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Research Center
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Abstract – In Part 1, this paper provides an overview of historical, legal, political and cultural factors which have shaped, to this day, the system of industrial relations in France. Drawing on the quantitative results of an on-line survey and on the qualitative analysis of a series of interviews with a sample of HR managers in France, Part 2 and 3 analyze how employers *perceive* Employee Representatives when it comes to social dialogue: eight factors impacting the quality of industrial relations are summarized. Building on this, Part 4 introduces eight suggestions to improve the quality of social dialogue in France.

Résumé – Dans sa première partie, cet article rappelle le contexte historique, juridique, politique et culturel qui a façonné, jusqu'à ce jour, la tradition française de dialogue social. À partir des résultats d'une enquête quantitative en ligne et d'une série d'entretiens semi-dirigés auprès d'un échantillon de directeurs ou responsables de ressources humaines en France, les parties 2 et 3 analysent comment les employeurs perçoivent les représentants du personnel en matière de qualité du dialogue social : huit facteurs-clefs sont mis en exergue. La dernière partie de l'article propose, en regard, huit suggestions de nature à améliorer la qualité du dialogue social en France.

Key words / Mots clefs

France – Industrial Relations – Social Dialogue – Trade Unions – Negotiation – Trust

France – dialogue social – syndicalisme – négociation – confiance – ressources humaines

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Note on the research program and network NEIRE

This research paper is part of a wider research program: the New European Industrial Relations (NEIRE) network is a research group from eleven different European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, The Netherlands and United Kingdom), interested in the labor relations and social innovation at the work floor in organizations.

The EC supported a first study on the perceptions of employee representatives (2012). The current project, funded by the EC and by all partners, is titled: "New European Industrial Relations (NEIRE): Expectations of Employers on Employee representatives' roles, attitudes, and competencies to act as partners in social innovation" (VS/2012/0416). The project focuses on managers' perceptions and perspective of employee representatives as partners in social dialogue.

The overall aim of the project is to improve the quality of social dialogue as a tool for innovation, by exploring European employers' experiences and expectations on structures, roles, attitudes and competencies of Employee representatives.

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Employee Representatives in France: Employers' perceptions and expectations towards improved industrial relations

Colson, A., Elgoibar, P., & Marchi, F.

1. Historical context of industrial relations and the labor movement in France

The system of industrial relations in France: a centralized, conflict-prone, tradition

"Un pays qui n'aime pas négocier?" ("a country that does not like negotiating"): such was the – somehow depressed – conclusion of Jean-Paul Jacquier, analyzing his experience as trade-union leader (CFDT) in France (Thuderoz, 2000). Indeed, industrial relations in France have had to cope with political and sociological features, deeply rooted in history, which do not leave lots of room for negotiation and cooperative social dialogue. Coined as *exception française* or "French exception" by Furet, Julliard, and Rosanvallon (1988), these features can be summarized under three headings.

First, the founding episode of the French Revolution in 1789, followed by similar popular insurgencies (1830, 1848, 1870, a list to which May 1968 could be added; Winock, 1986), created a long-lasting preference towards the direct and conflictual expression of diverging interests, at the expense of patient deal-making (Sellier, 1984). To this day, when French strikers demonstrate on the streets of Paris[1], or burn wood pallets in front of their shut-down plant, they more or less unconsciously continue this long-held tradition (Sirot, 2002). In the 1970s and 1980s, while unemployment was climbing, employees turned to less eruptive actions, described by Morel (1981) as the *Cold Strike*. However, in the last fifteen years conflicts have emerged again (Groux, 1998) as the French industrial sector is downsizing fast. In 2009, the number of days of strike per 1,000 employees was 136 in France, compared to 17 in Germany (INSEE; Bundesagentur für Arbeit). Some social conflicts became especially violent, e.g. Cellatex (Larose, 2001) and others since (e.g. in companies like Molex, Caterpillar, Goodyear, etc.).

