

# **VOLUNTEERS, MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES FACING THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE IN A FRENCH FAMILY ASSOCIATION**

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## **Abstract**

During the last fifty years, many theories and works have dealt with the subject of organisational change. However, very few studies have been devoted to the continuous succession of changes, especially in the voluntary sector.

The following analysis focuses on the way the actors in the voluntary field perceive these successive changes. Is the perception identical for the directors, the management team and the employees? Is the traditional division between managers and employees also observed within voluntary management?

We will answer these questions by studying two successive changes: the reduction in working time (Aubry Laws 1998 and 2000), followed by a change of the collective agreement (convention collective) in a French family association.

**Key-words:** non-profit organizations; organizational change; actors' perception; case study; France

## **Resumo**

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Durante os últimos cinquenta anos, muitas teorias e trabalhos têm analisado a questão da mudança organizacional. Contudo, poucos estudos têm se dedicado à sucessão contínua de mudanças, especialmente no setor voluntário.

A análise a seguir focaliza a maneira como os atores no campo voluntário percebem essas mudanças sucessivas. A percepção dos diretores, da equipe gerencial e dos funcionários é idêntica? A divisão tradicional entre gerentes e funcionários também é observada no gerenciamento voluntário? Responderemos essas questões através da análise de duas mudanças sucessivas: a redução das horas de trabalho (Leis Aubry, 1998 e 2000), seguida da mudança da "convenção coletiva" (convention collective) em uma associação familiar francesa.

**Palavras-chave:** organizações sem fins lucrativos; mudança organizacional; percepção dos atores; estudo de caso; França

## **Introduction**

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The centenary of the law of July 1, 1901 was an opportunity to clarify the place occupied by the voluntary sector in the economy of France. The current number of associations borders on 800,000, of which 120,000 have employees, representing approximately 5% of paid employment in the country (*LE MONDE*, June 21, 2001).

Benazet *et al.*, analysing associations and social organisations, note that “the social economy, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is, in France, a sector whose economic importance is often underestimated. The social economy is often modest, it does not possess the advertising means either to create or to maintain a flattering image (...). But it occupies a prominent place in many branches of industry” (BENAZET *et al.*, 1999).

In order to “overcome the conceptual and semantic confusion”, Archambault (1996, p.202) defines the non-profit-making sector as organisations which are simultaneously institutionalised, private and independent. Moreover, they must not distribute profits to their members or directors. Finally, they must involve a certain level of participation from volunteers and/or donors, even if this participation is limited to the voluntary service of the members of the Board, a definition we retain.

Up to a recent period, management studies were not very interested in associations. Therefore, the theoretical corpus remains in an embryonic state. However, it is growing. Along with the specialized American review *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* from the world-wide network ISTR<sup>1</sup>, and with other works reporting the place (notably through the Johns Hopkins international program) and the history of associations (for example for France: ARCHAMBAULT, 1996; LAVILLE and SAINSAULIEU, 1997), the recent interest aroused in France resulted in some publications aimed at defining the association and its management (VALÉAU, 1998; BAYAD, 1999; BAYLE,

2000; THIBAUDON, 2002; LAVILLE *et al.*, 1999).

These publications show that, if associations have not changed their fundamental principles for more than a century, on the other hand they have had to evolve and adapt themselves to a new environment. Today, they have to reconcile non-profit management for the realization of interdependent actions, even for the public good, with the respect for employment and taxation law, accountancy rules and marketing principles.

Moreover, the scarcity of public resources, the diversification of the areas of intervention, the emergence of voluntary and private competition, the growing complexity of legislation and the tasks to be achieved have obliged associations to manage their projects with greater vigilance and to call upon professionals.

Thus, a two-fold form of management is emerging. The technical action of professional managers combines with the political action of volunteers. In associations, as in firms (BERLE and MEANS, 1932), there is a separation between decision and control.

Associations show more and more similarities with firms. The pressures in HR management experienced by businesses are also experienced by associations. As in firms, management and legal changes are taking place in associations, impacting on both salaried and volunteer employees. How do people who work for associations live with change? Is the perception identical for the voluntary directors, the management team and the employees? Is the traditional division between managers and employees also observed within voluntary management? We will answer these questions by studying two successive changes in a French family association.

### **Change in a family association**

This paper deals with volunteer and employee perception of organisational change in associations. Two change processes are studied: the reduction in working time (AUBRY LAWS 1998 and 2000), followed by a change of the Collective Agreement.

Romelaer presents some examples of organisational change, including changes in the way an organisation works. “(These) changes may be substantial or marginal; a substantial change may be brutal, fast or incremental. A global or radical change may take place straight off, or be realised in several stages. Change may be in reaction to external events or pressures, or result from an internal initiative” (ROMELAER, 1997, p. 307).

In the present case study, the two successive changes derived from « external events or pressures ». Working time reduction resulted from the Aubry Laws (13<sup>th</sup> June, 1998 and 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2000). The change of the Collective Agreement resulted from an external and an internal pressure: first, the fact that the State no longer automatically accepts amendments to the 1971 Collective Agreement; second, the fact that the UDAF (Departmental Union of Family Associations) Chairman also rejected the 1971 Collective Agreement.

The analysis of the case study is based on various concepts found in the literature on change, mainly in a special issue of the *Revue Française de Gestion* on organisational change: resistance to change, activism in change, negotiated change, enforced change, change as a result of crisis, shift change (CLAVEAU *et al.*, 1998 ; GODELIER, 1998 ; PERRET, 1998 ; VANDANGEON-DERUMEZ, 1998). These concepts help identify potential differences of perception between the three groups (management team, employees, voluntary directors).

We propose that, in associations, the traditional division in reaction to change

between managers and employees is not the same as in firms. A particular kind of division exists in associations, due to their specific environment, mixing volunteers and paid employees.

