly between supervisory and management functions which mobilise precise 'management methods', which is not implied by the term 'cadre'.

However, here again, above and beyond these likely differences in status, and the greater or lesser distance or proximity between 'P and MS' and other wage earners, we feel that the question arises of the orientations defended by these 'P and MS', because these orientations are not defined mechanically either by the qualifications or by the different types of status, or by the management methods learned.

### Unionism and other forms of organisation of P & MS

Unionism among P & MS is either a particular form of unionism within more general trade union organisations (such as the CFDT cadres, the UGICT CGT in France), or else it stems from specific organisations (such as the CGC in France). EUROCADRES itself seems to be determined to become a trade union organisation 'especially for P & MS', and the AKAVA referred to in the text by Eugen Koev even has a 'sub-group of managers' (those with a university education or training of a comparable level). But as I have already indicated, there are plenty of other forms of organisation for cadres in France, the 'alumni networks' of the 'Grandes Ecoles', the associations specific to a particular enterprise (eg: the association of France Telecom managers) or other more transverse ones. In fact I think that clubs or networks such as Rotary, Lions and so on can rightly be considered as forms of organisation for the 'networks of social relations' especially for higher P & MS and management, at both national and even international level. One feature of these networks is that they represent a forum in which professionals and company managers can meet up and share activities all over the world.

But there is another form of P & MS organisation, for certain P & MS, which springs less readily to mind and yet which in France at least is very widespread and active: ‘self-organisation’, if need be with the support of lawyers or other legal counsel. There is evidence of this in France at the moment in the form of the explosion in the number of ‘dismissals for personal reasons’, which are often dismissals for economic reasons in disguise, and which are a way in which enterprises seek primarily to shed the less biddable P & MS, or the ones who are least ‘mercenary’ (the old, P & MS who are unionised, P & MS with children, who do not want to sacrifice their family life to the company)<sup>22</sup>. Some of them draw up ‘secret files’, to be negotiated to obtain severance payments that are as high as possible, while others appeal to the industrial tribunals with the help of lawyers specialising in cadres dismissal cases. This is indeed a form of ‘individualised collective’ defence, which characterises the relative specificity of the functions occupied by the P & MS.

From that point of view, in France, the fact that a cadre joins a union is already in itself a ‘distinctive act’, often in fact penalised by the stalling of his/her career (for which the employers are in fact criticised from time to time). So in France, joining a union is evidence in itself of defending certain orientations against others, while membership of the CGC, or unions of other wage earners like the CGT or the CFDT, does not send out the same signals. It is quite likely that this is not the case in other countries, where joining a union is generally a ‘normal’ act for the vast majority of unions, including P & MS.

### **The question of the orientations within unionisation**

We thus need to wonder whether there is some specificity in ‘P & MS unionism’, a specificity in the trade union forms and strategies vis-à-vis P & MS. It seems that in France, this is the case. A typical example is the ‘conscience clause’ or the ‘right to withdraw’ in discussion among the cadres unions

in France, which should make it possible for a manager to refuse legally to apply a particular directive or project which she/he deems harmful to his/her enterprise or which would be too incompatible with his/her own moral conscience. Here again, we find ourselves at the heart of the question of the orientations within the supervisory structure, which do indeed derive from a ‘personal choice’ and not from stances which are collective from the outset. Other forms of specific trade union strategies consist of using the particular expertise of the P & MS to counter certain arguments from the employers’ side justifying relocations or site closures, to produce alternative costings and figures, or to build counter-projects demonstrating the profitability of a site reckoned not to be profitable. Do such examples exist in other countries in Europe?

But the examples we have just outlined seem to us rather exceptional. There is nothing to say that more global real trade union strategies exist, in terms of the organisation of the specific skills of the supervisory structure to defend the future of enterprises. Two contradictory reasons appear to us, at the moment, to militate against such strategies in France. On the one hand, the ‘autonomous’ cadres trade unions (like the CGC) defend the specificity of P & MS as distinct from other wage earners, and only rarely tackle the employers’ policies head on. On the other, the ‘cadres branches’ of general trade unions like the CFDT cadres or the UGICT CGT build up claims which as far as possible are shared by other wage earners, and in our opinion only rarely succeed in framing trade union strategies which take account of the ‘invisible forms of resistance’ which exist in the management structure, of which we gave an example above. Nevertheless, some premises in this direction do exist in the field of what is known as ‘the social responsibility of P & MS’.<sup>23</sup>