Second, the French *Jacobin* state has for a long time tried to maintain centralized control over the labor system, at the expense of social groups i.e. industrial relations partners and negotiation actors (Gantzer, 2011). The decree *d'Allarde* and the law *Le Chapelier* (March-June 1791) forbade the creation of workers association and any form of trade unions. The state only would, on a unilateral basis, pass laws regulating the labor system, e.g. on child labor (1841). In 1884 the Third Republic granted the liberty to form workers' associations, opening the way for the creation of the first trade-

[1] In 2004, in Paris only, 1361 demonstrations took place on the streets, or an average of almost 4 every day (*Préfecture de Police*).

unions – notably the *CGT* in 1895, influenced by Marxism and then the Communist Party, and the *CFTC* in 1919, influenced by Christian thought (Andolfatto, 2013).

A third complicating factor for industrial relations, France is influenced by Roman and written law: voted in Parliament, the law is the supreme expression of the nation's unity (Carré de Malberg, 1984), at the expense of *ad hoc*, negotiated, agreements. This hierarchy of norms has prevented industrial relations partners to negotiate much at the level of the firm for most of the 20th century. It is only since 1982 that conventions negotiated at the lower levels of the pyramid (e.g. the firm) started superseding, under certain conditions, the legal regulations from the higher levels (i.e. the law or government's decrees). This was a turning point, introduced by one of the four *Lois Auroux* passed by the new Socialist government following President Mitterrand's election in 1981, and which profoundly modernized the industrial relations system – no less than a third of the labor legal system was changed (Le Goff, 2003).

The result of these three intertwined features, is that industrial relations do not find in France a favorable context (Adam, Reynaud, Verdier, 1972). On the contrary, they are the target of recurring critiques – as negotiated processes generally speaking (Colson, 2009).

When it comes to industrial relations, the legal system has improved in the last thirty years, building on the *Lois Auroux*. One of these laws (13 November 1982) created an obligation to negotiate once a year, in all companies, on wages and the organization of labour. Then a series of laws passed by left- or right-centered governments increasingly favored negotiation as a legitimate decision making system for industrial relations: *lois* Delebarre (1986), de Robien (1993), Aubry (1998-1999), and Fillon (2004) notably. Thanks to a law passed on 31 January 2007, any reform on labour issues must be preceded by a consultation of labour organizations, possibly leading to a negotiation; if they reach a negotiated agreement, then it must form the basis of the new legal reform to be voted in Parliament.

Actors of industrial relations in France: towards improved representativeness?

Following World War II, the state unilaterally designated in 1950 four trade-unions as *representative*, and therefore able to engage into negotiations leading to binding agreements: *Confédération générale du travail* or *CGT* (with strong links to the *Parti Communiste Français*, then the leading party on the left), *CGT-Force ouvrière* or *FO* (resulting from a split-off with *CGT* in 1948 along more reformist a line), *Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens* (*CFTC*), and *Confédération générale des cadres* (*CGC*, targeting white-collars employees). In 1964, a split-off from *CFTC* created the reformist *Confédération française démocratique du travail* (*CFDT*), which was also recognised as representative in 1966. No other trade-union was registered as representative at the national level.

This system created a *de facto* monopoly of representativeness, no matter how many employees actually joined the trade-unions, or voted for them in labor elections. This had become an increasing difficulty, since the proportion of employee joining a trade-union has constantly decreased; in 2009, the trade-union density was 7.8% in France (OECD) – i.e. the *lowest* rate of OECD countries, with the exception of Turkey. Besides,

this average hides the fact that the rate is around 9% in the public sector, and therefore as low as 5% in the French private sector (Gantzer, 2011).

In addition, under the *erga omnes* principle in French labor laws, any negotiated deal accepted by *one* trade-union in a given company was deemed legitimate and applicable to *all* employees of that company, no matter the actual representativeness of the said trade-union. This has further created a growing disconnection between trade-unionists and the very employees they pretend to represent (Amadieu, 1999; Andolfatto & Labbé, 2006). Clearly such as system was counter-productive and discouraged workers' genuine involvement (Tixier, 2007).