We propose to test this hypothesis by studying the two successive changes (Working Time Reduction and Collective Agreement Change) in an association, and by identifying the perceptions of change of the different actors. Three complementary analyses are carried out:

- The first will attempt to define any divisions in the context of the reduction in working time (*Aménagement et Réduction du Temps de Travail: ARTT*);
- The second lies within the scope of the change of the Collective Agreement;
- The last one studies the combined effect of these two consecutive changes and the divisions resulting from it.

In this context, what perception do the actors have of the organisational changes which they experience, according to the type and the rhythm of the changes? Does the analysis show the emergence and the evolution of divisions?

### **The field of study and the methods used**

In order to answer these questions, a privileged field of study presented itself. A Departmental Union of Family Associations (UDAF) experienced two successive changes: the introduction of the reduction of working time and the rejection of the Collective Agreement which governed it. The Reduction in Working Time started to be negotiated in the UDAF which is the focus of the present study in November 16, 1999. A few months later, the UDAF experienced the replacement of the 1971 Collective Agreement by the 1966 one, covering the majority of social sector employees.

The employees saw it as a social step backwards; as for the managers, they saw in it a less expensive convention allowing the UDAF employees to join the majority of their counterparts in the social sector.

### The Departmental Union of Family Associations and its changes

A national network called UNAF (National Union of Family Associations), subdivided into 22 URAFs (Regional Unions of Family Associations) and one hundred UDAFs (Departmental Unions of Family Associations) constitutes the various layers of associative structures, whose principal missions are:

- a legal mission (Ordinance of March 3, 1945, confirmed by the law of July 4, 1975) which recognizes that the UDAF has an institutional character representative of French and foreign families as a whole;
- a mission representative of the families in many departmental organizations (Caisses d'Allocations Familiales, Centres Communaux d'Action Sociale, Conseil Departemental d'Insertion, Caisse de Mutualite Sociale Agricole, among others);
- a mission of management of the supervisory services relating to family and adult social grants, and the supervision of young adults in care.

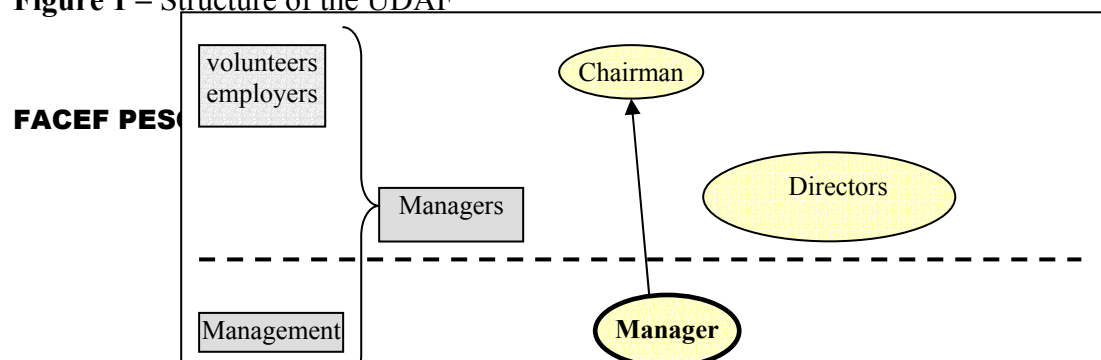
Our study focuses on one of the one hundred French UDAFs. The UDAF in question operates as a typical association, having a Chairman, a Board of Directors, a manager and employees (Figure 1, following page).

This UDAF was created on March 8, 1946. At the time of this study, 20 employees worked in it, plus 11 members of the Board of Directors.

### Context of Access to the Field of Study

The fieldwork in spring 2002 was carried out in a context which was somewhat affected by problems. A little before our intervention, there had been a judgement in the conciliation board<sup>2</sup>, the resignation of the accountant, two departures for maternal and parental leave, followed by several recruiting committees. In addition, the structure suffered from lack of communication at several levels: between the manager and the employees, between the supervisory service and the administrative service, and between the directors and the employees. Lastly, the two organisational changes took place in quick succession: the reduction to a 35-hour working week occurred between November 16, 1999 and February 14, 2002, and the first steps to change the collective convention were taken from the beginning of September 2001 until December 31, 2002.

Figure 1 – Structure of the UDAF



### **Data gathering**

A convention signed between the UDAF and the researcher authorised the interviews and the gathering of data. A managing committee (chairman, manager, researcher) was established to find the best way to present an interview to employees and volunteers. A letter was sent beforehand to all employees and volunteers informing them of our intention to carry out individual conversations, in their workplace or in any other place of their choice, on the topic of change.

The methodology selected is that of semi-directed interviews. The interviews, carried out in June and July 2002, were recorded to allow another hearing and a coding of responses before analysis. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. They represent a total duration of recording of 25 hours for 23 interviews. At the same time, a questionnaire was filled out during the interviews in order to allow rapid classification of the answers afterwards.

The interlocutors were invited to express themselves freely starting from a series of questions. A first stage was about the function of the interviewed person (inside and outside the structure, job title and nature, seniority in the structure, etc.) to create a feeling of trust. A second series of questions concerned the perception people have of the various changes that had occurred in the organization, the way they had experienced these changes, their involvement in the process, the consecutive nature of the two changes.

23 interviews were carried out among the 30 people in the organisation. They involved 13 employees and 10 directors.<sup>3</sup>