Yet some even more tricky questions arise, which are very important for existing or future forms of co-operation between trade unionists and researchers. The status of a trade unionist does not guarantee the type of orientations that each

– 22 – For a synthesis of a study on this subject see: F. Palpacuer/A. Seignour/C. Vercher: *Sorties de cadre(s). Le licenciement pour motif personnel, instrument de gestion de la firme mondialisée*, La Découverte, 2007

– 23 – Are these signs of changing times? Both UGICT CGT (trainings) and CFDT Cadres (a special number of the trade union paper, an information day), are now active in this field.

person deploys in his/her day-to-day activity. Some paid union officials, some elected (works councils, in particular) sometimes get ‘swollen-headed’ and behave as if their trade unionist status gave them by definition an aura of ‘progressive values’. Yet in the way in which they conduct themselves with other active members, or with the wage earning staff of the trade union organisations, they can act like some company managers whom they are quick to criticise. That is without even mentioning some discriminatory attitudes vis-à-vis women (there are macho tendencies present in unions) or wage earners from an immigrant background. Moreover, many unionists are caught up in a kind of ideology of ‘action’ or quite simply ‘urgency’, which causes them to hold meeting after meeting, but also demonstration after demonstration. This is not necessarily conducive to an attitude of detachment and critical distance vis-à-vis the ideas being defended, and hardly fosters receptivity to any more ‘spirit of research’.

## Research on P & MS unionism

Social science research on P & MS, in France at least, is a relatively recent phenomenon. The ‘GDR cadres’ (a grouping of researchers and laboratories working on P & MS) has now been running for 7 years, and is responsible for the bulk of the research and publications about P & MS, a virtually exhaustive bibliography of which can be found on its site<sup>24</sup>. In part because of certain specificities of the French ‘sociology of labour’, which was primarily interested in the ‘working class world’, it has taken a long time for P & MS to become a research topic deemed worthy of interest.

Nowadays, some of the gaps in terms of research on P & MS have been filled, and their results inform the union organisations for P & MS, as we may see from publications in common between researchers and unionists as well as the CFDT Cadres observatory.

Nevertheless, this co-operation between researchers and unions is not to be taken for granted, at least in France, for reasons which have to do with the specificity of the organisation of the

research on the one hand, and the relations between unions and intellectuals on the other. A situation like the one described in the text by Eugen Koev, namely researchers paid by a trade union organisation (of which they may, in addition, be the members), who contribute to the definition of the possible areas and lines for union actions, and help to provide scientific arguments which may or may not back up those of the unions, or to forecast the effects of a given political decision on the working conditions of the P & MS and to evaluate their impact, is the kind of situation which to the best of my knowledge does not exist in France, at the moment at least.

What is referred to in France as ‘academic research’, notably in the field of sociology, is characterised by a strong (and partially justified) desire to refuse the ‘instrumentalisation’ of research by ‘social demand’, whether it be of government origin or whether it come from public research bodies, enterprises or trade union organisations. This academic tradition also involves conducting research which relates more to the ‘conditions for the exercise’ of the jobs studied, the professional careers, the qualifications, diplomas and training, than to the actual professional practices. This means that in France today, there is much more data available on the proportion of self-taught P & MS compared to those with diplomas, on wage banding, on rates of supervision according to the size of the enterprises, etc, than on the actual content of the work done by these various types of P & MS and above all, the attitudes (investment, withdrawal) vis-à-vis their work.

Obtaining data in these latter areas in fact means not only holding conversations and filling in questionnaires, but also making observations of actual work. This therefore implies some strategies of surveying by ‘immersion’, which in turn means a certain complicity with the P & MS interviewed and observed. All this puts the work of the researcher on the same footing as a consultant, and a position of this kind seems hard to defend for a researcher, at least in France<sup>25</sup>.