Two major changes, however, have been introduced by a law passed on 20 August 2008 in order to modernize the system of industrial relations. First, it improved the conditions under which trade-unions can be considered as representative, and therefore take part in negotiations. Seven criteria for trade-union representativeness have been introduced, including a minimum of 8% in labor votes. The first elections under the new system were held in March 2013, and set the scene for the next five years. The turnover was 42,8%, out of (only) 12,7 million employees registered (Ministère du Travail). Results were the following: *CGT* (26,8%), *CFDT* (26%), *FO* (15,9%), *CFTC* (9,3%), *CGC* (9,3%). Two new contenders did not get enough votes: *UNSA* (4,3%) and *SUD* (3,5%). These results are important because the reformist bloc (*CFDT, CFTC, CGC*) has won a narrow majority over the more radical bloc (*CGT, FO*).

Second, as of 1 January 2009, this law put an end to the abovementioned *erga omnes* principle, and replaced it with the system of the *accord majoritaire*: a negotiated agreement will be valid if it is supported by trade-unions representing at least 30% of employee votes, and if within 8 days it is not opposed by trade-unions representing at least 50% of employee vote. In addition to this, the law extended the possibility to engage negotiations in small and medium enterprises even though there are no trade-unions.

Both of these changes – trade-union representativeness, *accord majoritaire* – clearly improve the system of industrial relations in France. Yet, it might still be too early to see concrete evolutions – as surveys and interviews with employers seem to indicate.

2. Current situation of the Employee Representatives (ERs): what do Human Resources Managers (HRMs) say?

This section summarizes the most relevant findings on the profile of the ERs, as they appear in the interviews carried out with employers in France. These features are in line with, and further illustrate, the overview of the French industrial relations system introduced in the previous section.

1. A window of opportunity for change? According to employers, two factors reinforce each other at the moment to prompt a change of scenery in French industrial relations: first, the abovementioned legal reform of representativeness and of process rules for social dialogue; second, the on-going economic and social crisis, which calls for rapid change in order to maintain the competitiveness of most sectors of the French economy. It is increasingly difficult for anyone (including ERs) to deny that business as usual is

no longer a valid option. For instance, the recent financial crisis has badly hit the banking sector: *"in a matter of two years, ERs understood they had to cooperate in order to help* save *their company"*, said an employer in this sector. However, the crisis also affects the trust between management and workers. As one HRM in the service sector expressed: *"Trust would increase if the company would be stable. This is not the case nowadays due to the crisis".* Such an evolution appears mixed, however, depending on the level of exposure of business sectors to international competition.

2. Dispersion of trade unions. In spite of the 2008 law on representativeness, ERs remain split into five main organizations (*CGT, CFDT, FO, CGC, CFTC*), plus two others which may play an important role in some business sectors or firms (*UNSA, SUD*), plus still several others which might be relevant at the local level only. This dispersion generates two difficulties, according to HRMs. First, trade-unions enter into a political competition, especially in the perspective of ERs elections (which was the case in 2013): most seem to believe that having an aggressive electoral platform will help them win votes. Second, most employers agree that having divided interlocutors in front of them at the negotiation table does not help construct a fruitful social dialogue. In that, sometimes agreements are blocked because the unions cannot find a common opinion within them. One HRM in the service sector interpreted: "*In a group of 30 it's difficult to believe they all think the same; and as they do not want to show they don't agree they don't take any position, and don't give answers, blocking the negotiation".*

3. The structure of worker representation remains too complex and formal. The 2008 law did not touch the overall structure of employee representation, which remains three-layered: trade-unions function at the national level, at the level of the business sector (*branche*), and then at the level of the firm (the bigger ones having several committees for employee representations and social dialogue), to the extent that *"we don't know any more who does what"*, confessed an HRM. Several HRMs highlighted in the interview that this structure creates all sorts of principal / agent tensions (Pratt & Zeckhauser, 1985), as there might be a lack of alignment between the representatives, their hierarchy in the national trade-union, and their own constituents in the company. As a result, "higher" levels may disagree with negotiations carried out at "lower" levels. *"Sometimes, even if the representatives agree with the policy of the company, they have to refuse the proposal because they must fit with the policy of their trade-union at the national level"*, said an HRM in the finance sector. The same example can be found in the housing sector: "*Sometimes we reach agreements inside the company which are blocked at national level, by a group that doesn't understand so in depth the company problems".*