### **Data analysis**

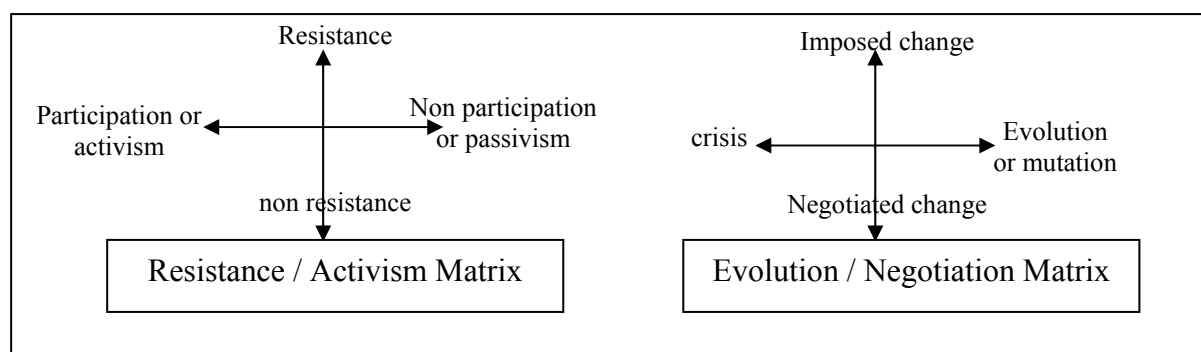
#### **Coding**

Coding of the interviews established various criteria for each person (sex, paid employee/volunteer, position in the organisation, classification of changes by degrees of importance, resistance/non-resistance to change, active/passive attitude, change lived as a crisis/mutation, imposed/negotiated change, how the two consecutive changes were experienced). A recapitulative table was made for each interview. This coding allowed us to reduce data to known dimensions, common to all the interviews.

**The construction of matrices about the perception of change**

For each change, two matrices were constructed (see Figure 2). The first deals with the resistance to change and the actors' participation; the second one opposes the concepts of negotiated change and imposed change, and crosses this dimension with an axis opposing crisis and evolution. In the periphery of each matrix, there appear the groups or the individuals who consider themselves outside the change.

**Figure 2** – Matrices of the perception of change



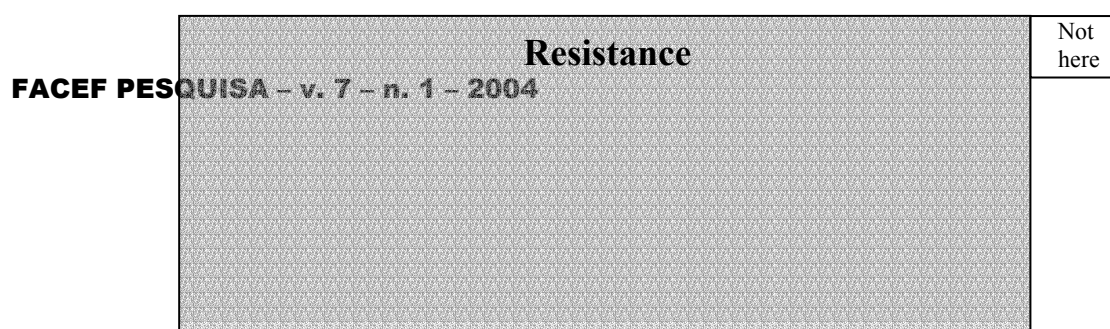
**Results: from one change towards a succession of changes**

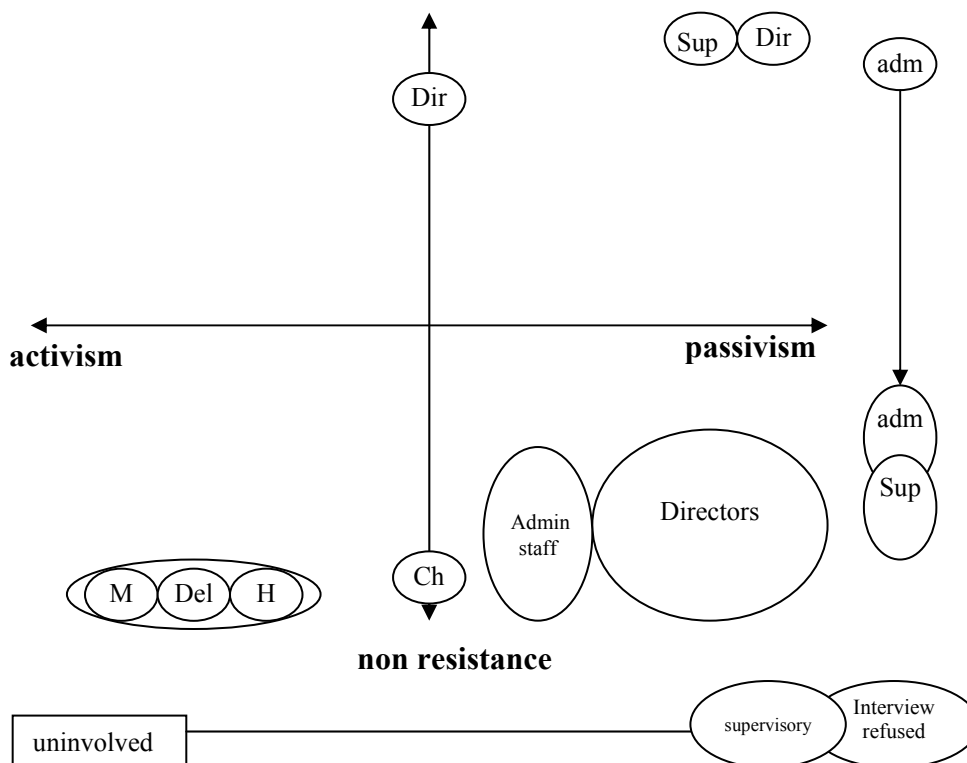
Results presentation is organized in three sections. The first one is about the working time reduction to 35 hours, the second one deals with the change of the collective convention, and the third one with the dynamics of these two consecutive changes.

**A first change: The reduction of the working week to 35 hours**

The two matrices previously presented were analysed and show the perception of the various actors during the introduction of the ARTT (Figures 3 & 4). The typology of the different behaviours will be identified below.

**Figure 3** – Resistance and activism in relation to the ARTT





Abbreviations :	Dir: directors	H: head of the supervisory services
	Del : trade union & staff delegate	M: manager
	Ch: chairman	Adm: administrative employees
	Sup: supervisory service employees	

**A change welcomed at first but generating disappointment afterwards**

**Initially, general acceptance of the reduction in the working week (ARTT)**

The vast majority of the people affected by the introduction of the ARTT were favourable to the change. Indeed, in the dynamics of the processes of change, “these actors (those who tend to be reluctant to change) will accept change when the advantages that they gain are greater than those offered by the present situation, as well as the disadvantages of not changing”. (VANDANGEON-DERUMEZ, 1998, p. 122). The reduction of working time makes it possible to reconcile professional life and

family life in a better way. However, everyone then says they are disappointed with the results of this change, as it gave rise to the most unexpected hopes and demands, just as it generated dysfunctions before facilitating reorganization.