The point is that there is some sort of research preconception which means that the seriousness

– 24 – See the website of GDR cadres <http://gdr-cadres.cnrs.fr/>

– 25 – In order to realise this, the Institute for Social Sciences on Work were created in some French regions.

and scientific rigour of a piece of research are dependent first and foremost on the institutional status and exercise conditions of the researcher. Research conducted by someone from a university or a CNRS researcher, on the basis of its own problematic, carrying out a ‘completely independent’ survey is often, in France at least, a guarantee of scientific rigour. Conversely, research conducted for an enterprise and paid for by the latter always carries a whiff of ‘non-objectivity’.

At European level, such questions probably have the merit of continuing to be raised, because there are countries where social science research is indeed heavily dependent upon the questions asked by those commissioning it, and where hardly anyone any more questions the relevance of the concepts used, the research problem, or the truth of the results. Perhaps the other side of the coin is that some of this research remains locked in dark drawers, and is largely unknown to the ‘public at large’ even though it may relate to them.

## Researchers and orientations in research

Another orientation issue facing researchers is whether or not to agree to contribute to a certain ‘popularisation’ of the research. The very term ‘popularisation’ is not very attractive, and some streams in the academic tradition may oppose any idea of ‘translating’ the supposedly scientific conceptual language into ‘everyday language’, never mind the idea of contributing to the framing of players’ strategies, notably those of the unions. Some of the researchers do not regard this as their role.

On the other side of the research arena we find the so-called ‘critical’ researchers, who preach certain forms of ‘social commitment’. Yet this desire for commitment may also have the effect that they effectively lose any critical distance vis-à-vis the unions’ stances, and may for example develop the belief that ‘the P & MS’ overall are ‘swinging’ to the side of the other wage earners, and they refuse to see that some of these P & MS are eager to maintain their power and privileges, and firmly support the employers’ policies.

Here too, the ‘orientations’ are not a question of ‘professed values’ or declarations of intention, but genuine deeds in the everyday course of the research work: how do these researcher-teachers, who also have managerial functions towards their students, ‘treat’ them, how do they supervise theses, how do they teach their lessons, how do they mark? And in their research, what is their stance vis-à-vis the people interviewed, what feedback do they provide of the findings of the research conducted, or do they not?

For myself, I think that it is possible to be very rigorous in theoretical terms, in demanding ‘truth’ in the analyses one makes, while at the same time putting forward the results without using too much scientific jargon<sup>26</sup>. But I also think that in the co-operation with unionists, it is important to remain very critical, because especially when it comes to P & MS, they often mistake their dreams for reality.

## Do we need to rethink the legitimate field of intervention of the unions?

According to my own research, P & MS and in particular the ‘supervisors’ among them (which include managers, nowadays known as ‘first-level’ or ‘first-line’ supervision) raise a brand new problem for the trade union organisations who would like to represent them. This problem is that the role of supervision is ultimately fundamentally political, whereas the unions are supposed not to get involved in politics.

By ‘political’ I do not mean ‘politics’ in the widespread, partisan or governmental sense of the term, although the political area proper is not without ties to what is going on inside enterprises. What I mean here by the ‘political rule of supervision’ is the fact that it is always ‘caught between two stools’, and makes ‘choices’ every day which may be called choices in terms of ‘staff policy’. Do managers take up a position as ‘P & MS showing solidarity’ (like the example we gave above), or as ‘mercenary P & MS’? Do they apply the productivity increasing measures ‘without moods’ by brutalising their subordinates, or do they try to manoeuvre and find space for compromise, to safeguard a

– 26 – That is what I have endeavoured to do in my latest book, ‘Encadrer, un métier impossible?’ (Armand Colin, 2006). The brisk sales achieved by this book do indicate that it is first and foremost executives (and managers) who are buying it, and it is indeed mainly to them that the book is directed.

certain 'breathable' social climate? These are some of the questions which we think arise every day in any supervisory situation.

Yet the question revolves around finding out whether the trade union organisations for P & MS are thinking about these questions, and trying to incorporate them into their organisation and intervention strategies? These days, with the Corporate Social Responsibility ('CSR') approach, under which the role of supervision is often crucial, it

seems to me that a 'fresh field' is in the process of opening up, which might be to the benefit of the trade unions. They are lagging years behind the employers in terms of reflection and strategies in the field of management, quality measures, and corporate communication. CSR might be an opportunity, and what is more, an opportunity at the European level, to build up alternative strategies from the start in this area, so as not to leave the employers with the sole responsibility for such initiatives.