In addition, HRMs consider that social dialogue is heavily constrained by strict regulations, whereas informal dialogue proves very useful (cf. infra). Informal dialogue seems to be easier in small rather than big companies: *"Management trusts workers and vice versa. This is mainly due to the fact that it is a small company, where everybody has worked together for a long time and they feel part of the same family"*, expressed an HRM from the education sector. Related to that, in small companies, where informal dialogue is working, the structure of worker representation can be considered as less needed: *"Simplifying the structure would be better. For example: if we are 49 we don't need to have this structure but if we are 51 we need 10 members in the workers council!"* Labour laws are unanimously considered too complicated. The benefits of informal dialogue are also related to trust. A HRM in the service sector pointed out:

"Informal dialogue at individual level works very well and is effective, but at the negotiation table this trust disappears".

4. Little influence of ERs, perceived as reactive rather than proactive. HRMs consider that under the present system, ERs do not have real influence on the decision-making system of companies. Some HRMs even consider that ERs would actually not be interested to have such an influence, because this involvement in joint decision-making would also mean accountability in the results of the company's strategy. However, ERs retain a capacity to influence the modalities of the implementation of decisions, usually in order to delay the latter. They are oftentimes perceived as reactive (trying to oppose, putting a brake on procedures to gain time), rather than proactive (putting elaborated proposals on the table). *"It is not natural for them to propose solutions, they wait for us to do something and then they react"*, said an HRM in the education sector. Also, other HRM in the housing sector expressed: *"There is a lack of initiatives by ERs proposing alternatives. The management makes proposals and hardly gets answers from ERs, and when we get answers are normally opposing the initiatives. This is not constructive at all".* However, most HRMs interviewed consider it would make more sense to have a genuine involvement of ERs in the discussions shaping strategic decisions, as a way to prompt more proactivity and responsibility on their side.

5. Negative image and disconnection with employees. Most HRMs maintain that should employees perceive French trade-unions as effective and innovative representatives, trade-union density in France would not be the lowest in OECD with the exception of Turkey, as highlighted in section 1. Whereas ERs retain some status in traditional industrial sectors (automotive), they suffer from low prestige in service sectors (e.g. banks, insurance). As a result, in whole areas of the French economy, few employees are interested to get responsibilities as ERs. Classic rhetoric of *la lutte* does not click so well with younger generations. An HRM from the banking sector said: *"we have a generation issue which is a problem for us, as the ERs are ageing and the bulk of them are over 50".* Trade-unions fail to attract younger employees, which deepens the gap with the very people they have to represent – e.g. in this French utility company (energy), due to the pace of retirements, 50% of the workforce will be replace before 2020.

6. Life-long tenure and lack of turnover. A consequence of the previous feature, HRMs consider that French trade-unions and ERs suffer from a lack of turn-over: *"one enters trade-unionism and then one never gets out of it",* said an HRM. Indeed, it seems customary to have life-long tenure as ERs. A senior HRM in an insurance company, about to retire, noted that over a third of the ERs in his company were already in these positions when he started his career – 30 years ago. Some ERs cumulate several responsibilities in order to be full-time on their trade-union responsibilities. The risk is to lose touch with the realities of the other workers' jobs.

7. Lack of specific capacities. HRMs acknowledge that ERs know very well the legal regulations pertaining to social dialogue, due in part to the length of their tenure; they are also at ease with the media. However, they consider that most ERs lack (a) awareness of strategic challenges facing their company in a fast-moving competition; (b) technical knowledge and management competencies to contribute and take a proactive role in proposing action plans; and (c) innovative, more cooperative, approaches for negotiation and bargaining. *"We have a real quality issue here"*, said an