Some people, however, adopt an attitude of resistance to this change. This is particularly the case of one director, who was also the manager of an organisation equivalent to the one studied here. Having set up the ARTT in his own organisation, he sees it as a change to be imposed and, in fact, not easily achievable inside associations with few financial means, all the more so as, according to him, it constitutes an obstacle to economic liberalism.

**The manager as the key agent of change**

In the case of the introduction of the 35-hour working week (change 1), the manager seems to be the key agent of the change. The manager, the trade union delegate, and the head of the supervisory services constitute the “active” trio which carries out and negotiates the change. However, as Perret specifies, he has the heavy task of managing several dilemmas concomitantly to conclude the change: “to be different...without being alarming”, “leading the change...without generating chaos”, “ordering people to accept”, and “defining the change...without being able to know what its impact would be” (Perret, 1998, p.91-92). He is consequently “active” out of necessity, while the chairman, the directors and a considerable number of administrative employees are passive (to various degrees), for everyone considers that it is the manager’s responsibility to carry out such a change.

Within this association, where the political decision-makers are, initially, the chairman and the members of the Board of Directors, the power and the specialized competences are entrusted to the manager of the organisation. They shift from the voluntary directors, who are insufficiently specialized, to the manager, a salaried specialist.

The directors and, in a much lesser proportion, the chairman, excluded themselves from bureaucratic and personal control. These prerogatives were delegated to an expert, the manager. The latter is in charge of the many functions identified by Mintzberg (1983): bureaucratic control and personal controls, coordination and direct control of the work. He is thus delegated part of the power by the formal authority.

**A trio that leads the change process and has to face directors and employees who remain in the background.**

The trio “Manager, trade union delegate and head of supervisory services” represents the active element in the introduction of the 35-hour working week, insofar as they are undeniably the only ones who bring about this process of change.

The staff delegate participates in the negotiations on behalf of the staff and raises any demands made during the staff meeting. This allows many people to stand aside or to remain in the background. Moreover, some employees declare that they will remain in the background and have a passive attitude as soon as they begin to feel that things are getting worse and that conflicts are appearing, especially if they have the feeling that personal interests are being thrust forward.

The administrative staff remains in the background because there is a clear split between them and the supervisory service delegates (a physical split in the location of offices, and a split as far as functions and affinities are concerned).

As for the Board of Directors, they are passive first of all because they place great trust in the manager, whose role is to carry out the management of human resources and to provide the interface between the leaders and the employees, while treating all and sundry tactfully.

The Board does not wish to be involved in a change which may at any time evolve into a conflict. They would then be obliged to become “active”, taking a more sustained position as an employer, meeting with the employees, and even making decisions which go against their ethical principles. As they are volunteers, the directors do not wish to do this, a phenomenon already identified by Hernandez and Leslie (2000).

Lastly, the chairman considers himself to be passive, although he is regularly present to discuss with the manager the strategy and the decisions to be taken before submitting them to the Board. Nevertheless, his feeling of



passivity in relation to the process of change is similar to the reasons evoked by the other members of the Board.

### Some actors in the margin of change

Finally, some employees do not feel involved in the process of this change. A few were not subjected to the change (maternity leave, recent recruitment, etc.), others refused to be interviewed. Lastly, most supervisory delegates have effectively excluded themselves from the life of the association and take part in it only to carry out their work.

### A change between crisis and negotiation

#### A change imposed before being largely negotiated

As Claveau *et al.* emphasise, “if one considers the problems of change in the long run, organisational dynamics always requires processes which are in part imposed and in part negotiated. First and foremost because there could be no strategy without dialogue, without interactions and confrontations, thus without negotiations” (CLAVEAU *et al.*, 1998, p.82).

In the case of the introduction of the reduction in working time within the UDAF, these various phases of the same process of change leave people, for this change and for this change only, with an overall feeling of negotiation, which finally prevails over the original feeling of many actors of having change imposed on them.

Thus, at this stage the feeling of a social improvement still prevails, throughout which the majority of the employees consider that they have been heard.

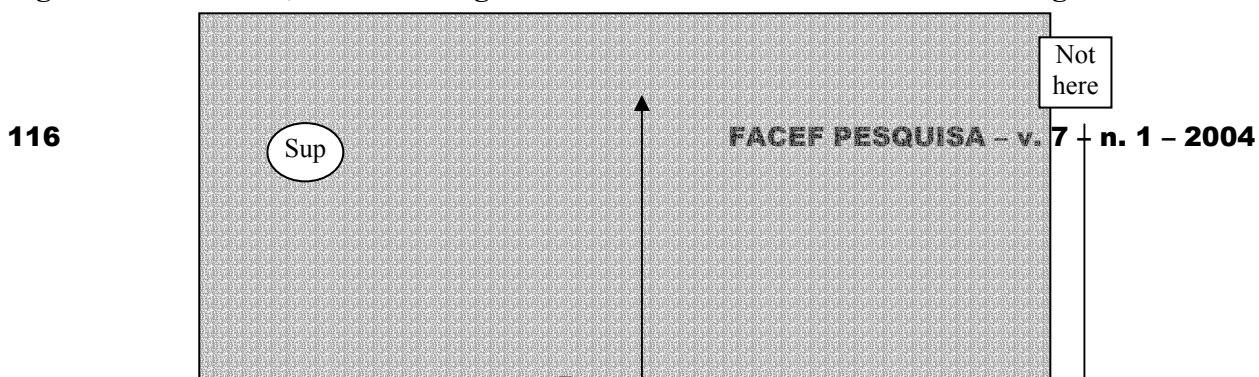
As for the manager, the change is doubly imposed on him: first by the law he must enforce in the association, and secondly through the Board, which determines the way of applying that law at the local level (framework agreement or more elaborate local negotiations).

### A feeling of crisis independent of the implications perceived during the change

Paradoxically, this process considered as negotiated generated a situation experienced as a crisis by various employees and directors. The explanation lies in the fact that the process of negotiation allowed latent tensions and conflicts to emerge.

The manager, who is in fact in the front line, ends up by experiencing this change as a crisis. The process becomes a burden when it depends mainly upon an individual in whom chairman and directors regularly reiterate their confidence throughout, while, in the last resort, leaving him “alone to face the storm”. Therefore, the manager, just like the head of the supervisory delegates, acts as a “buffer zone” between the Directors and the personnel, which is nevertheless recognised by the directors. They are conscious of living through moments of crisis, without wishing or feeling able to get further involved.

Figure 4 – Evolution, crisis and negotiation in relation to the 35-hour working week



As a result, the feeling of living or not through a crisis does not correlate with whether the actors were passive or active during the introduction of the Aubry Law (35-hour working week).

### **Feeling of Crisis versus Feeling of Evolution**

These difficult moments experienced by the manager and the head of the supervisory service delegates have nevertheless to be overcome to ensure the introduction of the 35-hour working week inside the organisation. On the other hand, they are regarded as a simple evolution by the trade union and staff delegate. Indeed, her double function and experience lead her to consider that discussion, refutation, proposals, expectations, withdrawals or strikes belong

to the traditional strategy of a negotiation. These phases are necessary to change and thus must be present in any process of change; therefore, she does not regard change as a “crisis”.

Admittedly, the concept of crisis as it is understood here does not have the same scope as that described by Roux-Dufort, which relates to crises of the Chernobyl type, the contaminated blood saga, etc. However, on lesser levels, what is at stake, their development and their results belong to the same process. “Organisational crises originate both in the imbalances generated by the organization itself, and in a choice of social options guiding our behaviours and our decisions and that shape our way of seeing the world” (ROUX-DUFORT, 2000, p. 8).

## **Behaviours and divisions during the introduction of the 35-hour working week**

The behaviours of the actors faced with the introduction of the reduction in working time are varied. Four types of behaviour can be identified (see Table I).

- “Activism”, including the “kingpins” of the change. This behaviour embraces at the same time people active “from inclination”, such as the trade union delegate, whose function consists in working for the improvement of the employees’ conditions, and people who “must be active”, such as the manager, who at first considered this change as a simple formality which, very quickly, became a burden. The head of the supervisory department, a regular link between the management and the supervisory delegates, also exhibits this type of behaviour.
- The “observers” include the administrative employees, the chairman, the executive and the directors. The administrative employees, the chairman and the executive practise a wait and see policy, whereas the directors are confident it will work. The chairman is actually one of the kingpins, having been “active by necessity” within the framework of the reduction of the working time. However, according to his own perception, he had little involvement in this change and fully trusted the manager

by letting him manage the situation completely.

- “Scepticism”, even reaching hostility, is an attitude which mostly covers the supervisory delegates (including the three people who refused to be interviewed).
- Lastly, the behaviour of “people remaining in the background” covers the people whom we describe as “uninvolved” because they are either:
  - new in the organisation; consequently, they did not experience this first change;
  - on a fixed-term contract; they consider they are only there for a short while and are little involved in the processes of change from which they will not gain. They see them as disturbing and personally destabilizing;
  - approaching retirement; they have projects outside work and are worn out by their employment, which destroys any desire to get involved in this change;
  - independent; they wish to remain “apart from the system” and only want to work there to fulfil their mission at a professional level.

These last three categories (the observers, the sceptics, the « uninvolved ») comprise the actors who think they have played a « passive » role in the introduction of the 35 hours.

**Table 1.** Typical behaviours during the introduction of the 35-hour working week

Reduction in working time Environment of change	Active		Passive		
	The kingpins		Observers, confident or wait-and-see	Sceptical, even hostile	'Uninvolved'
-reduced, but real margin for manœuvre  in terms of negotiation  - imposed by law / negotiated locally  - start 11/16/99  - end 02/14/01	<b>Active by inclination</b>  - trade union delegate  - elected staff representative	<b>Active by need</b>  - manager  - head of supervisory service	- chairman - members of the board and directors - paid administrative staff	- paid supervisory staff, of whom 3 refused an interview	- fixed-term contract - nearing retirement - « independent » who consider themselves outside the system - new appointments who did not experience the change

### **A second change: the Collective Agreement**

This significant change in the life of the organisation was in its final phase at the time of the study. The Collective Agreement had to be signed before December 31st, 2002 or the common work regulation would have been applied. The change of the Collective Agreement occurred in the association a few months after the end of the first change (Working Time reduction). The actors' perception is different from their reaction to the first change (Figures 5 & 6).