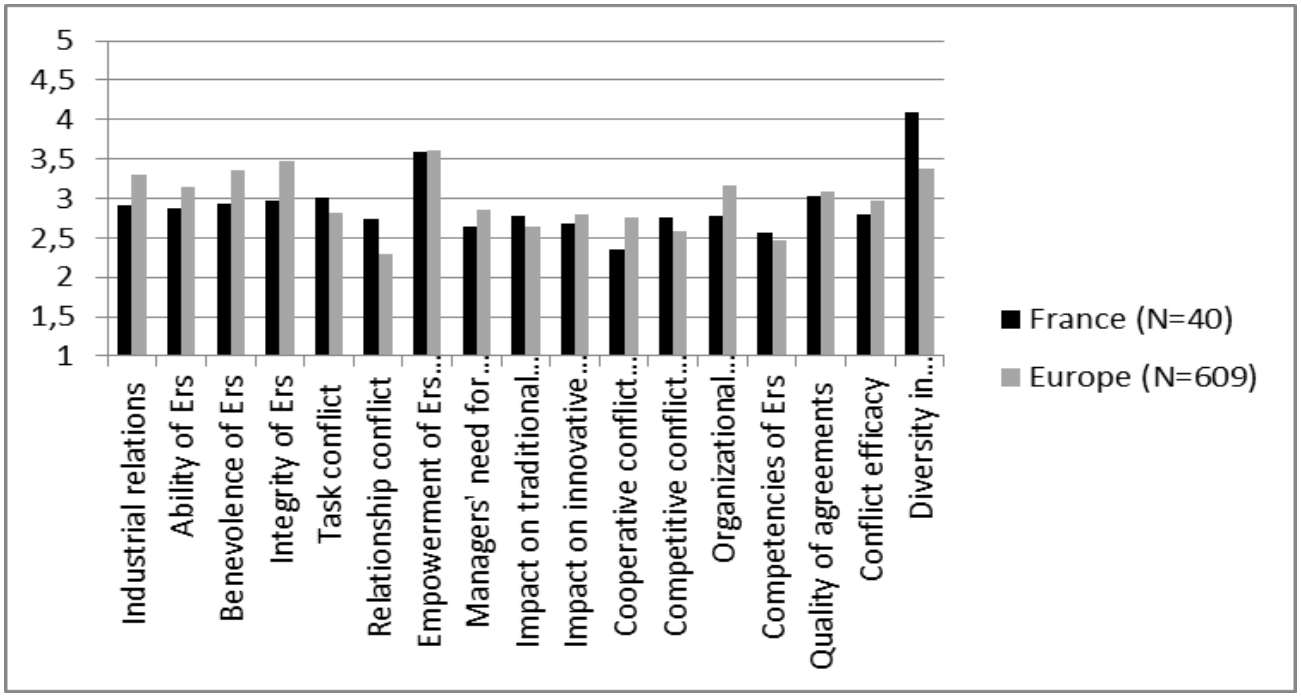
HRM in the banking sector. The fact that most of them have not for a long time been in classic work positions within the company (§ 6) does not help. And this very lack of expertise proves a handicap when ERs would like to exert an influence on decision, and therefore gain respect from employees. Indeed, it should be noted that most of these seven features reinforce each other, and build a coherent picture – or a vicious circle.

8. It takes two to tango. While pointing at the lack of pragmatism in some of their interlocutors, several HRMs acknowledge that the top management of their companies has a share of responsibility in the situation: *"we get the ERs that we merit"*. For instance, companies have not succeeded in providing proper career paths for ERs, as an incentive for higher turnover and shorter tenures. In companies where social dialogue has been taken seriously for a long time, with personal involvement of the CEO for instance, and once several episodes have reinforced mutual trust, ERs tend to escape from the above-mentioned features. Especially in times of crises, *"it has been possible to move from a state of distrust to a state of mutual trust"*, stated an HRM in the banking sector.

3. Perceptions of Human Resources Managers on Employee Representatives. Results of the survey

In this section we present the descriptive results based on the data collected through an online survey among 40 French HRMs working in different sectors (i.e. financial, industrial, education). The data collected in France is compared to the score of 609 HRMs from the other 10 European countries participating in the study (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom). In Figure 1 we present the variables' mean in Europe and France. An independent sample t-test was run to determine the significant differences between France and the other countries participating in the study (significant differences are circled in the graph). As we discuss below, we appreciate main differences between both groups according to HRMs' perception towards trust, relationship and ERs' commitment to the organization.

Figure 1. Mean scores of main variables for French and European HRMs.