### **Resistance and activism in relation to the rejection of the Collective Agreement**

#### **All actors experience lack of information**

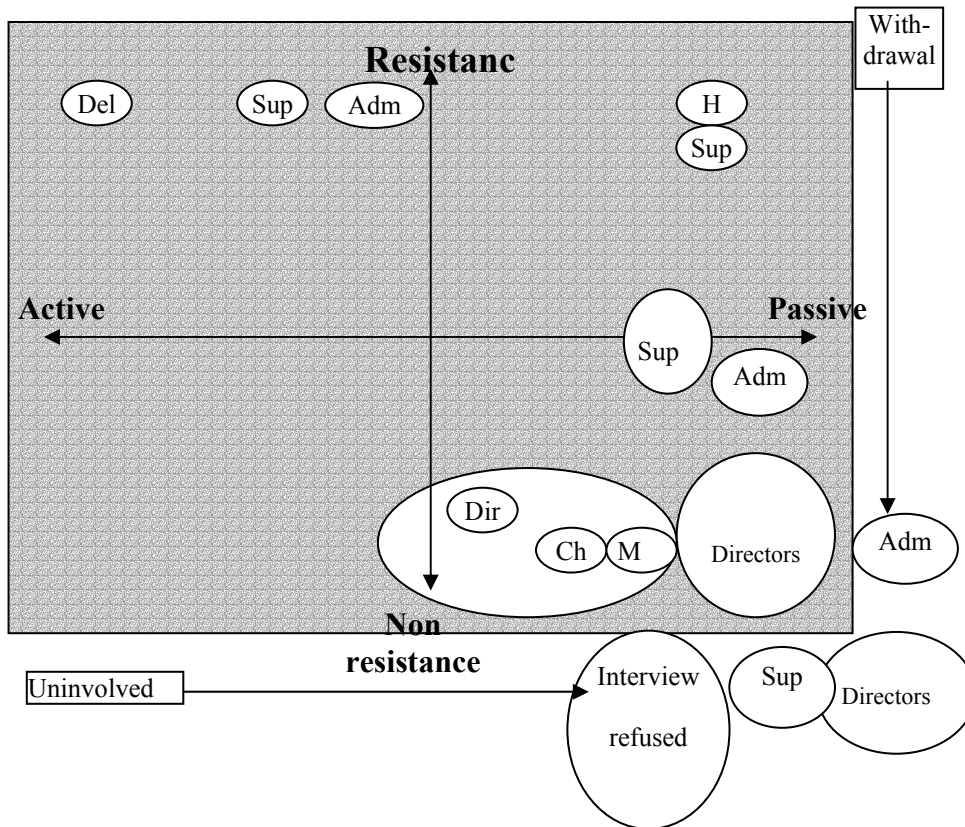
All actors experience lack of information about the change of the Collective Agreement. This feeling partly explains why they withdrew or became more passive in relation to a change over which they had little control.

### **Pronounced resistance combined with actors' withdrawal and increased passivity**

Resistance to this new change is more pronounced and involves actors in different functions or services. For example, the employees' representative and the head of the supervisory service are both opposed to this change, as well as some employees and supervisory delegates.

Many voluntary directors and administrative employees choose to remain in the background. A significant proportion of supervisory delegates do not feel concerned about this change process. Passivity increases, including actors who do not feel entirely outside the process, but who wait and see, and are on their guard.

**Figure 5 – Resistance and activism during the change of the Collective Agreement**



**Similarity of the perceptions of the chairman and the manager**

The Chairman and the manager have identical perceptions regarding both the acceptance of the change of the Collective Agreement and their involvement in the process. The manager, who was “active out of necessity” in the first change (working time reduction), is now “passive”, because he considers he was very involved in the first change. So he acts more in accordance with his own vision of change, and with those who support him.

The trade union representative is the only one who stays active, especially to defend the 1971 Collective Agreement, the social benefits of which are more advantageous than those of the 1966 Agreement. Her activism does not derive from a systematic opposition to the manager or his function, but from her desire to be a union activist,

working for the employees, and fulfilling her mandate with conviction and rigour.

**Crisis, evolution and negotiation in changing the Collective Agreement**

A growing number of people exclude themselves from the change process and stay in the background. Among those who still consider themselves concerned about the Collective Agreement change, various attitudes exist.

**The feeling of a largely imposed change of the Collective Agreement**

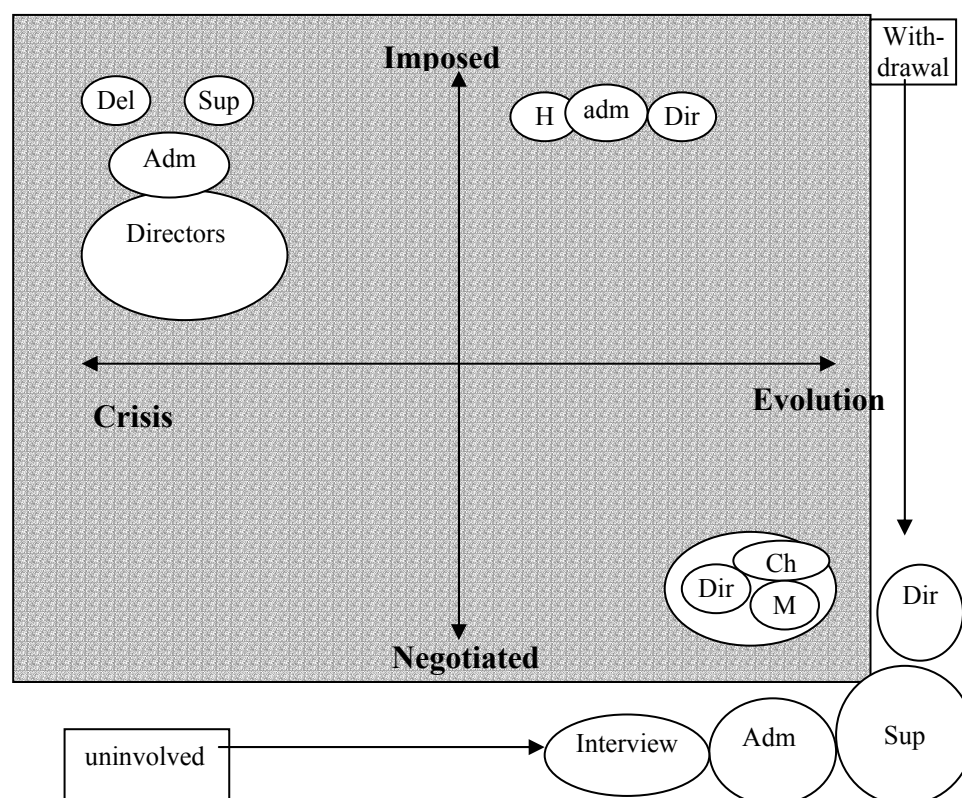
Though most actors experience the Collective Agreement change as imposed, they feel that it results from a decision taken by the management (CHAIRMAN and Manager). However, although managers do

take decisions, they often do so within imposed options, which leave limited scope for managerial choice (DONALDSON, 1996).

In addition, «the more the exogenous constraint is heavy, the more internal managerial power is wide» (COURPASSON, 1998, p. 12). This makes change difficult to lead, and puts the manager in an uncertain position, driving him (or her)

into defensive attitudes. Indeed the manager or the management team (chairman, directors, manager) have to manage an externally-imposed change process within the organisation.

**Figure 6 – Crisis, evolution, negotiation**



### **Strong division of opinion between the management team and other actors**

When comparing the Chandler and Pettigrew models of change, Godelier wonders if change happens as crisis or as evolution. He puts forward two periodical models of change: a radical crisis over a short time for Chandler, opposed to a progressive transformation over a long time for Pettigrew

(GODELIER, 1988; CHANDLER, 1962; PETTIGREW, 1987).

Some experience the Collective Agreement change as a « simple » evolution, whereas others experience it as a real « crisis ». In this case study, therefore, it is not the duration of the process that influences its definition as a crisis or an evolution, but the perception the actors have of it.

The Chairman, the manager and a director, who is also the director of another association, consider this change as an inevitable evolution, taking into account the difficulties of the current Agreement, and not as a crisis. The manager says he was worn by the first change and so he let things go their own way. Thus, he does not want to live this second change as a second crisis and he does not want to be too much implicated in it.

The three of them consider that this change is about a “negotiated” evolution because negotiations are conducted at a national level by the trade unions. Few contacts take place internally, except the meeting between employees and managers after the day’s strike organised by the employees at the beginning of the process (September 2001).

Most actors, including many directors, saw this change as a crisis and as an imposed process because they consider they are exposed only to the opinions and position of the manager and of the chairman and do not possess the means or the will to form their own opinion. This explains the feeling that this change is imposed on employees just as it is on the directors, although the latter do not suffer the consequences directly. They grant their approval to the policy followed within the UDAF out of solidarity and a sense of cohesion of the Board, but they are tormented by ambivalent feelings which lead them to perceive the change as a crisis.

### **Differing attitudes of the directors during the change of the Collective Agreement**

The change of the collective agreement highlighted the differing positions of the directors on the matrices and reveals the ambiguous nature of the situations they are in. The directors themselves repeatedly underlined their own ambivalence.

The diversity of the members of the Board (active people, retired people, professionals, various social and professional categories,

various generations, etc.) leads to rich exchanges, but also generates ambiguous situations.

Indeed, the directors do not fail to underline certain situations where they remain committed to the group and to its final position, but are concerned about the decisions that they have to take, in particular against the employees (e.g.: change of the Collective Agreement, dismissals, actions at the conciliation board).

With an essentially non-lucrative goal, an association nevertheless functions more and more like a typical company. However, the employers are volunteers. Legally responsible, they may be forced to make decisions concerning the employees that go against their own deontology and make their status uncomfortable. This situation is all the more ambiguous as they themselves are sometimes employees in other organisations.

In addition, the directors suffer from lack of legitimacy and recognition of their voluntary status by employees. Many employees think that the directors are paid, or at least that they carry out their function out of a desire for power. Lastly, it is sometimes difficult for the directors to understand or accept the employees’ demands when they themselves do not have such advantageous working conditions in their own professional life.

### **Behaviours and divisions in the case of the change of the Collective Agreement**

The standard behaviours observed at the time of the change of the Collective Agreement can be divided into four categories, just like the behaviours observed at the time of the introduction of the 35-hour working week (Table 2). The only kingpin left is the trade union delegate, as the manager, having burnt his fingers over the unsuspected developments during the introduction of the

35 hours, has joined the ranks of “suspicious observers and of those who wait and see”. The other groups are distributed somewhat similarly to those which appeared at the time of the first change.

The groups do not form clearly marked divisions between managers and employees.

A division could have been created between the manager and the trade union and staff delegate, but the latter considers that protest is part of the negotiating game without being directly hostile to the person representing the management.

**Table 2.** Standard behaviours in relation to the rejection of the Collective Agreement

Collective Agreement change environment	Active	Passive		
	Kingpins	Observers, ‘wait & see’ or mistrustful	Sceptics (even hostile)	Uninvolved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- imposed by the state then by the UNAF</li> <li>- non-existent margin for manoeuvre for local negotiation</li> </ul> <p>(national negotiation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- start : 09/25/01</li> <li>-end before 12/31/2002</li> <li>- happened closely after the first change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- trade union delegate (elected by staff)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chairman</li> <li>- Manager</li> <li>- members and administrators</li> <li>- Administrative staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supervisory Delegates, incl. 3 who refused the interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fixed-term contract</li> <li>- Nearing retirement</li> <li>- « independents » who consider themselves outside the system</li> <li>- directors</li> <li>- administrative staff</li> <li>- supervisory delegates</li> </ul>

However, there is a limited but clear division between the manager (and beyond him, the management in general) and some of the supervisory staff, because the latter see the manager’s role as applying the policy decided by the Chairman and the members of the Board, although it is equally inspired by himself. In addition, the manager is compelled to implement a policy imposed on the UDAF from the outside, either by law or the instructions of the UNAF, which puts him in an intermediary position which is not very comfortable.

### The dynamics of change

This case study enables us to ask questions about the evolution of several consecutive changes. One change analysed in isolation has certain characteristics of its own. As does a second change. But the conjugation of both

changes leads to particular behaviours and perceptions, which are amplified by their juxtaposition (see Figure 7).

Lewin studied the progress of a traditional change and developed the sequence “thaw – change – renewed frost” (LEWIN, 1951). In the case of the succession of changes which occurred in the UDAF, a kind of irritation appears, which means that the second change does not start under optimal conditions.