HRMs' perception towards the industrial relations climate in terms of trust is lower in France (M= 2.91) compared to Europe (M= 3.31), t (607) = 3.13, p = .002; and the antecedents of trust (abilities, benevolence and integrity) show the same result. In France, HRMs perceive that abilities, of ERs are low (M= 2.87) compared to the perception of HRMs in the other European countries (M= 3.14), t (607) = 1.81, p = .07. Benevolence is also perceived as low (M = 2.94) compared to the other countries (M = 3.35), t (607) = 2.77, p = .006. The third antecedent of trust that we measure is integrity and it is concluded that it is perceived also as lower (M = 2.98) than in the other countries (M = 3.47), t (609) = 3.75, p <.001. The low perception of trust and its antecedents in French organizations drives us to explore the relationship between the parties (HRMs and ERs).

Thus, a second point that we point out here is the significant difference encounter according to the relationship between HRMs and ERs. We observe that HRMs perceive more relationship conflicts in France (M= 2.74) compared to Europe (M= 2.29), t (607) = -2.93, p = .004. Also task conflicts are perceived as higher in France (M = 3.02) than in the European sample (M = 2.81), t (607) = -1.67, p = .09. According to the conflict style used to solve these conflicts, we see that a cooperative style of conflict management is less used in France (M= 2.36) compared to Europe (M= 2.76), t (607) = 2.687, p = .007. A difference according to the competitive style of conflict management is not observed between France and Europe.

Finally, it is important to explore HRMs' different perception towards ERs' commitment to the organization. We see that HRMs in France perceive that French ERs are less committed to the organization (M = 2.78) compared to the European average (M= 3.16), t (607) = 2.55, p = .011.

These results are in line with the conclusions obtained from the interviews. It should be noted that no statistical differences were found according to the perception towards

ERs' competences in France compared to the other European countries, although in the interviews this issue was pointed out. However, the diversity in competences and attitudes of ERs are shown to be high in France (M = 4.10) compared to the European sample (M = 3.38), t (607) = - 4.09, p <.001.

4. Suggestions given by employers to improve social dialogue in France

The consensus amongst HRMs, according to both interviews and surveys, is that improvements are needed – and urgently. HRMs would like to help changes happen, when it comes to gaps in ERs representativeness and capacities, or the lack of cooperation and effectiveness in negotiation processes. This appears increasingly important, as the range of topics under discussion keeps growing. Indeed, in addition to traditional topics like wages and working shifts (representing 40% and 25% of negotiation topics in 2011; Jobert, 2013), new topics have appeared, which are more open to social innovation and mutually satisfactory agreements: stress & working conditions (e.g. fight against moral harassment), diversity at the work place, gender equality (now compulsory every three years), "quality of life at the work place" (cf. for instance the agreement negotiated at Areva and signed on 31 May 2012). This expansion and diversification induce more sophisticated negotiations, calling for adequate capacities and training of ERs.

1. A priority is to put an end to the life-long tenure system. Neither the company, nor its employees, can afford to keep for decades the same ERs, who run the risk of losing touch with the actual jobs of the people they wish to represent, or with the reality of their business environment. Several HRMs suggest that no ER should be re-elected more than once – hence a maximum term of ten years.

2. Improving career management for ERs. In order to reinforce the previous suggestion, HRMs suggest that companies should better help ERs "re-enter" the workforce following one or two term(s) as ER. Being an ER (for a period of time) should be better considered by the company as a valuable leadership and stewardship experience in a career, and valued as such. Such recognition would help attract new and younger employees towards ER responsibilities, for the benefit of the company and its employees alike. *"We should be able to convey the message towards promising employees that running for election won't be a stain in their career, but rather an asset"*, said an HRM in the banking sector.

3. Raising the profile of trade-unionism in higher education. HRMs point at that the French higher education system has a share of responsibility in the negative image of trade-unions, which then does not help attract the most dynamic employees into ER responsibilities. They suggest that curricula should include more on the necessity, and the conditions, of social dialogue. This seems especially important in business schools and management universities.

4. Providing training programs to ERs. HRMs agree that more could be done to help ERs support innovation in social dialogue for mutual benefit. Three areas are identified. First, strategic vision, or *"the big picture on why change is needed"*: international competition, global financial flows and equilibriums, societal change, benchmarks.

Second, customer relationship management, as HRMs perceive ERs to be too self-centered, or too focused on the internal structure of the company, whereas its survival depends mostly on its management of relationship with external partners – starting with the customer. Third topic of interest: cooperative bargaining, as negotiation processes and routines should be shifted towards less confrontational and more value-creating approaches. This could help prompt changes in terms of attitudes, and conflict management style: *"The company should have given them training as soon as they got elected"* expressed an HRM from the education sector. Other HRM agrees and adds that the trade unions should also participate in the training programs. For at least one HRM, some ERs may be reluctant to join training programs where they have to mix with other employees having a better understanding of on-going challenges.

5. Involving ERs more into decision-making mechanisms. Several HRMs consider that as ERs have no real grip on company's strategy, it is understandable that they turn to conflictual rhetoric and "speaking to the gallery" instead of trying to put thorough proposals on the table. In order to involve them more in the decision making system, and therefore boost their sense of responsibility and accountability, HRMs very much doubt that the overall legal system of industrial relations in France is likely to be transformed on the short term. In this regard, however, they welcome a recent change brought in by the *Accord national interprofessionel sur la sécurisation de l'emploi* (national negotiated agreement) signed on 11 January 2013. Clause #13 of this agreement introduces an innovation in terms of governance, inspired by Germany: employees must be represented at board level, for all firms having more than 5,000 employees in France and/or 10,000 globally.

6. Investing in information sharing. In order to improve relationships with ERs and raise the level of mutual trust, most HRMs agree that a lot can be done informally at the level of the firm. In addition to the official / legal negotiation fora, more and more firms should create ad hoc groups gathering ERs and management (together with external experts if need be) in order to engage into informal discussions – the output of which can then be injected into the official pipeline. Such groups have emerged recently under various names: *"groupe de pilotage", "instance de dialogue stratégique", "groupe paritaire de concertation"* (Didry & Jobert, 2008). These groups create a fruitful continuum between information, consultation, and negotiation, involving more than "the usual suspects", and favorable to industrial relations generally speaking. Nevertheless, HRMs point at that improving the level of internal transparency requires that confidentiality towards external stakeholders is respected (Colson, 2004): this risk is particularly sensitive in the banking industry.

7. Minimizing trade-unions divisions. Although they understand that different approaches or political inspirations may be legitimate, HRMs consider that having so many different and small organizations across the table does not help anyone: neither the management nor the employees. *"We would have two or three big organizations, it would help build trust"*, said an HRM from the energy sector, and would diminish transaction costs. The 2008 law established a threshold of 8% for official recognition, which might prompt rapprochements or mergers between the smaller players.

5. Discussion on expectations of French employers on Employee Representatives' roles, attitudes, and competences

From a negotiation theory viewpoint, one could argue that the French system of industrial relations is reaching a "mutually hurting stalemate", as defined by William Zartman (1985): as the economic crisis and its social consequences deepen, and as global competition threatens whole business sectors of the French economy, neither employers nor employees can afford any longer to remain in this situation. The system is "ripe" for reform.

The question remains whether reforms will emerge from above – through new legislation – or from within – thanks to mutual adjustments between industrial relations partners and evolutions of attitudes at the level of companies. The French tradition (see section 1) would point at the former. Recent moves hint at the latter. There are indeed a few reasons for hope. First, the latest figures available (Ministère du Travail) show a growing number of negotiated agreements at all levels: national (*interprofessionnel*), business sector (*branche*), and firm (34,000 agreements in 2011 vs. 28,000 in 2006 and 23,000 in 2002). Second, social partners now try and negotiate so-called "offensive" agreements: pro-active deals trying to anticipate on future challenges in a more innovative way. For instance, the French automotive industry is going through an acute crisis, and this helped secure *"accords de compétitivité"*, whereby ERs and employers agreed to certain changes in a proactive manner (Jobert, 2013). However, with a few exceptions, HRM do not have lot of knowledge on European Union policies pertaining to social dialogue. Last but not least, all employee trade-unions and employer organizations managed to strike a national deal on 11 January 2013, called *Accord national interprofessionel sur la sécurisation de l'emploi.* Interestingly enough, the government agreed that the results of this major negotiation should be fully respected and confirmed by the Parliament, which passed a law to include into the legal system the points agreed through negotiation. Is the French state now taking seriously industrial relations and the labor movement?

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