Claveau *et al.* had already observed this phenomenon (CLAVEAU *et al.*, 1998, p.84), indicating that projects “in a recurring fashion (...) destabilized the units and did not allow them sufficient time to settle, to breathe, and assimilate the projects”. Indeed, in a single change, one observes phases which can be longer or shorter, more or less intense and more or less ordered, of information, negotiation, conflict, destabilization, loss of bearings, adaptation

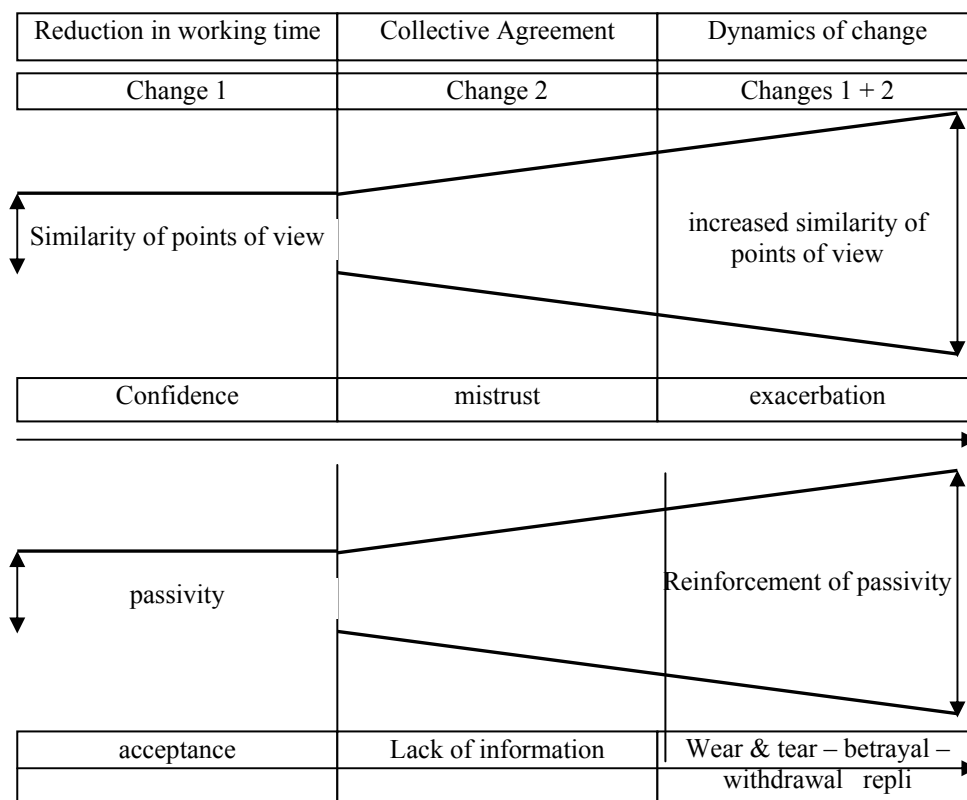


and stabilization. When there is a succession of changes, in addition to the phases indicated previously, there is increasing discomfort, resistance, and also irritation, an impression of misuse of competences, mingled with a feeling of deliberate betrayal.

The succession of changes reveals the various aspects of individuals' behaviours. Some tendencies are accentuated; some

individuals will throw themselves into conflict while others will adopt an increasingly passive stance as the changes develop. This is explained by the fact that "individuals come to work with varied values, beliefs and commitments, based on multiple identities which become more or less manifest according to the circumstances" (PERRET, 1998, p.95).

**Figure 7** – The dynamics of change, variety of points of view and passivity



Here, a change based initially on confidence generates mistrust at the time of the second change. Moreover, this mistrust will very quickly manifest itself as a form of exacerbation if the two changes happen consecutively, which is the case of the association analysed here. It is through this evolution from confidence to exacerbation that the dynamics of change reveals a reinforcement of the similarity of perceptions, whoever the actors are, and whatever their function within the association may be.

In the same way, a metamorphosis in perception takes place in three logical stages: the first change is generally accepted, the second causes most people to wait-and-see, in particular due to lack of information. The combination of the two processes of change generates a third stage; a feeling of erosion, even of betrayal. Passivity, although present right from the start, will gradually be reinforced in the event of a succession of changes, causing the withdrawal or the self-exclusion of the actors.

## Conclusion

The analysis we have just carried out within the UDAF shows that there is no traditional division between the perception of the managers and that of the employees when facing the challenge of change. We observe rather unstable and multi-faceted groupings of actors according to the types of changes and the manner in which they succeed one another.

The ambivalent position of the directors is significant in this absence of division between managers and employees, because they alone portray a complete picture of the behaviours and perceptions which can be observed during one or several changes. It is because the same director may feel sometimes close to the vision of the manager and sometimes close to that of the employees that he will occasionally have an ambiguous attitude. (KAHN *et al.*, 1964; HUXHAM and VANGEN, 2000).

However, his attitude will not extend to open opposition to the decisions taken by the Board. Therefore, the primary status of the directors (as pensioners, managers, employees, housewives), as well as their past experience, takes precedence over their status as director. The positioning of the director will be affected by whether the change is perceived as “progressive” or “regressive”.

There is however a division between the manager and some of the supervisory delegates, a division which persists and is accentuated during the various changes. The manager, a key agent in the implementation of the changes, is both negotiator and significant intermediary between the employers and the employees, and is therefore the most exposed actor.

Lastly, the dynamics of change amplify people’s attitudes and perceptions, and can cause paradoxical situations of acceptance or refusal, confidence or mistrust, activism or passivity according to the individuals.

However, most experience a feeling of irritation, coupled with betrayal for some and fatigue for others.

These conclusions relate specifically to the study of the rapid succession of two changes within one association. The replication of these questions in other associations should generate greater knowledge of the way they work, and a more comprehensive model of the behaviour of those who work in them.

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## Notas

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<sup>1</sup> International Society for Third-Sector Research.

<sup>2</sup> The « conciliation board » is a French lawcourt called « conseil des prud'hommes » offering parties a voluntary settlement.

<sup>3</sup> Three persons absent from the association could not be interviewed. Three other people refused for various reasons: the refusal to have an interview during their work time; they insisted that they had already been “overworked” since the reduction in working time. Besides, they did not wish to be interviewed outside their working time. Moreover, a letter was sent to the manager by the trade union and staff delegate pointing out these restrictions and also inquiring about the financing of the time used to answer questions.